PHC2025/01: The Future of Plant Health in Scotland

Background and knowledge gap: Plant Health across arable crops, trees, horticulture and wild plants is at risk from a wide range of pests and diseases. Some of these are familiar threats that can be tackled through established management practices, others can be kept at bay through attention to good biosecurity practices, while others remain a focus of vigilance, surveillance and early detection. However, the health threats to Scotland's plant-based assets are not static, nor are the tools and approaches with which they can be tackled. To maximise the likelihood of protecting Scotland's plant health, we need to better understand the drivers of threats (environmental, political and behavioural) and make optimal use of the tools available to identify, minimise and mitigate plant health threats.

The Plant Health Centre helps Scotland's regulatory authorities prepare for unwanted pests and diseases by plugging evidence gaps and recommending actions that could positively impact on Scotland's plant health.

This is an open call to help contribute to Scotland's preparation for future plant health risks facing any of our sectors (agriculture, horticulture, forestry and the natural environment), be it through horizon scanning, better identification and quantification of risks, guidance on technological implementation, delivery of behavioural changes that improve biosecurity, or understanding how the plant health opportunities resulting from changing policy landscape can be maximised, and risks minimised.

Impact: Improvements to the evidence base that leaves Scotland's regulatory authority and practitioners in the above sectors in a better position to protect Scotland's plant health in the future.

Objectives and research required for this call:

To provide evidence or deliver activities that contribute to protecting Scotland's plant-based assets from future pest and disease threats.

It is anticipated that the focus of this work will be on either specific pests and diseases identified as of considerable risk to Scotland's plant health, on plant assets that are of special significance to Scotland (important plant species or habitats), or on issues raised as concerns or gaps by key stakeholder groups.

The projects proposed may vary in character, and we particularly welcome project proposals that deal with one or more of the following topic areas:

Horizon scanning: assessments of how plant pest and disease presence or burden may change in the near to mid-term, and how Scotland can prepare for these scenarios (including climate adaptation); evaluations of changes to global trade, e.g. arising from major tariff changes, conflicts and other major international issues which could alter risks to plant health in Scotland.

Technological Changes: new and upcoming developments in the detection and surveillance of pests and diseases, including tools for border biosecurity; the use of Artificial Intelligence in protecting Scotland's plant health; new tools and approaches for recognition and minimising the impact of pests and diseases.

Policy changes: new or changes to existing policies, either within or outside Scotland, which have the potential to impact on plant health in Scotland. This includes pesticide regulation, land use / management regulations, incentives and responsibilities for plant health, and policies and regulations around trade in plants and plant products. This can include changes in the focus of major funding structures in countries influential in global science, undergoing major re-alignment of priorities.

People and plants: research or providing tools with a focus on behavioural change that can lead to positive plant health outcomes for Scotland in the future; comparisons between plant health Knowledge Exchange in different sectors, and how best practice or technologies can be adopted across sectors; guiding improvements to biosecurity (including guidance documents), especially for smaller trade; raising awareness around responsible sourcing for the different sectors; influencing retailers and supply chains to make Scotland's plant health a priority (e.g. encourage IPM uptake) in the future.

Plant diversity: changes to plant diversity (either within species or changes to species diversity within systems) and explorations of how to maximise benefits and avoid/ mitigate negative impacts (direct and indirect) to Scotland's plant health, in any or across our four sectors.

We also welcome projects that take forward recommendations made by previous PHC-commissioned projects (see our [publications page](#)), especially those that seek to maximise impact of existing research.

For more information on the remit of the projects the PHC commission, including areas that are not within scope see Appendix 1 of this document, and for previous examples of our projects please refer to the [projects page](#) on the PHC website.

Deliverables required from individual project:

- Final Report with executive summary on investigations, to contain key sources, analysis, findings and recommendations for implementation or further work. Reports should be a maximum of 20 pages of text (30 pages including figures but excluding appendices and references). Cover image(s) with associated photo credits should also be supplied.
- Brief policy summary (2 pages maximum) explaining how the work has contributed to filling evidence gaps and the context in which the findings can be used by policy makers and practitioners.
- Presentation at Scotland's Plant Health conference and any other relevant stakeholder meeting(s) to disseminate findings and contribution to other KE output such as the PHC virtual poster room or blogs.
- 200 word lay summary for project overview at outset, and of findings at completion (for website and newsletter).
- Slide deck of the key project findings.

Other deliverables may also be appropriate depending on the nature of the project proposed (e.g. delivery of guidance documents, decision tools etc), and these should be detailed in the application form.

Meetings:

- Project meetings throughout project lifecycle to include PHC manager, PHC Sector Lead, Scottish Government policy contact.
- Meeting/s with relevant PHC Impact Officer and Communications Officer to plan dissemination of project findings and impact strategy.
- Attendance at briefing discussion with PHC Steering group to discuss findings and next steps.

