



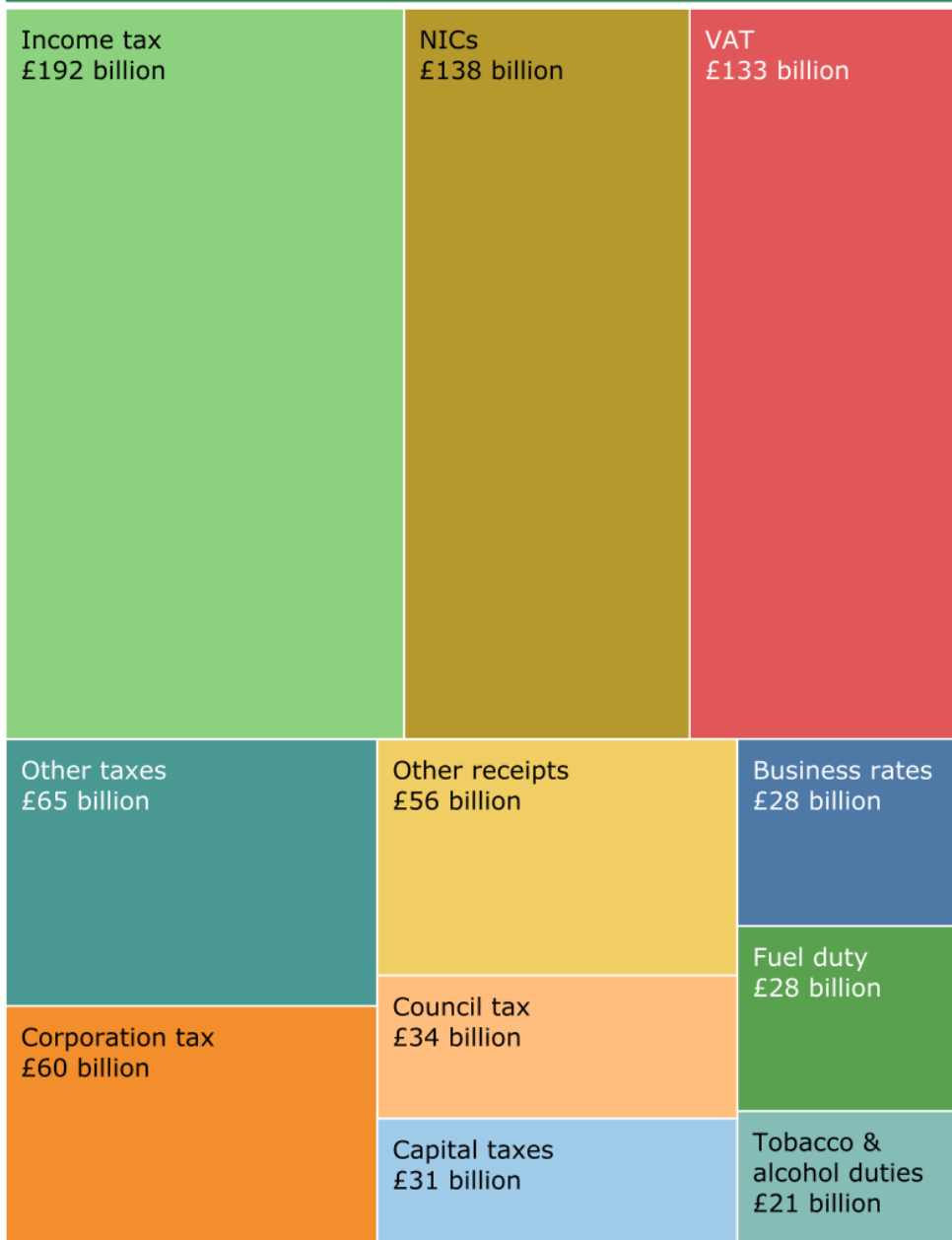
BRIEFING PAPER

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Tax statistics: an overview

By Matthew Keep

Public sector current receipts 2018/19: £787 billion



Contents:

1. Recent trends and forecasts
2. Public sector receipts since the 1940s
3. Distributional analysis
4. International comparisons
5. Effects of illustrative tax changes
6. Tax reliefs
7. Key sources

Contents

Summary	3
1. Recent trends and forecasts	4
1.1 Latest year	4
1.2 Trends and forecasts	5
Recent trends	5
Forecasts	6
1.3 The four largest taxes	6
Income tax	7
National Insurance contributions (NICs)	7
VAT	7
Corporation tax	8
1.4 Broad groups of taxes	8
2. Public sector receipts since the 1940s	10
3. Distributional analysis	12
3.1 Income taxpayers	12
3.2 Households	13
Households' share of tax receipts	13
Impact of taxes on household income	14
4. International comparisons	17
5. Effects of illustrative tax changes	18
6. Tax reliefs	19
7. Key sources	20
Recent years and forecasts	20
Regional comparisons	20
International comparisons	20
Taxpayers	20
Households: Effects of taxes on households	20
Income tax: breakdowns and further analysis	20
Other individual taxes	21
Commentary/discussion	21

Summary

UK government raises over £785 billion a year in receipts – income from taxes and other sources – equivalent to around 37% of GDP. The majority are from three main sources: income tax, National Insurance contributions (NICs) and value added tax (VAT). Together these raise over £460 billion. Income tax contributes £192 billion.

Recent trends

Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 receipts fell by around 1% of GDP, following the financial crisis and recession of 2008 and 2009. Receipts have since increased and are now larger than at any time since the mid-1980s, relative to the size of economy – as measured by GDP.

Receipts from VAT and NICs are larger now, relative to the size of the economy now than they were in 1999/00, while income tax receipts are smaller.

