

Highways England geared up to help motorists this bank holiday

More than 480 miles of roadworks will be lifted or completed on motorways and major A-roads to help families have smoother journeys over the August bank holiday.

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Highways England will remove the roadworks by early Friday morning (23 August) to help people get away on bank holiday journeys with as little disruption from roadworks as possible.

Almost 97 per cent of England's motorway and major A-roads, the strategic road network, will be free from roadworks over the August bank holiday period. To help motorists, Highways England is lifting 75 miles and completing 411 miles of roadworks.

Melanie Clarke, Highways England's customer service director, said:

We're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible and that's why we're keeping 97 per cent of the road network we manage, free from roadworks.

Safety is our top priority and we know from experience that almost half of breakdowns can easily be avoided if motorists carry out simple vehicle checks before setting off over this period.

Highways England traffic officers will also be on patrol and working with partners to help clear any incidents; the majority of which will be dealt with in under an hour.

And motorists are being reminded to do their bit to help keep traffic flowing by making sure they have everything they need for their journey by making sure they are aware of the signs and signals on motorways.

General enquiries

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

Media enquiries

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

[Applications for the UK Government's prestigious Chevening Scholarships open 5 August 2019](#)

Applications for Chevening Scholarships to study in the UK are open between 5 August and 5 November 2019, with applications to be submitted via www.chevening.org/apply

[Thailand: applications for UK government's prestigious Chevening Scholarships now open](#)

The applications will need to be submitted via the [Chevening website](#).

Chevening Scholarships are awarded to individuals with demonstrable leadership potential who also have strong academic backgrounds. The scholarship offers full financial support for future leaders to study for any eligible master's degree at any UK university whilst also gaining access to a wide range of exclusive academic, professional, and cultural experiences.

Since the programme was created in 1983, over 50,000 outstanding professionals have had the opportunity to develop in the UK through Chevening. There are more than 1,500 scholarships on offer globally for the 2020/2021 academic year, demonstrating the UK's ongoing commitment towards developing the leaders of tomorrow.

British Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Brian Davidson said:

We are looking for ambitious, professional, and innovative future leaders from any walk of life, who will study hard in the UK, and be open to immersing themselves in the opportunities that arise.

Chevening Scholars are incredibly diverse, so there is no such thing as a 'typical' scholar. That said, if you have demonstrable

leadership qualities and you have a clear vision for the future you want to help shape, you are very likely to fit in with our community of over 50,000 alumni worldwide.

Our alumni network is full of dynamic influencers who have shared the same experience that you will. They can offer encouragement, mentorship, advice, and contacts. When you return home after your studies you should feel well-equipped to start making a real difference professionally or socially.

There is a lot to potentially gain from submitting a thoughtful application, so if you have what it takes to be a Chevening Scholar, I would encourage you to apply before the 5 November deadline.

Head of Scholarships at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ben Coates, said:

Chevening represents the very best of the UK, welcoming exceptional people from across the world to study, grow, and thrive at some of the world's best universities. Chevening can be a transformative experience, not just for the scholars, but for their communities and countries as they return and use the benefit of their UK experience to make a positive difference in their chosen field.

Our universities promote the creation and exchange of information and ideas, as well as the building of knowledge and networks. Chevening Scholars find themselves immersed in that world, and leave the UK after their studies having grown academically, professionally, and personally as a result.

Since the programme started in 1983, many of those selected for this scholarship have gone on to become respected leaders across a range of sectors. Being a part of the Chevening network instils a strong sense of pride and responsibility, I have seen this first hand and am consistently impressed by the passion and commitment of the scholars and alumni I meet.

With our world facing countless challenges, the role that the Chevening community plays in building bridges and collaborating across borders to solve big issues is more important than ever.

The call for new applicants follows the selection of 24 scholars from Thailand, who won an award to study at a UK university this year. Successful applicants have been sharing their stories through the #ChosenForChevening hashtag on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

More information

Visit [Chevening Scholarship's official website](#) for detailed information on

the eligibility criteria and scholarship specifications.

Further information

Chevening Scholarships are the UK government's global scholarship programme, funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and partner organisations. The scholarships support study at UK universities – mostly one year taught master's degrees – for individuals with demonstrable potential to become future leaders, decision-makers, and opinion formers.

