

Frequently Asked Questions about using SPIRE

What is SPIRE?

SPIRE is the Export Control Organisation's one-stop online licensing database. Exporters should use the SPIRE system to apply or register for export or trade licences issued by the ECO. This includes applying for licences for a wide range of dual-use goods (which are civilian goods with a military purpose) such as lasers, chemicals, nuclear equipment and materials, telecoms equipment, computers and much more (as well as military goods such as firearms and ammunition).

The SPIRE website is available directly at <https://www.spire.bis.gov.uk> and also via the Businesslink website at <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>

This document aims to answer a wide range of practical questions about using SPIRE. Your first source of information should be to consult the guidance document **Top Queries about SPIRE** and also these Frequently Asked Questions (which are grouped by subject area below).

If your question is not answered in this document or elsewhere then you should contact the SPIRE Helpline on 020 7215 4594 or eco.help@bis.gsi.gov.uk

For more information about export licensing please see the [export control pages on the Businesslink website](#).

The latest updates about ECO training and seminar courses and the ECO's "Notices to Exporters" email service (which you can sign up for) are available via <http://www.bis.gov.uk/exportcontrol>

Export Control Organisation
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Applying for a Licence – FAQs

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Question 1 - What different types of licences are available?

The Export Control Organisation (ECO) issues a range of different export and trade licences which exporters should either apply or register for if their items, transfers or export activities are subject to controls.

The categories of licence that the ECO issues are:

- Open General Licences (OGLs)
- Standard Individual Licences (SIELs)
- Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs)
- Transshipment Licences
- Trade Control Licences
- Global Project Licences.

More information on each category of licence is available on the [export control pages of the Businesslink website](#).

Question 2 - Is there any charge to register or apply for licences or to use SPIRE?

No, ECO do not currently charge for either licence applications, issuing licences or for rating enquiries.

Question 3 - How early can I apply for a licence?

Whenever you have the relevant information required to complete a licence application.

Question 4 - How long does it take to process a licence application?

The ECO's aim is to issue SIELs within 20 working days and OIELs within 60 working days. However, where the end use destination and/or the equipment to be exported are sensitive, complex or contentious, processing can take considerably longer. The ECO publishes quarterly and annual statistics which detail, for each destination country, ECO's progress against targets .

See further questions below about SPIRE Reporting – FAQs.

For further details of the ECO's customer service targets see our guidance on the [export control pages of the Businesslink website](#).

You can access licensing statistics via the ECO's statistics database the [Strategic Export Controls: Reports and Statistics website](#)

Question 5 - How does SPIRE cater for companies who need to export dual-use goods that are located in another European Union country?

The ECO deals with approximately 150 of this type of application per year. To meet these specific requirements, ECO issues companies with a printed paper licence which ECO endorses.

Question 6 - Can I use paper forms for Licence Applications?

Applications should be sent in electronically via the SPIRE system.

Previous paper licences were not converted into an electronic format under SPIRE. Procedures relating to such paper licences (for example the presentation of the licence to HM Revenue & Customs) continue to apply.

A small number of very specialised licence application types need to be applied for separately to SPIRE.

Question 7 - Do I need to register to use SPIRE and if I do, how do I do it?

Yes – it is necessary to register to use SPIRE. The SPIRE registration process is as straightforward and quick as possible. Information on how to register is accessible in the guidance note on **Creating a SPIRE logon account and company registration** (published on the SPIRE website).

Question 8 - Are there delays in registering for SPIRE or adding more people?

Registration of your company is instant. The Company itself adds details of employees who need or want access to access SPIRE.

Once a company has registered, it can authorise other users to use SPIRE. Companies can give authority levels to their own staff and who can access SPIRE.

Question 9 - Do we need to have a unique EORI/VAT number to register to use SPIRE? (An EORI number stands for Economic Operator and Registration Identification number).

No.

For more details about EORI numbers, see the [Businesslink website](#).

Question 10 - Can I register and de-register for Open General Licences (OGLs) using this system?

Yes. More details are explained in the guidance note on **Registering for OGLs** (published on the SPIRE website).

Question 11 - Do I need to use a digital certificate to access SPIRE?

No – this is not required.