Since the late 1990s receipts from stamp duty on property transactions, capital gains tax and council tax have all grown noticeably faster than the economy. Fuel duty and tobacco duties have declined.

Forecasts

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) – the UK's public finances watchdog – forecasts that government revenues in 2023/24 will be larger than now relative to the size of the economy. Income tax and NICs are forecast to increase while VAT receipts are forecast to decrease a little, relative to the size of economy.

Some taxes – including corporation tax and tobacco duties – are forecast to grow more slowly than the economy, so will be relatively less significant in 2023/24.

Individual taxpayers: income tax paid, by income

Income tax payments are concentrated amongst those with the largest incomes. The 10% of income taxpayers with the largest incomes contribute around 60% of income tax receipts.

Households: taxes paid, by income

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) – an economic think tank – has analysed how much households pay in tax. Their analysis – which covers around three quarters of tax revenues (including income tax, NICs, VAT, excise duties and council tax) – found that the 50% of households with the largest incomes contribute around 78% of taxes.

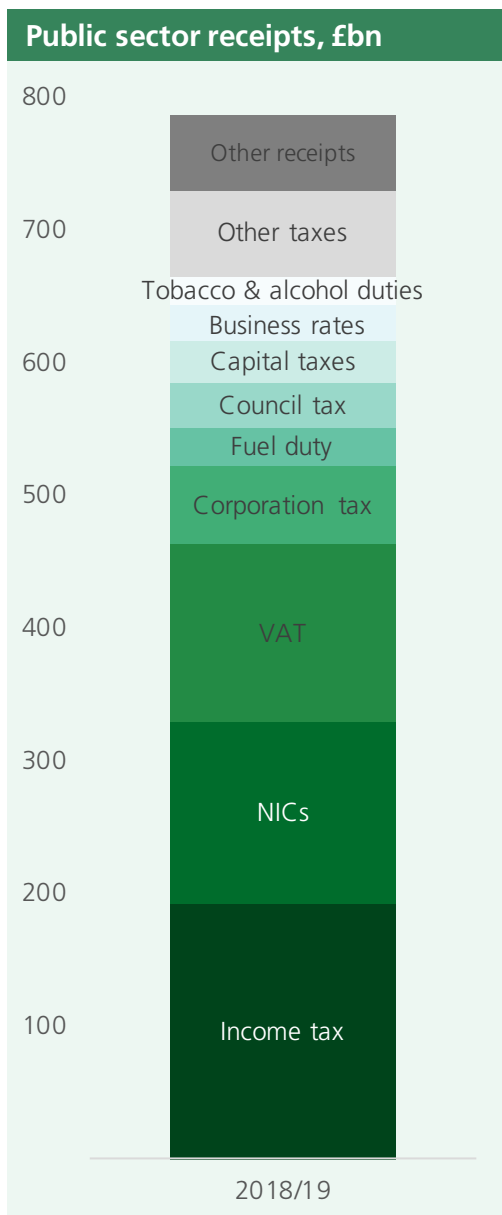
Impact of taxes across the income distribution

Overall, direct taxes (including income tax, NICs and council tax) lower income inequality. Richer individuals pay a greater share of their gross household income in direct taxes compared with poorer individuals.

Measured relative to household spending, there is little variation in indirect taxes across the income distribution.

1. Recent trends and forecasts

1.1 Latest year



In 2018/19, UK government revenues – or public sector current receipts – were £787 billion, equivalent to 37% of GDP.

Income tax, National Insurance contributions (NICs) and Value Added Tax (VAT) contribute around three-fifths of all revenues. In 2018/19, £192 billion was raised from income tax, £138 billion from NICs and £133 billion from VAT.

Corporation tax was the fourth largest tax, raising £60 billion. Council tax raised around £34 billion and business rates and fuel duty each raised around £28 billion. All other individual taxes each raised less than £20 billion in 2018/19.

Aside from taxes and duties, the government also receives other receipts, largely from income generated by public corporations (operating surpluses: see [Box 2](#)) – such as through local authority housing, or housing associations – and from

interest payments on its assets, such as student loans.

