

# Tax and NI



This briefing provides an introduction to the taxes most likely to affect your business. The sooner you set up systems for maintaining your records, and the better you keep them, the less money you will need to spend on professional help in dealing with the tax authorities. It will also be easier to plan for your liabilities.

Nevertheless, it is well worth consulting a tax expert — a qualified accountant, solicitor or tax adviser — for advice. An expert should be able to save you much more in tax than you spend on fees, as well as sparing you time and effort.

This briefing covers:

- Which taxes will affect your business.
- What can be classed as business expenses.
- Your responsibility for calculating and paying tax and NI for your employees.
- Tax breaks for investors in small and medium-sized companies.

## 1 Different taxes

- 1.1** Both the self-employed and employees pay **income tax** (see 2, 3 and 4).
- 1.2** A limited liability company pays **corporation tax** (see 5).
- 1.3** Employers are responsible for collecting and paying the tax on **employee pay** and **benefits** (see 9).
- 1.4** Employers are also responsible for paying **National Insurance** contributions for, and on behalf of, employees (see 10).

**1.5 Value added tax (VAT)** is payable on 'supplies' (usually sales) of goods and services (see 11).

**1.6 Capital gains tax (CGT)** may be payable when assets are sold for more than they cost (see 12).

**1.7 Stamp duty land tax (SDLT)** is charged on transfers of land and property.

- For commercial property transactions, rates on transfers (excluding shares) are 1 per cent on values in excess of £150,000, 3 per cent on values in excess of £250,000 and 4 per cent on values in excess of £500,000. Stamp duty at 0.5 per cent is charged on share transfers.

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**1.8 Substantial tax breaks** are available to investors in small or medium-sized companies (see **13**).

## 2 Are you self-employed?

People who are self-employed can benefit from significant short-term tax and National Insurance advantages compared with company employees (see **3** and **10**).

**2.1** You are **self-employed** if you are your own boss and trade as a sole trader or member of a partnership. To convince HM Revenue & Customs, you must at least show you:

- Control what you do, and how and when you do it.
- Have more than one customer.
- Bear an element of business risk.
- Have a right of substitution.

**2.2** If you trade as a limited company, you will be an **employee** of the company.

- This applies even if you are a shareholding director.

**2.3** If the company contracts your services to a single client, who would otherwise employ you, it will probably be classed as a **personal service company**.

## 3 Tax for the self-employed

**3.1** The self-employed pay income tax on the **profits** they make — not on their drawings. For example, if you make £30,000 profit, you pay income tax on the full £30,000 — even if you draw only £10,000 as salary and retain the rest in the business.

- Profit is business turnover less allowable expenses, excluding your salary (see **6** and **7**).

**3.2** You pay tax on the profits made over the **accounting period** (usually 12 months) which ends in that tax year.

- Tax is due in two equal instalments, on 31 January (during the tax year), and on 31 July (after the end of the tax year).
- The interim amounts payable are based on the previous year's tax liability. Arrangements can be made to cut payments, if profits are falling.
- If the profits made are higher than those for the previous year, a balancing payment is due on the following 31 January.

**3.3 New businesses** may be taxed twice on their first year profits, depending on the accounting period you choose.

- 'Overlap relief' will be available to compensate you for this, but the calculations are complex and there will always be a cashflow cost to the business. Consult your accountant or tax adviser.

**3.4** Tax planning can ensure that the self-employed pay the tax due much **later** than employees.

- For example, if your accounting period ends on 30 June 2006, you pay tax on the profits for the period on 31 January 2007 and 31 July 2007 (both payments being based on the previous year's tax liability). The final payment (based on actual profits) will not be made until 31 January 2008.

## 4 Income tax

**4.1** There are currently **three income tax bands** (for the tax year from 6 April 2006 to 5 April 2007):

taxable income (£)	tax rate
1–2,230	10%
2,231–34,600	22%
over 34,600	40%

These tax bands apply to both employees and the self-employed.

**4.2** Taxable income is reduced by a **personal allowance**.

- For the tax year 2007/08, the basic personal allowance is £5,225 (more for those over retirement age).
- If you run your own business, and your husband or wife has no other income, it makes sense for tax purposes to employ him or her on a salary at least equal to the basic personal allowance. The job must be genuine, you must pay the going rate for the work and you must make actual payment.