Question 12 - Can sole traders or individuals not registered for VAT or as a company use SPIRE?

Yes.

Question 13 - Can more than one person in my organisation use SPIRE? Will SPIRE allow for more than one user with the same privileges, or limited rights to be set up?

Yes – each company can authorise a number of users to use SPIRE. Companies can give authority levels to their own staff and manage access levels to SPIRE. The authority levels allow to people to view, prepare and/or submit applications on behalf of their organisation.

Question 14 - How do I add new members of staff in my organisation to access the SPIRE system?

To add new members of staff to an existing company logon account you need to do the following:

- Go to the 'Manage my registration' on the left hand menu bar'
- Select 'Update'
- Go to the tab on organisation 'Security'
- Select 'Set access privileges for organisation (all sites)'
- Select 'Add Person' and enter required details (forename, surname, email address)
- Set privileges by ticking appropriate access levels.

For more details (including screenshots of the appropriate screens, you can view the guidance document about **Creating a SPIRE logon account and company registration**.

Question 15 - How do you assess Authorised Signatories?

The function/role provided by Authorised Signatories was replaced in SPIRE by a new security model for the company.

Question 16 - Do I have to send all my supporting paperwork through electronically?

Wherever possible, supporting paperwork should be sent through electronically. Where there are exceptional reasons why this cannot be done, paperwork can be sent in and scanned at the ECO. However, this will impact on turnaround times for licence applications.

Further details about supporting documents such as End-User Undertakings can be found on the [export control pages of the Businesslink website](#).

You are also recommended to consult the guidance available on the Businesslink site about **Common Pitfalls to avoid in export licence applications**.

Question 17 - Do I have to send new support papers or technical specifications every time I apply for a licence for the same product?

Yes. ECO need to assess each application on its own merit and therefore need all supporting documents for each application.

Question 18 – Can I use the system to search applications and licences relating to my company?

Yes – SPIRE provides full search facilities and there is a summary tab under manage my registrations, if your company has registered status on SPIRE, which shows all licences and applications for your company or site.

Question 19 - How long does the system store partly completed applications?

Partly stored applications are retained for as long as you wish. The ECO does not plan to delete them. If the partially completed application is no longer required, it can be deleted by the applicant.

Question 20 - How do I know that the ECO have received my application?

Once the application has been received, you will receive notification from the ECO through the SPIRE system in your workbasket.

Question 21 - How are requests for further information sent to me?

Requests for further information are sent to the designated application contact electronically through SPIRE.

To inform you that there is new information on SPIRE, you are sent an email asking you to log onto SPIRE. When you log into SPIRE you will be able to pick up the request for further information.

Question 22 – Can I make changes to my application once I have submitted it?

You have some limited ability to change minor elements of the application. Permitted changes are explained in the guidance on the Licensing Process available on the [export control pages of the Businesslink website](#).

Once an application is submitted, it is more likely that the application request should be cancelled and a new one submitted (using the previous application retrieved from SPIRE as a template)

Question 23 – Can I partly complete a form and update it at a later date when I've got all the information?

Yes, you are able to save the application on SPIRE, complete it at a later date and then submit it to the ECO.

Question 24 – Can I refer to my previous applications on SPIRE?

You can view previous applications and use them as templates for new applications if you wish.

However, you need to complete a new application in full for a new licence application. You are not just able to refer to a similar previous application, although there is an opportunity to reference a previous, relevant application as part of the new application you are making.

Question 25 – Can I retrieve an application should the system fail? Will I lose any data?

Yes you can retrieve an application if there is a systems failure. Data is secured whenever you move between screens on SPIRE and, therefore, should not be lost (however, you may lose changes you have just made to the page you were working on at the time of the failure).

Question 26 – Can I store a template or a copy of the completed form in a readable format on our network system or on a standalone PC for future reference?

Yes – there is an option for you to save a copy of the form

Question 27 - Will the confirmation that my application has been submitted/received be automatic back to my screen and followed up by e-mail?

Yes.

Question 28 – Do I have to keep sending in the same documents for every licence application if SPIRE stores the documents electronically?

Appropriate supporting documentation is still be required for each application

Question 29 - Will I be notified if any changes are made to the SPIRE online forms?

