

Christmas and New Year closures for courts and tribunals 2020

News story

Details of which courts and tribunals will be closed over the Christmas holiday.



Crown Courts, magistrates' courts, County and Family Courts, the Royal Courts of Justice and the Rolls Building, and tribunals will close over the Christmas period, although some emergency courts may operate over the holiday on these days. Please check before travelling. See [Find a court or tribunal](#) for details.

The holiday dates for 2020 are:

- Thursday 24 December 2020
- Friday 25 December 2020
- Monday 28 December 2020
- Friday 1 January 2021

Offices in Scotland will be closed on:

- Friday 25 December 2020
- Monday 28 December 2020
- Friday 1 January 2021
- Monday 4 January 2021

Any hearings that do take place over the Christmas break will either take place in person, via video or telephone. Your hearing notice will confirm this if your hearing is taking place. See our full information on [attending a hearing during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

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Self Assessment customers warned about scammers posing as HMRC

Self Assessment customers should be alert to criminals claiming to be from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

As the department issues thousands of SMS messages and emails as part of its annual Self Assessment tax return push, HMRC is warning customers completing their returns to take care to avoid being caught out by scammers. The annual tax return deadline is on 31 January 2021.

The department knows that fraudsters use calls, emails or texts to contact customers. In the last 12 months, HMRC has responded to more than 846,000 referrals of suspicious HMRC contact from the public, and reported over 15,500 malicious web pages to internet service providers to be taken down. Almost 500,000 of the referrals from the public offered bogus tax rebates.

Many scams target customers to inform them of a fake 'tax rebate' or 'tax refund' they are due. The imposters use language intended to convince them to hand over personal information, including bank details, in order to claim the 'refund'. Criminals will use this information to access customers' bank accounts, trick them into paying fictitious tax bills, or sell on their personal information to other criminals.

HMRC's Interim Director General for Customer Services, Karl Khan, said:

We know that criminals take advantage of the Self Assessment deadline to panic customers into sharing their personal or financial details and even paying bogus 'tax due'.

If someone calls, emails or texts claiming to be from HMRC, offering financial help or asking for money, it might be a scam. Please take a moment to think before parting with any private information or money.

Pauline Smith, Head of [Action Fraud](#), said:

Criminals are experts at impersonating organisations that we know and trust. We work closely with HMRC to raise awareness of current scams and encourage people to report any suspicious calls or messages they receive, even if they haven't acted on them, to the relevant channels.

This information is crucial in disrupting criminal activity and is already helping HMRC take down fraudulent websites being used to

facilitate fraud.

It's important to remember if you're contacted out the blue by someone purporting to be from HMRC asking for your personal or financial details, or offering you a tax rebate, grant or refund, this could be a scam.

Do not respond, hang up the phone, and take care not to click on any links in unexpected emails or text messages. You should contact HMRC directly using a phone number you've used before to check if the communication you have received is genuine.

If you've been the victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and please [report it to Action Fraud online](#) or by calling 0300 123 2040.

HMRC is also warning the public to be aware of websites that charge for government services – such as call connection sites – that are in fact free or charged at local call rates. Other companies charge people for help getting 'tax refunds'. One way to safely claim a tax refund for free is to log into your [Personal Tax Account](#).

HMRC has a dedicated Customer Protection team that identifies and closes down scams but asks the public to recognise the signs to avoid becoming a victim. HMRC regularly publishes examples of new scams on GOV.UK to help customers recognise phishing emails and bogus contact by email, text or phone.

Ways to spot a tax scam

It could be a scam if it:

- is unexpected
- offers a refund, tax rebate or grant
- asks for personal information like bank details
- is threatening
- tells you to transfer money

Self Assessment customers can complete their tax return online and [help and support](#) is available on GOV.UK.

To protect against identity fraud customers must verify their identity when accessing HMRC's online services. They must have two sources of information including:

- credit reference agency data
- tax credits
- P60/payslip
- UK Passport

Further information

In the 12 months to October 2020, HMRC:

- responded to 846,435 referrals of suspicious HMRC contact from the public. More than 495,937 of these offered bogus tax rebates
- responded to 306,219 reports of phone scams, an increase of 47% on the previous 12 months. In October 2020, HMRC received reports of 44,543 phone scams
- worked with the telecoms industry and Ofcom to remove more than 3,387 phone numbers being used to perpetrate HMRC-related phone scams
- reported 15,518 malicious web pages to internet service providers to be taken down

If you're concerned about falling victim to a potential scam, remember:

Stop:

- take a moment to think before parting with your information or money
- don't give out private information or reply to text messages, and don't download attachments or click on links in texts or emails you weren't expecting

Challenge:

- it's ok to reject, refuse or ignore any requests – only criminals will try to rush or panic you
- read about [avoiding scams](#) on GOV.UK: information on how to recognise genuine HMRC contact and avoid and report scams

Protect:

- forward suspicious emails claiming to be from HMRC to phishing@hmrc.gov.uk and texts to 60599.
- contact your bank immediately if you think you've fallen victim to a scam, and report it to [Action Fraud](#)

[UK appoints champion to spur business on to net zero emissions](#)

The Prime Minister has appointed Andrew Griffith MP as the UK's Net Zero Business Champion to support the country's business community to make credible plans to net zero by 2050 or earlier and showcase the UK's place as a global leader in tackling climate change.

