Application process for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

As HMRC starts to contact taxpayers who may be eligible for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), the following note outlines how the process is expected to work.

Pre-application stage

Emails, SMS messages and letters are being sent to taxpayers whom HMRC thinks may be entitled to claim an SEISS grant. These were expected to have arrived during the week beginning 4 May 2020, although some letters may not be received until the following week. Each individual will receive one form of contact:

- By email where HMRC holds an email address it uses;
- By SMS where HMRC holds a mobile number, but not an email address; and
- By letter where HMRC holds neither of the above.

Note that to guard against fraud the emails and SMS messages from HMRC do not include active links. If you receive an email or SMS purporting to come HMRC which includes an active link, that email or SMS is a scam.

The initial contact explains what you need to do to be ready to claim when the claims portal opens.

HMRC is contacting all those who may be eligible, but not all recipients will in fact be eligible. HMRC has selected the cases based on the information in the self assessment tax returns you have filed, and has carried out the necessary calculations and eligibility checks based on those figures. However, HMRC will not necessarily know whether you meet the following conditions of the scheme:

- traded in the tax year 2019/20;
- are trading when you apply, or would be except for coronavirus;
- intend to continue to trade in the tax year 2020/21; and
- have lost trading profits due to coronavirus.

HMRC is providing an eligibility checker to allow you to check whether HMRC believes you may be eligible for a grant.

Eligibility checker

The eligibility checker is available on gov.uk and is open to anyone to use, not just those who have been contacted by HMRC.
You enter your self assessment UTR and national insurance number and the checker confirms whether HMRC believes you may be eligible. You don’t need to enter any information about your income. It doesn’t require you to log in to your government gateway account but, in the background, it looks at the tax return information held on HMRC’s system to provide a result. The checker does not give any information about the amount of grant available.

The checker tells potentially eligible taxpayers when they can make a claim (the dates and times are randomly allocated by HMRC to manage demand on the system). You are then presented with an option to either log in to your government gateway account or to create one. You are then asked to confirm or provide your contact details including email address.

The eligibility checker can be used by agents who know your self assessment UTR and national insurance number.

**Creating a government gateway ID**

If you already have a government gateway ID which gives access to HMRC’s self assessment services, you will be able to use that ID when applying for your SEISS grant.

Those who do not already have a government gateway ID are prompted to create one when they use the eligibility checker and during the application stage. **Our advice is that the eligibility checker is the best way to initiate the creation of a new gateway ID, as it saves time and effort - when a government gateway ID is created as part of the SEISS service there is no requirement for an authentication code (PIN) to be sent in the post.**

Creating a government gateway ID to claim an SEISS grant is also better through the SEISS service rather than through any other route on gov.uk, to ensure the correct type of ID is set up for you.

When creating an ID through the SEISS service, you are asked to verify your identity by providing details from your driving licence photocard or your UK passport. If you don’t have either of these documents you will be asked for a piece of financial information, for example, the date you set up a mobile phone contract.

**How to apply for the SEISS grant**

Applications will open to individuals on a staged basis between 13 and 18 May, with the portal opening on different days for different people. HMRC will email those who have provided an email address (when using the eligibility checker or previously) to confirm when the portal is open for them or may send an SMS message. You can also use the eligibility checker to check whether the application portal is now open for you.
You then log in to your government gateway account (or select the option to create an account) to complete the application process. You are presented with a detailed calculation and are asked to:

- read and accept the eligibility criteria;
- complete declarations, including to confirm that the business has been adversely affected by coronavirus; and
- supply the bank account details into which you would like the grant to be paid.

You do not need to provide any information about your income – the calculations are all done by HMRC based on the tax returns submitted. HMRC will check the claim and expects to make payments from 25 May 2020, or within six working days of the application being submitted, whichever is later.

**Disputes**

Where the eligibility checker gives a ‘not eligible’ result there is an option to ask HMRC to review the eligibility. This can be completed by you or we can do this for you. However, the process for disputing the amount of the grant is not yet known.

HMRC expects to have powers to check claims, to require repayment of the grant and to charge penalties.

**Role of agents**

HMRC has advised that agents should not use client credentials to apply for grants on behalf of clients, and that doing so may trigger HMRC fraud checks and delay payment.

However, we can use the eligibility checker on your behalf, and request a review for you where the system gives the response that you are not eligible.

**We are willing and ready to assist you in any way with your application and to advise on the conditions and calculations of the SEISS grant.**

Please contact your usual adviser at Watts Gregory for any assistance.