

Referendum on the UK Parliamentary Voting System

Fees and Charges Bulletin No. 4

In this bulletin we provide a progress update on the receipt and processing of claims, an update on issues particularly affecting Scottish Counting Officers, provide advice on how best to prevent queries being raised on claims submitted to ECU, and give a further update on superannuation contributions for Counting Officers. If there is a particular area that you would like us to cover in the next update, then please get in touch with us via the contacts given below.

Claim submissions progress to date

As at 7 October ECU had received 75 claims out of the 451 due. Of these 19 have been settled or had debtors invoices raised, 30 have been checked and have queries raised with Counting Officers, and 26 are being processed. A further 102 Counting Officers have indicated that they will submit claims during October.

As part of our service level agreement with ECU we have asked that all claims are acknowledged within 3 days of receipt. Records show that to date ECU has met this target.

We have also agreed to respond to all queries raised by ECU with us within 3 days of receipt. Of the 31 queries we have been passed to date, all have been responded to within the target.

There is now little more than 10 weeks to the claims submission deadline of 5 January 2012. Where claims have not already submitted, Counting Officers should make every effort to ensure that they are on track to meet the deadline and that claims are submitted as soon as possible. Payment for the remaining 25% of the fee for Counting Officer services will not be paid until final accounts have been submitted and cleared.

How to ensure your claim is settled quickly

We have had a look at the top 3 issues being raised as queries by ECU with Counting Officers after claims have been submitted. When claims are queried this

clearly leads to delays in being able to make a final settlement, and so it is preferable to keep these to a minimum. The main areas causing queries are:

- **Missing vouchers.** It is important to check thoroughly before submitting your claim that every item has a corresponding supporting voucher or invoice. Any item on a claim that does not have supporting documentation will not be accepted. All vouchers or invoices should be clearly numbered to indicate how they relate to items on the covering forms and should be in the order they are shown on the forms.
- **Lack of explanation for high spending under a particular head.** There is flexibility within the system for spending to be higher than the assumed costs under a particular head as long as the overall maximum recoverable amount is not exceeded. The amounts assumed under each Head provide a guide as to expected levels of expenditure, and ECU will query any element of a claim where expenditure significantly exceeds the assumed amount under a head and there is no explanation provided along with the claim. It would be very helpful if Counting Officers could include brief explanations of significant variances within the claim at the time of submission. For reference, assumed costs under each head for every Counting Officer can be found broken down by region on our website [here](#) under the Fees and Charges section.
- **Claims for election management software not properly identified.** There is provision within the assumptions to claim for up to half of the cost of the election component of the annual licence fee. Evidence of the components of the licence fee should be highlighted so that ECU can easily identify the amount you are claiming. Please remember also that only half of the identified election component should be claimed.

Reimbursement of public awareness activities within 28 days of the poll

We have now carefully considered all the claims received by the Commission (30 claims in total). Seven claims have already been passed for payment. The remaining claims have all been assessed, with some of these we have approved a part-payment – where it was clear that some of the public awareness activities carried out for the May 2011 events related specifically to UK-wide referendum and were therefore carried out on our behalf, as required. With a number of others there was little or insufficient evidence that the activities were carried out on our behalf, and as such we were not able to reasonably conclude that the cost of the claim can be met by the Electoral Commission. We have written to all these authorities with our findings and authorities have been given an opportunity to send further information or representations.

Counting Officers' superannuation

We wrote to Communities and Local Government (CLG) on 19 September to stress our concerns at the continuing lack of progress in resolving this issue to allow for superannuation contributions to be made in respect of Regional Counting Officer and Counting Officer duties. We highlighted three main consequences of the continuing delay, namely:

- Neither Counting Officers nor their local authorities can make superannuation contributions
- We are likely to incur additional costs because CLG's Election Claims Unit (who are contracted to support the claims process) are likely to have to make supplementary payments once the superannuation legislation is sorted out
- Our timetable for preparing and submitting the Resource Accounts for the referendum may be jeopardised - until we can finalise the superannuation elements of Counting Officers' claims, we cannot finalise the referendum accounts.

We asked for a firm indication of when the consultation will begin and end, and when the necessary changes to the regulations would be made.

CLG replied to us on 3 October indicating that they will aim for the consultation to begin in October, and with an intention that the legislation will be in place in Spring 2012.

We wrote further to CLG on 6 October welcoming the consultation commencing, but expressing disappointment at the prospect of legislation not being finalised until Spring 2012. We have copied all of the correspondence to Cabinet Office, the Scottish Public Pensions Agency, the Speakers' Committee, the National Audit Office, and HM Treasury.

Certification of copy invoices in Scotland

Counting Officers in Scotland have raised with us the issue of provision of copy invoices or vouchers and the need for the Counting Officer to personally certify every one as a true copy. This has arisen due to the need to submit accounts and all corresponding supporting documentation to both Scotland Office and the Electoral Commission.

We have agreed with ECU that alongside the provision of copy invoices or vouchers it will be sufficient for Counting Officers in Scotland to provide a single declaration to cover the certification. A form has been devised for this purpose and is available on our website [here](#). To fulfil our requirements Counting Officers should group the vouchers accordingly by head and type (e.g. Head F1, Vouchers 1-90, Presiding

Officer fees, Total amount £10,350). For additional clarity, the declaration should also confirm where the original invoices have been sent just to make it clear why copy invoices have been supplied.

Fees and charges resources

We have updated the FAQ document to reflect recent issues raised with us and this can be found on our website alongside other fees and charges resources. These can all be accessed via the following [link](#) and found under the heading of 'Fees and Charges'.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the preparation or presentation of your claim, ECU is happy to provide help and assistance. They can be contacted at ecu@communities.gsi.gov.uk or on 030 344 43912.

If you have any queries about the content of this bulletin or comments or suggestions to make about future content or format, please contact your local regional or devolved office (details [here](#)).