Yes – any key changes will be communicated.

To keep informed of changes to SPIRE you are recommended to sign up to the “Notices to Exporters” email notification service provided by the ECO. You can sign up to receive emails from ECO from the Department for Business pages at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/exportcontrol>

Question 30 - Will I receive confirmation that my application is in the system and is being processed?

Yes – the status of your application is be provided on the system. There is no need for you to call/e-mail the ECO to provide an update.

Question 31 - Will I be able to track/see the status of my application as it is processed?

Yes – SPIRE allows you to track the progress of your application at a high level. Further information is available in the guidance on **How to check progress of an application made via SPIRE** (available on the SPIRE website).

Question 32 - Will SPIRE allow me to provide a link to our website where technical specifications can be accessed, removing the need to attach these?

You may provide a link for additional information as part of your application, but Technical Specifications and other documents still have to be provided to the ECO (attached to the application). This is because the ECO need relevant technical specifications to support all applications.

Question 33 - I understand the letter and actions from Compliance Audits comes to me via SPIRE. How does that work?

More details are explained in the guidance note on **Registering for OGLs** (published on the SPIRE website).

Technical Issues - Accessing SPIRE – FAQs

1. [I need an export licence only very occasionally, but I don't have a computer or access to one. What do I do?](#)
 2. [I haven't got a scanner – will you accept supporting documentation on paper?](#)
 3. [Can I complete my application off-line and then upload it to SPIRE?](#)
 4. [Can I use SPIRE if the main applicant is overseas?](#)
 5. [I work in a company that has a secure computer network that will not allow me to connect to the internet. How do I access SPIRE?](#)
 6. [My company only has a dial up link to the internet – will I be able to use that for SPIRE?](#)
 7. [Do I need special computer hardware or software to use SPIRE?](#)
 8. [Can I access SPIRE using systems other than Microsoft Windows \(eg Apple Mac\) and browsers other than Internet Explorer?](#)
 9. [How do I know that my information will be secure on an online system?](#)
 10. [If my SPIRE session crashed for any reason is there any potential security issue where SPIRE might remain logged in when I reconnect to the Internet?](#)
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Question 1 - I need an export licence only very occasionally but I don't have a computer or access to one. What do I do?

You will need to find access to a computer with an internet connection. Computers can be accessed through public libraries or through Internet Cafes, Chambers of Commerce and many other locations.

Question 2 - I haven't got a scanner - will you accept supporting documentation on paper?

The ECO would prefer that you find a way of scanning your documents into the system with your application. Where there are exceptional reasons why this cannot be done, paperwork can be sent in and scanned at the ECO. However, this will impact on turnaround times for licence applications.

Question 3 – Can I complete my application off-line and then upload it to SPIRE?

This is not available. The form needs to be completed within the SPIRE system online. However, you will be able to save your form and come back to it as you wish.

Question 4 – Can I use SPIRE if the main applicant address is overseas?

You can register to use SPIRE from outside the UK but you will only be allowed to apply for particular licences or services where UK legislation extends to UK concerns that are operating outside the UK. For example Trade (trafficking and brokering) licences and providing support or other assistance to Weapons of Mass Destruction programmes.

For the major activity covered by licences available through SPIRE – namely the export of goods from the UK – there is no need for applicants to apply from outside the UK, since the goods will be here and the company will have a presence here.

Similarly, the ratings service, which is an advisory service only, is not open to non-UK applicants.

Question 5 - I work in a company that has a secure computer network that will not allow me to connect to the Internet. How do I access SPIRE?

ECO provides details of what access is required to use SPIRE. You need to work with your IT Department to see whether they can allow you access to SPIRE. As this is functionality required for the business operation, there should be a strong argument for this.

If not, then the company needs to find an alternative solution – (e.g a standalone solution off the secure network with a direct internet connection)

Question 6 - My company only has a dial up link to the Internet - will we be able to use that for SPIRE?

SPIRE will work over a dial-up link. However, attaching supporting paperwork may be an issue. The size of attachments needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that it can be transmitted across a dial-up link.

Question 7 - Do I need special computer hardware or software to use SPIRE?

A PC with an internet connection and a web browser is the minimum specification. A scanner will allow all supporting documentation to be sent in electronically.

