

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

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This document is being updated 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.

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.

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 again. From 01 April individual licences for all sectors will be reduced from £210 to £190. Additional licences will 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 in place 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.

Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS)

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

We are not accepting any new ACS applications. We will continue to process those applications that have already been submitted to us as far as we are able to do so.

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

We are removing the requirement that sub-contracting must only be to other approved contractors. If you wish to use a non-ACS business as a sub-contractor, you may do so. Please notify us that you are doing this by sending us an exceptional circumstances form. You remain responsible for ensuring appropriate due diligence.

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 are announcing a range of measures to support approved contractors. These include remote assessments, and the ability for approved contractors to sub-contract to non-approved contractors for the duration. 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"*

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

Where you are approved for one sector, but wish to be approved for another sector, because of a change in demand (e.g. from door supervision to security guarding or CCTV), we will allow you to do so, providing that you:

- tell us in advance,
- have the capability to meet the requirements of the new sector, and
- demonstrate conformance at your next scheduled 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.

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. We will be sending you an interim certificate digitally.

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 will be issuing a temporary addition to our policy G024 Absence of Security Services, which will explain our approach in this scenario.

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

We recognise the need for flexibility at this time, and this extends to an approved contractor's ability to conform with all aspects of the standards. The assessing bodies will be taking a flexible approach to this.

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

New applications will go into a holding position and remain where they are until we can resume a normal service.

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

We have extended all annual assessments by an initial 3 months, and extensions may be reviewed again at the end of that period.

Is this 3 month extension a one-off?

It is an initial response to the current crisis. We will review the situation at the end of that period.

Once things settle down all assessments thereafter will need to be completed within 12 month of the last assessment.

Can I still have a remote assessment for approval?

Yes. We will allow businesses to continue with a remote assessment if they wish, on a case by case basis. We have extended all annual assessments by an initial 3 months, and extensions may be reviewed again at the end of that period.

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.

Can we still deliver licence-linked training?

We encourage you follow government guidance at all times with regard to social distancing. It is likely that this will mean most training activity will stop. 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.