

# The student finance application clock is ticking

Our student finance application service launched at the end of February and before I know it, it's May, and I'm already talking about the deadline approaching this Friday (20 May) for full time, undergraduate students in England.

At SLC, we enable opportunity for students to invest in their futures through further and higher education and it's a role we take extremely seriously. In the Operations side of our business, which is my world, we have been focused on delivering a seamless application journey for students.

We recognise that preparing to go to university or college can initially seem a bit overwhelming, so we want the application process to be as simple as possible. The bottom line is students need to start the new academic year with their funding in place – that's our overall goal.

The good news is that students can [apply online](#) and can do this even if they don't have a confirmed place at university. The process doesn't take too long and once it's complete, students can relax knowing there is one less thing to take care of before they head off on this next chapter.

We receive around 1.5million applications each year, and for the most part, the majority are approved without a hitch. However, there are some applications that can be more complicated to process and require additional information. But our focus is on ensuring a good customer experience, which is why the improvements we have made to our digital services are so important.

The online account gives the student the freedom to self-serve where possible – update personal details and check the progress of the application at a time that suits them. Once submitted, applications can take up to six to eight weeks to process but if we need anything, or want to clarify their information, we will get in touch directly with a message on the account to-do list, by text or email.

There is also a range of resources and content available [online](#), which answer the most common student finance questions. We strongly recommend that applicants check this out first before calling us, as our phonelines are always extremely busy at this time of year, and we would prefer not to keep people waiting.

Students can also stay up to date on the latest student finance information by following SFE on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Of course, applications continue to stay open throughout summer, but we can't guarantee full funding will be received before the academic term starts. So, my advice to all students starting or continuing their studies at college or

university this year is to apply now. We look forward to receiving your application.

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## Maternity Disparities Taskforce explores women's health before and during pregnancy

- Discussion focused on the role of GPs, nurses and healthcare practitioners in supporting women's health before and during pregnancy while the NHS tackles the Covid backlog to improve care for patients
- It called for more targeted interventions to reach women from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas

Minister for Women's Health Minister Maria Caulfield and Chief Midwifery Officer Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent co-chaired the second meeting of the Maternity Disparities Taskforce this week (Monday 16 May 2022).

The taskforce led a deep dive discussion into the role of primary care – including GPs, nurses, healthcare practitioners, pharmacists – in supporting women's health before they become pregnant, known as preconception health.

This means not only identifying women who are at higher risk of poor outcomes linked to pregnancy and making sure they receive the right support but also empowering women with information on how health conditions and risk factors could affect them and what steps they can take for a healthy pregnancy. This will help to ensure that mothers and babies receive the best possible care while the government and NHS work to tackle the Covid backlogs, improving care and putting an end to the long waits for treatment.

Data shows there is an almost two-fold difference in mortality rates between women from Asian ethnic groups and white women, and they are also higher for black women. Black women are 40% more likely to experience a miscarriage than white women, and women living in deprived areas can have higher rates of stillbirths.

The taskforce discussed the barriers faced by some women in accessing information and services – these may be language barriers, levels of distrust, or concerns from asylum seekers over paying for the services. They considered advice from experts, including what effective pre-conception care is, how to reach those most in need and how to make sure this care improves the health of women and their babies.

The taskforce members agreed there needs to be a more proactive approach to make sure the right care reaches these women and their families when they need it.

These interventions must be more targeted towards women from ethnic minorities, those who live in the most deprived areas and refugees, and should explore how the wider health and social care system can actively seek these women out and bring the services to them. For example by working more closely with local organisations to understand the women it is trying to reach. To work towards this, the taskforce committed to listen to women's lived experiences of access to preconception care and maternity care, and continue to engage a range of stakeholders to understand how they can improve care for women, and agree actions in the future.

Minister for Women's Health Maria Caulfield said:

We must do everything we can to empower women with the information and services they need to ensure a healthy pregnancy for mum and baby, no matter their background or where they live.

The latest Maternity Disparities Taskforce meeting brought together experts from across the NHS, health charities to share ideas and experiences on how we can ensure women from ethnic minorities and the most deprived areas receive the support they need.

