

More than 142,000 use online payment plans to pay their Self Assessment tax bill

More than 142,000 customers have used HMRC's online Time to Pay facility to spread the cost of their Self Assessment tax bill since April 2021, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has revealed.

The Self Assessment deadline for 2020 to 2021 tax returns was 31 January but, this year, HMRC gave customers until 1 April to pay any tax owed and not face penalties.

Customers who were unable to pay in full but had a tax bill under £30,000 could use the online Time to Pay service to spread the cost into manageable monthly instalments. Those who owed more than £30,000 or needed longer to pay could still use Time to Pay but they had to contact HMRC to arrange it.

Since April 2021, Self Assessment customers have used this service to pay tax worth almost £475 million in instalments.

Myrtle Lloyd, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, said:

"I'd like to thank the millions of customers and agents who have sent us their tax returns and paid their tax bills."

Any Self Assessment customers who did not pay their outstanding tax by 1 April will now face a 5% late payment penalty on any outstanding tax.

Customers wishing to file their 2021/22 tax return can do so from 6 April 2022. Last year, more than 63,500 customers filed their 2020 to 2021 tax return on the first day of the tax year.

Find out more about [Self Assessment](#).

From 1 February 2022, all outstanding amounts were subject to interest.

Latest self-serve Time to Pay figures are for arrangements set up in the 2021 to 2022 tax year and are up to to 3 April 2022.

A 5% late payment penalty was set to be charged if tax remained outstanding, and a payment plan had not been set up, by midnight on 1 April 2022. Further late payment penalties will be charged at the usual 6 and 12 month points (August 2022 and February 2023 respectively) on tax outstanding where a payment plan has not been set up.

11.3 million customers filed their 2020 to 2021 tax return by 28 February 2022.

Royal Navy Offshore Patrol Vessel HMS Spey visits Solomon Islands

Since December 2021, HMS Spey has travelled from the UK via Hawaii, conducting a number of engagements along the way. In January the ship delivered water and medical supplies as part of the international response to the Hunga-Tonga volcanic eruption and in February deployed a medical team to deliver COVID booster vaccinations and dental treatments to the people of Pitcairn Island.

British High Commissioner Tom Coward said:

I am delighted to welcome HMS Spey to Solomon Islands. During its time here I hope that HMS Spey is of huge value to Solomon Islands supporting maritime surveillance and fisheries protection. I most of all hope this visit will mark the establishment of a close relationship between HMS Spey and Solomon Islands and further strengthen the bonds of friendship between our two countries.

One of the greenest ships in the fleet, Spey has also worked with regional partners to carry out environmental and hydrographic surveys as well as water sampling to aid studies on climate change. Her recent work in support of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) has seen the ship contribute to the fight against illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries activity.

HMS Spey Commanding Officer, Commander Mike Proudman, said:

It is a privilege to be able to support Solomon Islands through EEZ patrols and visible presence. As part of our mission in the Indo-Asia Pacific, we are building understanding of some of the challenges facing the area, and this is an important task that will help to safeguard their natural resource as well as contribute to maritime security.

HMS Spey is on a five-year mission to the Indo-Pacific region alongside her sister HMS Tamar. The mission so far has seen the ship visit Hawaii, Tahiti, Pitcairn, the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu.

While transiting Solomon Island waters, HMS Spey will work closely with Solomon Islands RSIPF Maritime Wing and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), including on matters of maritime and fisheries surveillance.

This visit will observe all COVID protocols in force in Solomon Islands and involve no direct personal contact between those onboard and onshore staff.

Maritime zone training strengthens Fiji's ocean governance

This week, nine technical officers from Fiji's Maritime Affairs Coordinating Committee received specialised software training to map and define the extent of Fiji's maritime zones, including extended continental shelf areas.

The training, funded by the United Kingdom and delivered in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) under the Pacific Extended Continental Shelf Project, is the first of several across the region that will strengthen national ocean governance through improved local knowledge and technical skills.

Permanent Secretary of Defence, Policing, and National Security Mr. Manasa Lesuma, said at the training opening on Monday 28th March:

Maritime zones are the foundation of good ocean governance and Fiji is committed to delimiting and declaring all its boundaries and zones with the United Nations.

Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, countries are entitled to an exclusive economic zone extending 200 nautical miles (M) from the coastline. In some cases, a country's continental shelf may extend beyond 200 M. The portion of the continental shelf beyond 200 M is called the "extended continental shelf" or simply ECS.

A country has exclusive, sovereign rights to conserve, manage, or explore seabed resources such as oil and gas, bottom-dwelling creatures such as clams, crabs, and corals, and deep sea minerals within their ECS.

The British High Commissioner to Fiji, Dr. Brian Jones, said:

Establishing rights over these ECS areas is crucial for the stability and development of Pacific island countries. Until these gaps in the world map are closed, Pacific island countries may not be able to fully protect their interests and achieve their blue economy aspirations.