Box 1: National Accounts taxes vs public sector current receipts

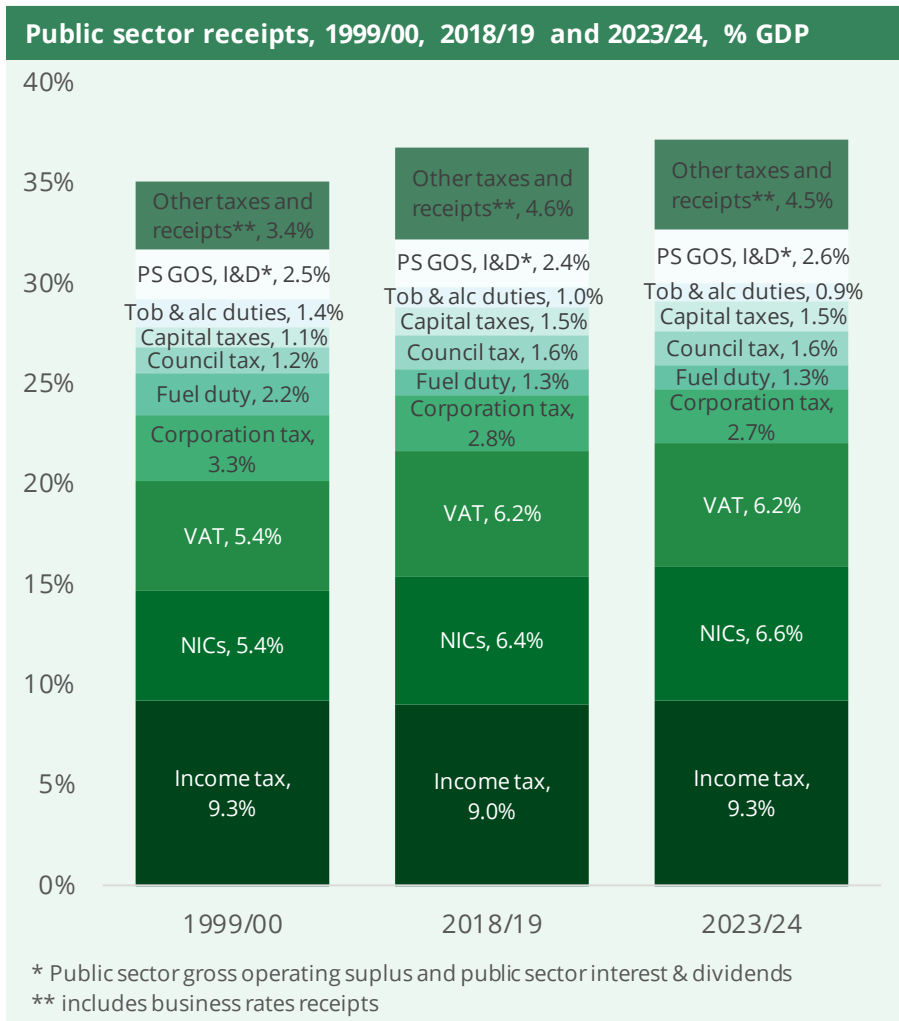
The vast majority of government revenues are classified as National Accounts taxes – that is, they are recorded as taxes in the National Accounts, which are the core accounts for the UK as a whole. In 2018/19, £735 billion was raised from National Accounts taxes, equivalent to 34% of GDP. In the chart above the only items that aren't National Accounts taxes are 'other receipts'.

If 'other receipts' – such as interest payments on government assets, and income generated by public corporations – are added in we reach the wider measure of public sector current receipts. In 2018/19, £787 billion was raised from public sector receipts, equivalent to 37% of GDP.

1.2 Trends and forecasts

Recent trends

Comparable data on public sector receipts covering both the past and forecasts for the future are available from 1999/00. In 1999/00, public sector receipts were equivalent to 35.1% of GDP. Receipts have fluctuated in the 19 years since, but the general trend has been towards receipts growing relative to the size of the economy. In 2018/19 public sector receipts were equivalent to 36.9% of GDP.



Both VAT and NICs are now larger, relative to the size of the economy, than they were in 1999/00. Income tax and corporation tax receipts are smaller relative to the size of the economy than they were.

Since 1999/00, noticeable relative decreases have been seen in fuel duty receipts – a result of improved fuel efficiency and freezes in fuel duty rates – and in tobacco duties.

Council tax has grown in significance since 1999/00. Receipts grew particularly quickly in the years leading up to 2009/10 but have slowed since then.

The taxes grouped in the chart above as 'capital taxes' have grown from 1.1% of GDP in 1999/00 to 1.5% in 2018/19. Receipts for stamp duty

on property transactions, capital gains tax and inheritance tax have all grown faster than the economy over the period.

The growth seen in the taxes grouped as 'other taxes' has largely come from the introduction of environmental levies and growth in receipts from both air passenger duty and insurance premium tax.

Forecasts

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) – the UK's public finances watchdog – publish forecasts for government receipts twice a year. The OBR forecast, in March 2019, that receipts would grow a little faster than the size of the economy over the next five years. The OBR expect receipts to be equivalent to 37.2% of GDP in 2023/24, a level last seen in the mid-1980s.

Income tax receipts are forecast to increase to 9.3% of GDP by 2023/24; in 2018/19 they were equivalent to 9.0%. NICs are forecast to increase while VAT receipts are forecast to decrease a little, relative to the size of economy.

The OBR expect some tax receipts to decrease relative to the size of the economy. Corporation tax receipts are forecast to fall from 2.8% of GDP in 2018/19 to 2.7% in 2023/24. This is largely a result of the corporation tax rate being lowered to 17% in April 2020. Also, the OBR assume that profits in the financial sector could grow more slowly than the economy from 2020/21, since the sector is "likely to be disproportionately affected by the UK's exit from the EU".¹

The OBR forecast that fuel duty receipts will remain stable relative to the size of the economy. However, if the Government chooses to continue to freeze fuel duty rates each year, then fuel duty revenues are likely to be smaller than the OBR forecast.²

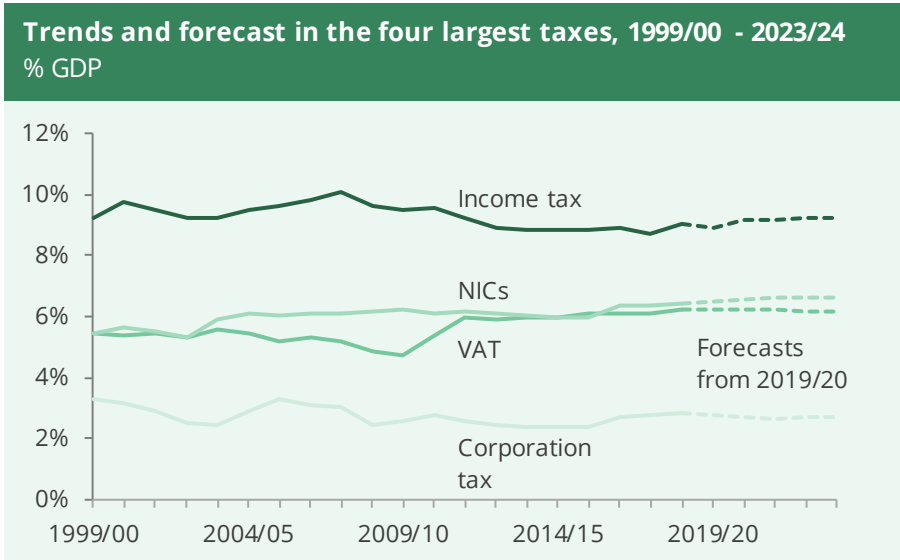
Tobacco duties are forecast to fall. Demand for tobacco is expected to fall as people give up, or reduce, smoking.