## 5 Corporation tax

Corporation tax is payable on the profits — business turnover less allowable expenses, plus investment income and chargeable gains — of limited companies.

“Under corporation tax self-assessment, you can be charged a penalty if a return is late, incomplete or incorrect. Do not give HM Revenue & Customs this opportunity.”

**David Spottiswoode, Solomon Hare chartered accountants**

“If you are self-employed, and profits are falling, you can arrange to reduce tax payments. But be careful not to reduce payments too much — you could end up with a nasty interest charge.”

**Geoff Speirs, Bentley Jennison chartered accountants**

### 5.1 Currently there are **two corporation tax bands**:

profit (£)	tax rate
1–300,000	20%
Over 1,500,000	30%

If your profits fall between £300,000 and £1.5 million, you are eligible for marginal relief. This is designed to ease the transition from one rate to the next. The limits are reduced for companies belonging to groups.

The Chancellor announced in his April 2007 budget that the small companies' rate will be increased to 21 per cent in 2008/09 and 22 per cent in 2009/10. The main rate will be reduced to 28 per cent in 2009/10.

### 5.2 Companies have to **calculate** their own corporation tax liability.

- If profits are likely to be in excess of £1.5 million, companies pay corporation tax by quarterly instalments. All other companies continue to pay corporation tax nine months after the end of the company's accounting period.
- Interest is charged on underpayments (and paid on overpayments).
- The tax return has to be filed within 12 months after the end of the accounting period and must be accompanied by accounts. Late returns incur automatic penalties.

## 6 Expenses

### Handle with care

Some expenses do not count. They cannot be deducted when calculating your profit figure, even though they may seem necessary and legitimate business costs. They include:

- Personal expenses, including living expenses, ordinary clothes, and travel to and from your regular place of work.
- Entertaining, including any food or drink bought for clients.
- Certain professional fees, such as the costs associated with forming a company and obtaining a lease.
- Depreciation. Instead of deducting an element for depreciation, you claim capital allowances (see 7).
- Fines, including parking tickets.

You need to be clear about what expenses are allowable when working out your profit figure.

Business costs are allowable, but personal ones are not. Allowable expenses include:

#### 6.1 Goods and materials, including anything your business buys in and then resells.

- Be careful about the value you put on your stock at the year end. A common mistake is to value it at selling price, rather than cost. This inflates your profit figure and increases your tax bill.

#### 6.2 Spending on **research and development** (R&D) by small and medium-sized enterprises.

- You can claim R&D tax credits on qualifying spending at 150 per cent. This means you can set £150 off against your profits, for every £100 you spend. The Chancellor announced in his April 2007 budget that the R&D tax credit will be increased (subject to state aid approval) to 175 per cent in 2008/09.
- Only limited companies can claim R&D tax credits.
- R&D tax credits apply to the costs of staff and consumable stores used in your R&D efforts, including expenditure on software, power, fuel and water.
- Companies not yet in profit (or not yet trading) can claim cash payments instead.
- To take advantage of these credits you must spend £10,000 or more on research and development in an accounting period.

#### 6.3 Capital allowances (see 7).

#### 6.4 Costs associated with your **premises**, such as rent, rates and heating.

- If you work from home, you can usually count a fair proportion of your gas, electricity, water, telephone and council tax charges as business expenses.

#### 6.5 Selling costs, including marketing and advertising expenses.

#### 6.6 Finance costs, such as bank charges and interest (including leasing and hire purchase interest charges).

#### 6.7 General **running expenses**, including telephone bills, insurance, transport, travel and subsistence (eg hotel costs on a business trip), repairs, postage, accounting and most other services.

“Time your purchases so that you buy any equipment you need before your year end. If you make a purchase a day before your year end, you still get the full capital allowance for the whole of that accounting period.”  
**Richard Shooter,**  
**Henstock Shooter**  
**chartered**  
**accountants**

**6.8** Directors' and employees' **wages** and **benefits** (see **9**), and employer's National Insurance contributions (see **10**).

**6.9 Bad debts**, where specific invoices are unlikely to be paid.

**6.10** If you are not registered for **VAT**, you treat the VAT element as part of your expenses.

- If you are registered, VAT is reclaimed separately (see **11**).