Mapping and declaring these ECS areas, however, is not an easy task. To complete a submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) requires specialised geoscience expertise and deep sea data which is not always readily available in the Pacific. In addition, submissions may wait years in the queue before they are reviewed by the CLCS.

SPC Deputy Director General Science and Capability, Dr. Paula Vivili, said:

One of the challenges we've seen across the region has been the loss of institutional knowledge at the national level. The people who drove much of this work when it began in 2005 have moved on or started to retire.

In this respect, this week's training filled a critical gap for Fiji by training up the next generation of maritime zone experts to take up the baton. Most trainees were early career professionals with expertise in geospatial analysis, hydrography, and geoscience who gained familiarity with the software for the first time.

The training recipients were awarded certificates at a ceremony hosted at the British High Commission Residence in Suva on Friday 1st April.

Subsequent trainings under the Pacific ECS Project will be hosted in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands later this year. Launched in July 2021 under the UK's Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund, the £363,000 project is supporting Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu to build local capacity, procure specialised software and hardware, acquire data, and, where required, engage experts in geophysics and legal drafting to help progress ECS submissions.

Cheaper and better buses in £7 billion package to level up transport outside London

- government confirms nearly £7 billion to overhaul and level up major local transport schemes
- lower, simpler bus fares to help tackle cost-of-living pressures
- major upgrades to local tram, cycling, walking and rail networks will also be funded
- first fares cuts of up to 45% will start next week

Thirty-one counties, city regions and unitary authorities have been chosen for funding to level up their local bus services in the latest awards from the government's bus transformation programme.

Including earlier awards, just under two-thirds of England's population outside London will benefit from new investment to make their buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, cheaper, or greener. Improvements will also include integrated ticketing and more bus lanes to speed up journeys.

The successful areas have been chosen because of their ambition to repeat the success achieved in London – which drove up bus usage and made the bus a natural choice for everyone, not just those without cars.

As the government stated in last year's national bus strategy, [Bus Back Better](#), areas not showing sufficient ambition, including for improvements to bus priority, would not be funded.

In the meantime, a further £150 million is being provided across England to maintain service levels as patronage continues to recover after the pandemic.

Areas among those set to receive funding today (4 April 2022) to help deliver on their [Bus Service Improvement Plans \(BSIP\)](#) include:

- Portsmouth
- Stoke-on-Trent
- Greater Manchester
- West Yorkshire
- West Midlands
- Liverpool City Region
- North East and North of Tyne Combined Authorities
- Reading
- Norfolk
- Luton
- York
- Warrington

Mayoral combined authorities will also receive money for buses from the [£5.7 billion City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements \(CRSTS\)](#), which are also confirmed today.

Improvements in the pilot area, Cornwall, will start next week, funded by £23.5 million from the government.

From 10 April, most bus fares in the county will be slashed, with short hop fares down by 20%, longer journeys costing up to 40% less and some bus passes cut by almost 50%.

Passes for unlimited bus travel across Cornwall will cost just £5 per day (down from £9 now) or £20 per week. Town zones offer great value travel for just £2.50 per day or £10 for a week. For commuters travelling 5 days a week, that works out at just £2 a day or £1 per journey.

All tickets will be available on all operators' services and in the summer contactless tap-on and tap-off payments will be introduced and buses will connect easily with the main rail line at stations across the county.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Buses are the most popular way of getting around in this country – but for too long people outside of London have had a raw deal.

The investment we're making today to ramp up the bus revolution will drive down fares at a time when people's finances are tight and help connect communities across England.

Today's funding follows the announcement last week of [£200 million for almost 1,000 new electric or hydrogen buses](#), bringing the total funded in England under this government to 2,000.

A further 600 green buses have been funded in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from the block grant to the devolved administrations, putting the UK on target to meet its commitment of 4,000 zero-emission buses.

The government is today also confirming £5.7 billion in funding to level up local bus, tram, rail, walking and cycling networks in England's 8 city regions.

The CRSTS, first announced in the autumn statement, give the mayors of our largest cities long-term certainty to plan and deliver transformational improvements to their local transport systems.

The money will help deliver, among other things, a new mass transit network in West Yorkshire, improvements to rail services in the Tees Valley, a flat fare on buses in Greater Manchester and bus rapid transit corridors in the West Midlands. Letters have been sent to the metro mayors outlining the funding.

Today's announcements, along with the funding of zero-emission buses and the bus elements of the increased CRSTS, form part of the £3 billion for bus transformation announced in 2020. Around £2 billion has also been paid to support bus and light rail services during the pandemic.

