

Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme

Guidance Notes and Frequently Asked Questions

OVERVIEW

The Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme (WPBSS) is a new support scheme from the Department for the Economy. It is designed to provide support to wet pubs, whose premises were required to close or cease trading during the period from 4 July to 23 September 2020.

This scheme is aimed at helping to keep companies in business and protect jobs, and at helping to prevent business closure and promote economic recovery.

The scheme opens on 11 January 2021. Eligible businesses will receive a one off payment that covers the full week(s) they were closed during the 12 week period from 4 July to 23 September 2020.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The scheme is open to businesses who are Wet Pubs. For the avoidance of doubt, for the purposes of this scheme, a wet pub is defined as the following:

- One which only serves drinks and does not offer food as a main meal; and
- It was required to close during the 4 July to 23 September 2020 period.

What is the aim of the scheme?

The WPBSS is designed to provide support to wet pubs, whose premises were required to close or cease trading from 4 July to 23 September 2020, a period in which most other hospitality businesses were allowed to trade.

What businesses are eligible to apply for Covid Restrictions Business Support Scheme?

Eligibility Criteria

Businesses meeting the following criteria will be eligible for the WPBSS:

- i). The business is named within the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020
AND
- ii). The business is eligible for the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS);

- iii). The Business was closed for at least one full week during the period 4 July to 23 September 2020. The applicant will be eligible to apply for the number of full weeks it was closed during this period.
- iv). Wet pubs who have an attached off licence business are eligible for support if the wet pub element of their business was closed.
- v). Businesses must have been actively trading before they were forced to close due to Covid-19 lockdown/ restrictions.

Exclusions

The following will be ineligible:

- vi). Businesses who operated at a reduced capacity (for example those who offered a takeaway service only).
- vii). Businesses which have failed to comply with a prohibition notice under regulation 7 of The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020(b)) would not be eligible for support under the scheme.
- viii). Businesses that are:
 - o dissolved or about to be dissolved, insolvent or for whom insolvency action had been instigated; or
 - o dormant, i.e. not trading but not insolvent.

Please note that this list of exclusions is not exhaustive and all businesses will be subject to verification and validation before eligibility is determined.

LRSS eligibility requirement

The WPBSS has been designed to provide support to wet pubs who were closed from 4 July to 23 September 2020. Other businesses who were forced to close following additional restrictions imposed by the Executive effective from 16 October across Northern Ireland, or 5 October in the Derry City & Strabane District Council area, have been provided with support through the Department of Finance's Localised Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS). Information on the LRSS scheme can be accessed at the link below:

[Coronavirus: Localised Restrictions Support Scheme \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Only wet pubs who qualified for LRSS will be eligible for the WPBSS. Businesses will have to meet the full eligibility criteria associated with the LRSS, for at least one full week during the 4 July to 23 September period to qualify, details on LRSS criteria can be found on the link above.

It should be noted that wet pubs who qualify for LRSS will only be eligible for the WPBSS if they meet the other eligibility criteria for the scheme.

Eligibility – Additional Information

The Department for the Economy has introduced a number of further verification checks that will be based on supplementary information that you will be asked to provide.

Businesses will also be asked to confirm veracity of information and understanding of terms and conditions in submitting the additional information.

Alongside returning their scheme supplementary information form, businesses will be asked to provide bank statements to provide the necessary evidence of 'trading' and 'non-trading' during the defined periods. Trading in this context means evidence or absence of customer transactions. Further information on the requirement for bank statements can be found in the 'bank statement' section below.

Period of closure

Businesses will be asked to declare which full weeks they were closed from the 4 July to 23 September 2020 period.

For clarity, there is a maximum claim period of 12 weeks. For the purpose of this scheme, weeks run from the Saturday to the Friday of each week as the first date of the restriction period began on Saturday 4th July. The final week (week 12) runs from 19th to 23rd September and this will represent a full week's payment.

It should be noted that payments will only be made for full weeks and not partial weeks. Payments that run from 7 days outside of the periods below will not be eligible (for example if a business was closed from 7th to 14th of July).

Week Number	Week Commencing
1	4/7/2020
2	11/7/2020
3	18/7/2020
4	25/7/2020
5	1/8/2020
6	8/8/2020
7	15/8/2020
8	22/8/2020
9	29/8/2020
10	5/9/2020
11	12/9/2020
12	19/9/2020 – 23/9/2020

ELIGIBILITY QUERIES

My business has been severely impacted, but is not named in the Health Protection Regulations, can I apply for support?