With the UK committed to build back greener from the coronavirus pandemic and

with only one year to go until the COP26 summit is held in Glasgow, the role of the Net Zero Business Champion has never been more crucial.

In his new role Mr Griffith will work closely with Business Secretary and COP26 President Alok Sharma to support as many UK businesses as possible to commit to net zero targets.

Over the next year, Mr Griffith will play a vital role in harnessing the potential of British firms as they launch new products, attract new investment and create new jobs.

Business and Energy Secretary and COP26 President Alok Sharma said:

I am very pleased to welcome Andrew Griffith today as our UK Net Zero Business Champion. His wealth of experience in business will be invaluable in supporting companies to embrace the opportunities of the green industrial revolution.

I look forward to working with Andrew in our efforts to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and build back greener from the coronavirus pandemic.

UK Net Zero Business Champion, Andrew Griffith said:

I am delighted to have been appointed as the UK's Net Zero Business Champion. Business has a central role to play in making a successful transition to a low carbon economy.

Our global leadership on climate change can open up new large and attractive sectors in the world economy in which British businesses will be well placed to succeed.

Today's announcement follows [last week's appointment of Anne-Marie Trevelyan](#) as the UK's International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for the COP26 Presidency.

Andrew Griffith served as the Prime Minister's Chief Business Adviser between July and December 2019. He was elected the Member of Parliament (MP) for Arundel and South Downs at the 2019 general election and is a member of the House of Commons Science & Technology Select Committee, excusing himself from BEIS related matters.

Mr Griffith served on Sky Group plc's Board of Directors from 2008-19 as Chief Operating Officer and previously Chief Financial Officer. Throughout his tenure at Sky, the company was a leader in taking action on climate and the environment attaining carbon neutral status back in 2006. He is also a former Senior Independent Non-Executive Director of Just Eat plc.

Andrew Griffith studied Law at Nottingham University and is a qualified

chartered accountant.

£1.8 million Partnership to Support Social Protection Advocacy

The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) commends the United Kingdom for allocating £1.8 million, through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Egypt, to support the 'Strengthening Institutional and Human Resources Capacities of the Ministry of Social Solidarity' project that aims to address social protection issues of vulnerable groups targeted by the Ministry through different advocacy tools including community dialogue events, launching a dynamic social media platform and mass media channels.

The partnership aims to support the most vulnerable families, improve their livelihoods and enhance accessibility of vulnerable groups to improved social care and welfare services through introducing a comprehensive awareness program to increase the vulnerable families' accessibility to social protection and economic empowerment services. Furthermore, the awareness schemes address social behaviour change on issues related to positive practices related to protection from COVID-19, protection of girls from traditional discriminatory practices, the value of education and good health practices for deprived groups addressed by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, community participation and promoting civil society partnerships through the Ministry.

MoSS currently plays an instrumental role in responding to and mitigating the COVID-19 crisis in Egypt. The ministry has identified six initial priority areas of intervention that are manifested in the new partnership's activities. The ministry has led the synchronisation of accelerated interventions to support vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic through enlarging the social protection umbrella and responding to the COVID-19's economic challenges. MoSS is also availing and enhancing its digital services; linking institutional support to volunteerism; tailoring awareness material for children; and offering awareness and support services to vulnerable groups.

The new partnership will also support the expansion of the present comprehensive social protection awareness and advocacy programme 'Waai' that focuses on enhancing awareness and knowledge of vulnerable groups on social protection services. It will also help mainstreaming Waai in MoSS social protection programmes, targeting Takaful and Karama beneficiaries and other targeted groups under MoSS.

The new cooperation will focus on enhancing institutional capacities of MoSS and the National Center for Social and Criminological Research (NCSCR), affiliated with the Ministry, to establish a Social Protection Research

Platform to cater to the ministry's research needs.

