

VAT Flat Rate Scheme

The flat rate scheme for small businesses was introduced to reduce the administrative burden imposed when operating VAT.

Under the scheme a set percentage is applied to the turnover of the business as a one-off calculation instead of having to identify and record the VAT on each sale and purchase that is made.

Who can join?

The scheme is optional and available to businesses with anticipated taxable turnover (excluding VAT) of £150,000 or less in the next 12 months. A business must leave the scheme when income in the last twelve months exceeds £230,000, unless HMRC are satisfied that income will fall below £191,500 in the following year. A business must also leave the scheme if there are reasonable grounds to believe that total income is likely to exceed £230,000 in the next 30 days.

The turnover test applies to your anticipated turnover in the following 12 months. Your turnover may be calculated in any reasonable way but would usually be based on the previous 12 months if you have been registered for VAT for at least a year.

To join the scheme you can apply by post, email or phone and if you are not already registered for VAT you can apply online for the flat rate scheme at the same time as registering for VAT.

You may not operate the scheme until you have received notification that your application has been accepted and HMRC will inform you of the date of commencement.

When is the scheme not available?

The flat rate scheme cannot be used if you:

- use the second hand margin scheme or auctioneers' scheme
- use the tour operators' margin scheme
- are required to operate the capital goods scheme for certain items.

In addition the scheme cannot be used if, within the previous 12 months, you have:

- ceased to operate the flat rate scheme
- been convicted of an offence connected with VAT
- been assessed with a penalty for conduct involving dishonesty.

The scheme will clearly be inappropriate if you regularly receive VAT repayments.

How the scheme operates

VAT due is calculated by applying a predetermined flat rate percentage to the business turnover of the VAT period. This will include any exempt supplies and it will therefore not generally be beneficial to join the scheme where there are significant exempt supplies.

The percentage rates are determined according to the trade sector of your business and generally range from 4% to 16.5%. The table in the appendix to this factsheet summarises the percentages. In addition there is a further 1% reduction off the normal rates for businesses in their first year of VAT registration.

If your business falls into more than one sector it is the main business activity as measured by turnover which counts. This can be advantageous if you have a large percentage rate secondary activity and a modest major percentage trade. You should review the position on each anniversary of joining the scheme and if the main business activity changes or you expect it to change during the following year you should use the appropriate rate for that sector.

Although you pay VAT at the flat rate percentage under the scheme you will still be required to prepare invoices to VAT registered customers showing the normal rate of VAT. This is so that they can reclaim input VAT at the appropriate rate.

Example of the calculation

Cook & Co is a partnership operating a café and renting out a flat. If its results are as follows:

| VAT inclusive turnover: | £ |
|----------------------------------|---------|
| Standard rated catering supplies | 70,000 |
| Zero rated takeaway foods | 5,500 |
| Exempt flat rentals | 3,500 |
| Total | £79,000 |

Flat rate $12.5\% \times £79,000 = £9,875$

Normally $£70,000 \times 20/120 = £11,667$ less input tax

And $£70,000 \times 5/105$ (reduced rate) = £3,333 less input tax

Limited cost trader

A 16.5% rate applies for businesses with limited costs, such as many labour-only businesses. Businesses using the FRS, or considering joining the scheme, will need to decide if they are a 'limited cost trader'.

A limited cost trader will be defined as one whose VAT inclusive expenditure on goods is either:

- less than 2% of their VAT inclusive turnover in a prescribed accounting period
- greater than 2% of their VAT inclusive turnover but less than £1,000 per annum if the prescribed accounting period is one year (if it is not one year, the figure is the relevant proportion of £1,000).

Goods, for the purposes of this measure, must be used exclusively for the purpose of the business but exclude the following items:

- capital expenditure
- food or drink for consumption by the flat rate business or its employees

- vehicles, vehicle parts and fuel (except where the business is one that carries out transport services - for example a taxi business - and uses its own or a leased vehicle to carry out those services)
- Goods for re-sale, or hiring out, unless selling or hiring is the main business activity
- Goods to be used as promotional items or gifts.

