

Inheritance tax planning using regular premium protection plans



Protection | Inheritance tax planning



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Introduction

The Inheritance Tax trap

Over the years Inheritance Tax (IHT) has traditionally been seen as a tax on the wealthy which may lead many of your clients to think that IHT doesn't apply to them. But with the **average UK house price at £269,735** as of May 2025 using up 82.98% of your client's standard nil rate band – they could be mistaken.¹

The Government's IHT receipts for April 2025 to August 2025 totalled £3.7 billion, which is £0.2 billion higher than the same period last year.²

How many of your clients are at risk of being caught in the trap?

What is IHT and what does it mean for your clients?

IHT is a tax payable upon death or a transfer of assets on certain lifetime gifts.

The tax is charged **at a rate of 40%** on the value of your client's estate that is above the **nil-rate band of £325,000**³, depending on certain exceptions. The estate can't normally be distributed until the IHT bill has been paid, and usually needs to be paid **within six months**.⁴ If the IHT bill isn't paid within this time, interest may be added. IHT may also be payable in other circumstances, for example if a person dies within seven years of making a gift.

Opportunities for Advisers

This situation creates an increasing need for effective IHT planning and this has led to more focus on how to reduce clients' IHT liability over time – either by gifting away assets during their lifetime, or investments into IHT friendly schemes – and ultimately how to provide for the IHT bill.

This provides you with the opportunity to:

- Advise individuals and couples planning for IHT on their own estates
- Advise potential beneficiaries on ways to meet a tax liability
- Advise beneficiaries on managing their inheritance – and avoiding a tax bill for their own heirs
- Establish or develop relationships with professional connections, such as solicitors and accountants as well as trustees.

IHT at a glance

£325,000 – The standard nil-rate band, up to which no IHT is chargeable on a deceased individual's estate.

40% – The rate of IHT payable on estates over the total available nil-rate band.

6 months – The period in which the IHT bill must be paid before interest is charged.

¹ <https://landregistry.data.gov.uk/app/ukhpi/> - accessed August 2025

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmrc-tax-and-nics-receipts-for-the-uk/hmrc-tax-receipts-and-national-insurance-contributions-for-the-uk-new-monthly-bulletin#inheritance-tax> - accessed August 2025

³ <https://www.gov.uk/inheritance-tax> - accessed August 2025

⁴ www.gov.uk/paying-inheritance-tax - accessed August 2025

Selected reliefs and exemptions from IHT

What are the main circumstances under which there's no liability for IHT?

Standard nil-rate band – Currently frozen at £325,000 until 2029/2030 (everyone has their own nil-rate band, which is transferable on death between married couples / civil partners therefore providing the survivor with a potential nil-rate band of £650,000).⁵

Residence nil-rate band (RNRB) – An additional relief introduced in 2017 when passing on a home to a direct descendant. Currently frozen at £175,000 until 2029/2030.⁶

- The property must be left to direct descendants which includes children who are adopted, stepchildren, fostered children and grandchildren.
- Applies to the net value of the property which is the value of the property after deducting any mortgage or other debts charged on the property. The RNRB available to the estate is the lower of 1) the RNRB threshold at death or 2) the net value of the property.
- RNRB is transferrable to the survivor where second death occurs on or after 6 April 2017 for married couples and civil partners only.
- Only estates valued at £2m (net) or less will benefit in full. Tapering applies to estates valued at greater than £2m and will mean that £1 of RNRB will be lost for every £2 over threshold.
- When someone has sold, given away or downsized to a less valuable home before they die, their estate may still be able to get the RNRB if they qualify for a downsizing addition.

Gifts between married couples/registered civil partners – All gifts between long-term UK resident married couples or registered civil partners.

Normal expenditure out of income – These are gifts that must form part of normal expenditure and be made from income not capital. The individual, making the gift, must be left with enough income to maintain their usual standard of living.