1.3 The four largest taxes

Taken together, income tax, National Insurance contributions (NICs), VAT and corporation tax contributed around two-thirds of public sector receipts in 2018/19, a similar proportion as in 1999/00. The OBR forecast that these four taxes will contribute a similar proportion of public sector receipts in 2023/24.

¹ OBR. Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2019, [para 4.35-4.40](#)

² There is further discussion of this issue in the Library Insight [Fuel duty: Would no further freezes mean more money?](#), July 2018



Income tax

[Income tax](#) is charged on different forms of personal income including earnings, income from investment and pension income.

Income tax receipts were equivalent to 9.0% of GDP in 2018/19, lower than in 1999/00 when income tax receipts were equivalent to 9.3% of GDP. Prior to the financial crisis and recession of 2008 and 2009, income tax receipts had risen to 10.1% of GDP. The relative fall in income tax receipts since the recession can be broadly attributed to weak earnings growth and the Government increasing the tax-free personal allowance, which means that income tax is charged on less of individual's incomes.

National Insurance contributions (NICs)

[NICs](#) are levied on the wages and salaries of employees and earnings of the self-employed.

NICs receipts have increased from 5.4% of GDP in 1999/00 to 6.4% in 2018/19.

A significant increase was seen in 2003/04 when various employee, self-employed and employer rates were raised by 1% point. At the same time thresholds at which earnings start being charged NICs were frozen. The measures were introduced to raise revenues for additional NHS spending.³ In 2002/03, NICs were equivalent to 5.3% of GDP. Since 2003/04 they have fluctuated between 5.9% and 6.4%.

VAT

[VAT](#) is charged on the purchase of many goods and services.

In the years leading up to the recession, VAT receipts had fluctuated around 5.2% - 5.6% of GDP. During, and immediately after, the recession they fell below 5% of GDP. The standard rate of VAT was

³ For further information see the Library briefing [The National Insurance Contributions Bill](#), 8 May 2002

reduced from 17.5% to 15% for a 13-month period between 1 December 2008 and 31 December 2009.

The standard rate of VAT was increased from 17.5% to 20% from January 2011⁴ and since VAT receipts have been equivalent to between 5.9% and 6.2% of GDP.

Corporation tax

The majority of corporation tax ([onshore corporation tax](#)) is raised from the taxable profits of limited companies and other organisations, after taking into account various deductions and allowances. Some corporation tax ([offshore corporation tax](#)) is raised from UK oil and gas revenues.

Corporation tax receipts have fallen from 3.3% of GDP in 1999/00 to 2.8% in 2018/19. Since 1999/00 corporation tax receipts have only been as high as 3.3% of GDP in one year outside of 1999/00: 2005/06. In 1999/00 corporation tax receipts were relatively large due to buoyancy in onshore receipts, which themselves were equivalent to 3.2% of GDP. In 2005/06 offshore receipts – largely from North Sea oil – were at the highest level over the period (0.6% of GDP) while onshore receipts were also above the average for the period.

The recession saw corporation tax fall from 3% to 2.4% of GDP between 2007/08 and 2008/09. Since the recession onshore receipts have grown relative to the size of the economy, but offshore receipts have fallen.

1.4 Broad groups of taxes

The chart below shows that between 1999/00 and 2007/08 (immediately prior to the recession) personal income taxes increased relative to the size of the economy, while indirect taxes decreased as receipts from VAT and duties such as for fuel, tobacco and alcohol grew slower than the economy.

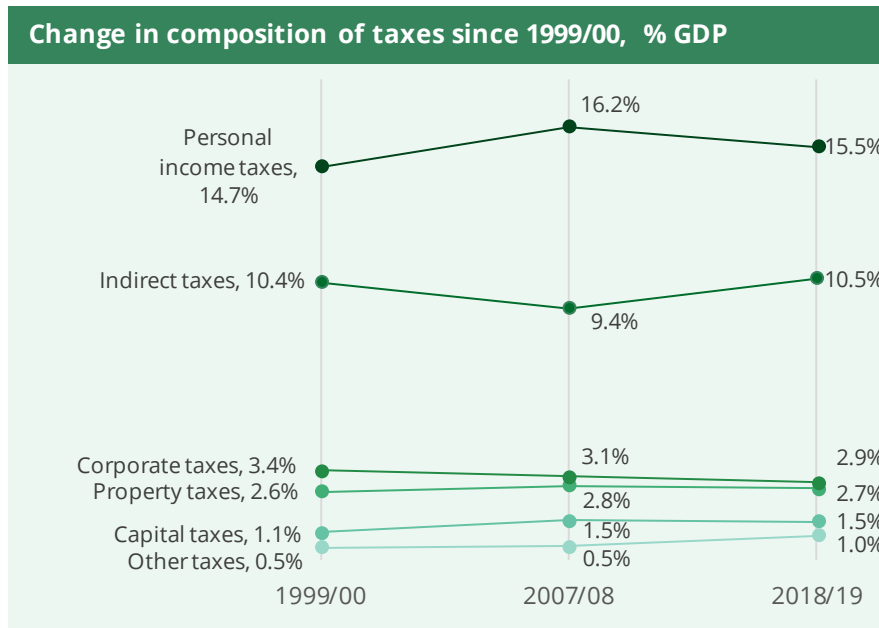
Since 2007/08 the trends for these two taxes has changed. The relative size of personal income taxes has fallen since 2007/08, although in 2018/19 they are still larger, at 15.5% of GDP, than they were in 1999/00. Indirect taxes are now similar to their 1999/00 level. Growth in indirect taxes since 2007/08 has largely come from VAT receipts accompanied by increases in some smaller taxes including insurance premium tax.