Indicative key dates:

- Deadline for submission of applications: **5pm on Wednesday 4th June 2025**
- Project start: 1st August 2025
- Overview of plans and project start-up meeting with PHC Directorate: 15th August 2025
- Final report and policy summary submitted: 30th January 2026
- Project outputs signed off by PHC Sector Lead: 27th February 2026

Detailed milestones to be confirmed by bidder.

Date all work needs to be completed by: Length of projects may vary, but all work must be completed by January 2026

Maximum funding available exclusive of VAT[1] **(where applicable) and including any knowledge exchange activities:** Projects with a maximum budget of £50,000 will be funded and we expect to be able to fund up to 2 projects.

[1] Please note that costs should be submitted net of VAT recovered by the applicant. Applicants should seek advice on appropriate VAT treatment of proposed funding.

Submitting an application form

Applicants should use the PHC Application Form when applying for projects and must ensure they are able to accept the PHC Funding Terms and Conditions before submitting an application.

Applicants should note that the project final report and policy summary will undergo a multistage review process, and this should be taken into consideration when costing projects

Completed applications should be submitted to info@planthealthcentre.scot for evaluation by 5pm on Wednesday 4th June 2025. Successful applicants will be notified by 4th July 2025 and we may request further clarification on any aspect of the application prior to contract award. You should highlight any potential conflicts of interest in your proposal.

Please contact the Centre Manager if you have any queries (info@planthealthcentre.scot). Answers to any non-confidential questions will be published on our website.

Review of application

Applications will be reviewed by a panel selected from the PHC Directorate, Scottish Government, PHC partners and/or commissioning stakeholder, as appropriate.

Expectations for section 1 of the application form:

Expectation	Descriptor
Duration	The proposed duration will align closely to the details provided in the anticipated timescales section of the specification.
Staff time and effort	The proposed allocation of staff time and effort is appropriate and includes all deliverables. The proposal must also provide a commitment that named staff members will be available to work on the contract if the bid is successful.
Project costs	The estimated breakdown of project costs is realistic and inclusive of all deliverables.

Expectations for section 2 of the application form:

Expectation	Descriptor
Background	The proposal should include an introduction which demonstrates a clear understanding of the project requirements. This should include the need for this research; the project aim; and how the proposal will address this aim.
Proposed methodology and outcomes	The proposal should demonstrate a high quality and workable methodology, including: how the evidence will be identified, reviewed and assessed, consulting relevant stakeholders and/or experts where appropriate, to address the key questions and produce the deliverables in the timescales required.
Milestones	The project milestones are logical, practical and include all deliverables.
Project Management	The staff, resources and expertise are appropriate for conducting the proposed project. The proposal should name the project lead.
General and specific topic expertise and experience	The proposal should provide details of individual staff members who will work on this project and demonstrate how they will meet the project requirements, specifically: - general research experience and expertise - specific experience and expertise relevant to the call
Risk	The proposal should provide a risk assessment matrix detailing any risks identified in relation to the delivery of this contract, and proposed mitigation measures to minimise their probability and impact, focused particularly on risks to completion on time.

Appendix 1 – Remit of Projects commissioned by Scotland's Plant Health Centre

The Plant Health Centre has an annual budget for commissioning projects that enhance Scotland's resilience in the face of threats to arable crops, trees, horticulture and wild plants. Our projects aim to fill knowledge gaps associated with new or emerging plant health threats to Scotland's plant assets (either from the perspective of the pest/pathogen, or of the host plant/habitat), or with processes and schemes that address plant health risks, and with trade pathways that carry risks. The following outlines some of the areas in which we have a remit to commission projects, and others that we do not.

We commission projects on:

- Pests and pathogens that are of significance to Scotland's plants and have not yet, or have only recently, entered the country. This includes collating information, filling knowledge gaps on pest/pathogen biology, modelling potential for spread, testing or creating tools for detection.

- Pests and diseases already endemic in Scotland whose impact is likely to worsen in the future (for example because of changing climate, withdrawal of pesticides, changes in land management etc).

- Knowledge gaps around health risks to plant assets (i.e., iconic Scottish plant species or habitat types).

- Assessing and addressing human-mediated pest and disease risks to Scotland's plant assets, such as plant biosecurity, plant trade, large planting schemes, recreation, and other plant-associated activities.

- Understanding and evaluating how different policies impact on plant health in Scotland, with the potential for policy enhancement and development.

- Knowledge Exchange projects relating to improving Scotland's plant health.

We do not commission projects on:

- Endemic plant pests and diseases that do not present a growing threat.

- Longer term surveillance programmes.

- Areas of plant health that are already addressed in the Strategic Research Programme (although projects may be complimentary to SRP research), or through levy organisations.

- Abiotic threats to Scotland's plants, unless as a component of exploring the threat of pests and diseases.

- Invasive plant species.