By listening to women's experiences we can better understand the issues they face and how to improve care, and I look forward to making progress in this area.

Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, Chief Midwifery Officer for England, said:

The NHS is committed to ensuring that all women, particularly those from ethnic minorities backgrounds and deprived areas can get high quality care before, during and after their pregnancy.

Health pre-pregnancy determines health during pregnancy so it is imperative to provide care that is tailored to meet the needs of women from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are most deprived.

Listening, understanding and then acting will help improve maternity outcomes and experiences for women.

Some habits or health problems can harm a baby. Smoking during pregnancy has been linked to health issues including premature birth, low birth weight, cot death, miscarriage and breathing and being overweight or obese also raises the risk of some pregnancy problems, such as [high blood pressure](#), [deep vein thrombosis](#), [miscarriage](#) and [gestational diabetes](#). It is also recommended women take a daily supplement of folic acid to reduce the risk of the baby having a neural tube defect.

The Maternity Disparities Taskforce was launched in February 2022 to explore inequalities in maternity care and identify how the government can improve

outcomes for women from ethnic minority communities and those living in the most deprived areas.

It will do so by improving personalised support and care for mothers, addressing how wider societal issues impact maternal health, improving education around pre-conception health, and empowering women to make evidence-based decisions about their care.

The taskforce brings together experts from across the health service, mothers, government and the voluntary sector, who meet every two months.

The government and NHS is working to tackle the Covid backlogs while reforming routine care services, ending long waits and improving patient care. The pandemic has put huge pressure on health and care services and over the next three years, a record £39 billion will be invested through the Health and Care Levy, so the NHS has the funding it needs. The NHS is opening new surgical hubs and 160 community diagnostic centres so patients have easier access to tests closer to home – with 88 already open, delivering over 800,000 scans.

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## [National Highways helps bring 'Capability Brown' pool back to its former glory](#)

Vital restoration work of the 16-acre pool at Berrington Hall, near Leominster in Herefordshire, started in autumn last year and finished in February this year.

The conservation work included careful woodland management and thinning of trees and shrubs around the pool which now complete, will provide open canopy and improve water conditions.

Collapsed trees which were causing detrimental impacts to the structure of the dam were also removed.

National Highways Head of Service Delivery Andy Butterfield said:

At National Highways, our work goes beyond operating, maintaining and improving roads, and through our Environmental and Well-Being Designated Funds, we're investing in the environment and communities surrounding our road network.

We've worked closely with the National Trust to realise this small but important project which will help support aquatic biodiversity

at a location close to the A49. We look forward to seeing nature flourish now that the work is complete, and we're pleased that we've been able to play a part in helping to restore the pool to its former glory.

National Highways Head of Service Delivery, Andy Butterfield and National Trust Countryside Care Manager Iain Carter in front of the 16-acre pool.

During the repair activity, specialist teams re-homed carp from the pool so that crucial desilting works, and reed clearance could take place once the water had been drained away.

The pool has since been restocked with a mix of smaller fish including rudd, common roach and northern pike which are a rich source of food for waterfowl. The introduction of these new species will also support biodiversity and a large herony which nests on the pool's island every year.

The pool is a key feature of the parkland at Berrington and was originally designed by prolific landscape architect, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Brown loved water in the landscape and often included curving, serpentine lakes as part of his designs. The pool, parkland and garden make up Brown's final complete estate before his death in 1783.

More than 200 years later, the pool is now a haven for wildlife and visitors alike; it is a Site of Special Interest (SSSI) due to the large herony which nests on its island every year. It is one of only two heronries in Herefordshire and the largest in the West Midlands.

During the project, ecologists Will Watson and Giles King-Salter completed a detailed survey of the wildlife present in the pool and were able to identify 35 different types of invertebrates including swan mussels.

These mussels rarely grow bigger than 180mm, however the largest rescued from Berrington's pool was 203mm.

In total, there were 38 species of bird identified, including the great white egret, water rail, green sandpiper and kingfisher. The footprints of an otter were also discovered during the work, suggesting that they also use the pool to source food.

National Highways Head of Service Delivery, Andy Butterfield learns about the wildlife at Berrington Hall from National Trust Countryside Care Manager, Iain Carter.

