

Covid-19 and the Private Security Industry - Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated 29 July 2020

We are updating this document on a regular basis. Please keep checking back to make sure you stay up to date with the latest guidance.

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Licence Applications

Are Post Offices still open to assist with licence applications?

Government advice is to stay at home whenever possible.

If you are looking to work in a sector with critical worker status and need to pursue your application, the Post Office SIA application service is widely available. We are aware that a small number of Post Office branches have temporarily closed. In order to find your nearest open branch and avoid unnecessary travel, please use the Post Office's branch finder at <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder>.

We received reports from some licence applicants on 26 March 2020 that Post Office staff had advised them the SIA licence application service was not available. That advice was incorrect and a significant number of applications were processed at the Post Office on that day.

Do applicants still need to go to the Post Office?

Over the last few weeks a number of you have raised concerns about having to go to a Post Office as part of the licence renewal process. In response to this, we have changed our processes so that most people who are renewing their licence or applying for an additional sector will not need to go to the Post Office to have their documents checked. If you are renewing your licence, you will receive instructions through the online account so please log into your account for guidance.

You've asked me to post a document to you but you've closed your office so you can't take delivery. What should I do?

We are still processing licence applications but we have had to close our office, which means that we can't receive or process any physical documents sent to us.

If we have asked you to post documents to us, such as your passport or driving licence, **please don't!** Instead, you should send us a digital scan or photograph of the documents we have asked you to provide. How you do this will depend on how we have asked for the information. We explain more about this below.

The quality of any images you send us must be high enough that the documents are clear and can be easily read. If they aren't, we will not be able to progress your application until you provide images that are.

Information requests

We may have sent you an 'Information Request'. These appear on the 'My Messages' page of your SIA online account. If we have, then you should send us the document(s) we have asked for

by selecting the option that says *"I will upload a scanned copy of the document using the Upload section below"*.

Any other messages (for example, your 'Next Steps' instructions)

We may have asked for your documents as part of a longer message – for example, the 'Next Steps' instructions that you were given when you submitted your application. If we have, then you should:

1. Log into your SIA online account.
2. Click on the 'Contact the SIA' tab.
3. Select *"I want to ask about a new application or make a general enquiry"* as your reason for contact.
4. Attach the images of your scanned or photographed documents using the 'upload' button.

Should I send in my ID documents if I am applying for a licence?

We have closed our offices in London due to the progress of the coronavirus pandemic. This means that we are not able to process, or return, identity documents that are sent to us as part of the licence application process.

Please DO NOT send us your identity documents, even if we have previously asked for them to support your licence application. If you have already sent us your identity documents, we will return them as soon as we are able to re-open our offices.

We are still processing and issuing licences, and we are urgently working on ways in which we can progress all applications.

I've already sent in my documents to the SIA. When can I expect to get them back?

Please do not send any documents to the SIA as our office is closed. Any documents already in our possession are being stored safely and will be returned as soon as it is safe to do so, but this may be some time off. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause, but the situation is currently beyond our control.

We were able to access our offices in the last week of May, and a team returned 1500 sets of documents that had been sent in during the lockdown period. Every set of returned documents also included a letter explaining what the applicant needs to do next. We will conduct a similar exercise in the future to return, unopened, any documents that are sent to us over the following weeks.

Is there any delay in processing licensing applications at the moment?

There are no delays to 'decision-ready' applications – that is, applications that are at 'checks in progress' **and** we have received all of the information we need in order to make a decision.

Our application process relies on us receiving information from a number of different organisations (the post office, criminality disclosure bodies and so on). It also relies on us receiving information from the applicant themselves.

If your application is at Next Steps or we require further information from anyone (including you), then there may be a delay due to the closure of our office and a slowdown in the interfaces with other organisations.

If you have already sent documents to us but have not had them returned to you, and you have a copy or image of that document, please upload that to your licensing account as that may enable us to progress your application.

We are doing everything we can to progress your applications, and we will provide regular updates on our website as events unfold. We remain committed to providing excellent service.

I can't afford my licence renewal. Can you put special arrangements in place?

We've recently reduced the licence fee paid by applicants. From 01 April 2020 the individual licence fee paid for all sectors has been reduced from £210 to £190. Additional licences cost 50% of this reduced fee from the same date.

