



One-to-one Farm Advisory Service

September 2016- April 2017 Annual Report for Scottish Government

Customer:**Scottish Government****Customer reference:**

Farm Advisory Service

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Executive summary

It has been a busy year combining set up and delivery activities. Considerable effort was put into engaging with stakeholders and policy teams to develop an approach to meet the multiple objectives of the programme and understanding the farmer needs. We have worked closely with advisers and those involved in delivering Whole Farm Reviews to determine what worked well and shouldn't be changed, and what could be built upon.

The various development tasks included

- Developing the grant templates, application guidance and correspondence
- Developing the management processes, databases and structures
- Training the internal team (including the Lantra Peer Review group)
- Informing and training the advisory team
- Promoting the service to advisers and farmers

The service was launched on the 20th September 2016, the website went live and the service was promoted via the farming press and at agricultural shows. Interest in the programme started to build and a gradual month on month increase in calls to the advice line can be tracked. In February 2017, the first direct communications to farmers went out and all businesses with a BRN number received a letter and flier promoting the service. This had a substantial impact on farmer awareness. The number of queries to the advice line escalated and there was substantial interest in the one-to-one services.

Ricardo have continuing to embrace opportunities to promote the service to farmers and to encourage advisers to get started on their first ILMPs. Ricardo fully appreciate that the FBAASS advisers through their interaction with clients can be key advocates for the programme. Many advisers were not enthusiastic about the broadening of the remit of Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs) from what they had previously delivering with Whole Farm Reviews and Ricardo have put significant effort into communicating with advisers, responding to adviser queries and working to bring this key group on board.

In October 2016, applications started to flow in and Ricardo have been busy managing the application and report review process, working closely with the Peer Review group at Lantra to ensure that we apply a consistent approach and are clear on the standards required. The feedback on reports reviewed has been excellent, despite advisers' fears of working within a set template, they have clearly understood what is required of them and the flexibility within this structure to develop a report that fits the needs of the client. In the last month of this reporting period the first completed pay claim was submitted and the first pay run instigated. This process ran smoothly and the processes were found to be robust.

There are challenges with increasing the numbers of ILMP. WFR continued to be delivered until March 2016 then followed by AECS, IACS and busy farming times. The next few months present the first clear delivery window for ILMP.

In looking to the next years' delivery Ricardo will be working to further promote the service to advisers and farmers and to look for ways to reduce the administration burden on farmers by introducing on-line application forms.

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1 Training

With the introduction of Integrated Land Management Plans the advisers were required to provide a more holistic service and a greater focus on improving public good. The development of the template therefore required consultation and training was required to ensure advisers has sufficient knowledge to be confident holding initial discussions with farmers and crofters, providing appropriate signposting and identifying opportunities to bring in more specialist advice if required.

1.1 Engaging with advisers and stakeholders

From April to June 2016 Ricardo sought to engage with advisers, farmers and other stakeholders on the format and focus of ILMPs, there was significant activity, in the form of face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations and email discussion as Ricardo both communicated plans and took on-board the feedback of those with experience of delivering Whole Farm Reviews.

The Caroline Wood/Hugh Martineau delivered SFAS presentations at a range of meetings to ensure as many advisers as possible were briefed on the new requirements. The following sessions were attended:

- SAC adviser briefing
- SAC Southern Adviser briefing
- SAC Northern Adviser briefing
- New Entrants to Farming team briefing
- Strutt and Parker
- Allathan Associates
- Laurence Gould
- Peter Cook (independent)
- Quality Meat Scotland
- Soil Association

Telephone discussions

- Farm Business Services (Richard Huston)
- Sinclair Simpson (independent)
- RASBI (Richard Huxtable)

1.2 Adviser Briefing in June

Ricardo launched the service to advisers at a briefing session held 4-5.30pm on the 23rd June in the Scottish Government's Pavilion at the Highland Show.

