GUIDE 3

Corporation Tax and Key Filing Deadlines

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Starting a limited company creates a series of legal and tax deadlines. Some arise from Companies House, others from HM Revenue & Customs, and they do not all fall on the same date.

The first year can be particularly confusing because the company's first statutory accounts may cover more than 12 months, while a Corporation Tax accounting period cannot. This can mean that a new company needs one set of accounts but two Company Tax Returns.

The safest approach is to understand the obligations early and treat tax deadlines as part of the company's operating timetable, rather than something considered after the year end.

The company year end

When a company is incorporated, Companies House assigns an accounting reference date.

The first financial year usually ends on the final day of the month in which the first anniversary of incorporation falls.

For example, a company incorporated during 12 July would commonly receive a first accounting reference date of 31 July in the following year.

The first accounts may therefore cover slightly more than 12 months.

First statutory accounts

A private company's first accounts are normally due at Companies House 21 months after incorporation.

After the first year, statutory accounts are normally due nine months after the company's accounting reference date.

The exact deadline should always be checked on the Companies House register or within the company's accounting records. Filing late can result in an automatic penalty, and continued failure may lead to enforcement action or the company being struck off.

Companies House's current guidance includes examples showing the 21-month filing period for a private company's first accounts.

Company Tax Return

A Company Tax Return is submitted to HMRC and includes the company's Corporation Tax calculation together with the required accounts and supporting information.

The normal filing deadline is 12 months after the end of the relevant Corporation Tax accounting period.

This is later than the usual Corporation Tax payment deadline, which means the company generally has to pay its tax before the return itself is due.

Paying Corporation Tax

For a standard small or medium-sized company, Corporation Tax is normally due nine months and one day after the end of the accounting period.

For example, where the accounting period ends on 31 March, the Corporation Tax payment would normally be due on 1 January.

The payment reference matters. HMRC assigns a specific Corporation Tax payment reference for each accounting period, and using the wrong reference can result in the payment being allocated incorrectly.

Very large companies may fall within quarterly instalment-payment rules, but this would be unusual for a newly formed owner-managed business.

Why the first year can produce two tax returns

A Corporation Tax accounting period cannot exceed 12 months.

Where the company's first statutory accounts cover more than 12 months, the accounting period must therefore be split for Corporation Tax purposes. The company may need:

- One short Company Tax Return covering the initial period
- A second Company Tax Return covering the following 12-month period

Each return can have its own Corporation Tax payment date, even though there is only one Companies House accounts filing date.

HMRC's guidance confirms that a company may need two tax returns where its first accounts cover more than 12 months.

Corporation Tax rates

For the financial year beginning 1 April 2026, the main Corporation Tax rate is 25% and the small-profits rate is 19%.

Broadly:

- Companies with profits of £50,000 or less may qualify for the 19% small-profits rate.
- Companies with profits above £250,000 generally pay the 25% main rate.
- Companies with profits between those limits may qualify for marginal relief.

The £50,000 and £250,000 thresholds can be reduced where the company has associated companies or where the accounting period is shorter than 12 months.

The company's effective tax rate may therefore be different from the headline rate. The current rates and marginal-relief limits are published by HMRC.

Corporation Tax is charged on taxable profit

Corporation Tax is not simply charged on money in the bank or total sales.

The starting point is the company's accounting profit, which is then adjusted for tax purposes. Adjustments may include:

- Removing expenditure that is not tax-deductible
- Claiming capital allowances
- Treating depreciation differently for tax
- Accounting for losses
- Applying specific tax reliefs
- Adjusting for entertainment or private expenditure
- Considering income that falls into a different period

The final taxable profit may therefore be higher or lower than the profit shown in the company's management accounts.

The Confirmation Statement

A Confirmation Statement is filed with Companies House to confirm that the information held on the public register is accurate.

It is separate from the annual accounts and does not contain the company's profit or tax calculation.

The statement typically confirms information such as:

- Registered office
- Directors
- Shareholders
- Share capital
- People with significant control
- Principal business activities
- Registered email address and other statutory information

The Confirmation Statement must normally be filed at least once every 12 months, although it can be filed more frequently where appropriate.

The filing deadline shown by Companies House should be monitored even where there have been no changes.

Personal Self Assessment

The company's return does not replace the director's personal tax return.

A director or shareholder may separately need to submit a Self Assessment return where, for example, they receive:

- Dividends
- Untaxed income
- Rental profits
- Capital gains
- Income above relevant limits
- Benefits or other amounts requiring disclosure

The company's tax and the director's personal tax should be planned together, but they remain separate liabilities.

VAT deadlines

A VAT-registered company will usually submit VAT Returns quarterly, although other VAT schemes and periods may apply.

The standard online filing and payment deadline is generally one month and seven days after the end of the VAT period.

VAT collected from customers does not belong to the company in the same commercial sense as sales income. Retaining VAT money separately can help avoid cash-flow pressure when the return falls due.

PAYE deadlines

Where the company operates payroll, it must report salary and other payroll information to HMRC through Real Time Information.

A Full Payment Submission is normally made on or before the date employees are paid.

PAYE and National Insurance are generally payable:

- By the 22nd of the following tax month when paid electronically
- Earlier where payment is not made electronically

Some small employers may qualify to pay quarterly, but reporting obligations can still arise each time employees are paid.

Statutory records and changes

Companies House must be informed about certain changes, including changes to:

- Directors
- Registered office
- People with significant control

- Share structure
- Company name
- Certain accounting dates

These filings are not necessarily dealt with through the annual accounts or Confirmation Statement. Tell us when a change happens rather than waiting until the year end.

Your recurring compliance cycle

A typical limited company may therefore have all of the following:

- Annual statutory accounts
- One or more Company Tax Returns
- Corporation Tax payments
- An annual Confirmation Statement
- VAT Returns
- Payroll submissions
- PAYE and National Insurance payments
- Pension submissions
- Personal Self Assessment returns
- Event-driven Companies House filings

Not every company requires every filing, but the absence of activity does not necessarily remove the obligation. Dormant companies, for example, may still need to file accounts and a Confirmation Statement.

Filing software

The former joint online service for filing company accounts and a Company Tax Return closed on 31 March 2026. From 1 April 2026, companies need suitable software to file Company Tax Returns with HMRC.

This makes maintaining compatible accounting records and engaging with the accounts process before the deadline increasingly important.

The practical rule

Do not use the Companies House accounts deadline as the date on which to begin preparing the accounts.

Corporation Tax may already be payable several months before that filing deadline, while VAT, payroll and personal-tax liabilities may arise throughout the year.

A better rhythm is to maintain the bookkeeping continuously, review tax provisions during the year and begin the annual accounts work soon after the company’s year end.

This guide provides general information only. Your actual deadlines depend on the company’s incorporation date, accounting reference date, tax registrations and filing history.

Need advice tailored to your company?
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