Government Help and Advice

Where can I find the latest government advice about the coronavirus?

You can find the latest government advice about the coronavirus here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

This has information on the symptoms and what to do if you have them, how to protect yourself, guidance for employees and businesses, and the number of cases in the UK.

Are security staff classed as critical workers and therefore exempt from a stay at home lockdown?

On Monday, 23 March the Prime Minister announced further instructions to the British public to combat the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). His announcement can be viewed [here](#). It places

further restrictions on when people can leave their homes and limits travel for work to essential roles only.

We can confirm that the current definition of critical worker DOES include regulated (licence holding) security professionals, essential to national infrastructure, operating in roles under the 8 broad headings listed. This status is only directly relevant to the ability to access the school and childcare systems at this time. This critical worker definition does not affect whether or not you can travel to work - if you are not a critical worker, you may still travel to work where this absolutely cannot be done from home.

To prioritise pressure on the schools system, it does NOT extend to all licence holders. It is role dependent. The list may change over time.

Government advice is to stay at home whenever possible. It is to keep your children at home whenever possible – even if you are a critical worker. If, and only if, you are undertaking an essential role, supporting the nation’s COVID-19 response, which you can only do by accessing the school or childcare systems, should you do so as a critical worker.

This definition covers, amongst other areas, security provision in hospitals; schools; social care; courts; government estate; supermarkets and the food supply chain; the transport network; national infrastructure and utilities. If you are providing essential security to a service which itself remains critical and functioning, which attracts critical worker status, then you are likely to be covered. If in doubt, check with whoever contracts for your services.

Roles essential to supporting law and order, with the potential to reduce demand on policing, also meet the critical worker definition. This would include, amongst other areas, the guarding of empty or closed commercial, retail or office premises; the monitoring of similar through CCTV or other remote means; and the provision of alarm response centres including mobile units.

If your role does not clearly fall under the headings above then you may still travel to work, if that work absolutely cannot be done from home. Your aim should be to stay at home whenever possible. If this is not viable then assess whether you can deliver more services remotely e.g. through CCTV. If a physical presence is required then you should seek to minimise the number of staff deployed to the lowest safe level and ensure social distancing is applied.

Note that in any circumstance, critical worker or otherwise, the Prime Minister has been very clear that ensuring social distancing remains the responsibility of the employer.

These are difficult questions in unprecedented times. They are not easy and no-one else can answer them for you. You will need to apply judgement, with the aim of minimising social contact where possible. The words to focus on are ‘necessary’, ‘critical’ and ‘essential’, otherwise please stay at home and minimise the transmission risks for the benefit of your health, your families, the general public and the NHS.

Do you have any information as to the status of the industry, particularly of keyholders and responders, in the event of a more intensive lockdown?

Guidance is only available for the current situation and, therefore, critical worker status only relates to accessing schools and childcare. Updated guidance will be produced only in the event that more stringent rules, such as travel restrictions, are applied. We cannot speculate on this.

Where can I get help if I have lost my job/am not able to work due to sickness, cancelled events, or venues closing?

You can find advice for employees here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-for-employees>

This guidance includes information about Statutory Sick Pay, and how to apply for [Universal Credit](#) or [Employment and Support Allowance \(ESA\)](#)

Where can businesses get support?

You can find government advice for businesses here:

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/>

This includes financial support measures that are being made available to UK businesses and employees, wider business support, and other advice for businesses.

For our licensed staff who come under the category of critical/key worker. What support can we give them if they are questioned by the police when they are travelling to their place of work?

The Government has created a letter for employers to help with this situation. Employers are advised to download the letter and customise with their letter head and details and print off for their staff to show to the police. Check the Government website for details and [download the letter here](#).

General

Can I still get in touch with the SIA?

Yes. However, in order to ensure that we can continue to operate as normal, we would urge you to avoid all unnecessary contact with us. If you do need to contact us, please do so via your

online account. We will prioritise all incoming correspondence and respond as quickly as possible, and currently within our normal timescales.

Can the SIA use its influence in government to increase protections for zero-hour security staff?

This is something that is beyond the scope of the regulator.

Can the SIA use its influence with security firms to ensure that staff are treated properly during this crisis?

The ACS standard already provides for the proper treatment and welfare of staff.