Corporate taxes have fallen relative to the size of the economy since 1999/00.

In the run up to the recession capital taxes grew relative to the size of the economy: stamp duties, capital gains tax and inheritance tax all saw

⁴ For further information see the Library briefing [VAT : the new 20% standard rate](#), 3 September 2013

noticeable growth. In 2018/19, capital taxes are at their 2007/08 level, 1.5% of GDP.



Other taxes⁵ remained broadly similar relative to the size of the economy between 1999/00 and 2007/08. Since the recession other taxes have become more significant, with environmental levies and the climate change levy exhibiting noticeable increases.

⁵ This doesn't include other public sector receipts such as the gross operating surplus. These receipts have remained at a broadly similar level relative to the size of the economy since 1999/00.

2. Public sector receipts since the 1940s

Since the late 1940s public sector current receipts have fluctuated between 31% and 44% of GDP, with peaks in the early 1950s, late 1960s, mid-late 1970s and early 1980s.

National accounts taxes have fluctuated between 28% and 37% of GDP and have largely tracked the wider measure of public sector receipts (see Box 1 for definitions of the two measures).

Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 both revenue measures fell by around 1% of GDP, following the 2007-2008 financial crisis and recession. Both measures are now higher than prior to the recession. Public sector current receipts were last at a higher level in the mid-1980s. National accounts taxes were last as high, relative to the size of the economy, in the late 1960s.



The gap between public sector receipts and national accounts taxes closed between the early 1980s and the early 1990s from around 7% of GDP to under 3% of GDP. This is largely a result of industries previously under public ownership being privatised.

When industries are in public ownership some of their operation generates receipts that add to public sector receipts. For instance, any surplus created by public sector industries adds to public sector receipts. During the late 1970s public corporations' gross operating surplus was over 4.5% of GDP – by the early 1990s it was less than 1% of GDP.

Box 2: What is 'Gross operating surplus'?

Gross operating surplus consists of general government depreciation and the gross operating surplus of public corporations. The gross operating surplus of corporations is akin to the profit of a public sector body. It is the income from operating that exists once operating costs – such as production costs, staff costs and taxes – have been taken away.

Historical view

The Library briefing [The public finances: a historical overview](#) includes data on government revenues from the late 1600s. It discusses how the composition of government revenues changed during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

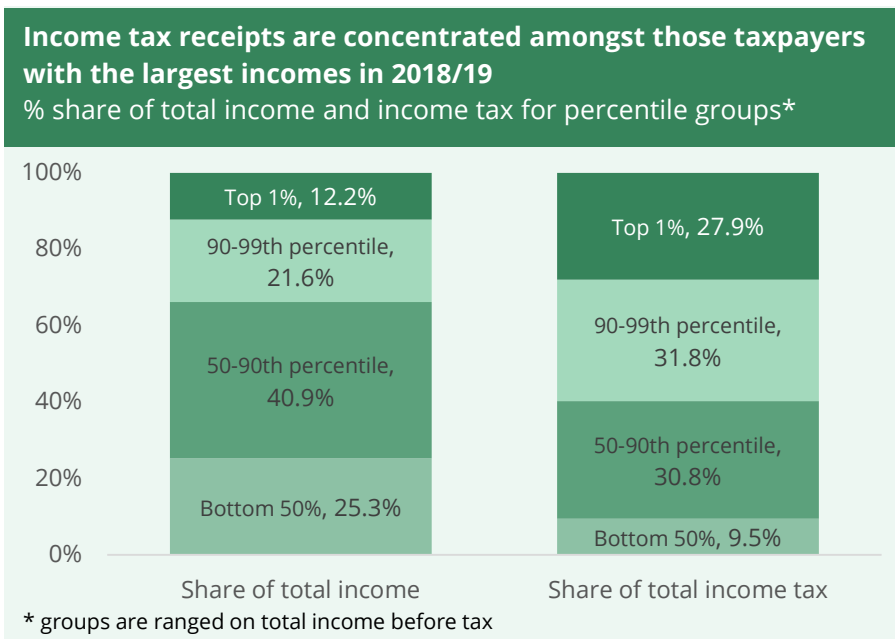
3. Distributional analysis

Here we look at how the amount of taxes paid varies across individuals or households with different incomes. We also show how taxes impact on average household incomes.

3.1 Income taxpayers

Projections for 2018/19 suggest that amongst income taxpayers the top 1% (those with the largest incomes) will earn 12% of income and contribute 28% of income tax receipts. The top 1% are expected to have pre-tax incomes of over £177,000.⁶

The top 10% of income tax payers (including the top 1%) are expected to contribute around 60% of income tax receipts. The bottom 50% of income taxpayers (with incomes under £25,500) are expected to contribute just under 10% of income tax receipts. These figures only include those paying income tax. They exclude, for instance, anyone whose income is too low to be charged income tax.