Annual gift exemption – Gifts made up to £3,000 in total in each tax year. Any unused part of this allowance can be carried forward but only for one year.⁷

Small gifts exemption – Gifts of up to £250 can be made to each of any number of people in the same tax year. It cannot be combined with any other exemption.⁷

Gifts on marriage or civil partnership – An amount of up to £5,000 from each parent, £2,500 from each grandparent and £1,000 from anyone else.⁷

Gifts to charities – During lifetime any gifts to UK charities are exempt. On death a lower rate of IHT of 36% will apply where 10% or more of a person's net estate is left to charity.⁷

Outright gifts to individuals & trusts – If the donor survives 7 years from the date of the gift (those between spouses and civil partners are automatically exempt).⁷

Business Relief

Also known as Business Property Relief, this is a valuable relief of up to 100% in respect of business transfers during life or on death.⁷ Shares in qualifying businesses (or funds which invest in these businesses) are exempt from IHT provided they've been held for at least two years at the time of death.

However, if the investor dies within two years, the investment will remain subject to IHT and therefore life cover would be needed to cover that period of IHT liability.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/inheritance-tax> - accessed April 2025

⁶ www.gov.uk/guidance/inheritance-tax-residence-nil-rate-band - accessed April 2025

⁷ www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/gifts-and-exemptions-from-inheritance-tax - accessed April 2025

Gifts

One way to reduce the IHT liability on an estate is to make gifts. However, if a client makes an outright gift to a person during their lifetime, there may be IHT to pay. These are known as Potentially Exempt Transfers (PETs).

Any gifts made more than 7 years before death are exempt and won't be included in the value of your client's estate. But gifts made within 7 years of death will be considered part of the client's estate again. Unless they fall within the client's standard nil-rate band or are covered by a different exemption, the beneficiary of the gift becomes liable to IHT.

The amount of IHT payable depends on when within the 7 years the death of the donor occurred. If less than 3 years, the full rate of IHT of 40% is charged. If between more than 3 years and 7 years the rate of IHT charged reduces. This is known as Taper Relief.

How does Taper Relief work?

It is important to understand that Taper Relief applies to the amount of tax payable, not the value of the gift.

If the donor dies within 7 years of giving a gift and there's Inheritance Tax to pay on it, the amount of tax due after their death depends on when they gave it.

Gifts given in the 3 years before their death are taxed at 40%.

Gifts given 3 to 7 years before their death are taxed on a sliding scale known as 'taper relief'.

Taper relief doesn't reduce the value of the gift transferred – it only reduces the tax payable if the total value of gifts made in the 7 years before the donor dies is over the £325,000 tax-free threshold.⁸

The table shows the reduction in IHT tax that would otherwise be payable on the transfer.

Years between gift and death	Rate of tax
Less than 3	40%
3 - 4	32%
4 - 5	24%
5 - 6	16%
6 - 7	8%
7 or more	0%

For example

When Fiona died she was not married or in a civil partnership.

She gave 3 gifts in the 9 years before her death:

- £50,000 to her brother 9 years before her death
- £325,000 to her sister 4 years and 2 months before her death
- £100,000 to her friend 3 years and 6 months before her death

There's no Inheritance Tax to pay on the £50,000 gift to her brother as it was given more than 7 years before she died.

There's also no Inheritance Tax to pay on the £325,000 she gave her sister, as this is within her standard nil-rate band.

But her friend must pay Inheritance Tax on her £100,000 gift at a rate of 32%, the Inheritance Tax due is £32,000.

Fiona's remaining estate was valued at £400,000, so the estate would pay Inheritance Tax of 40% on £400,000 (£160,000).

The recipient of the gift is the one who will have to pay the IHT, not the estate of the deceased. Once they have received the gift, the recipient may then also have a liability on their own estate which should be covered too.

⁸ www.gov.uk/inheritance-tax/gifts - accessed April 2025

Chargeable Lifetime Transfers (CLTs)

These are gifts into a trust (e.g. Discretionary Trust) other than a bare / absolute trust.