Question 8 - Can I access SPIRE using systems other than Microsoft Windows (eg Apple Mac) and browsers other than Internet Explorer?

SPIRE works with other browsers and also works on a Mac and on Lynx.

Question 9 - How do I know my information will be secure on an online system?

SPIRE will encrypt all data being sent between your organisation and the ECO. SPIRE data is transmitted using security levels higher than those used by many online banks.

For the technically minded, the encryption level used by SPIRE will be 256bit. This will negotiate down to 128bit if your browser doesn't support 256bit.

Security accreditation and exhaustive penetration testing was carried out during the SPIRE development process and is repeated annually.

Once the data is within the ECO, all access to SPIRE by the ECO and Other Government Departments is through the Government Secure Intranet (GSI).

As long as information and security processes are secure within your organisation (e.g. access controls are maintained, passwords are kept secure etc) the information will be secure once within SPIRE.

Question 10 - If my SPIRE session crashed for any reason is there any potential security issue where SPIRE might remain logged in when I reconnect to the Internet?

The SPIRE session does not remain logged in. The session only remains logged in for that particular internet browser session. If the session ends, you will need to log back into SPIRE to continue work.

Interface between SPIRE and HMRC systems – FAQs

1. [How do customs systems and procedures maintained by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs \(HMRC\) relate to SPIRE?](#)
 2. [Does SPIRE interface with the HMRC CHIEF system?](#)
 3. [Does SPIRE interface with the HMRC New Export System \(NES\) system?](#)
 4. [Am I able to \(or need to\) print my licence and present it to HMRC?](#)
 5. [Is HMRC able to see my NLR \(No Licence Required letters electronically so that they don't stop goods that ECO have told me don't need a licence?\)](#)
 6. [Do HMRC decrement an electronic licence in value and quantity?](#)
 7. [What will happen if I lose my licence?](#)
 8. [What happens if my goods are stopped at customs by HMRC?](#)
 9. [What should I do in the case of an Automatic Licence Verification Error at customs?](#)
 10. [What if I have accidentally voided my licence?](#)
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Question 1 - How do customs systems and procedures maintained by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) relate to SPIRE?

HMRC were fully involved in the SPIRE development. The electronic export licence is passed to HMRC automatically once it is issued by the ECO. This means that HMRC have access to the licence in electronic format when goods are declared for export.

Question 2 - Does SPIRE interface with the HMRC CHIEF system?

The SPIRE system interfaces directly with the CHIEF system to transfer data about the electronic Licences to HMRC.

NOTE: CHIEF stands for Customs Handling of Import and Export Freight. It is HMRC's customs declaration processing system and used to record all international trade movements.

Question 3 - Does SPIRE interface with the HMRC New Export System (NES)?

There are no plans for SPIRE to interface with the HMRC NES system.

NOTE: The NES is an electronic based system that enables exporters/agents to send their export declarations to HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) electronically. The NES was implemented at all UK maritime ports in 2002 and at all UK airports in 2003.

Question 4 - Will I be able to (or need to) print my licence and present it to HMRC?

The electronic licence is the 'legal' licence. HMRC will already have access to this when you make your declaration. Paper licences do not need to be presented to HMRC. Instead, you need to quote the electronic licence reference or name of the Open General Licence (OGL).

Question 5 – Is HMRC able to see my NLR (No Licence Required) letters electronically so they don't stop goods that you've just told me don't need a licence?

HMRC have access to SPIRE and they can see rating advice letters.

This does not mean, however, that exporters are not scrutinised at the point of export as part of HMRC's normal enforcement procedures.

HMRC do not have access to emails issued by the ECO as part of the Iran End-User Email Advice Service.

Question 6 - Do HMRC decrement an electronic licence in value and quantity?

Export licences issued by ECO are automatically 'decremented' by HMRC via the Automatic Licence Verification process (link with the HMRC CHIEF system).

The HMRC issued Customs Information Paper (08) 22 in April 2008 advised the following:

“6.1 To ensure the ALV process works efficiently, it is vitally important Exporters freight forwarders or shipping agents are careful when entering CHIEF input data at item level on the SAD Export Declaration with the line number(s) of quantity controlled SIEL licences and the licence quantities to be decremented.