The government is also today confirming that tram and light rail operators across the Midlands and the North will also benefit from over £37 million of government support including:

- Manchester (£20.5 million)
- the North East Nexus (£7.3 million)
- the West Midlands (£2.7 million)
- Sheffield (£4 million)
- Nottingham (£3.3 million)

All will receive a share of the government's multimillion-pound pandemic recovery package.

This money will be used to ensure light rail services continue to run and millions of passengers can continue to get around as the country emerges from the pandemic.

Today's confirmed light rail recovery funding allocations come from the wider £150 million package announced by government to support vital bus and light rail services across the country.

International Trade Secretary's speech at Nor-Shipping Conference

Good morning everyone.

It is a real pleasure to be here in Lillestrøm at this great maritime conference.

The UK and Norway share a long and close partnership. One bound by our common history as great seafaring nations.

And in the face of President Putin's barbaric and illegal invasion of Ukraine, our partnership is more important to Europe's security than ever before.

We are both freedom-loving democracies, committed members of NATO, and outward-looking maritime nations.

And in the last month, we have demonstrated our continuing commitment to these principles clearly to the world – as HMS Prince of Wales, the UK's largest warship, led the NATO taskforce in the largest Operation Cold Response exercise for three decades.

In lockstep with our allies, we have launched an unprecedented package of economic sanctions against Russia. Asset freezes and travel bans are restricting cashflows to reduce Putin's ability to fund his war machine.

We have targeted oligarchs, members of the Russian Duma, and those closest to Putin. Together, we must make sure they pay the price for Russia's horrific crimes in Ukraine.

As the UK, USA, EU and Norway stand firm together on coordinating sanctions we reduce Putin's ability to find diversionary routes.

Looking ahead, trade, investment, and the partnerships between these like-minded nations will be vital to starving Putin of his energy sales.

The West has acknowledged that they have relied on Russian energy for far too long.

So, through new trade and investment relationships around energy we can end this dependence, and starve Putin's war machine of the funding it needs.

First, we must use our relationships with reliable energy partners like Norway to meet our needs, protect our supply chains, and steady the global market.

The UK imported a third of its gas from Norway last year, and we greatly

value that long-standing, mutually beneficial partnership.

Secondly, we must use our trade and investment relationships to grow our green economy.

Over a quarter of the UK's electricity needs now come from renewables, and we are working with partners like Norway to drive investment and harness the clean energy potential of the UK.

Last year, our two nations became connected by the world's longest under-sea electricity cable. This is enabling surplus Norwegian hydroelectric power to flow to the UK, and when the UK has an oversupply of wind power, exports of affordable renewable energy to move in the opposite direction.

Across our economies, the more we trade and the more we invest, the more prosperous we will become, and we can use these gains to build a green economy that will eliminate Russian fuel from our energy mix once and for all.

Of course, almost all this trade will be underpinned by the maritime sector.

Around 90% of our traded goods are carried by sea. Virtually all international data – and new energy – travels through subsea cables. And by the middle of this century, global maritime trade volumes are expected to treble.

This trade creates a huge opportunity to revitalise coastal communities, boost growth, and tighten those bonds between nations. But it must not come at the expense of the environment.

Shipping currently accounts for around 2.5% of global emissions, but this share could more than treble by 2050. And the UK is committed to leading the world to build a cleaner, greener, more sustainable maritime network.

At COP 26 in Glasgow last year, we were the lead signatory of the Clydebank Declaration. A coalition of 22 countries, including Norway, that committed to establishing at least six zero-emission, green shipping corridors by the middle of the decade.

As an island nation with a proud maritime heritage, just as in Norway, shipbuilding is part of the UK's national identity. And where we once built the world's most powerful vessels, now we must build its greenest.

The UK already holds a global market share of around 5% in green shipbuilding, as well as being a world leader in subsea technology.

We are investing over £200 million to launch the Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions to fund more innovative green research.

And I know that across the shipping industry the Norwegian government and businesses are leading the race to develop those low-carbon solutions.

But decarbonising shipping will be a global effort. And as an independent

trading nation once again, we in the UK will use the full arsenal of tools at our disposal, including our independent seat at the WTO, to tackle the protectionism that pervades in maritime trade.

Through free and fair trade, we can share both our nations' expertise, creating high-skilled jobs, and accelerate the growth the global maritime industry's green transition requires.

In maritime, and across our economies, trade enables the exchange of the ideas, technology, and expertise that benefit us all.

And this is what Global Britain is championing.

We are not looking inwards – we are focused on trading with the world.

Trade is how we will join forces with our allies to protect our planet, electrify the global economy, and stand as a bulwark against aggressors.

The likes of Putin will not succeed. They won't divide us. Because we know that we are stronger when we trade together, stand together, and fight for progress together.

All this will only be possible with a strong, secure, and green global maritime sector. And this is exactly what the UK is determined to build.

Thank you.