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| **Coronavirus (Covid-19) – briefing**  |

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Issued 20 April 2020

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| **Below is the latest briefing on the activity in managing the response to coronavirus (Covid-19).** **Local updates, council service changes and links to trusted sources of health guidance are published at *www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus*** |

**FAQs published by COSLA and unions**

COSLA, the SJC and SNCT Unions have jointly published an initial set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to accompany the Health Protection Scotland COVID-19 Information and Guidance for General (Non-Healthcare) Settings version 4.0.

This guidance was published on 14 April by Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and is the official guidance on the matter of minimising the spread of COVID-19.

Scottish Government, COSLA and the Unions are working together to ensure that all employees and service users are kept safe; that all follow UK and Scottish Government Advice in relation to limiting the spread of COVID-19; and that during this time Local Authorities are able to keep delivering critical services to our communities.

The FAQs have been developed to help Local Government employees understand the national COVID-19 advice.

COSLA and the joint Trade Unions are clear that our workforce must have access to practical guidance and necessary PPE to ensure they have the confidence to carry out their roles as part of this whole system approach to tackling COVID-19.

The Scottish Government have assured that they will continue to work with COSLA and the Unions on future setting-specific guidance and that they will take all possible steps to ensure all appropriate supplies are made available to the workforce.

The joint statement also said: “We hope that this will give confidence to those who are receiving vital services and who are already shielding that their safety is being prioritised

“We wish to emphasise that all local government employees have our utmost thanks and support for the essential work they are carrying out during this pandemic.”

The full FAQs are available at the COSLA website and in the council employee section at [www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus)

**Over £2m business grants issued**

Inverclyde Council has issued £2.3m in business grants to 200 businesses across Inverclyde. Completed applications are being accepted for the Scottish Government Coronavirus Business Support Fund.

**Job retention scheme**

Below is information published by HMRC about the job retention scheme, which opened for applications across the UK today:

Employers can now claim online for a grant for 80% of their furloughed employees’ salaries, up to a maximum of £2,500 per employee, per month, through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. This scheme will be open until the end of June 2020.

**Before employers in your constituency claim, they need to:**

* Read all the available guidance on GOV.UK before applying;
* Gather all the information and the precise calculations they need before starting their application. If they have a payroll provider, they will be able to help them with this;
* Employers can find out more in the calculation guidance where they can access a claim calculator. This will allow them to check their claim for most employees who are paid the same amount each pay period;
* Access our simple, step-by-step guide on GOV.UK for additional help.

To receive payment by 30 April, employers will need to complete an application by 22 April.

We expect to be very busy so we would ask that employers only call us if they can’t find what they need on [GOV.UK](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/rZXLCJy3mcnZZADFVd2ek?domain=gov.uk) or through our webchat service - this will leave our lines open for those who need our help most.

**After employers have made a claim, they should:**

* Keep a note or print-out of their claim reference number – they won’t receive a confirmation SMS or email;
* Retain all records and calculations for their claims, in case we need to contact them;
* Expect to receive the funds six working days after they apply, provided they claim matches records that we hold for their PAYE scheme. Employers should not contact us before this time.
* Ask their furloughed employees not to contact us directly - we will not be able to provide them with any information on individual claims.

HMRC will check claims made through the scheme and will act to protect public money against anyone who makes a claim using dishonest or fraudulent information.

We also encourage all employers to protect their own credentials and please be aware of potential scammers and opportunist criminal activity.

**Exams coronavirus update**

**The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has published information about how the 2020 exams certification will work.**

**Below is a copy of a statement issued by SQA:**

*Following the cancellation of the 2020 exam diet, I fully understand that this is an uncertain time for learners who have worked hard throughout the year and, with their parents and carers, are worried about what the current situation now means for them and their future.*

*Together with Scotland’s education system, SQA remains committed to delivering results to learners, in as fair a way as possible, at this exceptionally difficult time. We want to ensure that young people across Scotland get the results they deserve, so they can progress to further learning or work.*

*At the request of the Deputy First Minister, I have been asked to develop an alternative certification model for 2020.*

*We are basing all of our work on three broad principles, whilst adapting to the current challenges we all face:*

* *Fairness to all learners;*
* *Safe and secure certification of our qualifications, while following the latest public health advice; and*
* *Maintaining the integrity and credibility of our qualifications system, ensuring that standards are maintained over time, in the interests of learners.*

*I would like to set out some further detail on this model today, so that we can provide results to learners by 4 August.*

***Step 1 - Estimates***

*With no exams taking place this year and no feasible way for SQA to mark coursework, this means estimated grades will be the core element of certification.*

*Today, I have issued information to schools and colleges on the estimation process.*

*Teachers and lecturers are best placed to have a strong understanding of how their learners have performed and, based on their experience and the evidence available, what a learner would be expected to achieve in each course. An estimated grade is not just the result of one prelim or one project, but is an overall judgement based on all activity across the year.*

*By Friday 29 May, schools and colleges will provide us with their estimates of the grades, bands and rank order for each learner, for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.*

***Step 2 - Awarding***

*We will then check and validate that information. We will moderate it, if necessary, to ensure consistency across schools and colleges and with results from previous years.*

*We will use the information from these estimates, in addition to prior learner attainment, where this is available. For example, if learners achieved National 5 or Higher courses, in a previous year.*

*We will also look at schools’ and colleges’ previous history of estimating and attainment in each subject and level. We may moderate these estimates, up or down, if that is required.*

*This process will produce the results for learners, using our national grades for each subject and level.*

*Each year, we hold Awarding Meetings that bring together a range of people with subject expertise and people with experience of standard setting across different subjects and qualification levels. We will maintain this approach this year, as far as possible.*

***Step 3 - Results and Certification***

*We will then process the results to allow us to issue learners with their individual results by 4 August. We continue to strongly encourage all learners to* [*sign-up to MySQA*](https://www.mysqa.org.uk/cs8/content/secure/my_homepage.jsp)*, our online and text service, as a direct way to receive their results.*

***Step 4 - Appeals***

*After 4 August, a free appeals service will be available to schools and colleges, to allow them to request a review of the grade awarded for a learner or a group of learners. It is important that such a service is in place in this exceptional year.*

*Assessment evidence must be available to support an appeal and the evidence will be reviewed by senior examiners. We will provide schools and colleges with full details of this service shortly.*

*Further information is available for learners, parents and carers in the* [*Frequently Asked Questions*](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/93797.9752.html) *section of our website.*

*I would like to thank you for your ongoing support and patience during this time.*

*Fiona Robertson*

*SQA Chief Executive and Scotland’s Chief Examining Officer*