

Frequently asked questions

Q1 – What is the background to this issue?

Securing tax relief on UNISON subscriptions for qualifying health professionals comes after a twelve year campaign. Our aim was to restore a level playing field for those UNISON members working alongside members of organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and Royal College of Midwives (RCM) who already enjoyed tax relief on their subscriptions.

In order to earn recognition for tax relief from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) the activities of an organisation have to be mainly directed at helping members of a profession to do their jobs better.

Following extensive negotiations with HMRC, UNISON earned recognition for tax relief for members working in the following UNISON healthcare sectors:

- Nursing sector
- Ambulance sector
- Voluntary sector
- Professional and Technical 'A' sector
- Professional and Technical 'B' sector
- Senior and General Manager sector

More details of the job roles that come under each of these sectors can be found on the Claim Form.

HMRC determined that these “approved sectors” are, in the main, directed toward the development and promotion of education, knowledge and professional standards and therefore qualify for tax relief.

Currently, members of the Administrative and Clerical and the Ancillary and Maintenance sectors do not qualify for tax relief. UNISON believes that HMRC has taken a narrow view on defining what roles are 'professional' and UNISON is continuing to make representations on behalf of members in these sectors.

Q2 – Am I eligible to claim?

UNISON members within the “approved sectors” may claim 70% of their UNISON subscription against their taxable employment income.

If your tax affairs are in order you could receive a cheque giving you a tax refund for past years that you have paid a UNISON subscription and HMRC will make an adjustment to your PAYE Code for future years.

You can claim back the relief for subscriptions you have paid in the previous six years if you do not complete a tax return. If you do complete a tax return then you can only claim back four years.

Remember, you must only claim relief on UNISON subs paid by you whilst you were a member of one of the approved sectors.

You are responsible for the accuracy of claims that you make so in future, if you move into or out of an approved sector you should advise your tax office and only claim relief for subscriptions paid during the period in which you were in an approved sector.

Note: If you are a member of the British Association of Occupational Therapists do not pay a subscription direct to UNISON. Please contact BAOT for information on how you can claim tax relief on your subscription.

Q3 – How do I make a claim?

Simply complete the claim form which is available to download from the UNISON website at: <http://www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/taxrelief.asp> or by telephoning UNISON on 0845 355 0845.

If you complete a Self Assessment Tax Return, you can make a claim on the return itself. Turn to the Employment Page and enter the amount eligible for tax relief under the 'Professional Fees and Subscriptions' section.

Q4 - What does it mean financially?

Your personal tax position depends on a number of factors so this response can only be given in general terms.

Tax relief applies to 70% of your annual UNISON subscription. This means that if you pay annual subscriptions of £138 you will be entitled to tax relief on (£138 x 70%) £97.

To avoid confusion we need to stress that your entitlement is relief on £97 and NOT a tax refund of £97.

If you pay tax at the basic rate of 20% this will give you an annual saving of £19.40.

These figures are for illustration only and the situation for individual members will obviously depend on the period during which they were members of an approved sector, the amount of subscriptions paid and the rate at which they are liable to income tax.

Q5 - Why do only 70% of my UNISON subscriptions qualify for relief?

Trade union activities such as negotiating, representing members on individual cases and campaigning on terms and conditions don't qualify for tax relief. HMRC are entitled to grant partial relief where the organisations have objects and activities some of which qualify and some of which don't. We believe that 70% is reasonable in our circumstances.

Q6 - What if my subscriptions change during the year?

Your claim for each tax year should be in respect of the subscription paid in that year so if the monthly amount has changed during the year it is important that you calculate the annual amount accurately when completing the claim form and/or your tax return.

As far as future years are concerned, HMRC will include an amount in respect of the estimated relief due in calculating your PAYE tax code number so you should advise your tax office of any increase or decrease in your annual subscription promptly, so that any necessary adjustments can be made.

Q7 - What if I cease to be a member?

If, for any reason, you cease to be a member of UNISON you should advise your tax office so that HMRC can amend any relief that had been included in your PAYE tax code.

Q8 – Can I apply for tax relief on the costs of my uniform or professional registration fees?

As a health care worker, you may be able to claim tax relief on the costs of maintaining your uniform and the costs of registering with professional regulators, such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), Health Professions Council (HPC) and the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). You'll need to apply for this separately to the tax relief on your UNISON subscription. To help find out if you can claim and how to do it, please read the guidance and claim form which are available on the UNISON website.

Q9 - What if I need further information or help?

Further information and help can be obtained from the UNISON website - www.unison.org.uk - or by contacting your UNISON branch office.