Discretionary Trusts are trusts where the beneficiaries can be changed / added to and the trustees use their discretion as to when and to whom benefits may be paid.

If the CLT gift amount exceeds the donor's available nil-rate band it can be subject to an Entry Charge, which is charged at a rate of 20% on the excess above the nil-rate band at outset. CLTs, made by the donor in the previous 7 years, will affect the amount of their available nil-rate band.

If the donor dies within 7 years the tax due is recalculated at the IHT death rate (40%). Any tax already paid is taken into account. This effectively means that additional tax would only be payable if the donor dies within 5 years.



Gift Inter Vivos plans

PETs offer the opportunity for financial planning advice as any resulting IHT liability can be protected using what are known as Gift Inter Vivos plans.

What is Gift Inter Vivos?

Gift Inter Vivos plans have a fixed seven-year term, with cover reducing in steps to match the reduced liability as Taper Relief takes effect. Although the cover reduces, the premium typically remains fixed for the whole seven years. This gives your client the peace of mind that their gift won't mean a large tax charge for their beneficiary.

Gift Inter Vivos using the Royal London Menu Plan

Our Menu Plan could be a great way of setting up a Gift Inter Vivos plan by using a series of level term plans. Five plans each equal to 20% of the initial liability are required for terms of 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 years. From year 3 onwards, 20% of the total sum assured falls away to match the reducing liability. The premium will reduce when using a series of plans, from year three onwards, as each plan ends.

Here's an example

Mary, 75, who has never been married, decides to gift £450,000 to her niece. She hasn't made any other gifts in her lifetime except using her £3,000 a year annual exemption. Mary knows that if she dies within seven years, then her niece will be responsible for the IHT on £125,000 (the amount the gift exceeds the current £325,000 threshold level). The amount of IHT will taper down but Mary doesn't want her niece to have to pay anything. A Gift Inter Vivos plan using a series of term assurance plans under our Menu Plan would therefore be a suitable solution to provide her niece with the funds to meet this tax liability. In this instance a plan starting with £50,000 of cover (40% of £125,000) which then reduces by £10,000 each year after year three would be recommended.

Cover	Term (years)	Premium
£10,000	3	£12.88
£10,000	4	£13.64
£10,000	5	£15.17
£10,000	6	£16.46
£10,000	7	£17.77
Total initial premium including £2.60 plan charge ⁹ = £78.52		

Remember, if a PET becomes chargeable to IHT then the whole standard nil-rate band could be used up. This means that the whole estate would attract a 40% IHT charge. Mary doesn't want her beneficiaries to suffer this additional tax so she decides to cover this in her plan. She therefore adds a further amount of cover of £130,000 over a 7 year term (after which time the gift would be free of IHT) and thus the amount after tax that her beneficiaries will receive will be the same as if the full standard nil-rate band was available to her estate.

Chargeable Lifetime Transfers

A series of level term plans could also be set up under our Menu Plan to cover any IHT liability on death in respect of CLTs. If death occurs within 7 years of making the gift into the trust, the tax due is recalculated at the death rate of 40%. Taper Relief will apply and the tax already paid is taken into account, but no refund can be made. 3 level term plans would be required for terms of 3, 4 and 5 years, mirroring the additional tax that would be payable. Note that plans wouldn't be needed for terms of 6 and 7 years as the IHT death rate liability would be less than the Entry Charge due to Taper Relief.

⁹ September 2025. Client is 76 next birthday, non smoker, Life cover, level lump sum, figure shown (other than the total of £78.52) don't include £2.60 plan charge

Covering the estate's IHT liability on death

Whole of Life plans

If the IHT liability is expected to remain indefinitely (i.e. until death), then a Whole of Life plan could be used to provide the beneficiaries with the required amount of money to pay HMRC. This will pay out whenever the person covered dies, regardless of age.

