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RPA computer glitches hinder entitlement trading

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Philip Clarke (<http://www.fwi.co.uk/author/philip-clarke>)

Ongoing glitches with the Rural Payments Agency's computer has caused one entitlement trader to put on hold paying out vendors, following a confirmed online transfer, for fear the system is getting it wrong.

Exeter-based Hugh Townsend says he has experienced serious issues relating to the notification of entitlement transfers.

This year, confirmations of completed transactions are being sent automatically to the vendor or agent within two hours, whereas last year the transfers were checked manually in a process that took at least a month.

See also: [English lowland entitlements trading for less than in 2016](http://www.fwi.co.uk/business/english-lowland-entitlements-trading-less-2016.htm) (<http://www.fwi.co.uk/business/english-lowland-entitlements-trading-less-2016.htm>)

But, according to Mr Townsend, this automatic system has not been working properly.

"The way it's meant to happen is that, when you make the transfer application online, if there are no problems, then you get an automatic message confirming it – at which point we release the funds to the vendor.

"But if there is a problem, then the RPA computer should flag this up, and the application should show in the 'entitlement transfer pending' window," he explained.

In one recent case, however, Mr Townsend received a confirmation message in respect of an entitlement sale and released the funds to the vendor, only to discover that the RPA had not transferred the entitlements.

"The purchaser was claiming Basic Payment for the first time, so was not recorded on the RPA system as an active farmer. As far as the RPA was concerned, the entitlement transfer could not go ahead, even though the automatic messaging system told us it had," said Mr Townsend.

Entitlement correction

Further problems have been encountered as a result of "entitlement corrections", especially in relation to common land.

Some of these result from errors that occurred in 2015 allocations, which are still being worked out for hundreds of applicants.

There are also issues in relation to the New Forest area, where additional land has recently been mapped and the recalculated eligible area has not yet been confirmed.

As a result, applicants are still seeing their entitlements either increased or decreased as part of an ongoing reassessment, with no end date in sight.



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Lingering doubts

“Both these issues raise the question of whether the system is operationally competent,” said Mr Townsend. “It is certainly true that what we see on screen cannot be 100% relied upon.

“We are still transferring entitlements, but for now we are putting on hold the paying out of money to vendors until the situation has been clarified. It is too dangerous.

“We advise farmers and other agents to adopt a similar position until the RPA tells us we can rely on the confirmations and, importantly, that they will compensate individuals where the transfer has not taken place as indicated.”

An RPA spokesperson said: “Anyone applying for BPS 2017 who thinks there may be an issue with the information held on the Rural Payments service should contact RPA so we can investigate.

“Further support on applying for BPS 2017 is [available on our website \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bps-2017\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bps-2017).



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