Tapered annual pension allowance and how it works

The amount you can contribute to your pension(s) each year and receive tax relief on is limited to the annual allowance (£60,000). For some high earners this may be reduced. The allowance will be 'tapered' according to your income, although everyone will retain an allowance of at least £10,000.

This means the amount you could tax-efficiently invest in your pension(s) each year, could change from tax year to tax year.

IN THIS GUIDE WE COVER:

- Why some high earners may have a reduced annual pension allowance
- How to calculate if you are affected or not
- How much your allowance will potentially drop by
- What happens if you exceed your allowance

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Will I be affected by the tapering of the annual allowance?

This depends on your annual income as defined by two measures. Your annual allowance will only be reduced if both of the following occur in a tax year:

- Your 'threshold income' is above £200,000 and
- Your 'adjusted income' is over £260,000.

Each tax year runs from 6 April to 5 April the following year.

Working out your threshold and adjusted income is rather complicated but we have shown how you can calculate these figures on page 3 of this guide. You will need to reassess your position on a yearly basis.

The first step is to calculate your threshold income because if this is £200,000 or below you will not be subject to the tapered annual allowance and you do not need to worry about your adjusted income.

How does the tapered annual allowance work?

If you are affected, your £60,000 allowance will reduce by £1 for every £2 of adjusted income you receive over £260,000. However, the tapering of the allowance stops at £360,000 and so everyone will retain an allowance of at least £10,000. An illustration of how this may affect you is shown in the next table.

Please keep a record of your tapered annual allowance for each year as you will need it to determine whether an annual allowance charge applies.

The value of tax benefits from a pension depends on your circumstances, and tax and pension rules may change in the future.

How it works:

Adjusted income	Annual allowance for the 2024/25 tax year:
£260,000	£60,000
£270,000	£55,000
£280,000	£50,000
£290,000	£45,000
£300,000	£40,000
£310,000	£35,000
£320,000	£30,000
£330,000	£25,000
£340,000	£20,000
£350,000	£15,000
£360,000	£10,000

The figures in the above table are for illustration purposes only. In practice the reduction in your annual allowance as a result of tapering will not reduce by £5000 increments. We show some examples of how this works in practice on the last page.

How is my threshold income calculated?

Firstly, add up all the following gross income:

- Your salary (do not include any pension contributions made through salary sacrifice)*
- Any bonuses, commission and any benefits in kind
- Income from property
- Dividend payments and interest from savings
- Any self-employed earnings
- Any salary/bonus you have sacrificed for pension contributions if:
  1. The arrangement started on or after 9 July 2015. This could apply where a decision to renew the arrangement is required from the member.
  2. Your contributions have increased since 9 July 2015.

You should then deduct:

- Any contributions you make to a pension (do not include any contributions made by your employer)
- Certain reliefs you may be entitled to such as those applying to charitable donations (these reliefs are outlined in Section 24 of the Income Tax Act 2007).

This will give you your threshold income. If it is £200,000 or less you will not be affected by the taper and your annual allowance will not be reduced. However, if it is above £200,000, you will be affected if your adjusted income is over £260,000.

***Some employers will have a different name for salary sacrifice and you should check if you are unsure.**

How is my adjusted income calculated?

Firstly, add up all the following:

- All your taxable income (as per your threshold income)
- Any contributions your employer has made to a pension (including any made by salary sacrifice)
- Benefits built up in a final salary (defined benefit) pension scheme, excluding the cost of your contributions (you should contact your scheme provider for more information on the 'pension input amount')
- Any contributions you have made to a workplace pension scheme where the contributions were taken from your full pay before tax was calculated (this is known as Net Pay and if you are not sure, you should check with your pension provider)

You should then deduct:

- Certain reliefs you may be entitled to such as those applying to charitable donations (these reliefs are outlined in Section 24 of the Income Tax Act 2007).

This will give you your adjusted income. If it is less than £260,000, the tapered annual allowance will not apply. If it is more than £260,000 (and your threshold income is above £200,000) your annual allowance will be affected. It will reduce by £1 for every £2 of adjusted income you receive over £260,000 (the minimum allowance is £10,000).

What happens if I exceed the annual allowance?

If your pension contributions for the tax year exceed the annual allowance, you may be able to 'carry forward' unused annual allowance from the three previous years to cover the excess amount. Pension contributions in excess of the available annual allowance and any 'carried forward' annual allowance is liable for tax at your highest marginal rate. The charge is normally declared and paid through the income tax self-assessment process (although it could be deducted directly from your pension savings if certain conditions are met – this is known as 'Scheme Pays' and you will have to make a formal request to your pension scheme provider if you want to apply for this).

See the Carry Forward guide on our website for details.

It is important to note that if you have triggered MPAA then you will not be able to carry forward any unsused allowances.

Can I still carry forward any unused annual allowances?

The carry forward rules will continue to operate as before but please note the taper can potentially affect the amount you carry forward to future years. This is because the amount you may be able to carry forward will be determined with reference to your tapered annual allowance in each of the tax years this applies.

If you need further information on pension allowances, please speak to your financial adviser if you have one or visit our website.

What if I am already subject to the money purchase annual allowance?

If you have taken taxable money out of your pension pot using pension freedoms (i.e. more than the tax-free part), a lower money purchase annual allowance (MPAA) may apply to you.

However, you should note that if you also hold a defined benefit pension, (which includes 'final salary' and 'career average' pension schemes) you can benefit from what is called the 'Alternative Annual Allowance' which is £50,000 in the current tax year. You should contact your defined benefit pension provider for details.

If you have triggered MPAA then you will not be able to carry forward any unsused allowances.

How the tapered annual allowance works in practice

Example 1 – Phoebe

Phoebe's salary is £210,000 and her employer contributes £20,000 to her pension.

Phoebe's threshold income = £210,000

- Salary of £210,000
- No additions or deductions

Phoebe's adjusted income = £230,000

- Salary of £210,000
- Employer's pension contribution of £20,000

Phoebe will not be affected by the tapered annual allowance. This is because, although her threshold income is above £200,000, Phoebe's adjusted income is below £260,000. She will therefore have an annual allowance of £60,000 for the 2024/25 tax year.

Example 2 – Ravi

Ravi's salary is £235,000 and his employer contributes £60,000 to his pension.

Ravi's threshold income = £235,000

- Salary of £235,000
- No additions or deductions

Ravi's adjusted income = £295,000

- Salary of £235,000
- Employer's pension contribution of £60,000

Ravi will be affected by the tapered annual allowance because his threshold income is above £200,000 and his adjusted income is over £260,000. His annual allowance of £60,000 will be reduced by £17,500 (£35,000 divided by 2) and therefore will be £42,500 for the 2024/25 tax year. As his employer's contributions exceed his annual allowance, Ravi could be liable for a tax charge. This could be as much as £7,875 (£17,500 at 45%), if Ravi is an additional rate UK tax payer.

If Ravi is a Scottish Resident any tax charge payable will be based on the Income Tax rates for Scotland which differ from the rest of the UK.

Important information

Tax treatment depends on individual circumstances and all tax and pension rules may change in the future. The minimum age you can normally access your pension savings is currently 55, but this is due to rise to 57 on 6th April 2028.

The information in this guide is correct as at April 2024.

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