This briefing session provided advisers with:

- an overview of the new service,
- guidance on processes,
- communication,
- branding
- the next steps in the training programme and accreditation procedures

The response from advisers was mixed. Some were supportive and agreed that the changes were sensible and the tool flexible enough to meet farmers' needs, however there was also a resistance to change, some advisers worrying that they would not have the breadth of knowledge, that the reports would take too much time and that there would be little uptake from farmers.

1.3 Engaging with policy leads to define content

During May/June 2016 Ricardo engaged with the Scottish Government policy leads to establish the topics and technical content of the required adviser training. Based on information provided by the policy leads training modules on Cross Compliance, Carbon Footprinting, interpreting the results of a Carbon Footprint, Animal Welfare and Conservation, Organic Farming (stage 1 and 2) and Biodiversity were developed.

The final course material was reviewed and signed off by policy leads

1.4 Development of on-line training tools

The training material was built into an on-line training platform <http://sfas.ricardo-aea.com/> and released to advisers in early September 2016. The course was designed to:

- Be consistently available so advisers can revisit and refresh themselves at any time.
- Provide flexibility should a new adviser join the panel, or we identified a skills gap and needed to recruit new panel members.
- Enable new courses to be launched at any time should we identify new needs subject to changing policy, without the high costs of convening a conference.

1.5 Delivery of Face-to-Face Training Events

In November 2016 adviser training workshops took place in four locations across Scotland and provided a mix of information sharing, training and feedback sessions.

Schedule

Tuesday 22nd November- Stirling Court Hotel, Stirling

Wednesday 23rd November, The Aberdour, Dumfries

Thursday 24th November, Park Inn, Aberdeen

Friday 25th November, Waterside, Inverness

Agenda

10.00 am Coffee on arrival

10.30 am Welcome and overview of FAS programme

11.20 am ILMPs in detail

11.50 am Group discussion- feedback on experience to date, training needs and other support required

12.20 pm Lantra update on FBAASS accreditation requirements

1.00 pm Carbon audit training - how to use AgRE Calc and interpret the results

3.00 pm Closing remarks.

Attendance

76 advisers attended the training events over the four days. Generally, there was a very positive response from advisers (just a couple of advisers who are still resistant to the change from Whole Farm Reviews) and the events were very interactive with lots of questions and discussion. The advisers seem to have a good grasp of what is expected of them and appreciated the training that they were receiving. At the event advisers were asked for feedback on what material would be useful to help them to promote the scheme to their clients and what further training they require, and in what format. Feedback was that advisers would like electronic versions of the programme flier so they can print as required. In terms of training suggestions included soil analysis, succession planning and benchmarking.

In summary, we found some advisers who were initially resistant to change at the Highland Show had been brought round and that the general approach and mood towards ILMPs was far more positive.

2 Accreditation

2.1 Re-accreditations

Lantra manage the FBAASS accreditation process. During this period, the reaccreditation of registered advisors was completed, with 88 full advisors and 21 associate advisors registered at the end of the reporting period, a total of 109 registered advisors.

3 Review of reports

A new accreditation process was introduced in 2016, to quality check each advisor and create a clear benchmark for the standard which all advisors should achieve – this relates to both technical competences and style and use of language.

Our accreditation process is integrated into our quality assurance process. We conduct a 'peer' review process with reports reviewed by a panel of peer reviewers managed by Lanta.

The peer review group met in July 2016 to agree processes and to calibrate grading against standards. The process covers 4-steps involving an assessment of: 1) formatting, punctuation and grammar 2) readability 3) meeting of scope and guidance and 4) technical competence. A traffic light scoring system 1-10 is followed to benchmark the advisors. A score of 7-10 is the achievement level above which accreditation is awarded. Scores lower than this trigger the report to be sent back to the advisor with comments and the re-written reports are then re-assessed.

All first ILMP reports from an adviser are peer reviewed, if the first report scored less than 7, the subsequent report is also issued for peer review. Thereafter all reports are subject to a light touch review by the team at Ricardo, should this review raise any concerns the report is sent for a second opinion by the peer review group. A record of which reports have been checked and any issues identified is kept on the QA tracker database.