No, only businesses named in the Health Protection Regulations are eligible for support.

My business has been severely impacted but did not qualify for the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme, can I apply for support?

No, only businesses who were eligible for, and received a payment through the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme, are eligible for support.

My business qualified for the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme, and is a wet pub. Will I automatically receive a WPBSS payment?

No. Whilst information provided by businesses to Land & Property Services (LPS) as part of their LRSS applications, including checks carried out by LPS, will be shared with the Department for the Economy for the WPBSS purposes, the Department will seek additional information and declarations from those that qualify to verify eligibility including to ensure that only businesses who were closed during the 4 July to 23 September 2020 period receive WPBSS payment.

My wet pub was not closed the full twelve week period of 4 July to 23 September 2020, can I still apply?

Yes. Businesses will be asked to provide information on their scheme supplementary information form regarding the number of **full** weeks they were closed for during the 4 July to 23rd September time period and provide a bank statement and scheme supplementary information form to evidence this. Please note the scheme does not pay for partial week's closure.

My business was not closed during the 4 July to 23 September but operated on a reduced service basis (for example it provided takeaway services but the premises was closed) - am I eligible for support?

No. The WPBSS only provides support to businesses who were fully closed and ceased all trading as a pub during the 4 July to 23 September period.

My business was not fully closed during the 4 July to 23 September period, but it was only able to use its outdoor seating area, and the business was therefore restricted in numbers in comparison to its pre Covid operating levels, I therefore consider my business to have been significantly impacted through the 4 July to 23 September period, am I eligible for support?

No. Only businesses who were forced to fully close or cease operating are eligible for the WPBSS.

What evidence do I need to provide to prove my business was trading at the time the restrictions came into effect?

As part of a scheme supplementary information form issued by the Department for the Economy, businesses will be asked to provide a bank statement that clearly shows the period immediately before the business closed. For some businesses, who were closed from the 23rd March, this will be the period covering 1 - 15 March 2020. You should refer to the 'bank statement' section of this FAQ for further information.

What evidence do I need to provide that my business was closed during the 4 July to 23 September period?

Businesses will be asked to complete a scheme supplementary information form that:

- States the weeks that they were fully closed during the 4 July to 23 September 2020 period;
- Confirms they have not undertaken any pre-insolvency discussions with an accountant, solicitor or an insolvency practitioner;
- Confirms that they understand that providing false and misleading information that they will be liable for potential prosecution and will be required to repay any grant received; and
- Confirms that they consent to their information being shared with other Government/public bodies for the purposes of fraud prevention and avoidance of misuse of public money.

Alongside returning their scheme supplementary information form, businesses will be asked to provide bank statements to evidence lack of trading and evidence of trading pre closure. More information can be found in the 'bank statement' section.

Where the evidence is not definitive, applicants may be asked for additional supporting evidence.

Can I apply for the fund if I have accessed the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme/Job Support Scheme and furloughed my staff?

Applicants are eligible as long as they are eligible for the LRSS and meet wider scheme eligibility. This scheme is a compensation scheme to offset fixed costs incurred during the eligible period, from 4 July to 23 September. Similarly, during the spring/early summer lockdown the £10,000 Small Business Support Grant Scheme and the £25,000 Retail Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Scheme were available to help support eligible businesses meet fixed costs.

I am a pub that is classified as a wet pub within the 11 December Health Protection Regulations 2020, however I was able to operate during 4 July to 23 September in a reduced capacity, do I qualify for the WPBSS?

No – only those wet pubs who were closed between 4 July and 23 September 2020 are eligible for support. The Localised Restrictions Support Scheme provides support to businesses who have been affected by the 16 October restrictions introduced by the Executive. This scheme is targeted at those who were subject to additional restrictions during the July to September restriction period.

[My business has been closed since March 2020. Will I received support from that date?](#)

No. The WPBSS is only support for the period from 4 July to 23 September 2020. Most other hospitality businesses were permitted to re-open from this date. This scheme is in addition to the earlier schemes introduced by the Executive such as the £10,000 Small Business Support Grant Scheme and the £25,000 Retail Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Scheme which were available from March and April 2020.

[My business qualified for LRSS but I have not been contacted by the Department for the Economy by email with an invite to complete a scheme supplementary information form to complete the application process for the Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme, what should I do?](#)

The Department has identified businesses deemed pre-eligible for the scheme. If you have not received an invitation, it is likely that your business has not been identified as pre-eligible. This may be because you declared yourself to be a pub that also serves food as part of your application for the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme.