6.2 Failure to take due care when submitting licence line and quantity information to CHIEF will result in a system validation error response being generated if an attempt is made to decrement a licence line that has an insufficient quantity balance remaining to cover the Export. Conversely, where the correct licence line to decrement has not been accurately reflected, and there is sufficient balance on that licence line to satisfy the export, CHIEF will automatically accept the declaration.

6.3 It is therefore in your best interests that automatic decrementing of licence balances is undertaken with precise licence status codes, licence line numbers and quantity data declared on the Export SAD. Incorrect decrements will potentially delay subsequent exports that attempt to utilise incorrectly decremented multi lined licences. Where declaration data is not accurately declared first time, HMRC will regard the export declaration as an incorrect entry which could result in the initiation of further compliance action.

6.4 Manual corrective action will be carried out by HMRC if notification is made in writing to the NCH providing details of the licence reference, incorrect decrements made, and the licence lines and quantity amounts that should have been attributed as a result of the export.”

To access further information see the HMRC website at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk>

Question 7 - What will happen if I lose my licence?

Licences are issued electronically and cannot be 'lost'. The electronic licence is stored on the ECO's SPIRE system and a record of it kept on the HMRC system.

Question 8 – What happens if my goods are stopped at customs by HMRC?

Once HMRC have stopped your goods to see if they require a licence, there is nothing that the ECO can do. HMRC is legally in charge of goods “snagged” at customs.

If your goods do need a licence, having been stopped at customs, you should apply via SPIRE.

Question 9 – What should I do in the case of an Automatic Licence Verification Error at customs?

Occasionally you might be in the position of presenting your goods at customs and quoting your issued licence number, but there will be no match on the HMRC's CHIEF system.

In the case of Automatic Licence Verification Errors such as “licence not available to be declared” you should send an email to the SPIRE helpline at: eco.spire@bis.gsi.gov.uk. In your email you should quote your:

- VAT number
- EORI number
- SPIRE licence number
- Brief description of problem

Question 10 – What if I have accidentally voided my licence?

If you have accidentally voided an OGEL licence (for instance because you have wrongly recorded the licence as ‘exhausted’) then you need to re-register for the OGEL via SPIRE.

SPIRE Reporting – FAQs

1. [Does SPIRE offer a publicly accessible database of licences?](#)
 2. [Does SPIRE provide exporters with more information on licences refused to certain destinations?](#)
 3. [Will the ECO be making more licensing information public \(eg in Annual Reports\) as a result of SPIRE?](#)
 4. [Have performance indicators / targets changed as a result of SPIRE? Will I get my licence faster?](#)
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Question 1 – Does SPIRE offer a publicly accessible database of licences?

The ECO does not provide a publicly accessible database of licences due to commercial confidentiality reasons. However, the ECO launched a publicly searchable database of licence statistics in 2008. This system is the [Strategic Export Controls: Reports and Statistics website](#).

This website contains data on export licensing decisions which was historically published as read only in the quarterly and annual reports.

Question 2 – Does SPIRE provide exporters with more information on licences refused to certain destinations?

The ECO's statistics website provides exporters with access to published reports (Annual Report, Quarterly Reports and Figures).

The Quarterly Reports contain information which is grouped by destination of export on licences issued, refused or revoked within the designated period for specific types of licences including Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs).

The Quarterly Figures outline the refusal percentages and processing times by destination of Standard Individual Export Licences.

The purpose of these reports is to give exporters a better idea of the likelihood of a licence being refused and of the time, by destination, an application is likely to take.

Additionally, the statistics website enables users to create their own bespoke, customised reports (subject to certain limitations). For example users can either produce reports of aggregated details of licensing activity for non-standard time periods (subject to a minimum period) or sort data by categories of equipment to see destinations to which that category has been licensed. To create bespoke reports, a logon account needs to be created via a simple registration procedure.

Question 3 - Will the ECO be making more licensing information public (eg in annual reports) as a result of SPIRE?

No additional information, apart from the possibility of the Criteria used for each refusal, will be made publicly available at this time. The majority of the information that is supplied to the ECO in support of an export licence application or enquiry is

commercially sensitive, and is therefore exempt from publication under Section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Question 4 - Have performance indicators / targets changed as a result of SPIRE? Will I get my licence faster?