Guaranteed and Reviewable rates

Royal London offers Whole of Life plans with both guaranteed and reviewable rates.

Guaranteed rates provide the security that the cost of the cover will not change in the future.

If however your client plans to reduce their IHT liability during their lifetime, for example, by gifting assets to their family, or by way of IHT-friendly investments, a Whole of Life plan with reviewable rates may be more suitable.

This type of plan provides cheaper cover in the early years compared to guaranteed rate plans. As the IHT liability of the estate reduces, the sum assured can be reduced accordingly therefore offsetting future premium increases at the rate review points (10 years and every 5 years thereafter with Royal London). Cover can continue to be maintained in respect of any remaining IHT liability, for as long as it's needed.

When spouses (or civil partners) leave their assets to each other, there will be no IHT liability on the first death. Royal London offers Whole of Life and Personal Menu term plans to cover a wide range of IHT planning.

Protection plans, such as those offered by Royal London, provide:-

- Cost – Guaranteed rates mean certainty of cost
- Access – Setting the plan up under a suitable trust (such as Discretionary Trust) can mean faster pay-out on death as the sum assured is available to the trustees without having to wait for probate (confirmation in Scotland) to be granted. This means the IHT bill can be settled quickly, and the estate distributed without delay
- Outcome – Once we have accepted the death claim we guarantee to pay out the sum assured
- The arrangement is tax efficient as the money is taken outside the client's estate and doesn't form part of it.

Royal London offers a choice of guaranteed and reviewable Whole of Life rates.

More than financial support

Royal London offers a range of additional features included within our protection plans.

Lifestyle Review

If Royal London accepts one of your client's covers on non-standard terms or charges rates based on smoker status, and your client has changed their lifestyle in a way that could reduce the likelihood of a claim, you can ask us to review the terms for that cover. **Premium rates used in respect of any change would be those applicable to your client's age at the time the plan was taken out.**

Insuring the uninsurable

You may think that if a client isn't accepted for cover they won't be able to get any cover.

Well, this isn't strictly true. If your clients require Joint Life Second Death cover, and we're unable to accept one of the lives, we'll still be able to offer the plan on a Joint Life Second Death basis. The premium is based on the accepted life.

Underwrite Later

With our Underwrite Later option, we'll place your client's plan on risk for up to six months while we wait for any medical information we might need to fully assess the application. If your client satisfies the Underwrite Later criteria, their cover can start immediately, following an initial assessment by an underwriter – so they can get peace of mind knowing they would be protected.

Tax and trust support

We have a range of trust literature from easy to follow trust guides to our interactive trust forms. Our team of specialists can provide information on protection related tax and trust issues whenever it's needed. Between them they have a wealth of knowledge and experience in this field. For help and support email us at protection.techsupport@royallondon.com

For more information on inheritance tax planning using regular premium protection plans, speak to your usual Royal London contact or visit adviser.royallondon.com/protection

Personal support with Helping Hand*

Helping Hand is included with all our advised protection plans. It's there for clients, whichever stage in life they're at, and as a plan owner it doesn't cost them anything extra to use.

Your clients can also get legal advice through our helpline service on a range of subjects. Our helpline gives your clients access to legal professionals who can answer questions on things like their employment rights, wills and probate or inheritance tax.

Claims

We know that when a claim needs to be made, your client's family are going through a challenging time. We're committed to treating each claim on an individual basis with as much care and attention as we can.

From a single point of contact in our claims team, to personal support from a dedicated nurse through our Helping Hand service (available upon request), we aim to deliver a more positive claims experience throughout this difficult time.

*Helping Hand is a package of support services, and each service is provided by third parties that aren't regulated by either the Financial Conduct Authority or the Prudential Regulation Authority.

These services aren't part of our terms and conditions and don't form part of your client's insurance contract with us.

This means that your client or your clients family's access to these services could be amended or withdrawn by us in the future.





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large print or audio, just ask us when you get in touch.**

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