

HMRC makes changes that could affect how GPs profits are taxed

Practices and GPs have been warned that they could face an increased tax bill for 2023/24 as HMRC is changing the way it calculates profits for businesses and the self-employed.

From April 2024, the period over which taxable profits are calculated will change so that it aligns with the standard tax year (April to March) instead of a business's own accounting period. Currently GPs and practices don't have to align their accounting period with the standard tax year and their year-end can be whatever date they choose.

The 2023/24 tax year will be a transition year during which practices and GPs may face an increased tax bill. Those that use an accounting period that doesn't align with the standard tax year will be taxed on profits arising in their

usual accounting period plus the number of months up to 5 April 2024. GPs and practices whose accounting date is not aligned with the tax year will therefore need to pay additional tax.

To reduce possible cashflow difficulties, the reform allows additional taxable profits to be spread over five years. However, because it is the additional profits that are spread over this five-year period, and not the additional tax incurred, GPs who are affected by the reform are likely to have higher taxable income in 2023/24. As a result, some may find that they are in a higher tax band or lose part of their personal allowance.

The reform may also have an effect on GPs' pensionable pay, resulting in additional pension contributions. As

a result, some GPs may find that their pension contributions exceed the annual allowance.

Although the reform does not require GPs and practices to change their accounting date to align with the tax year, they may face certain disadvantages if they do not. For example, they will be required to make two submissions to HMRC each year – an estimated return and a final return. However, according to taxation experts, GPs and practices need to be aware that the change is coming and to plan for the extra tax bill.

HMRC has introduced the changes, called 'Basis Period reform', to create a 'simpler, fairer and more transparent' set of rules for the allocation of trading income to tax years.

Read more about the change at: <https://bit.ly/3KBGhVn>



Consultation on changes to pension scheme

The Department of Health and Social Care has held a consultation on proposed changes to the NHS pension scheme. The proposals are intended to attract and retain experienced clinicians by allowing them to return to work or increase their working hours without facing unnecessary financial penalties.

Under the proposed changes, there would be a new partial retirement option to allow staff to work more flexibly as they approach the end of their careers, claiming all or part of their pension while they continue to build up more contributions. Staff who have already retired would be able to re-join the pension scheme if they decided to return to work.

The proposals also include revised rules for calculating the effects of inflation on pension benefits and contributions. This follows a period during which the rapid increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) meant that staff were taxed more than necessary as the result of a 'timing mismatch' between the CPI rate used to revalue accrued benefits and the CPI rate allowed for in annual allowance calculations.

A further proposal would make it easier for GPs and other clinical professionals working in primary care networks to join the NHS pension scheme. Under current rules, it can be hard to determine whether employers in primary care

networks have access to the NHS pension scheme. This means that they have to apply for time-limited access on an ad hoc basis. The revised rules would extend automatic pension-scheme access to primary care networks, provided that they meet certain qualifying criteria.

The consultation ran from 5 December 2022 to 30 January 2023 and the Department for Health and Social Care is currently analysing the results.

Read more about the proposals at: <http://bit.ly/3kDiy7I> and <https://bit.ly/3kuOGAX>

Government launches Hiring Toolkit for care sector

The Government has launched a free downloadable toolkit that will help care sector employers in England make faster, safer and more informed hiring decisions. Created by leading safeguarding experts in the sector, the Better Hiring Toolkit is a first of its kind designed to support employers through the recruitment process.

Recognising that social care staff and volunteers provide support for some of society's most vulnerable people, the Toolkit will provide a one-stop shop for industry best practice, with a view to raising standards throughout the care sector.

It provides simplified guidance on both obtaining and providing references and conduct information, making the process easier for both employers and recruiters. It also encourages an increase in sharing of information, including barring referrals, to ensure that those who

are not suited to work in the care sector are prevented from working in such roles.

The Toolkit is a collaboration between the Better Hiring Institute, the Disclosure and Barring Service, Reed Screening, Skills for Care,

Dominic Headley & Associates and VBA Consulting. It was created in recognition that, while references are an essential safeguard in care sector recruitment, the current system is lacking.

Despite the legal requirements of the Care Quality Commission, some employers still do not provide appropriate 'evidence of conduct' information, and many employers refuse to complete references or provide insufficient information. It is hoped that by making the Toolkit simple to use and free to access, it will encourage best practice, streamline hiring processes and improve safeguarding standards throughout the whole sector.

Read more about the Toolkit here: <http://bit.ly/3ZksjLG>



In brief...

Almost 500 GPs leave the NHS

Figures from NHS Digital have revealed that 471 full-time fully qualified GPs left the NHS in England in the 12 months to November 2022. Overall, around 1,900 GPs have left the NHS since 2015, with almost a quarter leaving in the last 12 months. Rising workloads, financial pressures and punitive pension rules are key factors behind the rise in GPs leaving. Many GPs have also reduced their hours to protect their wellbeing. In response to the figures, the BMA has urged the Government to take steps that will support practices and encourage more GPs to stay in the profession.