Following a period of delivery, on the 15th February the peer review group (Keith Spalding, Ian Pearce and Jim Seaton) met with Hugh Martineau, Caroline Wood, Duncan Waldman, Lorna Teague and Kevin Patrick to review scoring of the ILMPs which had been scrutinised by the peer review process to date. The findings of the group were positive. The current template for providing feedback and detailing required action by the adviser was found to be robust and will continue to be used. The scoring applied by the group was unanimous and the process held up. Some minor amends to the ILMP template were suggested and actioned, these were to; include the BRN on the front of the template and to provide some standard text which will be included in all reports to explain to the farmer how to read the SWOT analysis.

4 Website

The hosting and development of the website sits within the one-to-many contract. Ricardo developed the content for the one-to-one contract ready for the launch on the 20th September 2016

For each of the support packages available; Integrated Land Management Plans (including Specialist Advice), Mentoring for New Entrants, and Carbon Audits the content is designed to illustrate the support available, the application process and the benefits of taking this support

5 Advice Line

The Service (one-to-one and one-to-many) have a single advice Line number and email address. To minimise confusion for customers and provide them with a one-stop-shop for farm advice. This advice line is managed by Ricardo under contract to SAC. During this period Ricardo:

5.1 Set up the call handling system

This involved:

- Purchasing a telephone number.
- Providing bespoke call messaging.
- Establishing a 'call monitor' for each agent so they can monitor incoming calls for the FAS Advice Line and can activate more resources as required.
- Recording all inbound and outbound calls so the Advice Line Manager can undertake QA checks and we have protection against claims of erroneous or incorrect advice being made.
- Collating call statistics; call logs, wait time, call duration, abandoned calls etc.

5.2 Set up data base for Advice Line data management

- Data is held securely and password protected (each user has a unique log-in) and can only be accessed via the Ricardo network or via a secure VPN.
- The CRM has the ability to record and report a large amount of data; company information including address and postcode, contact information, details of the contact made and overview of advice provided.
- There is a search function to see past contact and add new records to existing contacts, so that all records for the user are linked and we can see a complete user history.

5.3 Up-scaled the Advice Line's capability

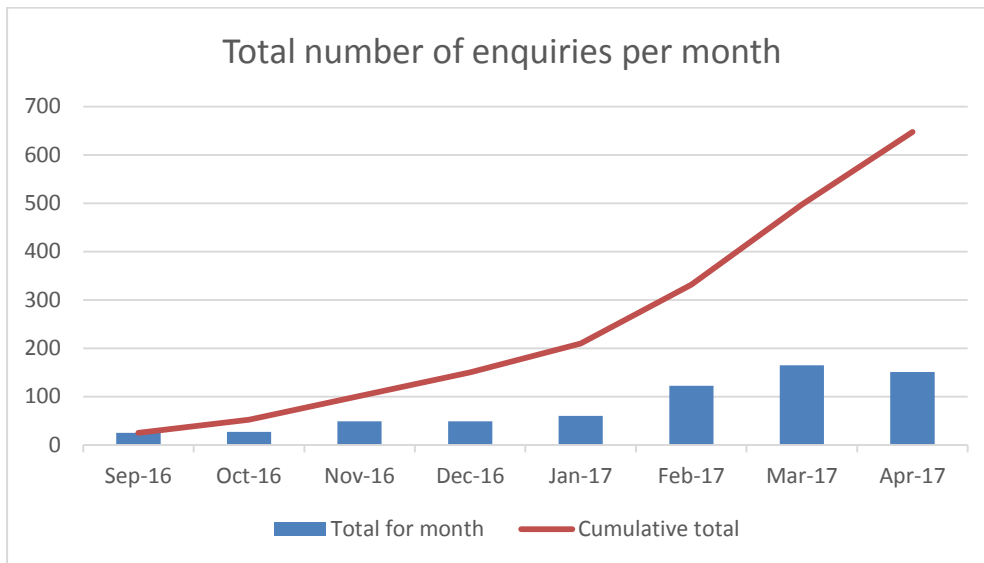
The Advice Line team who are experts in managing agricultural enquiries, were provided with training in order that they were ready and prepared to take on this new advice line. The adviceline were provided with:

- Guidance on topics that are likely to be frequently asked and key sources of information that should be consulted, including; guidance documents, newsletters and websites.
- Internal updates; as any changes or new events cause a flux in calls.