Has the SIA taken any view with regards to dispensations for using SIA licensed staff but who are not licensed to work in the control room?

Public Space Surveillance (CCTV): A Public Space Surveillance (CCTV) licence is required when manned guarding activities are carried out through the use of closed circuit television equipment to:

1. monitor the activities of a member of the public in a public or private place; or
2. identify a particular person.

This includes the use of CCTV in these cases to record images that are viewed on non-CCTV equipment, but **excludes the use of CCTV solely to identify a trespasser or protect property** (a security guarding licence would cover this activity).

Our [enforcement approach](#) takes into account a number of factors including whether an individual already holds a licence for another licensable sector, as well as any other factor that we think is relevant in the circumstances.

In the case of shortage of security, can non-licensed be used for the urgent security tasks which cannot be left such as attending an intruder or panic alarm or removing someone from the premises.

Licensing requirements for security operatives remain unchanged. A number of demands on security are significantly reduced (e.g. door staff for pubs and clubs) so it may be possible to use alternative sources for security staff.

When there is an expectation for an individual to respond to security tasks, whether urgent or not, they are likely to be a security operative and require a licence. The PSIA does exclude persons undertaking other activities (i.e. not security operatives) who respond to sudden or

unexpected occurrences. However, the circumstance of such an event would be for an individual or business to justify.

Our existing [enforcement approach](#) already allows for taking into account individual circumstances including, for example, the progress made towards getting or renewing a licence; whether we are able to keep licensing functions operational and whether there is any build-up of applications; availability of training; and any other factor that we think is relevant in the circumstances. Alongside this, we will be prioritising dealing with the activities and actions of those who might use the situation to abuse their position and/or trust the public place in the private security industry and risk harm to the public.

Does an employer have a responsibility to provide PPE (personal protection equipment), such as facemasks, to their staff?

All employers should carry out risk assessments to ensure that staff are provided with the appropriate equipment to fulfil their role safely and securely. Any assessment and mitigation of risk should consider the most up-to-date government guidance on the use of PPE. The Government has published a number of guides for those working in a variety of environments. They can be found [here](#). The current advice suggests that the added value from some measures is very limited outside of a clinical/medical setting. The guidance continues to highlight the overwhelming benefits of good hand hygiene, and the limited role of face coverings.

Stipulation of PPE is assignment-specific, and the responsibility of the employer or venue. It is outside the powers of the SIA to prescribe use of specific equipment.

Is there any guidance on detaining people safely in the current environment?

The safety of staff requires employers (the contracted security company) to carry out on-the-ground risk assessments which will take into account the challenges of the current situation. The assessments will include the need for personal protective equipment, client policies and identifying any further training required. The professional training of SIA licence holders encourages de-escalation of incidents with physical intervention only used as a last resort.

We are concerned that security officers can have to deal with violent or abusive situations and we encourage all staff to report incidents to managers. Incidents may also need to be escalated to the Health and Safety Executive. The standards of professional behaviour displayed by security officers should be the same as they are usually.

Can security staff ask members of the public to remove their masks in order to confirm their identity or age? **NEW 29 Jul 20**

The latest current [government guidance](#) for restaurants, pubs, bars, and takeaway services states: “Customers...should be prepared to remove face coverings safely if asked to do so by police officers and staff for the purposes of identification”. ‘Staff’ in this case includes security staff in shops, pubs, restaurants, business premises and other settings whenever such checks might be necessary.

Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS)

Is there any delay in processing Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) applications?

From 1 July 2020, we will be accepting and processing applications for the scheme. These will be processed within the usual timescales.

Are there any changes to Licence Dispensation Notices during the crisis? Can approved contractors offer LDNS more widely, or for a longer period?

We had previously announced changes to the use of LDNs during the current crisis. These changes included:

- That a Licence Dispensation Notice (LDN) could be issued to an operative whose application was at Next Steps and had been paid for, rather than waiting until it reached Checks in Progress.
- The duration of Licence Dispensation Notices was extended from 10 to 20 weeks before needing to be renewed. This applied to both first and subsequent Licence Dispensation Notices.

These rules have been reviewed, and we have now reverted to the usual position from 01 July. This means that LDNs should be issued for an operative where an application is at Checks in Progress, and the duration is back to 10 weeks.