Read more about the figures at: <http://bit.ly/41TKqKz>

Free PPE scheme extended for GP practices

The Department of Health and Social Care has confirmed that the provision of free personal protective equipment (PPE) for GP practices has been extended by 12 months until 31 March 2024 or until stocks run out. The scheme was introduced during the pandemic and has been extended as part of the Government's living with Covid strategy, as well as to help practices tackle rising costs. The Department of Health has announced that it will publish guidance when it expects to run out of specific types of PPE to help practices with their planning.

Read more about the extension at: <https://bit.ly/3ZIWtZq>

Challenges accessing NHS dental care threaten oral health

The British Dental Association (BDA) has warned that challenges accessing NHS dental treatment risks undermining decades of progress on oral health. The warning comes after figures revealed that only 43% of people who reported toothache in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic received complete professional treatment, while 11% received no professional treatment or advice. According to the BDA, the oral health gap in England will continue to widen due to ongoing access challenges, as the number of dentists delivering NHS care has fallen significantly and many practices have reduced their NHS commitment.

Read more about the figures: <http://bit.ly/3Zm1Ugv>

New virtual exam for trainee GPs

The Royal College of General Practitioners has confirmed that the recorded consultation assessment introduced to allow GP trainees to qualify during the Covid-19 pandemic will be replaced with a new exam. From November 2023, trainees will be required to sit a virtual exam in their own practice where actors will play the role of patients. The new exam, which needs to be approved by the General Medical Council, has been developed in consultation with trainees, trainers, examiners and patients.

Read more about the new exam at: <http://bit.ly/3ZSbbwY>

Patients avoid dental treatment due to cost of living

Figures from Healthwatch have revealed that more people are avoiding dental treatment due to the cost of living crisis. Overall, 15% of people avoided dental check ups in December 2022 because of the cost of treatment, up from 12% in October 2022. In addition, 11% avoided booking an NHS appointment as they couldn't afford associated costs, such as for phone calls, travel or the internet. More patients are also being forced to stop taking up NHS prescriptions or buying over the counter medication that they normally rely on due to the cost.

Read more about the figures at: <https://bit.ly/3EJUJXx>

ICBs agree to make up shortfalls in QOF income

A number of integrated care boards have agreed to make up shortfalls in Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) income for GP practices that are asked to prioritise urgent demand. QOF is an incentive programme that rewards practices for meeting certain targets. However, GP practices are at risk of failing to meet the targets as they have been asked to focus on meeting urgent care pressures during the winter. As a result, several care boards have announced payment protection deals with practices, while others are in discussions to agree financial support for those that are facing funding gaps.

Read more about the shortfall at: <https://bit.ly/3ktqvRP>



Government to develop new strategy on major conditions

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has announced that the Government will develop and publish a new Major Conditions Strategy. This will be developed in consultation with NHS England and an interim report is expected to be published in summer 2023.

The Major Conditions Strategy will set out a strong and coherent policy agenda to move towards integrated, whole-person care. This builds upon measures already taken under the

NHS Long Term Plan. The Health Secretary acknowledged that the current nature of the health system would change as some patients have increasingly complex needs and multiple long-term conditions, and therefore a different workforce model would be required.

Measures taken under the Major Conditions Strategy will have three key objectives. The first will be to reduce pressure on the NHS. The second, reflecting manifesto promises, will be to increase life expectancy. The third will be to reduce the number of people absent from the labour market due to ill health. Once in place, the Major Conditions Strategy will complement the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and align with the Government's Life Sciences Missions.

The DHSC is also working on a suicide prevention strategy and a second action plan on rare diseases.

The Health Secretary acknowledged that strategies do not equal outcomes and that delivery will require concerted effort from the Government and the NHS. The NHS Confederation welcomed the focus on integrated, whole-person care and the emphasis on services and local government working together, but also stressed the need for the Government to provide the right workforce, resources and regulatory environment.

Read more about the new strategy at: <http://bit.ly/3EGNUpB>
The statement text is available in full at: <https://bit.ly/3kwnjoy>

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New NHS cybersecurity resources to help tackle online threats

NHS Digital has emphasised the need for healthcare staff to have good online security practices and greater awareness of potential cyber threats. Announcing that it is publishing new resources to help practices stay safe, NHS Digital is looking to ensure GP practices and other health and care organisations are informed about, and proactive in reducing, potential threats. The new cybersecurity resources have been made available on the NHS Digital website as part of the existing Keep IT Confidential toolkit. The resources include posters, screensavers, digital banners, sticky notes, social media graphics and animation.

GP practices and other health and care organisations are responsible for their own cybersecurity, making it vital that staff are aware of, and take action to mitigate, the risks to patient data and services. These include potential threats such as ransomware, where a cyberattack renders data or systems unusable

until a 'ransom' payment is made, greatly impacting patient care.

In 2022, NHS Digital emphasised that cybersecurity is as important an issue to healthcare practices as health and safety and should be treated as such. While it is easy for busy staff to neglect cybersecurity as they prioritise other seemingly more urgent tasks, NHS Digital stressed that it was everyone's responsibility to ensure patients' data remained safe and caregiving wasn't compromised. Good daily cybersecurity habits and an awareness of online threats can make a huge difference in the data security of a practice and reduce the risk of being victim of a cyberattack. It urged organisations to use the new resources to educate themselves and become more cyber aware.

Read more about the resources here: <https://bit.ly/3XZNS2V>