## 7 Capital allowances

Whether you are self-employed or trading as a limited company, you cannot count the full cost of purchasing or improving premises and equipment as an expense. Instead you have to claim a 'capital allowance', which is then set off against your profits like an allowable expense.

**7.1** In most cases, capital allowances allow you to write off a **percentage** of the value of the asset against profits, over several years.

- You apply the percentage to the original cost in year one, and write the value of the asset down by that amount.

In subsequent years, you apply the percentage to the written-down value, so that the allowance gradually declines.

**7.2** Capital allowances **range** from 0 per cent to 100 per cent, depending on who you are and what you are purchasing.

- There are 100 per cent allowances for energy saving and environmentally beneficial equipment.
- Small and medium-sized businesses can claim 50 per cent first-year allowances on investments in plant and machinery. But this excludes cars, plant and machinery for leasing, railway assets and long-life assets. Small businesses are those with turnover below £5.6 million a year, assets below £2.8 million or fewer than 50 employees. Medium-sized businesses are those with turnover below £22.8 million a year, assets below £11.4 million or fewer than 250 employees.
- The first-year allowance is only available in the accounting period in which the equipment is purchased. After that, the allowance reduces to 25 per cent.
- The 25 per cent rate also applies to cars, but with a maximum writing-down allowance of £3,000 per car, per year.
- The allowance for qualifying industrial

buildings and large hotels is 4 per cent a year, based on cost.

- Since 11 April 2007, businesses have been able to claim the Business Premises Renovation Allowance. It gives businesses in designated disadvantaged areas 100 per cent capital allowances for the costs of renovating or converting business premises that have been vacant for more than one year.

**7.3** To make life simple, all equipment subject to the 25 per cent rate (except cars costing more than £12,000) is generally put into a '**pool**', and capital allowances are calculated at 25 per cent of the total value.

- Each time you buy something, the cost is added to the value of the pool.

**7.4** Where assets have an expected life in the business of four years or less, you can elect for them to be treated separately as **short-life assets**. This can accelerate tax relief.

**7.5** You can choose to **defer** claiming capital allowances.

- The whole process of writing down the assets is simply delayed by a year, leaving their value unchanged.

**7.6** If you are not registered for **VAT**, you can also claim capital allowances on the VAT charged on the equipment you buy.

**7.7** The Chancellor announced in his April 2007 budget that capital allowances would be replaced in 2008/09 by an **Annual Investment Allowance** for the first £50,000 of expenditure on plant and machinery.

## 8 Offsetting losses

**8.1** If you are **self-employed**, you can offset trading losses against other income received in that tax year or the preceding year, such as earnings from a job or income from investments, plus any capital gains arising in that year.

- Alternatively, losses can be carried forward to offset against future profits from the same trade. Losses in the first four years, or in the last year, may also be carried back up to three years.

**8.2 Limited companies** can also offset their trading losses against other income in the

“Make sure your accounts include all expenditure which has been incurred, even if it has still to be invoiced. It could save you tax.”  
**David Spottiswoode, Solomon Hare chartered accountants**

accounting period.

- Losses incurred in the first four tax years of a new business can be carried forward to reduce future tax bills, or carried back for one year to reclaim tax already paid.

## Cars and tax

**A** If you are **self-employed**, and use your own car for work, you must keep a record of business miles travelled.

- Whenever your car is serviced, make sure the mileage reading is noted on the bill.

This allows you to work out the car's total mileage for the year — and provides evidence to satisfy the tax inspector.

- You must estimate what percentage of the mileage was for business purposes. For example, if the business mileage was 75 per cent of the total, you can claim 75 per cent of your car costs (petrol, insurance, repairs) as business expenses. You can also claim 75 per cent of the capital allowance you would have had if the car had only been used for business (see **7.2**).
- Alternatively, you may be able to claim an allowance in line with HM Revenue & Customs Approved Mileage Allowance Payments (see **B**).

**B** Employees who use their own cars usually receive a **mileage allowance**.

- If mileage allowances are paid in line with HM Revenue & Customs Approved Mileage Allowance Payments (AMAP), there is no extra liability. If they are greater than AMAP, the difference is taxable.
- AMAP for all cars (and vans) are 40p a mile for the first 10,000 miles, and 25p a mile thereafter.

