

The Revenue send a statement of account – quite like a credit card statement – as each due date approaches to show what has been settled and what is coming up. If you don't file a return at all, HMRC may estimate the amount you owe and demand it. The only way of disputing their figure is to submit your own – so they are likely to guess high to make the taxpayer act.

Is that all?

The Revenue rely on taxpayers to do a great deal of work under SA, but they don't trust them absolutely. After you have filed your 2007/08 tax return before the due date, they can "open an enquiry" into it up to 12 months after they receive it from you. That can range from asking about one particular figure to launching an in-depth investigation into the taxpayer's finances. Even after that date, they can still ask for more tax if they find something out that suggests there was an underpayment.

How we can help

For someone moving from employment to SA, the whole system can be confusing and intimidating. Knowing what your responsibilities are – on pain of penalties and interest – is difficult. Trying to match up tax payments with different years can be tricky. If you don't know what the detailed rules are for all those boxes on the tax return, you may end up paying too little tax and get in trouble – or you may end up paying too much! We are here to help with every aspect of SA, from letting you know what is required, through filing the returns and checking Revenue statements to dealing with any enquiries that may arise. "Self" assessment doesn't mean you have to do it on your own!

OUR SERVICES

Essex Abel are here to help guide you through the issues detailed in this guide or any other business or taxation issue you may have.

We offer a FREE initial consultation to discuss your individual requirements, from which we will be able to provide a clear and concise plan of action to address the issues discussed.

All our clients (whatever their size or needs) all have something in common – they receive the same professional, reliable, friendly, quality service that forms the basis of our core business values.

We offer an extensive range of services, including the following:

- Tax Planning Advice
- Tax Returns
- Business Start-up Support
- Business Plans & Forecasts
- Year End & Management Accounts
- VAT Returns & Bookkeeping
- Payroll & CIS Bureau
- Statutory Audits
- Company Secretarial Services

For further information on our services, please see our website www.essexabel.co.uk or contact us directly on 01509 267827

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Self assessment



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Self assessment



PAYE or DIY?

When you work as an employee for someone else, your tax is usually dealt with by them under Pay As You Earn – they work it out, take it off your pay before you see it, and send it to HM Revenue & Customs. Most employees don't have to fill in a tax return or deal directly with the taxman.

All that changes if you start up your own business, or if you acquire a source of income on which the tax isn't paid before you receive it – that's how most small savers pay their tax on interest and dividends, but if you receive rent, you have to pay the tax on that yourself.

You will enter the world of “self assessment” (SA) – the name implies that you can do it yourself, but it's not easy. Many people use a professional to reduce the pain of dealing with the paperwork.

Where do I begin?

To start with, you have to tell HMRC to put you in the system. You have to tell them:

- 1 within 3 months of the end of the month, if you start a business;
- 1 by 5 October after the end of the tax year, if you have tax to pay on any other source.

If you miss these deadlines, HMRC may charge you a penalty – or you may simply fail to pay your tax on time, in which case you will pay interest.

Example

Kim starts a business on 10 January 2008. She needs to tell HMRC by 30 April 2008.

Alex buys a buy-to-let property with a sitting tenant on 10 January 2008. If he doesn't already fill in a tax return, he needs to ask for one by 5 October 2008.

Many happy returns

Once you are in the SA system, you will be sent a tax return each year, usually shortly after 5 April. You have to file your information by 31 January after the year end (e.g. 31 January 2009 for the tax year to 5 April 2008). Many people can file their return online using the Revenue's website, but this does not suit everyone. The Revenue are keen on online filing – in 2008, they have brought forward the deadline for traditional paper returns by 3 months to 31 October. If you miss that date, you must file online or pay a late filing penalty.

You also have to pay outstanding tax on 31 January (whichever way you file). If you only send in the return at the last moment, obviously HMRC won't be able to work out how much you owe and ask for it in time – you will have to do that yourself. They promise to work out the tax and tell you if you send the return in on paper by 30 September, or online by 30 December. The return can be a daunting document, with hundreds of boxes for different types of income – interest, dividends, salary, business profits, rent and so on – and deductions such as pension contributions, gifts to charity and business expenses.

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Paying up

For the first year of SA, you have to pay the outstanding tax on 31 January (even if you send in the return earlier). For later years, you make “payments on account” (POA) of half the previous year's SA tax on 31 January and 31 July, with the balance due on 31 January following.

Example

James has to fill in a SA tax return for the first time for 2007/08. He has a total tax liability of £10,000, of which he has already paid £3,000 under PAYE and by deduction on interest.

He will have to pay:

- 1 on 31 January 2009: the balance of £7,000 for 2007/08 and a POA of £3,500 for 2008/09;
- 1 on 31 July 2009: the second POA of £3,500 for 2008/09.

On 31 January 2010, he will settle up the SA tax for 2008/09 and pay a POA for 2009/10.

And if I don't?

If you are late filing your return, you suffer a penalty of £100 (or the outstanding tax, if less). If you are a month late there is a surcharge of another 5% of the tax to pay – it's generally cheaper to borrow the money to pay the taxman. If you are late with any payment of tax, you are charged interest.