National Trust Countryside Manager Iain Carter said:

We're delighted that, thanks to National Highways, we've been able to complete this vital conservation project. The biodiversity of

the pool had been adversely affected over the years due to the spread of reed cover and accumulation of silt.

Large carp had become the dominant fish species and very few smaller fish remained which may have impacted the heronry, for which population numbers had sadly declined over the last 10 years. It was therefore vital that we intervened to restore the pool and ensure the survival of the SSSI and the heronry.

The National Trust consulted with Historic England and Natural England as part of the project.

[Find out more information about the project.](#)

While the project work has finished, visitors cannot walk around the whole lake yet because the ground is still recovering and it will reopen later in the year.

### **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

### **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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## **[Statement on the introduction of the Northern Ireland Legacy Bill](#)**

News story

The Ministry of Defence's statement on the Northern Ireland Legacy Bill.



We are pleased to announce that yesterday, the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill was introduced to the House of Commons. This Bill, brought forward by the Northern Ireland Office, is a Government pledge to address the extremely complex and sensitive legacy of Northern Ireland's past, helping society look to the future, not the past.

It delivers on our commitments to those who served in Northern Ireland, whilst implementing a process that provides answers for families. For too long, veterans and former service personnel have lived in fear of prosecution for actions taken whilst serving their country in order to uphold the rule of law. We are pleased that the Bill not only gives veterans the protections they deserve, but provides better outcomes for victims, survivors and their families. Key is the establishment of a new Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery, that will allow individuals and communities affected by the Troubles to seek and receive information about Troubles-related deaths and serious injuries.

Following publication of the Command Paper in July 2019 we have listened to what people have said about keeping open the prospect of criminal justice outcomes, and we have adjusted our approach to remove any automatic access to immunity for those involved in Troubles-related incidents. Instead, the independent body will grant immunity based on an individual's cooperation with the body's enquiries. This approach gives our veterans the certainty that they deserve but leaves open the route of prosecution if individuals are not deemed to have earned their immunity. For those who do not come forward, the possibility of prosecution will remain.

We are confident that this legislation will deliver for those most impacted by the Troubles; providing answers and accountability for many families, delivering on our commitments to those who served in Northern Ireland, and helping society in Northern Ireland to look forward

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# Drivers urged to get training to tow trailers and caravans safely

News story

From today (18 May 2022), drivers in England, Scotland and Wales can take newly-accredited training to learn and improve the skills they need to safely tow.



The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is urging drivers who are planning to tow a trailer or caravan to take a training course before getting behind the wheel.

There are newly-accredited trainers running courses to suit every level of ability, including:

- towing for the first time
- returning to towing after a break
- towing larger trailers
- refreshing and formalising your skills if you already regularly tow

DVSA is recognising expert organisations who are approving the individual trainers joining the scheme. They must all follow the [learning to drive a car and trailer syllabus](#), which DVSA has developed with industry experts.

## Find an accredited trainer

You can take training that will teach you how to tow:

- large trailers
- small trailers (under 750kg MAM)
- specific types of trailers such as caravans or horse boxes

You can find a training provider or course by contacting one of these organisations:

- National Register of LGV Instructors



- Safe Towing Scheme
- Skills for Logistics

Check with the trainer to find out:

- what type of training they specialise in
- how much the training costs (trainers set their own prices)

## **Help to keep Great Britain's roads safe**

Baroness Vere, Minister for Roads, Buses and Places, said:

Towing safely is an important issue and I urge drivers to access the training to help keep Britain's roads safe.

The new accreditation scheme, will help them to get targeted training and improve their driving skills.

I want to thank the trailer training industry, stakeholders and our partners for their commitment and support in developing this training scheme over the last few months.

Mark Winn, DVSA's Chief Driving Examiner, said:

With the summer holidays fast approaching, we know many families will be looking to tow a trailer or caravan so it's vital you have the skills to do this safely.

We'd encourage anyone who plans to tow something, whether it's a caravan on holiday, or a trailer to the tip, to get training from an accredited provider. They will be able to make sure you have the skills and knowledge to keep everyone on Britain's roads safe.

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