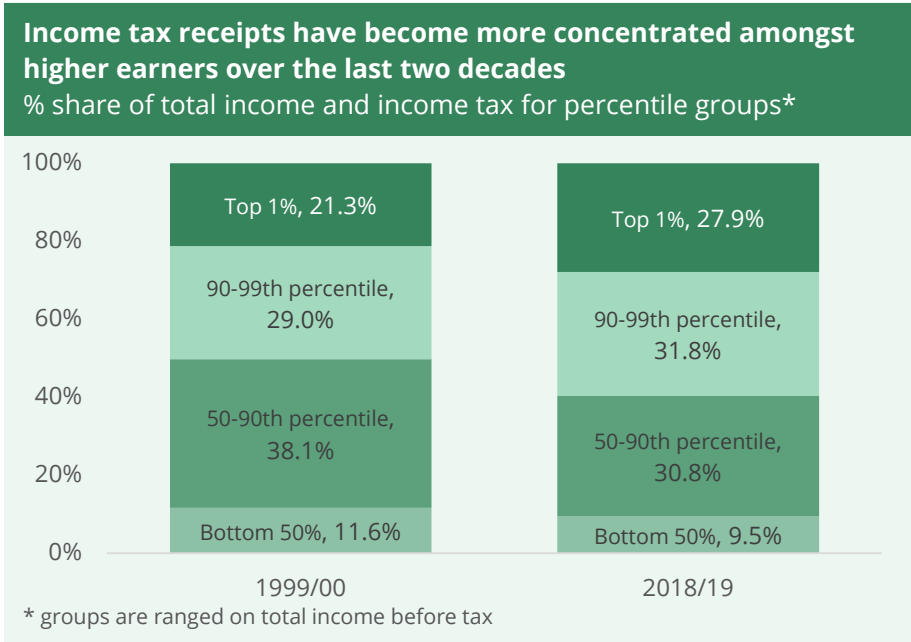
In 1999/00 income tax receipts weren't concentrated amongst those with the highest incomes to quite the same extent as they are now. The top 1% contributed 21% of income tax receipts in 1999/00, with the top 10% contributing 50%.

Some of the increased concentration in income tax receipts can be put down to those at the top of income distribution increasing their share of total income. Policy changes made since the recession have also had an effect. For example, the tax-free personal allowance has been withdrawn for those with incomes over £100,000,⁷ the threshold at

⁶ HMRC. [Table 2.4](#) Shares of total Income Tax liability

⁷ The allowance is reduced by £1 for every £2 income is over £100,000.

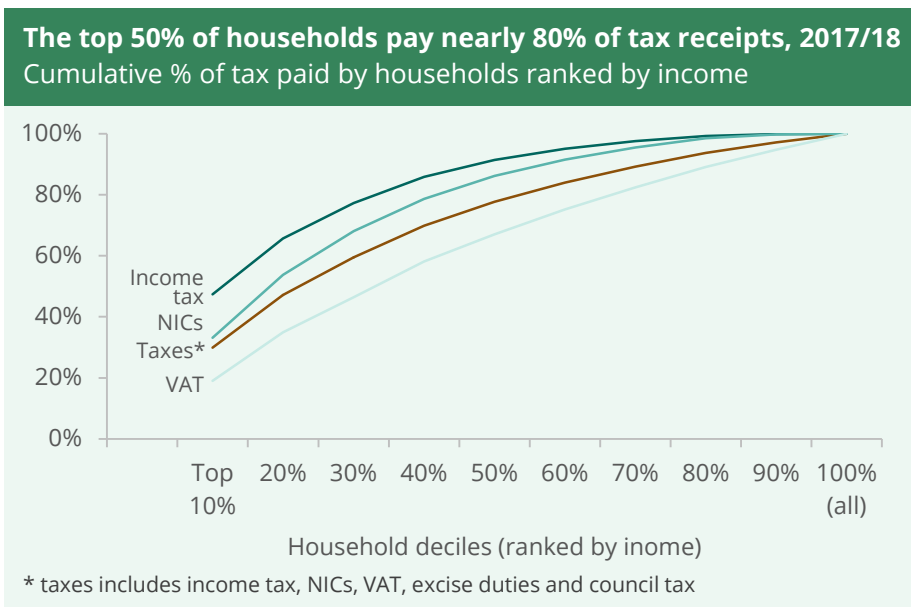
which the higher income tax rate is paid has been lowered, the income tax relief individuals can claim on pension contributions has been reduced and the tax rate paid on income over £150,000 has increased.



3.2 Households

Households' share of tax receipts

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) – an economic think tank – has looked at how a broader set of taxes are distributed across households, according to household incomes.⁸



The IFS include around three quarters of tax revenues (including income tax, NICs, VAT, excise duties and council tax) in their analysis. They find

⁸ IFS, [Tax revenues: where does the money come from and what are the next government's challenges?](#), 2017

that the 50% of households with the largest incomes contribute around 78% of these taxes. This means that overall tax payments are concentrated, but not to the same extent as income tax receipts.

For NICs and VAT, the IFS find that:

- NICs are concentrated amongst the better-off households, but not to the same extent as income tax
- VAT receipts are more broadly distributed across households.

There are limitations to the IFS' analysis, which point to taxes being concentrated amongst the higher income households to a greater extent than their estimates suggest:

- the data are based on survey responses, which under report the incomes of the highest earners and the analysis is therefore likely to underestimate their tax contribution
- some of the tax receipts not included – such as capital gains tax and inheritance tax – are likely to be concentrated amongst the better off households

Impact of taxes on household income

The ONS reports on the effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income. Their analysis considers the impact of direct and indirect taxes.⁹

Direct taxes

In 2017/18, the average household paid £10,800 in direct taxes, equivalent to 20% of gross income. Gross income includes all original income – for example, from earnings and investments – plus cash benefits provided by government – for example from the state pension.

Direct taxes (income tax, employee NICs and council tax) reduce income inequality: household incomes are more evenly distributed across the income distribution after direct taxes have been paid. The richest fifth paid on average £26,500 in direct taxes in 2017/18, which is equivalent to 24% of gross household income.¹⁰ The poorest fifth paid £2,500 in direct taxes, which is equivalent to 13% of gross household income.

