

[SLC Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) update](#)

SLC is continuing to support students, universities and colleges and we will be providing further relevant updates here.

Will I still get my next student finance payment?

SLC can confirm that students will receive their scheduled or next instalment of their maintenance loan at the planned start of their summer term, regardless of whether their university or provider has made alternative arrangements for teaching.

Can I still apply for student finance?

If you're studying at the moment or you'll be starting a full-time, undergraduate course after 1 August 2020, you can apply online for student finance as normal.

Postgraduate and part-time, undergraduate student finance applications for academic year 2020 to 2021 are scheduled to launch in June. If this changes, we'll let you know through our social media channels.

Will you still take student loan repayments if I can't work due to Coronavirus?

It's important to remember that you'll only make repayments to your student loan once you're earning over the repayment threshold for your [repayment plan type](#). This means that if you stop working, or your income drops below the threshold, your repayments will stop too.

Find out about the repayment thresholds for [Plan 1](#), [Plan 2](#) and [Postgraduate Loans](#).

[Further details on exams and grades announced](#)

The exam regulator, Ofqual, and exam boards will work with teachers to provide grades to students whose exams have been cancelled this summer, following our actions to slow the spread of coronavirus.

University representatives have confirmed that they expect universities to be flexible and do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to higher education.

This year's summer exam series, including A levels, GCSEs and other

qualifications, and all primary assessments, have been cancelled as we fight to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The Government's priority is now to ensure affected students can move on as planned to the next stage of their lives, including going into employment, starting university, college or sixth form courses, or an apprenticeship in the autumn.

This means ensuring GCSE, A and AS level students are awarded a grade which fairly reflects the work that they have put in. There will also be an option to sit an exam early in the next academic year for students who wish to. Ofqual will develop and set out a process that will provide a calculated grade to each student which reflects their performance as fairly as possible, and will work with the exam boards to ensure this is consistently applied for all students. The exam boards will be asking teachers, who know their students well, to submit their judgement about the grade that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead.

To produce this, teachers will take into account a range of evidence and data including performance on mock exams and non-exam assessment – clear guidance on how to do this fairly and robustly this will be provided to schools and colleges. The exam boards will then combine this information with other relevant data, including prior attainment, and use this information to produce a calculated grade for each student, which will be a best assessment of the work they have put in.

Ofqual and exam boards will be discussing with teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that it is as fair as possible. More information will be provided as soon as possible.

The aim is to provide these calculated grades to students before the end of July. In terms of a permanent record, the grades will be indistinguishable from those provided in other years. We will also aim to ensure that the distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to that in other years, so that this year's students do not face a systematic disadvantage as a consequence of these extraordinary circumstances.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Cancelling exams is something no Education Secretary would ever want to do, however these are extraordinary times and this measure is a vital but unprecedented step in the country's efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus.

My priority now is to ensure no young person faces a barrier when it comes to moving onto the next stage of their lives – whether that's further or higher education, an apprenticeship or a job.

I have asked exam boards to work closely with the teachers who know their pupils best to ensure their hard work and dedication is rewarded and fairly recognised.

We recognise that some students may nevertheless feel disappointed that they haven't been able to sit their exams. If they do not believe the correct process has been followed in their case they will be able to appeal on that basis. In addition, if they do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam at the earliest reasonable opportunity, once schools are open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.

There is a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations, and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade. We are encouraging these organisations to show the maximum possible flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged. Ofqual is working urgently with the sector to explore options and we will work with them to provide more details shortly.

The Government will not publish any school or college level educational performance data based on tests, assessments or exams for 2020.

[COVID-19: Updated Contact Centre opening times](#)



An existing news article advised that the DBS Contact Centre had closed temporarily. As of today, 30 March 2020, the Contact Centre has reopened.

The DBS Contact Centre opening hours have changed, as detailed below:

Previous opening hours	Opening hours as of today, 30 March 2020
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm	Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm
Saturday, 10am to 5pm	Saturday, Closed

This decision has been made to maximise availability, ensuring that we have sufficient staff on hand to deal with incoming customer calls, and to ensure we are still able to offer a high standard of customer service to our customers.

If you have a general enquiry, you can still contact DBS via:

You can also track your application online:

- Online tracking for basic DBS checks, [here](#)
- Online tracking for standard and enhanced DBS checks, [here](#)

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Last updated 31 March 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 31 March 2020

Email updated for barring customers.

2. 20 March 2020

First published.

[Mergers between window blind companies raises competition concerns](#)

Hunter Douglas is a leading global supplier of window coverings, which generated global sales of \$3.6 billion in 2018. Hunter Douglas owns and operates a wide range of window coverings businesses, including Blinds2Go and Hillarys in the UK. 247 Home Furnishings Ltd also sells a range of window coverings, including curtains, shutters and blinds, across the UK.

Hunter Douglas originally obtained a minority interest in 247 Home Furnishings (247) in 2013, although this was not publicly disclosed at the time. The CMA's investigation has therefore considered the impact of this initial deal alongside Hunter Douglas's subsequent purchase of the entire shareholding in 247 last year.

Hunter Douglas and 247 are 2 of the leading suppliers of online made-to-measure blinds in the UK. This is a growing market in which customers 'click to order' their own bespoke blinds online but do their own measurement and fitting. Since its establishment in 2000, Blinds2Go has become by far the largest retailer of online made-to-measure blinds in the UK. 247 is one of the other largest companies in this market and competed closely with Blinds2Go. Most other specialist retailers are much smaller and less well-established than the merging businesses, and competition from large retailers

of window coverings, like Next and John Lewis, is limited. The CMA therefore found that the merger could leave customers for online made-to-measure blinds with few alternative suppliers.

Colin Raftery, CMA Senior Director said:

Sales of blinds online continue to increase, with people in the UK spending over £150 million on made to measure blinds last year.

Hunter Douglas's Blinds2Go business is already by far the largest supplier, so any deal that results in it buying up one of its closest competitors clearly gives cause for concern.

As competition from other suppliers appears to be limited, we're concerned that the merger between these two companies could leave people paying more or receiving lower quality products or customer service.

Hunter Douglas and 247 Home Furnishings Ltd must now address the CMA's concerns within 5 working days. If they are unable to do so, the two-stage deal will be referred for an in-depth (Phase 2) investigation.

For more information, visit the [Hunter Douglas N.V. / 247 Home Furnishings Ltd merger inquiry](#) web page.

For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

[Crucial medicines protected for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) patients](#)

The parallel export ban will help ensure there is an uninterrupted supply of medicines for NHS hospitals treating coronavirus patients.

The new restrictions cover crucial medicines such as:

- adrenaline
- insulin
- paracetamol
- morphine

Parallel exporting is when companies buy medicines meant for UK patients and sell on for a higher price in another country, potentially causing or aggravating supply problems.

All medicines on the list are in high demand across Europe as health systems come under increasing pressure from coronavirus (COVID-19).

The restrictions are a standard measure to manage potential medicine shortages and protect UK patients by ensuring the NHS has the treatments to continue providing world-class care.

Companies that parallel export a medicine on the ban list may face tough enforcement action from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and risk having their trading licence revoked for serious breaches.

The Department of Health and Social Care has existing, well-established processes to deal with and resolve medicines shortages. The medicine supply chain is complex and highly regulated, so problems can arise for a variety of reasons, including manufacturing issues or problems with raw ingredients.

Health minister Lord Bethell said:

Our brilliant NHS staff are going above and beyond to provide world-class care to patients with coronavirus and we are supporting them in every way we can.

We are today banning the parallel export of more than 80 crucial medicines to protect patients in the UK and help ensure they can always get the treatments they need.