**C** An employee using a **company car** for private use pays income tax on the benefit. The employer must also pay National Insurance on the benefit, as if it were part of the employee's salary.

- If fuel is provided for the employee's private use, the taxable benefit is based on the car's carbon dioxide emissions.

See **Company cars and tax**.

There is a similar loss relief when a business is closed down but losses can then be carried for three years.

➔ See **Company pension schemes**.

## 9 Tax and employees

**9.1** The employer must deduct employees' **income tax** from each wage payment. The tax must then be sent to HM Revenue & Customs on a monthly or quarterly basis.

- Employers can make quarterly payments of PAYE and NI if their average net monthly payments fall below £1,500.
- Most redundancy payments under £30,000 are tax free. Any overpayment or underpayment of tax will be corrected once employees have sent their tax returns in.

**9.2 Employee benefits** are generally taxable. There are some exceptions:

- Payments into HM Revenue & Customs-approved pension schemes.
- Approved schemes to encourage employees to take up shareholdings.
- Low-interest loans of up to £5,000 from the employer.
- Workplace childcare and up to £55 per week of childcare vouchers for approved childcare and welfare counselling provided by employers.
- Provision of some items of equipment, such as provision of a mobile phone or the loan of a computer for work purposes only. Computers lent to employees must cost no more than £2,500. The computer scheme must be open to all ranks. No tax is charged when employees buy computers at market value that they have previously borrowed from their employer.
- Some less commonly-used benefits.

**9.4** If you trade as a limited company, you could cut the tax bill for your employees by introducing tax-favoured **share schemes**. Such schemes can provide employees with incentives for staying with the company and promoting its success.

➔ See **Remuneration**.

- Enterprise Management Incentive schemes allow small firms to give key employees tax-favoured share options. To qualify, companies must be independent with gross assets of less than £30 million. The total value of shares under option is limited to £3 million. There is no restriction on how many employees can benefit.
- Share Incentive Plans (SIPs) allow companies to give their employees up to £3,000-worth of shares each year, free of

tax and NI.

Some or all of this can be awarded in respect of performance targets.

Employees can buy shares, free of tax and NI, out of their pre-tax salaries, up to a maximum of £1,500 a year.

Employers can give their employees up to two free shares for each share purchased.

Provided the shares are held for at least five years, no tax or NI will be payable.

## 10 National Insurance

**10.1** The **self-employed** pay much less National Insurance than company employees. But they get substantially fewer benefits.

**10.2 Employees** pay Class 1 contributions.

This is deducted from pay at source, along with the employee's income tax.

- Employees earning less than £100 a week are exempt.
- Contracted-in employees pay 11 per cent on weekly earnings of between £100 and £670 plus an additional one per cent on weekly earnings over £670. Contracted-out employees pay 9.4 per cent.

**10.3 Employers** pay the 'employer's contribution' on pay and benefits.

This is charged at 12.8 per cent for contracted-in employees on earnings over £100 a week. There are lower rates for contracted-out employees.

- Employers pay nothing for employees earning less than £100 a week.

**10.4** The **self-employed** currently pay:

- Class 2 contributions of £2.20 a week (£114.40 a year). The National Insurance Contributions Office collects this. Someone earning less than £4,635 a year can apply to be exempted from Class 2 contributions. Ask for Form CF10.
- Class 4 contributions of eight per cent on profits of between £5,225 and £34,840 plus an additional one per cent on annual profits over £34,840. HM Revenue & Customs collects this at the same time as income tax.

There is no longer a limit on how much the self-employed can pay in NICs. If you have a job as well as working on a self-employed basis, you pay Class 1 contributions. In this situation, you can apply to defer payment of Class 2 and Class 4 contributions.

## 11 VAT

VAT is payable on most sales (of goods and services), and recoverable on most purchases.

**11.1** All businesses must pay VAT, but only those that are **VAT-registered** can reclaim it.

- Businesses must register once their turnover exceeds the VAT-registration threshold (currently £64,000).
- VAT-registered businesses must charge VAT on their sales of standard-rated goods and services, and account for the tax to HM Revenue & Customs.
- They may deregister if their annual turnover falls below a certain limit (currently £62,000).
- Businesses with turnover below the VAT-registration threshold may choose whether to register. They have to weigh the advantages (the ability to recover VAT) against the disadvantages (having to charge VAT, and the costs of administration).