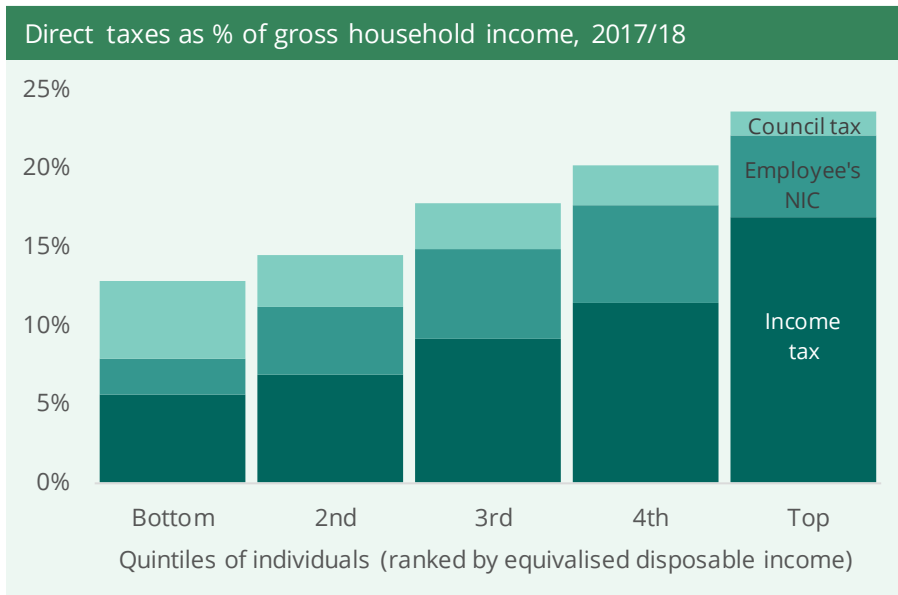
Council tax limits the extent to which direct taxes reduce income inequality. Even after including council tax support claimed, the poorest fifth pay a greater proportion of their gross income on council tax than the richest fifth.¹¹ Research from the IFS suggests that this is partly due to low take-up of council tax support entitlements.¹²

⁹ ONS. [Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income: financial year ending 2018](#)

¹⁰ Individuals are grouped into quintiles (or fifths) based on their equivalised household disposable income. The richest quintile is the 20% of individuals with the highest equivalised household disposable income. The poorest quintile is the 20% of individuals with the lowest equivalised disposable income. Equivalisation is the process of accounting for the fact that households with many members are likely to need a higher income to achieve the same standard of living as households with fewer members.

¹¹ This is council tax and Northern Ireland rates after benefits/rebates

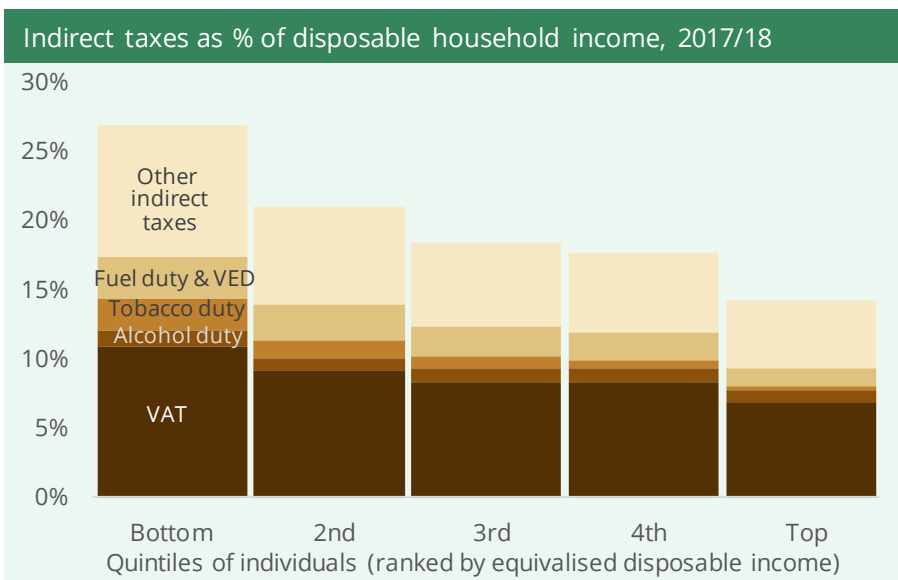
¹² IFS. [The effect of taxes and benefits on UK inequality](#), May 2019, page 10



Indirect taxes

When measured relative to household incomes, indirect taxes¹³ (around 45% of which are VAT) can be judged to be regressive: that is, those with lower incomes pay more relative to their income. However, when measured relative to household expenditure, indirect taxes are more evenly distributed across individuals.

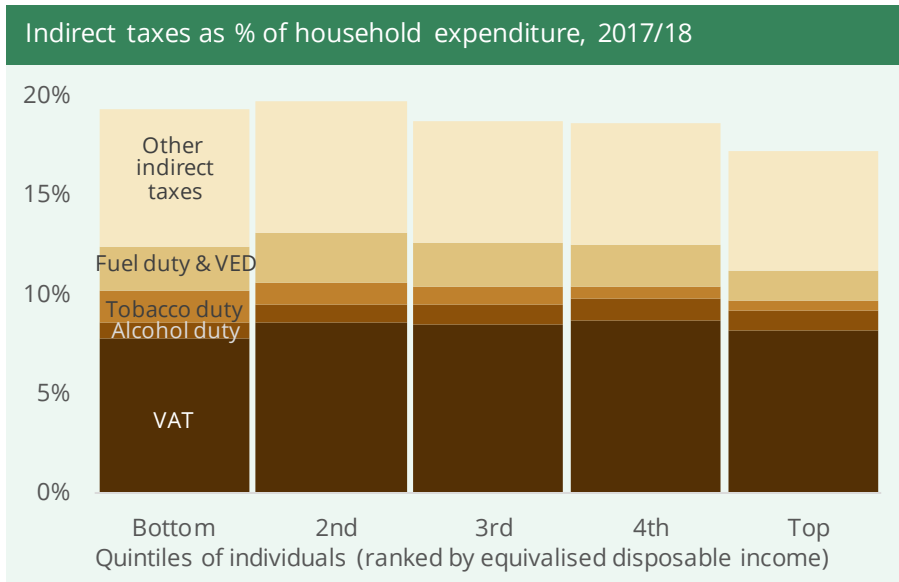
The richest fifth paid £12,300 in indirect taxes in 2017/18; the poorest fifth paid £4,600. For the poorest fifth this is equivalent to 27% of disposable household income, but for the richest fifth it is equivalent to 14% of disposable household income.