5.4 Advice line delivery

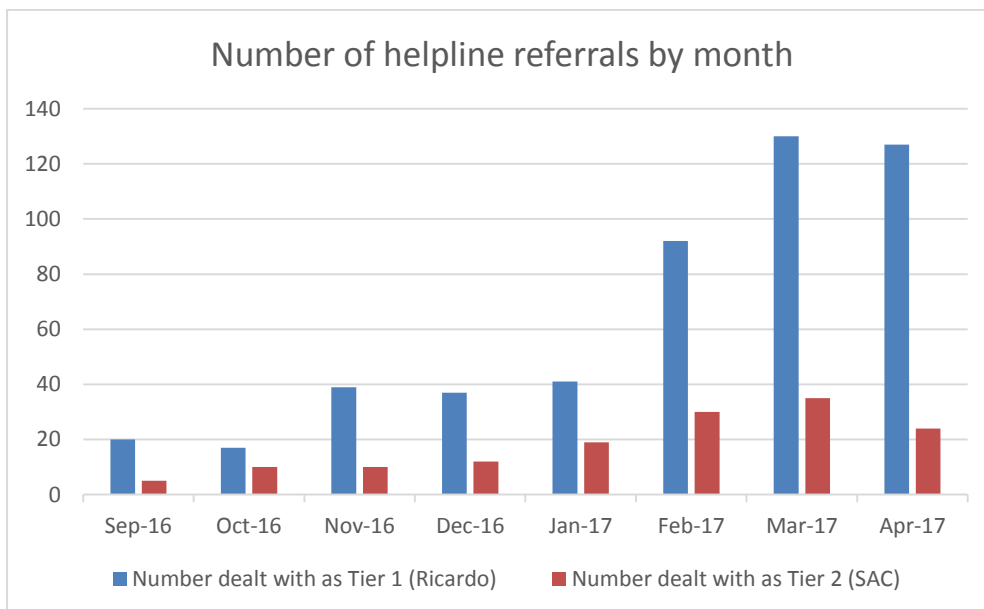
Delivery commenced on the 20th September. During the period between September and 31st March, the number of enquiries per month showed an increasing trend. The numbers were significantly boosted in February and March 2017 when SAC sent out an FAS introductory letter to all BRN holders

Figure 1 Graph to show the number of helpline enquiries per month



The calls are either dealt with as Tier 1 (answered by the advice line operative) or Tier 2 (referred to a technical specialist). The graph below shows that whilst the volumes of calls increased the advice line team had the knowledge to continue to field the majority themselves. This ability to provide an answer without delay generates the most customer satisfaction and cost efficiency for the service.

Figure 2 Graph to show how advice line queries were dealt with



6 Database

A database was developed to enable the efficient management of the delivery of the service activities and the precise reporting of financial metrics required in delivering RDPE funded advice. The database has multiple functions:

Tracking customer information so we can clearly understand who has engaged, how they have accessed the service and what support they have received (Advice Line, visit, etc)

Managing the progression of each scheme. The management process and the database are designed to ensure that each check is complete before payment may be triggered.

7 Promotion

7.1 Press articles

- September 2016: development of press release to launch the programme.
- October 2016- Ricardo drafted an article promoting the mentoring service. This was sent to Kirsten Williams for inclusion in the first edition of the New Entrants to Farming Newsletter.