**11.2** Most small businesses use the **cash accounting** system.

- The amount paid in VAT is based on sales revenue, while the amount recovered is calculated according to the invoices that have been paid. This avoids the problems that can otherwise arise with slow payment by customers, or with bad debts.
- Businesses with a turnover of up to £1.35 million may apply to use this system.
- Businesses need to meet certain conditions before cash accounting can be adopted.

**11.3** Small to medium-sized businesses can choose **annual accounting**, rather than submitting quarterly returns.

- Businesses with a turnover of up to £1.35 million may apply to use this system.
- The leaving threshold is £1.6 million.
- Any business under the £1.35 million threshold can use the scheme from the date of VAT registration.

**11.4** A **flat-rate scheme** is available for small companies.

- It is available to companies with an annual taxable turnover of up to £150,000. Their total turnover (including exempt and zero-rated supplies) must not exceed £187,500.
- VAT will be charged as a percentage of turnover, rather than on individual transactions.

This reduces the costs of compliance

### More information

- ➔ See **Income tax self-assessment**.
- ➔ See **Corporation tax**.
- ➔ See **Company cars and tax**.
- ➔ See **Common VAT problems**.
- ➔ See **National Insurance and state pensions**.
- ➔ See **Key dates for the tax year**.
- ➔ See **Incentive pay**.

“Businesses opting to pay VAT under the annual accounting scheme are required to make monthly payments on account by direct debit.”  
**Steve Connor,**  
**Shepley Window Systems Company**

considerably, but is not primarily designed to reduce the amount of VAT paid.

See **Common VAT problems**.

## 12 Capital gains tax

Capital gains tax (CGT) is a tax on successful investments, such as those in property or shares. If you sell something for more than you paid for it, you may have to pay CGT. Individuals get indexation relief for inflation up to April 1998, and then get taper relief which effectively exempts them from the tax part of any subsequent gain, depending on the length of ownership of the asset. Companies can claim indexation relief up to the date of sale.

**12.1** Capital gains tax is generally paid at the same **rate** as income tax (see **4**).

- Capital gains are added to any other income, to determine what the top rate should be.
- Gains falling within the middle rate band are charged at 20 per cent, rather than 22 per cent.
- The first £9,200 of capital gain each year is tax free. A husband and wife or people in a civil partnership can each claim this allowance.
- CGT is payable on 31 January following the end of the tax year in which the gain is made.

**12.2 Limited companies** pay corporation tax on any capital gain.

- Capital gains are treated as part of the company's taxable profit.

**12.3** The **self-employed**, like other individuals, pay CGT at their top rate of income tax.

**12.4** CGT **exemptions** include increases in the value of your car and your principal private residence.

- If you work from home and have not claimed any part of your mortgage payments as a business expense, there is usually no CGT on the profits made from the sale of your house.
- Under certain conditions, some investment vehicles, life assurance policies and charitable gifts may also be exempt.

**12.5** Capital **losses** can be set off against capital gains from the same year.

Any excess loss can be carried forward to

be set off against future gains.

**12.6** Enhanced capital gains tax taper relief is available on **business assets**.

- All unquoted shares in trading companies count as business assets. So do all shareholdings held by employees in quoted trading companies. And so do all shareholdings in excess of 5 per cent in quoted trading companies.
- All shares held by employees in non-trading companies also count as business assets, providing that the employee does not have a 'material interest'.
- The holding period for CGT taper relief on business assets is two years. So qualifying assets sold within the first year will still be charged at the full rate (40 per cent to a 40 per cent taxpayer). The rate declines to 50 per cent of the full rate (ie 20 per cent for a 40 per cent taxpayer) on qualifying assets sold after one year, and to 25 per cent of the full rate (ie 10 per cent to a 40 per cent taxpayer) on assets sold after two years.