These exclusions are part of the test to prevent traders buying either low value everyday items or one off purchases in order to inflate their costs beyond 2%.

Treatment of capital assets

The purchase of capital assets costing more than £2,000 (including VAT) may be dealt with outside the scheme. You can claim input VAT on such items on your VAT return in the normal way. Where the input VAT is reclaimed you must account for VAT on a subsequent sale of the asset at the normal rate instead of the flat rate.

Items under the capital goods scheme are excluded from the flat rate scheme.

Records to keep

Under the scheme you must keep a record of your flat rate calculation showing:

- your flat rate turnover
- the flat rate percentage you have used
- the tax calculated as due.

You must still keep a VAT account although if the only VAT to be accounted for is that calculated under the scheme there will only be one entry for each period.

Summary

The scheme is designed to reduce administration although it will only be attractive if it does not result in additional VAT liabilities. The only way to establish whether your business will benefit is to carry out a calculation and comparison of the normal rules and the flat rate rules.

How we can help

We can advise as to whether the flat rate scheme would be beneficial for your business and help you to operate the scheme. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Appendix: Table of sectors and rates

| Trade Sector | Appropriate % |
|---|---------------|
| Accountancy or book-keeping | 14.5 |
| Advertising | 11 |
| Agricultural services | 11 |
| Any other activity not listed elsewhere | 12 |
| Architect, civil and structural engineer or surveyor | 14.5 |
| Boarding or care of animals | 12 |
| Business services that are not listed elsewhere | 12 |
| Catering services including restaurants and takeaways | 12.5 |
| Computer and IT consultancy or data processing | 14.5 |
| Computer repair services | 10.5 |
| Entertainment or journalism | 12.5 |
| Estate agency or property management services | 12 |
| Farming or agriculture that is not listed elsewhere | 6.5 |
| Film, radio, television or video production | 13 |
| Financial services | 13.5 |
| Forestry or fishing | 10.5 |
| General building or construction services* | 9.5 |

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| Hairdressing or other beauty treatment services | 13 |
| Hiring or renting goods | 9.5 |
| Hotel or accommodation | 10.5 |
| Investigation or security | 12 |
| Labour-only building or construction services* | 14.5 |
| Laundry or dry-cleaning services | 12 |
| Lawyer or legal services | 14.5 |
| Library, archive, museum or other cultural activity | 9.5 |
| Management consultancy | 14 |
| Manufacturing fabricated metal products | 10.5 |
| Manufacturing food | 9 |
| Manufacturing that is not listed elsewhere | 9.5 |
| Manufacturing yarn, textiles or clothing | 9 |
| Membership organisation | 8 |
| Mining or quarrying | 10 |
| Packaging | 9 |
| Photography | 11 |
| Post offices | 5 |
| Printing | 8.5 |
| Publishing | 11 |

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| Pubs | 6.5 |
| Real estate activity not listed elsewhere | 14 |
| Repairing personal or household goods | 10 |
| Repairing vehicles | 8.5 |
| Retailing food, confectionery, tobacco, newspapers or children's clothing | 4 |
| Retailing pharmaceuticals, medical goods, cosmetics or toiletries | 8 |
| Retailing that is not listed elsewhere | 7.5 |
| Retailing vehicles or fuel | 6.5 |
| Secretarial services | 13 |
| Social work | 11 |
| Sport or recreation | 8.5 |

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| Transport or storage, including couriers, freight, removals and taxis | 10 |
| Travel agency | 10.5 |
| Veterinary medicine | 11 |
| Wholesaling agricultural products | 8 |
| Wholesaling food | 7.5 |
| Wholesaling that is not listed elsewhere | 8.5 |
| * 'Labour-only building or construction services' means building or construction services where the value of materials supplied is less than 10% of relevant turnover from such services; any other building or construction services are 'general building or construction services'. | |