7.2 Show Attendance

- June 2016 – Highland Show, Advisers Briefing.
- November 2016 - Ricardo and SAC jointly manned a FAS stand at Agriscot on the 16th November. The stand did not receive many farmer enquiries but was good for brand awareness. Advisers took the opportunity to discuss the programme and clarify their understanding.
- New Entrants to Farming Gathering, Tuesday 28th February 10.30am- 3pm at Perth Racecourse was very well attended, with 125 delegates. Caroline Wood presented an overview of the One to One services available to New Entrants and details of how to apply. The meeting generated significant interest in the One-to-One Service. SAC forwarded the feedback forms from the event and Ricardo administrators extracted a contacts list of those who requested follow up information on ILMP, Carbon audits or mentoring.

7.3 Stakeholder Meetings

- On the 8th March Ricardo and SAC attended parliament to provide Fergus Ewing with a briefing on the FAS programme. Mr Ewing was keen to understand the level of support available to farmers and to ensure the value for money achieved by the programme.
- 7th March, representatives from Jersey Government visited Scotland on a fact-finding mission, arranged in conjunction with Zero Waste Scotland. The delegates asked to be provided with a briefing on the Scottish FAS, they were keen to learn about the tailored support available to farmers and particularly interested in the carbon audits.
- Immediately following the meeting with Fergus Ewing, Ricardo were contacted by Henry Graham with regards to the linkages and signposting opportunities between FAS and the Forestry Commissions 'Sheep and Trees' project. Jamie Pitcairn and Caroline Wood met with Henry and provided him with a briefing on the FAS. Henry was keen that we develop training for the advisers to highlight the benefits of 'Sheep and Trees', Ricardo suggested this could be rolled out in the next adviser training workshops in August.

7.4 FBAASS Adviser newsletter

Ricardo introduced the FBAASS advisers' newsletter as a mechanism for keeping one-to-one delivery in the adviser's minds and incentivising action. The first e-newsletter for advisers was issued in March. The newsletter provided advisers with an update on processes, news and information plus a summary or progress to date in terms of number of applications received and geographical data with the aim of keeping ILMPs etc. The newsletter opening rates were reviewed and reissued to advisers who had not opened it within 2 weeks. New issues of the newsletter will be issued every 2 months to keep advisers informed and engaged.

7.5 Data sharing agreement

Details of all farmers with a BRN were transferred to Ricardo in September 2016 to enable Ricardo to undertake eligibility checks of applicants and to utilise the data in the promotion of the service. An updated version of the database is now sent to Ricardo every 3 months.

7.6 Branding

Ricardo purchased 200 FAS Adviser branded badges- identical to those that SAC uses for the One-to-Many events. These badges were distributed to advisers as they become FBAASS accredited/reaccredited.

8 Payment Mechanisms

8.1 Approach to payment

Ricardo administer the payments directly to recipients on the Scottish Government's behalf. Ricardo operate a separate bank account with funds being drawn down into the dedicated bank account in accordance with financial profiling. We have developed this process to ensure the following:

- No monies are awarded without evidence of the work being completed or support being provided (evidence saved onto the CRM).
- All monies to be paid in arrears.
- The monies are ring-fenced and separated from Ricardo's own accounts.

8.1.1 Overview of the Financial Management Process

In September 2016, utilising our existing relationship with Lloyds Bank, Ricardo, set up a ring-fenced client bank account in the Service's name (the programme account) to facilitate the flow of funds directly to advisers from the Scottish Government.

This programme account is discrete from the operational bank accounts of the Ricardo business and the funds that pass through the account are not accounted or reported as company turnover. The bank account is under the control of a financial manager with payments authorised using established and agreed procedures that include dual consents to release payments by electronic transfer. Interest accumulated on this bank account is the property of the Scottish Government and will be repaid upon request or closure of the bank account.

All claims are batched as per a funding schedule. Payments are only initiated once dual authorisation, by Ricardo Finance and senior management staff as appointed by the Ricardo plc board and in line with corporate governance best practice, has been gained. Authorisation of payments are made via the secure Lloyds Link portal using smart card readers and pin numbers. Access to the Service bank account is restricted to the Finance Team and Senior Management. This ensures a clear segregation of duty between those with access to the CRM system and to those with access to the Finance and banking system.