If you have not received an invite email from the Department for the Economy by 22nd January, you should contact the Department for the Economy at WPBSS@economy-ni.gov.uk, strictly no later than 29th January 2021. You will be required to provide evidence that you are a wet pub, and confirm that your business was closed, for at least a one week period between 4 July and 23 September 2020.

[My business is a sports club, operating licenced premises as part of the wider club operation, am I eligible for support?](#)

One of the eligibility requirements for the WPBSS is being in receipt of the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme. If your business does not qualify for LRSS, it will not be eligible for this scheme.

MAKING AN APPLICATION

[How do I make an application?](#)

[Scheme Supplementary Information Form](#)

There is no requirement to make an application for the WPBSS scheme through an online portal. The Department for the Economy has worked with Land & Property Services to identify potentially eligible businesses within the 'wet pubs' industry. Once the payment for a business, identified as a wet pub, has been verified and processed for the DoF Localised Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS), DfE's WPBSS team will contact those potentially eligible businesses via email and provide a scheme supplementary information form to businesses identified as pre-eligible which asks businesses to declare when they were closed during the 4 July to 23 September period.

The form must be completed in full and returned to WPBSSforms@economy-ni.gov.uk within ten days of issue. You will receive an acknowledgement email when the form has been received.

Businesses should note that by declaring on the form that they are closed, they are agreeing that they understand that:

- Providing wrong or misleading information to secure public money is an offence and may lead to criminal investigation and prosecution; and
- That the information provided on this claim form will be made available to other Government departments and their agencies for the purpose of detecting and preventing crime.

The Department for the Economy is required to validate eligibility as far as possible. Payments will be made as soon as possible where the information submitted has been assessed to demonstrate clear eligibility. In cases where eligibility is less clear it will be necessary to carry out further verification checks. You will be contacted where further information is required.

Please note, submission of the requested information does not guarantee payment. The Department reserves the right to reject payments to those that do not fully meet the eligibility criteria. In these cases written notification (including the reason) will be sent as soon as the rejection decision is made.

Any business who has not been contacted by the Department for the Economy is not considered eligible for the scheme.

If you consider your business to meet the wet pub criteria set out in this guidance note, have received an LRSS payment and were closed from 4 July to 23 September, and have not received an email from the Department for the Economy by 22nd January 2021 then please email your details to the WPBSS mailbox at wpbss@economy-ni.gov.uk. You will need to provide evidence of how your business operates as a wet pub and confirm that you were closed for at least one week during the period 4 July to 23 September. This information must be provided by 29th January 2021.

The Department will assess your details and, if it you are considered to be pre-eligible, based upon the evidence provided, will issue you with an invitation to complete a scheme supplementary information form to complete your application form for the scheme.

Bank Statement

In order to complete the verification process, and for validation of eligibility purposes, applicants are required to provide copies of their business' bank statements to cover two time periods:

1. The period prior to the initial lockdown - 1 to 15 March 2020 (inclusive); and
2. The full WPBSS eligible period - 4 July to 23 September 2020 (inclusive).

Whilst we acknowledge that the Department has copies of bank statements covering the March 2020 period, for any business that applied to the £25k Business Support Grant, most of these statements were heavily redacted and are therefore not suitable as a means of verifying trading activity during that period. We therefore require un-redacted copies of bank statements for both periods.

If possible, it would be useful if you could highlight on the bank statements, customer-based transactions e.g. till receipts

Copies of bank statements should be emailed to WPBSSforms@economy-ni.gov.uk quoting the unique reference number at the top of the information form in the subject line of your e-mail.

Not adding the reference number may result in the application being refused.

These bank statements should be for the business trading account (i.e. the account that shows customer transactions). The bank statements should also be for the same account number for the 2 periods requested.

Please note that a pdf or scanned copy of the bank statement is preferable. A photograph of your statement can be provided in exceptional circumstances. The Department must be able to clearly read the details. It would be helpful if you could highlight transactions that help confirm the business was trading such as bar receipts.

Please note the Department cannot verify applications until these bank statements are received. They should be submitted no later than five working days after submission of the completed information and declaration sheet.

