

My wife has been seeing aliens so I can't file my tax return.....

The deadline of 31st January for filing your self-assessment tax return has now passed. Currently you will get an automatic £100 penalty if you submit your return up to 3 months late and will have to pay more if it is any later. However HMRC is in the process of reviewing how penalties are applied, with a suggestion of a driving licence-style points system, with further penalties for those who continue to not submit. You also face a fine if you pay your tax late.

It is possible to appeal to HMRC against a penalty received for filing a return late, not paying all the tax you owe, paying tax after the due date, filing an incorrect return or not being able to prove you have kept adequate records to back up your tax returns. Your penalty can be cancelled or amended but only if you have a reasonable excuse.

According to HMRC a reasonable excuse is normally something unexpected or outside your control that stopped you meeting a tax obligation, for example: your partner died shortly before the tax return or payment deadline, you had an unexpected stay in hospital that prevented you from dealing with your tax affairs, your computer or software failed just before or while you were preparing your online return, service issues with HMRC online services, a fire prevented you from completing your tax return or postal delays that you couldn't have predicted. You must try to send your return or payment as soon as possible after your reasonable excuse is resolved.

HMRC have revealed some very odd excuses that they received last year which were obviously unsuccessful!

- I couldn't file my tax return as my wife has been seeing aliens and won't let me enter the house
- I've been far too busy touring the country with my one-man play.
- My ex-wife left my tax return upstairs, but I suffer from vertigo and can't go upstairs to retrieve it.
- My business doesn't really do anything.
- I spilt coffee on it.

More 'normal' excuses that are still not accepted as reasonable include: you relied on someone else to send your return and they didn't; your cheque bounced or payment failed because you didn't have enough money; you found the HMRC online system too difficult to use or you didn't get a reminder from HMRC.

All in all, it is far easier and cheaper to avoid the penalties by submitting your tax return by the deadline date!

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