

No rise in National Insurance for the self employed

I am pleased the Chancellor has changed his mind on National Insurance. It is true the previous Chancellor defined the Manifesto promise as relating to NI for just the employed when he legislated to implement the promise, but there was no such limitation in the Manifesto or in the election speeches and broadcasts to warn the self employed they were not covered. It is always a good idea to keep the spirit and the letter of promises made.

I did speak in favour of not taxing the self employed and small business more, and put in representations from constituents against the Budget proposal. Removing this tax increase removes £325 m extra tax from 2018-19, and around £600 m in each of the next two years. I see no need to replace this “lost” revenue, as I expect the economy to grow a little faster than the official forecasts, which will generate more extra revenue than this policy change. Fortunately the sums involved are small against a total revenue of around £800 bn annually in the relevant years, so this item is under 0.1% of the total.

News story: NHS-funded nursing care rate for 2017 to 2018

The reduction follows a [review of agency costs by Mazars LLP in 2017](#)

Registered nursing care for eligible nursing home residents is funded by the NHS, with the standard weekly rate per patient currently set at £156.25. This was a 40% increase on the 2015 to 2016 rate following an earlier review of the overall rate by Mazars in 2016.

In announcing the 40% increase last year, the government committed to further review the contribution of agency staff costs to the rate. In line with Mazars’ latest evidence on agency costs, the government will now reduce the agency cost component of the rate by £3.29 to allow for lower agency costs. This reduction is partially offset by an uplift in the remainder of the rate by 1.7% to reflect overall nursing wage pressures.

These rates are based on the best evidence currently available to the Department of Health on the costs of providing nursing care in the sector.

The Department of Health plans to consult on the introduction of a regional rate of NHS-funded nursing care ahead of future rate change announcements.

Methodology

The headline agency cost reduction calculated by Mazars (on page 4 of their report) has been uprated based on a 1% uplift. The Department of Health has decided that for the non-agency component of the rate, a 1.7% uplift for overall changes in staffing costs should be applied for a full year (this approach is based on recommendations from the Mazars 2016 review).

The Department of Health has therefore taken the agency rate on page 15 of the most recent Mazars report and applied a consistent 1.7% methodology for 6 months of the year. This is because the agency data runs to September 2016 (see page 35 of report). This ensures the uprate methodology for both the agency and non-agency component of the rate is on a consistent basis, and uprated to April 2017 for overall estimated changes in staffing costs.

The higher rate of NHS-funded nursing care will be reduced to £213.32 per week, the same percentage decrease as applied to the standard weekly rate (this is only relevant for those people who were already on the higher rate in 2007 when the single band was introduced).

EU funding to support jobseekers in Powys

The funding will support the new Workways+ Powys project, which will be delivered by Powys Council and PRIME Cymru. It will target out-of-work people aged 54 and over.

Workways+ Powys will run for three years and help people looking to start their own business; return to work or hoping to take part in volunteering opportunities to improve their skills and confidence.

It will offer support with jobseeking and interview skills; help with CV writing and the chance to gain vocational qualifications and take part in work experience placements.

Around 50 volunteer mentors will be recruited and trained to provide one-to-one mentoring to people looking to return to work in Powys as part of the project.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“EU funding is making a huge contribution to boosting the skills and prospects of people in Wales through projects like Workways, as well as apprenticeships, traineeships, graduate programmes and schemes to help young people pursue careers in STEM industries.

“I’m very pleased to announce this further investment, which will fund important services and new opportunities for people in Powys to get back into work and develop new careers.”

David Pugh, chief executive of PRIME Cymru said.

“We are delighted to be working with Powys Council on this truly innovative approach to supporting mature individuals who have so much to offer both Powys and the economy of Wales as a whole.

“This project will be one of the very first in Wales dedicated to supporting this age group back into economic activity.”

[Yemen urgently needs a ceasefire, a political settlement and food aid – Emily Thornberry](#)

Emily Thornberry MP, Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary, responding to the publication of a UN report showing that Yemen has moved closer to famine, said:

“Yemen urgently needs a ceasefire, a political settlement, and food aid. It does not need more bombing.

“Britain must stop selling billions of pounds’ worth of arms to Saudi Arabia. This is only prolonging the conflict. We are providing the means for the Saudis to continue a war which has been shown to include the aerial bombardment of farming land, fishing boats, and ports that provide access for desperately-needed humanitarian aid.”

[Airspace Consultation](#)

I recently wrote to the Transport Secretary to request a consultation event on airspace changes should be held in Wokingham. I have now received the enclosed reply from the Secretary of State.



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Thank you for your letter of 9 February 2017, about the two consultations on airport capacity and airspace policy.

The rationale for the locations of consultation information events is derived from the Airports Commission's analysis of indicative flightpath data, which projected potential noise impacts of a new runway in 2030. From this we identified local authorities which either border the airport or whose land boundary would be wholly or partly within a 54 dB noise contour. We also included any Parliamentary constituencies on the same basis. This does not mean that people outside these areas are not affected by the impacts of expansion of Heathrow, but I believe we have used reasonable criteria to decide on the locations for the local events.

In addition to the local events, we are also planning to hold a programme of regional stakeholder conference-style events across the UK. For instance there is one in Reading on 12 April and we hope stakeholder groups across the region will register for and attend one of these events.

Further information on the consultation information events being held, including the times and locations of events and the content of the information boards displayed at the events, can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/heathrow-airport-expansion#consultation-information-events>

I appreciate that you would have liked the Department to have held an event in your constituency, but you will recognise that the rationale for the locations of the events described above was necessary given the many factors that had to be considered, such as availability of suitable facilities within the consultation window, department resources, logistical considerations and accessibility of

the venues. However, leaving aside the events, I am content that all interested parties across the region and not just those that are close to the airport are nevertheless able to access the information and make an informed response to the consultation, and I would very much encourage them to do so.

Will best wish

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT