

**STUDENT SUPPORT INFORMATION NOTE  
(SSIN)**

COVID-19 flexibility

**To:** Student Finance administrators and practitioners in institutions of higher education, further education or specialist colleges providing HE, and alternative providers; Student Finance advisors, and the Student Loans Company.

**SSIN 04/24**

**May 2024**

Dear Colleagues,

**Additional COVID-19 flexibility**

1. This SSIN provides guidance on the assessment of student finance and home fee status where a student was absent from the UK (or relevant residence area where applicable) for an extended period due to COVID-19.
2. For the purposes of this guidance, the relevant residence area includes residence in the European Economic Area, Switzerland, Gibraltar, Turkey, Republic of Ireland, Overseas Territories and specified British Overseas Territories.
3. Previously, guidance only made provision for 'short periods of absence' as a result of COVID-19 to be discounted for the purposes of calculating whether the ordinary residence requirements had been met. Updated guidance has now been issued so that Student Finance England can take into account longer absences from the UK (or relevant residence area), from those who were equally impacted by COVID-19, for example, students who may have remained overseas longer than was strictly required by travel restrictions, such as for health, caring or study reasons. There may also be other circumstances we did not anticipate at the time, given the exceptional nature of the pandemic.
4. Additional flexibility will, therefore, be applied to those who were absent from the UK (or relevant residence area where applicable) between March 2020 and March 2022 so that they will be automatically treated as being ordinarily resident in UK (or relevant residence area where applicable) during that timeframe, provided they had been ordinarily

resident in the UK (or relevant residence area where applicable) on or after 1 January 2020. To reduce any administrative burden, students will not be required to provide evidence that their absence was COVID-related or otherwise.

5. Furthermore, where a student was assessed as eligible by Student Finance England for any mode of study in either the 19/20 or 20/21 academic year, irrespective of whether any course was attended, they will become eligible to access student funding for courses starting from AY 21/22 up to and including AY 25/26, in order for them to commence or resume their studies. This is on the basis that these students would have started, or have been due to start, courses in England when COVID-19 struck but were unable to proceed and left the UK (or relevant residence area where applicable) for an extended period.
6. Whether a student can take advantage of the temporary absence provision when being assessed for home fee status is a matter for the individual provider concerned. However, where a person comes within these provisions, including those who may have been previously assessed as international students in line with the previous guidance, we would expect providers to apply the same flexibility as Student Finance England and charge the home fee rate of fees.

### **Further Information**

#### **ENQUIRIES:**

If you have any queries about the Regulations, please contact, in the first instance, the Student Finance England Practitioner Support Team: telephone 0300 100 0618; email [SSIN\\_queries@slc.co.uk](mailto:SSIN_queries@slc.co.uk)