Chevening began in 1983 and has developed into a prestigious international awards scheme. Chevening Scholars come from over 160 countries and territories worldwide, and almost 1,800 scholarships were awarded in 2019/2020. There are over 50,000 Chevening Alumni around the world who comprise an influential and highly regarded global network.

The name 'Chevening' comes from Chevening House in Sevenoaks, Kent – currently the joint official residence of the UK's Foreign Secretary.

More information is available on the [Chevening website](#).

Paula Sussex's speech to the NUS, Memberships Services Conference

I'm Paula Sussex and I'm the CEO of the Student Loans Company. I've been in the role for under a year so I think I still get to say I'm the relatively new CEO of SLC.

One of my very first acts as CEO was to appear before the Education Select Committee at an accountability hearing in October last year. I'd only been in the role about three weeks at the time.

It was a wide-ranging session that covered a lot of ground – perhaps some of you watched it.

One of the things that has really stuck in my mind from that session was a debate about the SLC's use of the word 'customers.'

At the SLC, we use the term customers to refer to applicants, students, sponsors & repayers.

A couple of members of the Committee challenged me on that. They made the case that as there isn't a ready market in student finance providers – as students in the UK don't have a choice of providers they can go to for their HE and FE funding – that for the SLC to refer to them as 'customers' simply wasn't right.

And while I agree with them that it isn't an ordinary customer-client relationship that we have, I made the point that I think it's healthy for public servants to focus on customer service and, therefore, the concept of having a customer to whom good customer service is owed. So I was very pleased when I saw the topic of this panel, because I think it's an important discussion. We'll no doubt hear a lot today about the relationship between students and universities. I want to also make the point that the SLC firmly considers students to be our customers and we're determined to improve the customer service we provide to them.

In the next academic year, the SLC will turn 30. And we're just about unrecognisable from the organisation that was set up nearly 30 years ago:

- We've gone from offering just one maintenance loan product to all UK students to over 86 variants of loan and grant products
- From fewer than 100 staff to over 3,500
- From just 180,000 customers to over 8.5 million
- We now manage a student loan book valued at over £136.7 billion

The SLC's mission is to enable its customers to invest in their futures through access to higher and further education. This expansion in the student finance system over recent years has enabled more customers from more walks of life to make this investment in their futures – which is both good for them and good for the UK.

But there is no doubt that its expansion has also added significant complexity to the operations of the Student Loans Company.

A 2015 McKinsey Report commissioned by the then Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), noted that "SLC already has comparable size and complexity to a small retail bank" and we have only continued to grow since then.

Despite this rapid growth and complexity, we have also made some significant performance improvements over the same period:

- In 2018-19, our customer satisfaction (apply-to-pay) was 84.1% up from 78.9% in 2011-12
- We received just 2.5 complaints per 10,000 apply-to-pay customers (applicants and students)
- And just 0.8 complaints per 10,000 repayment customers

These are good results for our customers – but we know we can and must do better. The SLC has made some significant improvements to our customer service over recent years. Over the last two years alone we've introduced:

- online password reset – so that customers no longer have to call us to reset passwords if and when they forget them;
- electronic signatures – so that customers can sign their applications online and no longer have to print, sign and post their applications to us;
- online evidence upload for overseas customers – so they no longer have to post us evidence from overseas, which we know is timely and expensive;
- More Frequent Data Sharing with HMRC – so that when customers are in repayment, HMRC tells us on a weekly basis what they have repaid, meaning we can provide customers with much more up-to-date loan balances. (Until this year HMRC only gave us this information on an annual basis.)
- Introduction of social media direct messaging – In December 2017 we became one of the first government entities in the UK to introduce full customer service by Facebook and Twitter direct messaging. Meaning we're engaging with our customers where they are.
- All of the new services we develop and make available are 100% tested by students to assess usability and to explore opportunities for future development.
- Notwithstanding these important developments, it should also be recognised that we only assess customer calls on the quality of service and content provided.

But we know our service still doesn't always meet the needs or expectations of our predominately digitally-native customers. There is more we can do and more we must do. A priority for me as CEO is to ensure that we're listening directly to our customers to find out what they want from SLC. I'm therefore implementing a series of SLC 'surgeries' where SLC will come to a university to hear directly from its staff and students about what the SLC can be doing better. This initiative, alongside others I have outlined, will help to ensure that we remain focussed on providing good customer service to students, graduates and all of our stakeholders across the UK.

Thank you