Where you do not have access to online banking systems or have a copies of your bank statements that covers the requested periods, you should contact your bank to obtain a pdf copy of your statement. If you can only provide a paper copy, then a photograph of your statement can be provided as a last resort - you should note that the Department for the Economy reserves the right to ask for other corroborating evidence if required.

Please contact the following mailbox WPBSSforms@economy-ni.gov.uk if there is an exceptional circumstance which means you cannot provide the required bank statements and the verification team will discuss options with you.

The Department will, where further supporting evidence is required, undertake additional checks including cross-referencing with Companies House, social media and the insolvency service.

When does the scheme close?

All scheme supplementary information forms must be returned within five days of receipt of the invitation email from the Department for the Economy. The closure date for return of information forms (including bank statements) will be 5th February 2021.

When will my payment be made?

Following receipt of your scheme supplementary information form, your details will be assessed and payments made as soon as possible where they demonstrate clear eligibility. In cases where eligibility is less clear it will be necessary to carry out further verification checks, you will be contacted where further information is required and payments will be made as soon as possible.

How will I know if my application is successful?

The Department will process business details as quickly as possible and applicants will be informed via email if payment of their grant has been processed. Applicants who are unsuccessful will also be informed via email.

PAYMENT

Do I need to provide my bank details?

No. The bank details provided by businesses as part of their Localised Restrictions Support Scheme applications will be the bank account the WPBSS payment is made into.

How much can I expect to receive?

The scheme is based upon your business' Total Net Annual Value (NAV) band at the 1st April 2020 8th Valuation List.

Businesses will receive payments according to the following tiered structure:

- I. Total NAV £15,000 and less: £800 per week
- II. Total NAV £15,001 to £51k: £1,200 per week
- III. Total NAV of over £51,000: £1,600 per week

Payments will be issued in one lump sum.

Where can I find my NAV?

You can find the Total Net Annual Value of your property by searching the non-domestic Valuation List.

See <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/property-valuation/valuation-lists>

When can I expect to receive the grant payment?

Payments will issue as soon as checks are complete. Please do not contact the Department regarding payment times. The Department will contact you if further information is required to process your eligibility.

Is the grant awarded on a first come first served basis?

No, all eligible, qualifying businesses will receive funding.

OTHER FAQs

How will the Department take the necessary precautions to verify that only businesses who were closed during the 4 July to 23 September 2020 period, receive a WPBSS payment?

Only businesses who are eligible for the DoF-led Localised Restrictions Support Scheme and pass the verification processes associated with this scheme, will be considered as pre-eligible for the WPBSS.

The Department is mindful that not all wet pubs who receive LRSS will have been closed for the 4 July to 23 September period. That is why additional verification checks have been introduced in the form of a scheme supplementary information form from the business.

Businesses should note that by declaring on the form that they are closed, they are agreeing that they understand that:

- Providing wrong or misleading information to secure public money is an offence and may lead to criminal investigation and prosecution; and
- That the information provided on this claim form will be made available to other government departments and their agencies for the purpose of detecting and preventing crime.

The Department will, where further supporting evidence is required, undertake additional checks including cross-referencing with Companies House, social media and the insolvency service.

What other support is available?

A range of business support measures have been made available to Northern Ireland businesses. You can find out how to access the support that has been made available, who is eligible and how to apply at: <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/business-support/coronavirus>.

If I am successful, do I have to declare this grant to HMRC?

Yes. Any payment must be declared to HMRC as appropriate as part of the tax return for the business.

Can I appeal?

Yes. Unsuccessful applicants have the right to a single appeal within two weeks of issue of the rejection notice. Instructions will be provided in the rejection notice. Please note that only those businesses identified by the Department as eligible for the scheme and whose applications have been submitted, processed and rejected will be given the right to appeal.

Reporting Fraudulent Payments

If you have any concerns about fraudulent payments relating to this Scheme you can contact the Department for the Economy using the following email address raising.concerns@economy-ni.gov.uk

You can view the Department for the Economy's Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan at the links below:

Fraud Policy - <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/fraud-policy>

Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing guidance - <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/raisingconcerns-whistleblowing-guidance>

Data Handling How will my data be handled?

You should note that your data will be shared and handled in line with the Department for the Economy's Privacy Notice

Will details of businesses who receive the grant be published?

Yes – the Department reserves the right to publish the list of successful support scheme recipients.

Who can I contact about the grant?

If you have any enquiries about the Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme that cannot be answered within the FAQs, please contact the Support team at WPBSS@economy-ni.gov.uk