

Renewables Obligation (RO)

www.ofgem.gov.uk/ro

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Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation FAQ - Microgenerators

This document provides guidance for generators of renewable microgeneration stations¹ accredited under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) scheme ("micro-NIRO"), who have appointed an agent to act on their behalf. The guidance does not cover third party ownership operating under the 'Rent-a-roof' model².

What is Ofgem's role?

We administer the NIRO in accordance with the NIRO Order on behalf of the Northern Ireland Authority Utilities Regulator (NIAUR) under an Agency Services Agreement. Under this agreement, Ofgem is required to carry out the functions such as: granting accreditation for generating stations eligible for the NIRO scheme, monitoring compliance with the requirements of the NIRO Order and issuing Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation Certificates (NIROCs) for electricity generated by accredited stations. However, NIAUR continues to retain responsibility under the legislation for administering the NIRO.

What is an Agent?

The scheme enables micro-NIRO generators (eg a householder with solar panels on their roof) to appoint an agent to act on their behalf. The main role of an agent is to apply and maintain accreditations under the NIRO scheme, submit data claims, including responding to any queries Ofgem might have regarding data submitted and to be the main point of contact between the generator and Ofgem. Currently there are more than 23,000 microgenerators accredited under the NIRO scheme and the vast majority of them choose to be represented by an agent.

¹ Microgeneration refers to the small scale generating stations with a declared net capacity of 50kW or less

² Where the homeowner receives the electricity generated (lowering their electricity bills) and the third party owner of the installation receives any associated subsidies eg NIROCs and/or any export payments

How do I appoint an agent?

You can appoint an agent to act on your behalf for the NIRO scheme by completing an [Agent Appointment Form \(AAF\)](#) and sending it to MicroNIRO@ofgem.gov.uk. Please refer to our website [here](#) for more guidance on this process.

When should MicroNIRO generators submit meter readings?

You will need to agree with your appointed agent how often you will claim NIROCs and submit meter readings to support your NIROC claim. If you choose to submit meter readings annually, then you should take a meter reading on 31 March each year. This meter reading and any supporting evidence required, such as meter photographs, should be provided to your agent by their stated deadline.

What is required from meter photographs?

We recommend you take meter photos more frequently than once a year. This provides a better understanding of how your system is working and enable you to identify any potential system failures. It is best practice to time-stamp all meter photos and to ensure they clearly show both the reading and the meter serial number.

There might be two meters installed on site, to separately measure exported and generated electricity. The first one is used by your supplier to calculate the export payments due, the latter measure what is generated by your stations and is used for claiming NIROCs. Your agent will be able to provide you with further guidance on how to distinguish between two meters and take meter readings correctly.

When will I receive my payment?

Once Ofgem receive data submissions, these are reviewed and NIROCs for eligible generation are issued on 15 June each year.

Where your NIROCs are issued to an agent, it is the agents' responsibility to trade those certificates and issue payment to you in line with conditions of the agreement between you and your agent. Ofgem does not have oversight of this part of the process.

Why does it sometimes take longer to get my payment?

Submissions may be flagged during our review and are held while we request further information and evidence to validate these claims. Ofgem provides agents with a list of queries for submissions which do not pass our initial checks. Typical types of queries include requests for time-stamped meter photographs and data from a remote monitoring system.

Ofgem may set deadlines by which the required evidence must be provided, following which no further submission will be reviewed. Agents are informed in advance of any deadlines.

Each agent is expected to re-submit initially queried data claims in large batches rather than providing Ofgem with requested information separately for each queried submission. It is possible that agents may delay submission of your revised data claim until the next batch is ready if information requested is not provided in a timely manner from other generators your agent is representing.

What happens if there are changes to my station?

Another common reason for late NIROC issuance, are where changes have been made to a generating station without Ofgem being informed. You should inform your agent as soon as possible if you have made any changes to accredited generating stations such as, adding new solar panels on the roof or replacing a meter. It is then your agent's responsibility to contact us within two weeks of the alteration occurring as any changes to your generating station may require the accreditation application to be amended and might impact data claims for your station. Failing to inform your agent of changes in a timely manner can cause significant delays to NIROCs being issued. In some cases, certificates might even be at risk of expiry, potentially resulting in payment not being possible for that obligation year.

What evidence does Ofgem require in case of system faults?

If there is a problem with your system you should let your agent know as soon as possible. Once you have informed your agent about the fault, they should advise you on documents that will be required to process any necessary application amendments and avoid delays with payments.

As for the data claim, it is essential to regularly take meter read photographs as additional information might later be required to validate your submission. For example, in a situation where a meter has been replaced, we need to see evidence as to when the change took place and the last available reading from the old meter. Evidence could include a form of time-stamped photograph and/or confirmation from the meter installer, or any testing documents they might have provided you.

When should I contact Ofgem?

Each generator who has appointed an agent agreed to the conditions listed on the agent appointment form. One of the points on that agreement states that an agent should be the sole point of contact between a generator and Ofgem. This applies to any queries you might have regarding your accreditation application, data claims or if you would like to submit a complaint.

How to terminate my agreement with an agent?

You may decide to move to another agent or terminate your agreement with an agent and start managing your accreditation, submitting meter readings and providing evidence directly to us on the Renewables and CHP Register.

If you would like to move to another agent, please contact the agent of your choice and they will make this change for you. To enable the efficient administration of the scheme, Ofgem must be notified by 28 February at the latest, if the switch is to have effect from 1 April. The existing agent would still receive NIROCs for the year up to 31 March next year. Your new agent will start claiming NIROCs from the following year. Unless both the agent and you agree otherwise and communicate your decision to Ofgem.

If you no longer like to be represented by an agent, you will need to terminate your agreement with them and contact Ofgem so that we can ensure your account is accessible to allow you to submit data annually or monthly and make relevant updates to your accreditation when necessary.

What to do if my agent goes out of business?

Ofgem recognise that this situation might happen. If this happens an administrator would be appointed as with any other business and we would expect that they would communicate with you as the generator. To minimise any potential delays in NIROC issuance, we strongly encourage you to keep on taking meter read photos on 31 March each year and getting in touch with your new agent or the appointed administrator at the earliest convenience.

Contact us

If you have any questions/concerns about the process, don't hesitate to get in touch with us at MicroNIRO@ofgem.gov.uk

More information:

- Information relating to the RO scheme can be found [here](#).
- Information relating specifically to the Micro-NIRO scheme can be found [here](#).
- You can get in touch with Consumer Council by following the instructions provided on their [website](#).