**12.7** Payment of CGT can be **deferred**.

- You can get 'rollover relief' if you sell a building from which you trade (or certain other types of asset), and use the money to replace it with another.
- You can get 'reinvestment relief' if you reinvest the gain in qualifying shares in certain types of companies, under the Enterprise Investment Scheme (see **13**).
- However capital gains tax deferral relief has been withdrawn for gains re-invested in venture capital trust shares on or after 6 April 2004.

“There are a number of opportunities to minimise capital gains tax through effective tax planning and utilisation of the reliefs available. Ask your accountant for advice.”  
**Richard Shooter,**  
**Henstock Shooter**  
**chartered**  
**accountants**

## 13 Investments and tax

Various schemes exist to encourage investment in small to medium-sized companies.

**13.1** The **corporate venturing** scheme is designed to encourage big companies to take stakes in smaller, unquoted ones.

- At least 20 per cent of the small company's shares must be held by individuals.
- Corporate assets must not exceed £15m before the share issue (or £16m after it).
- The small company must not obtain most of its income from royalty or licensing agreements, unless they relate to intellectual property or other intangible assets largely created by the company.
- Investors get corporation tax relief (at

20 per cent) if they hold shares for three years. They can defer tax on gains made in corporate venturing, if the proceeds are invested in another qualifying company. They must not hold stakes of more than 30 per cent.

- Capital losses can be set against income.

**13.2 Both enterprise investment and venture capital** schemes are aimed at boosting investment in small unquoted companies — the former by individuals previously unconnected with the company, the latter by venture capital trusts (VCTs).

- The period for which such investments must be held to qualify for income tax relief under a VCT has risen to five years.
- The definition of control has been changed to focus on who controls the company, rather than how profits are distributed.
- The annual limit on investments qualifying for tax relief under the Enterprise Investment Scheme increased to £400,000 for shares acquired from 6 April 2006.
- For investors in VCTs income tax relief on qualifying investments is 30 per cent for the tax year 2006/07.
- Other measures include protection of enterprise investment scheme status if companies go into receivership.

## 14 Paying less tax

There are widely-used ways of paying less tax.

**14.1 New businesses** expecting to make a first-year loss can delay incorporation.

- This may be advantageous because the self-employed can offset the tax loss against previous years' employment income and receive a tax rebate (see **8**). But being self-employed has other important implications, including unlimited liability.

**14.2** If you are making profits and your cashflow is sound, it may be worth trying to **reduce profit** at the year end in order to cut your tax bill.

- Bring forward the purchase of assets that you will have to buy later anyway.
- Make full provision for specific bad debts.

**14.3** Payments into a **pension scheme** are an efficient way of saving tax.

- But such payments will then be locked in.

Weigh up the possibility that the cash will be

needed in the business.

## 15 The 2006/07 tax year

The main changes from the previous year are outlined below.

**15.1 Income tax** (see **4**). The three income tax bands and rates for the tax year to 5 April 2006 were:

taxable income (£)	tax rate
1–2,150	10%
2,151–33,300	22%
over 33,300	40%

**15.2 Corporation tax bands** (see **5**). In 2006/07 they were:

profit (£)	tax rate
0-300,000	19%
Over 1,500,000	30%

If your profits fell between £300,000 and £1.5 million, you were eligible for marginal relief. This is designed to ease the transition from one rate to the next. The limits are reduced for companies belonging to groups.

**15.3 Allowances** (see **4**).

- The personal allowance was £5,035.

**15.4 National Insurance** (see **10**).

- Employees earning less than £97 a week were exempt. Other employees paid 11 per cent (9.4 per cent if contracted-out) on any extra, up to £645 a week.
- The employer's contribution was 12.8 per cent on earnings above £97 a week (less if contracted out).
- The self-employed paid Class 2 contributions of £2.10 a week.
- Class 4 contributions were charged at eight per cent on profits between £5,035 and £33,540.
- The earnings limit for exemption from Class 2 contributions was £4,465.

**15.5 Capital gains tax** (see **12**).

- The annual individual exemption was £8,800.

## Expert contributors

Thanks to **Geoff Speirs** (Bentley Jennison chartered accountants, 0117 925 9255); **Lionel Griffiths** (University of Wales, Newport, 01633 432460).

## Further help

There are other Directors' Briefing titles that can help you. These briefings are referred to in the text by name, such as **Company cars and tax**.

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