8.1.2 Team training a documentation of processes

The team managing the payments received training in September 2016 on the required processes. A workflow document was established for the reference of the team and this was circulated to the advisers to ensure there is clear understanding of the process for claiming funds and deadlines for each stage of the process.

9 Launch of Grants

9.1 Plan template finalised

From April to September 2016 Ricardo worked with Scottish Government and stakeholders to inform the development of the ILMP, Specialist Advice, Carbon Audits and mentoring. We consulted widely to ensure the balance of content meets the needs of Scottish Government, whilst appealing to farmers and not being so overly labour intensive that it is not financially viable for advisers to deliver. This is a delicate balance to achieve and whilst we have now pinned down a final template we will continue to closely review feedback and uptake to ensure that we have got this right. The templates for reports were circulated to all advisers. This template provides a FAS branded report with a fixed structure to ensure a more consistent product, whilst still allowing tailoring to expand or contract sections as required to meet the individual business's needs.

9.2 Development of applications and guidance

Application forms for all grants were developed in consultation with Scottish Government and made available on the FAS website in September 2016. In parallel with application forms the application guidance and rules and procedures for the grants were developed.

9.3 Development of Specialist Advice skills matrix

All specialist advice applications must include a CV or skills profile for the chosen adviser so Ricardo can check that they are appropriately qualified to provide advice. To assist with this Ricardo have developed a skills questionnaire for advisers to complete which defines the key information required. A skills matrix has also been developed in which Ricardo document the advisers' skills and develop a database of contacts which can be offered to any farmer who requires some assistance with identifying an adviser to help them.

9.4 Mentor's skills profile

There have been a number of farmers coming forward offering their services as mentors. The intention has always been that we start with the mentees and then use the networks to identify suitable mentors, however it is very positive that we have willing mentors. To ensure we can best deploy mentors we need to establish their skills profile. Most do not have CVs and are not very comfortable being asked for one, therefore a questionnaire has been developed to ensure we capture the right information on skills and experience. This is kept up to date and interrogated when looking for mentors for new applicants.

9.5 Delivery Commenced

Delivery commenced on the 20th September.

10 Grant Delivery against targets at the 6-month point

During this first 6 months of grant delivery (since 20th September 2016) there were still a large number of Whole Farm Reviews still being completed by advisers. This was clearly a priority for advisers and whilst they did work with farmers to submit new grant applications there was quite a delay from offer accepted to report delivered

It became clear that other businesses tend to stockpile this work for attention in less busy periods. Ricardo have instigated processes to remind advisers of outstanding commitments and to chase reports which are nearing deadlines for completion. The adviser newsletter was developed to provide another mechanism for continuing to remind advisers of this work stream.

Figure 3 Table showing status of applications at the close of March 2017

	Applications received to date	Reports fully complete
ILMP	92	10
Specialist Advice	106*	2
Carbon Audits	106	0
Mentoring	15	0

*69 individual businesses, significant numbers of businesses are utilising both entitlements to specialist advice

Figure 4 Delivery against targets at the 6-month point



10.1 Budgetary Analysis

Based on the status of applications at the 6-month point it is apparent that the majority of businesses are applying for Specialist Advice in addition to ILMPs (69% of businesses are applying for both at the same time). This suggests that the current balance of the targets for the programme may need to be reassessed. If we are to achieve ILMP targets we will exceed the targets for specialist advice. To work within the budgets available may require the ILMP target to be reduced and the specialist advice target to be expanded.

	6 month targets	Achieved	pipeline spend	Budget
ILMP	150	92	110,400.00	180,000.00
Specialist Advice	50	106	106,000.00	50,000.00
Carbon Audits	125	106	53,000.00	62,500.00
Mentoring	30	15	15,000.00	30,000.00
Total			284,400.00	322,500.00

Looking at the budget implications for the programme as a whole at the 6 month point, the programme is 11% behind budget, taking into account the impact of Whole Farm Reviews diverting attention at this time this suggests a stable base and that we can assume we can achieve full utilisation in the future as momentum builds.



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