ECO performance indicators and targets are periodically reviewed and any potential change would be communicated to exporters via our website or other announcement including the ECO's "Notice to Exporters" notification service.

For details of current licence application target times see the [export control pages of the Businesslink website](#) and also the **ECO Service and Performance Code** which is accessible via the export control pages on the Department for Business website at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/exportcontrol>.

In most cases, licences are issued within the target times.

The process of assessing an application and issuing a response on SPIRE benefits from instant electronic delivery of information with no postal delays for further information requests or delivery of the final licence document.

SPIRE Training and Support – FAQs

1. [I have never applied online before. Is SPIRE complicated and difficult to use?](#)
 2. [If I have a problem applying online, who do I phone? Is there a dedicated helpline?](#)
 3. [Is there specific training required or available for users of SPIRE?](#)
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Question 1 - I have never applied online before. Is SPIRE complicated and difficult to use?

The SPIRE system is designed to be intuitive and simple to use. ECO provides guidance within the SPIRE system on how to complete the applications on SPIRE.

Question 2 - If I have a problem applying online, who do I phone? Is there a dedicated helpline?

ECO provides a telephone and email helpline to support export licence applications made via SPIRE.

The SPIRE Helpline is: 020 7215 4594 or eco.help@bis.gsi.gov.uk

However, we believe that most problems can be handled through the help functions built into SPIRE and this should be your primary source of information.

Question 3 - Is there specific training required or available for users of SPIRE?

When SPIRE was launched it was always anticipated that training would be provided for a short period prior to and during the introduction of SPIRE. This is based on the fact that the system is intuitive and easy to use.

However, you should be aware that the ECO currently provide a half day seminar called **Making Better Licence Applications** which includes step-by-step training through the licence application process on SPIRE.

To find out more about this and other training offered by the ECO including the current programme of courses, see the information about the UK Export Control Training and Skills Academy which is published at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/exportcontrol>

Why SPIRE? – FAQs

1. [Why did you introduce SPIRE?](#)
 2. [What benefits has SPIRE brought for exporters?](#)
 3. [Did you ask exporters for their input on what SPIRE should do when the system was launched?](#)
 4. [Are other government departments part of SPIRE?](#)
 5. [Is SPIRE part of the International Trade Single Window \(ITSW\) on Businesslink?](#)
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Question 1 - Why did you introduce SPIRE?

SPIRE was introduced to improve the service that ECO provides to exporters. It provides enhanced functionality and ease of use for exporters when making export and trade licence applications.

It also increases productivity within ECO and Other Government Departments by removing time-consuming manual and administrative processes which are costly and can introduce errors.

The move to electronic licensing also enhances the ability for HMRC and ECO to provide a more seamless service as well as removing the risk of paper licences being lost.

Question 2 - What benefits has SPIRE brought for exporters?

SPIRE provides a one-stop shop, on a secure electronic system, to apply for Ratings and all licences currently processed by the ECO. It removes the risk of transcription errors occurring from applications being received on paper forms and eliminates the possibility of paper licences being lost in transit (both once the licence is issued, and to and from presentations to HMRC).

SPIRE also allows exporters to:

- manage security and access controls in relation to those who apply for licences on their behalf
- view and retrieve previous applications
- use previous applications as templates for other applications
- track the progress of their applications at a high level

Question 3 - Did you ask exporters for their input on what SPIRE should do when the system was launched?

The Export Control Organisation has close working links with industry and trade bodies. The SPIRE team was able to use these existing relationships to introduce exporters to the SPIRE developments from very early on. We listened to exporters views and incorporated many of their requirements into the SPIRE solution. Throughout the development of SPIRE, we have invited exporter representatives to look and comment on our developments to date.

Question 4 - Are other government departments part of SPIRE?

SPIRE links together export licence processing within the Department for Business (Export Control Organisation), Ministry of Defence (MOD), Foreign Office (FCO), Department for International Development (DfID) and GCHQ.

Question 5 - Is SPIRE part of the International Trade Single Window (ITSW)?

As of March 2010, SPIRE is accessible via the Businesslink website at <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>