LDNs issued when the exception rule was in force remain valid for a 20 week window.

Is the SIA making any special provision for the payment of ACS annual fees during the crisis? **Amended 29 Jul 20**

We are continuing to allow approved contractors to pay their re-registration fees within three months.

Therefore those approved contractors who are due to re-register between 01 July and 01 October 2020 will have their payment terms extended from 30 days to 90 days.

- Payments due by 30 April 20 are now due by 31 July 20
- Payments due on 31 May 20 are now due by 31 August 20
- Payments due by 30 June 20 are now due by 30 September 20

To ensure that your payment is made as efficiently as possible, we are asking you to use the BACS option on your payment slip. This ensures that your payment will be processed more efficiently and your ACS status will be uninterrupted.

Can approved contractors still sub-contract only to other approved contractors?

From 1 June we require approved contractors to revert back to sub-contracting to other approved contractors only. Exceptions will only be considered where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated using the standard process. Sub-contracting requests made to us between 01 April and 31 May will be respected for the duration of the contractual agreement, subject to advising us if the contract is likely to run for more than three months from 1 June 2020.

What is the SIA going to be offering in terms of support for approved contractors? Will there be any allowance made for not meeting normal ACS standards in the current circumstances?

We have announced a range of measures to support approved contractors. These include remote assessment. Please read these frequently asked questions for more information and visit regularly to see updates. We appreciate your best endeavours in these challenging times and will ensure that we are pragmatic in our approach to non-conformance where it is justified.

Businesses concerned about conformance to the ACS standard in relation to security screening, should follow the [temporary guidance announced by the Disclosure and Barring Service](#) in relation to DBS ID checking. This will help demonstrate conformance to our requirements and to BS7858 (Security screening of individuals employed in a security environment: Code of Practice).

Note in particular DBS guidance: *"The applicant will be required to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend their employment"*

What is the process for a remote ACS assessment?

From 1 April all approved contractors who had an annual assessment due before 30 June were given an additional 3 months in which to undergo assessment.

The following examples illustrate how extension to ACS assessment due dates will work for these businesses:

- Company 1 had an assessment originally due in April, assessment now due by 31 July
- Company 2 had an assessment originally due in May, assessment now due by 31 August

- Company 3 has an assessment originally due in June, assessment now due by 30 September

We made this temporary change to the ACS assessment process because the COVID-19 pandemic and current Government policy has had a direct impact on how ACS assessments can be undertaken. Maintaining our usual arrangements is impossible.

Business with assessments due from the 1 July 2020 will be expected to go ahead, although we will consider any requests for extensions on a case by case basis. This consideration will include factors relating to COVID-19 measures.

How can an approved contractor gain approval in another sector during this period?

From 01 June, if you are currently approved for one or more sectors and wish to seek approval for a new sector, then you must complete and submit a new ACS application form. Approval to a new sector will be subject to being eligible, meeting approval conditions, and having a successful assessment.

I use the Licence Management service and can see the DBS has issued revised guidance. Can I use that guidance?

Businesses concerned about conformance to the ACS standard, including the Licence Management requirements, should follow the [temporary guidance announced by the Disclosure and Barring Service](#) in relation to DBS ID checking. This will help demonstrate conformance to our requirements and to BS7858 (Security Screening of Individuals employed in a security environment: Code of Practice).

Note in particular DBS guidance: "*The applicant will be required to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend their employment*".

Your ACS assessment will check that you are following this guidance.

I haven't yet had my ACS Certificate. Will it still be posted to me?

In view of the on-going situation regarding Covid-19, our London Office has closed. Unfortunately this means that we are unable to physically print and post ACS certificates for the foreseeable future.

In the meantime, please rest assured that we are processing annual return and renewal applications in the normal way. You will therefore remain ACS approved and continue to be on the [Register of Approved Contractors](#) on our website.

If businesses go under due to the impact of Covid-19, will they be able to regain ACS approval (as this is not usually allowed)?

We aim to take a flexible and pragmatic approach in relation to our eligibility criteria and approval conditions. We will review each on a case by case basis, and make decisions based on the risks to the integrity of the scheme, and protection of the public. We recognise the need to make decisions that are sympathetic with the current environment.

If my company loses all its contracts, will I lose my ACS approval?

