

My wife has been seeing aliens.....and other excuses

If you need to fill in a self-assessment tax return, the online deadline of 31st January 2019 is now looming. You will get an automatic £100 penalty if submit your return up to 3 months late, and will have to pay more if it is any later. You will also be fined if you pay your tax bill 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 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 revealed some very odd excuses that they had 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.

As well as these, HMRC also received some questionable items which taxpayers have tried to claim as business expenses:

- A three-piece suite for my partner to sit on when I'm doing my accounts.
- Birthday drinks at a Glasgow nightclub.
- Vet fees for a rabbit.
- Hotel room service – for candles and prosecco.

- £4.50 for sausage and chips meal expenses for 250 days.

More 'normal' excuses for filing late 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 your deadline date!

Published in the Wigan Observer – 22nd January 2019