

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

Last updated 07 January 2021

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? Amended 26 Nov 20

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. 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>.

Do applicants still need to go to the Post Office? Amended 26 Nov 20

Most people who are renewing their licence or applying for an additional sector do not need to go to the Post Office to have their documents checked. If you are renewing your licence, you will receive instructions on how to complete your renewal when you have made your application.

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? Amended 26 Nov 20

We have closed our offices in London due to the ongoing 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 can, but this may take a few weeks.

We are still processing and issuing licences, and have established effective ways of progressing the vast majority of applications despite our office being closed.

I've already sent in my documents to the SIA. When can I expect to get them back? Amended 26 Nov 20

Please do not send any documents to us as our office is closed. Please follow the instructions sent to you via your online account. We have reviewed all of our communications in order to avoid requesting that applicants post documents to us.

Any documents already in our possession are being stored safely and will be returned as soon as it is safe to do so, as we are able to access the office albeit on a less frequent basis than normal.

We have been able to access the office on a fortnightly basis returning all documents posted to us. Every set of returned documents also included a letter explaining what the applicant needs to do next. The ability to visit the office could change depending on government advice.

Is there any delay in processing licensing applications at the moment? Amended 26 Nov 20

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 a slowdown in the interfaces with other organisations.

Please do not post any documents to us. Instead, upload copies of your documents to your licensing account as that should enable us to progress your application.

We are doing everything we can to progress your applications, and 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? Amended 07 Jan 21

On Monday 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that the government will be introducing new national COVID-19 measures in England to protect the NHS and save lives.

The SIA has spoken with the Home Office to obtain information and guidance for individuals and security businesses/ employers in the sector to enable them to consider working requirements during the on-going period.

A security operative is considered a critical worker if they are deployed in the following:

- Critical security provision in hospitals, social care, the courts, government estate buildings as well as key supermarkets/ food supply chain, the transport network and critical national infrastructure and utilities is critical work.
- Roles essential to supporting law and order, or which have the potential to limit any further likely pressures on the Police or national emergency services. This could include

the guarding of empty or closed commercial property judged at risk, closed retail sites or sensitive office premises, or the monitoring of similar through CCTV or other remote means, and the provision of alarm response centres including mobile units.

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.

To further assist in determining locally which private security roles are critical, decisions will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis by those contracting security provision and security businesses/ employers. Any access to school places is role dependent and will be decided on by the relevant local authority.

These are challenging and unprecedented times. The questions arising are not easy and no-one else can answer them for you. You will need to apply judgement, with the aim of following the Government's guidance and always minimising social contact where possible.

For further information please refer to the Government's guidance published [here](#) on GOV.UK.

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?

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? Amended 26 Nov 20

Since 1 July 2020, we have been accepting and processing applications for the scheme. These are being processed within the usual timescales.

Can approved contractors still sub-contract only to other approved contractors? Amended 26 Nov 20

Since 1 June we have required 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?

Amended 26 Nov 20

We have announced a range of measures to support approved contractors. This includes some use of 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"*

How can an approved contractor gain approval in another sector during this period? Amended 26 Nov 20

Since 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? Amended 26 Nov 20

In view of the on-going situation regarding Covid-19, our London Office remains 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? Amended 26 Nov 20

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 indicators that will be covered as part of this assessment.

Please contact your ACS assessment body for further details.

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? Amended 26 Nov 20

Use of virtual classrooms and proctored invigilation are permitted for some qualifications. Awarding organisations will have more information on this.

Can we still deliver licence-linked training? Amended 26 Nov 20

Please 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? Amended 26 Nov 20

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

Ofqual have confirmed that they will be issuing a statement to Awarding Organisations about the impact of the second COVID-19 national lockdown on the [Extended ERF](#), which came into effect on 12 October, shortly.

Awarding organisations and training providers should study the latest [government guidance](#) and [legislation](#), which refers to 'education and training' as being exemptions.

We have worked closely with Awarding Organisations to pilot remote training and assessment as a contingency to licence linked training ceasing, as a result of the impact of a COVID-19 national lockdown.

Following the success of the pilot, from 12 October 2020 to 31 March 2021, it will be possible to deliver and assess the following qualifications in full, remotely:

- Security Officer (SO)
- Cash and Valuables in Transit (CViT)
- Public Space Surveillance CCTV (CCTV)

and three of the four units of

- Door Supervision (DS) i.e. all units except Physical Intervention (PI)

Please approach [OfQual](#) direct for further advice.