We have issued a temporary addition to our policy G024 Absence of Security Services, which explains our approach in this scenario. Please see [here](#).

If the Post Office is 'locked down' and individuals cannot get their identity verified, can an approved contractor be authorised to verify identity instead?

Providing the approved contractor follows the DBS guidance on ID checking, and our systems can be adapted to trigger the move to checks in progress, then this may be possible. We are looking into this.

Are you co-ordinating any sort of response to aid civil authorities through voluntary sign up from approved contractors?

We are not at the moment co-ordinating this response, but we remain in close contact with the Home Office and will communicate any key messages to the industry if required.

Is there a way for approved contractors to keep in touch with the SIA and each other during this period?

To support approved contractors amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we have set up a LinkedIn group that will allow you to easily communicate with each other. This is a closed group managed and moderated by the SIA's communication team and business relationship manager.

You will be able to comment within the group but the group will not be displayed in your LinkedIn profile.

We want to enable as many approved contractors as possible to submit, rate and comment and contribute to discussions. We also want to keep discussion as open as possible, and will not attempt to exclude or edit critical opinions. However, to protect this service from abuse, ideas and comments must satisfy some basic conditions.

Before joining the group, please note the following:

- Any information you give to us in comments or messages belongs to you. We do not own or hold any of the data that you post, and therefore we are unable to edit or delete your posts.
- To comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018 we will remove personal information so that it is not visible to the public.
- Please note we also reserve the right to hide comments so that they are not visible to the public.

We look forward to the collaboration and support this group will provide.

To join the group, follow the link [here](#)

What indicators will be assessed as part of my ACS assessment?

Before your re-verification visit you will be expected to review and update your previous self-assessment, taking account of any organisational changes over the past twelve months, along with the assessor's comments from the past report.

We have identified 29 key mandatory indicators that will be covered as part of this assessment.

Please contact your ACS assessment body for further details.

What if I have any Improvement Needs during this lengthened assessment process? How will these be dealt with?

We have extended all re-visit assessments for outstanding improvement need(s) for an initial three months. An approved contractor with outstanding improvement needs should continue to submit an action plan to us within five working days and implement their action plan within six weeks.

Assessors will verify the implementation of the action plans during the approved contractor's next assessment, or on-site revisit.

My ACS application is already with the SIA. What's going to happen to it?

New applications will be considered from 01 July 20.

Can I have an extension on my ACS assessment due date?

We expect businesses to go ahead with a scheduled assessment (either face to face or using a hybrid of face to face and remote assessment). Businesses that are unable to do this should

contact us to request an extension. We will consider these requests in the context of the difficult trading conditions that we know businesses are facing.

Can I still have a remote assessment for approval?

Yes. We will allow businesses to continue with a remote assessment if they wish, which will be followed up by an on-site assessment when possible.

Licence-linked Training

Will you be making any concessions on the current rules so that training can take place while still meeting government guidelines on social distancing?

We are working closely with the awarding organisations that deliver assessment for licence-linked qualifications. We are preparing a flexible response that considers remote delivery of training within a framework of robust assessment.

We are piloting, under carefully controlled conditions, remote training for some licence-linked qualifications.

We will be evaluating the pilot with a view to rolling this out more widely. This will be done only when we have assured ourselves that the systems of assessment are robust. In the meantime, government advice on social distancing should be referred to by any organisation considering how to plan activity.

Can we still deliver licence-linked training?

We encourage you follow government guidance at all times with regard to social distancing. Refer to your awarding organisation for any clarification.

We are currently working with the awarding organisations to trial ways that licence-linked training can be delivered remotely within the framework of robust assessment.

Is there any guidance on face-to-face training? NEW 29 Jul 20

We cannot provide specific guidance on face-to-face training.

Awarding organisations and training providers should study the latest [government guidance](#) and make their own assessment as to what they are able to do.

OfQual's guidance says that it is the Awarding Organisations' responsibility to assure the quality of assessment i.e. to ensure that awards are valid and fit for purpose. If an Awarding

Organisation cannot assure the quality of a face-to-face (F2F) delivery/assessment, they should not award the relevant licence-linked qualifications.

We are working with Awarding Organisations to gain a common understanding of emerging best practice in the safe delivery of qualifications.

Awarding organisations and training providers should approach [OfQual](#) direct for further advice.