The Minister of Social Solidarity, H.E. Minister Nivine El-Kabbag said:

Increasing accessibility of vulnerable groups to evidence-based awareness messages falls in the heart of Social Protection Strategies, thus MoSS has placed Waai program for Community Development on top of its priorities. The Ministry will promote its comprehensive awareness vision through diverse tools such as mainstreaming messages among our social workers on the ground whom I consider the real agents of change, introducing digital targeted solutions to enhance awareness among youth and finally through consolidated partnerships with our national partners and civil society organizations. Social behaviour change is a process that requires us to pound on different dynamic communication tools and furthermore, engage communities to promote social change.

The British Ambassador to Egypt, Sir Geoffrey Adams, said:

All over the world states, international organisations, private companies, and NGOs are working together to reduce the economic impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable people, including through targeted support to protect low-income families. The UK is proud to support the launch of this programme with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the UNDP, which will strengthen the Ministry's efforts to address the challenges Egypt faces.

UNDP Egypt Resident Representative, Ms. Randa Aboul-Hosn also stressed the timeliness and significance of the partnership to ensure that the most vulnerable are not to be left behind, especially amidst the global outbreak of COVID-19. This pandemic has left governments and social protection systems overwhelmed and under a great strain worldwide, and this is where UNDP aims to continue to support the government of Egypt. The pertinent £1.8 million funding of the United Kingdom and the extensive and vital efforts and policies taken by MoSS will support the protection of the most impacted Egyptians.

Egypt has already developed the largest Social Safety Net (SSN) system in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a cash transfer programme that now reaches more than three and half million households, and 11 million beneficiaries that provides vital basic income protection for the poorest and most vulnerable. The new partnership is set to ensure that this safety net continues to be operative and sustainable, while reaching people living in marginalized areas across Egypt.

Regulator issues Official Warning to poverty relief charity over failures to manage conflicts of interest

The Charity Commission has criticised a grant-giving charity over failures to manage conflicts of interest. Combined Funds Limited, which was set up to relieve poverty and advance religion in accordance with the Jewish Orthodox faith, has been sanctioned with an Official Warning by the regulator.

The Commission launched its statutory inquiry into the charity in March 2018, following serious concerns surrounding unmanaged conflicts of interest and unauthorised trustee personal benefit, as well as loans from the charity to its trading subsidiaries.

Investigators found that the charity had made a grant to cover £250k of private medical care of a person connected to the original trustees. The trustees' connection to each other and the beneficiary meant they were unable to appropriately manage this conflict of interest. Trustees told the inquiry that there were no formal systems in place for assessing applications for grants. Applicants would make requests either by phone, letter or in person, or they would be identified from the trustees' knowledge of the community. The charity did not keep a record of requests, or its decision-making process.

The inquiry also found that the charity gave loans of over £1m in total to four subsidiary companies, of which a trustee was the sole Director. The original trustees' connection to each other meant they were not able to make unconflicted decisions in relation to the charity's subsidiaries.

There were also serious failures in the administration of the charity – the original trustees failed to register it, despite being legally required to do so. They also failed to properly prepare and ensure independent scrutiny of the charity's accounts.

During the inquiry, investigators took protective action to restrict access to the charity's bank account. The inquiry concluded that there had been misconduct and/or mismanagement in the administration of the charity. As a result, the Commission issued the remaining original trustees with an Official Warning.

Since its intervention, the regulator has seen positive steps towards improvement. Two independent trustees have been appointed to the charity's board, and the trustees have formalised written investments, grant making and conflicts of interest policies. They have also confirmed that the loans have all now been repaid to the charity. The inquiry did not see any evidence of a misappropriation of funds or of any loss to the charity.

An Action Plan has been issued to the current trustees, to ensure they

continue complying with their trustee duties. The charity remains under statutory supervision and the regulator will continue to monitor the trustees' progress.

Amy Spiller, Head of Investigations at the Charity Commission, said:

Our inquiry uncovered a number of poor governance arrangements that were not serving this charity well. This case serves as a reminder that good governance is not a bureaucratic detail – it underpins the delivery of a charity's purposes to the high standards expected by the public and for those it was set up to help. While this charity receives its funding from a trustee and the trading subsidiaries they control, charity law expects all charities' governance to meet high standards, regardless of their income source, given the special status charities enjoy in the public mind and the privileges that charitable status brings.

Our intervention has ensured marked improvements at this charity and I expect to see continued progress in line with the Action Plan we have set.

[Read the full report of the inquiry into Combined Funds Limited.](#)

Ends.

Notes to editors:

1. [View the charity's entry on the register of charities.](#)
2. The Commission has a duty to maintain an accurate register of charities. Where it has an annual income of over £5,000 the duty to register a charity rests with the trustees of the charity. Failure to register a charity where there is a legal obligation to do so does not exclude the charity from the Commission's jurisdiction.
3. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.