Indirect taxes can also be considered relative to households' spending, not least because they are generally levied on spending. Doing so results in less variation across the income distribution. The IFS have argued – largely in respect of VAT – that there is a good argument for measuring

¹³ Including intermediate taxes

impact as a share of household spending, rather than income. This is because incomes are volatile, and spending can be smoothed through borrowing and saving. The IFS's opinion is that this 'consumption smoothing', makes spending a better measure of living standard (and households' perception of the level of spending they can sustain).¹⁴

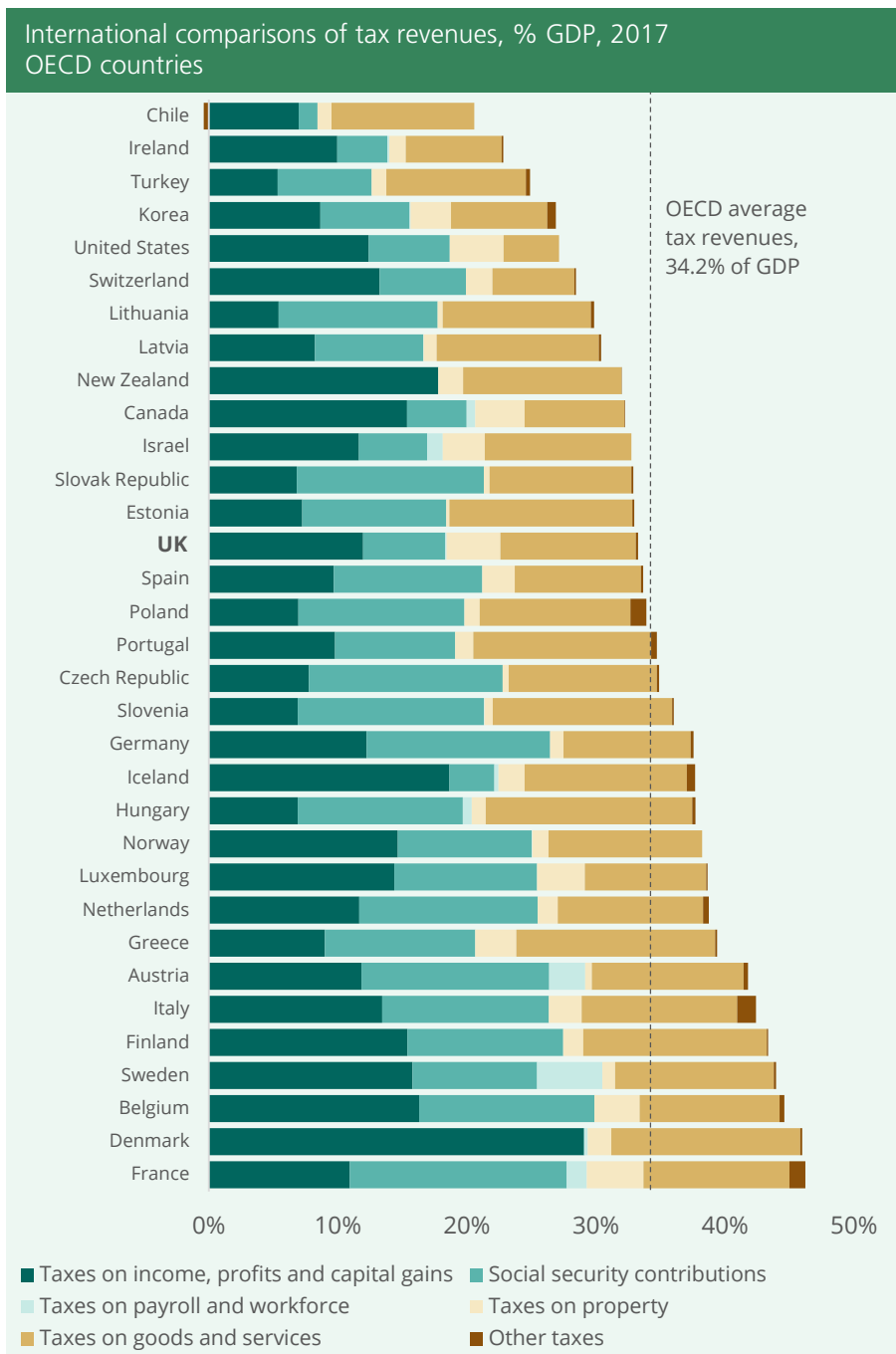


¹⁴ IFS. Green Budget 2009, Chapter 10, [pp197-199](#)

4. International comparisons

The UK raises less tax revenues, as a share of GDP, than the average of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2017, OECD countries' tax revenues were equivalent to 34.2% of GDP; in the UK they were 33.3% of GDP.

In 2017, only France raised more than the UK from taxes on property, as a share of GDP. 13 countries raised more from taxes on income, profits and capital gains than the UK, while 19 raised less.¹⁵



¹⁵ Complete data are available for 33 of the 36 OECD countries in 2017.

5. Effects of illustrative tax changes

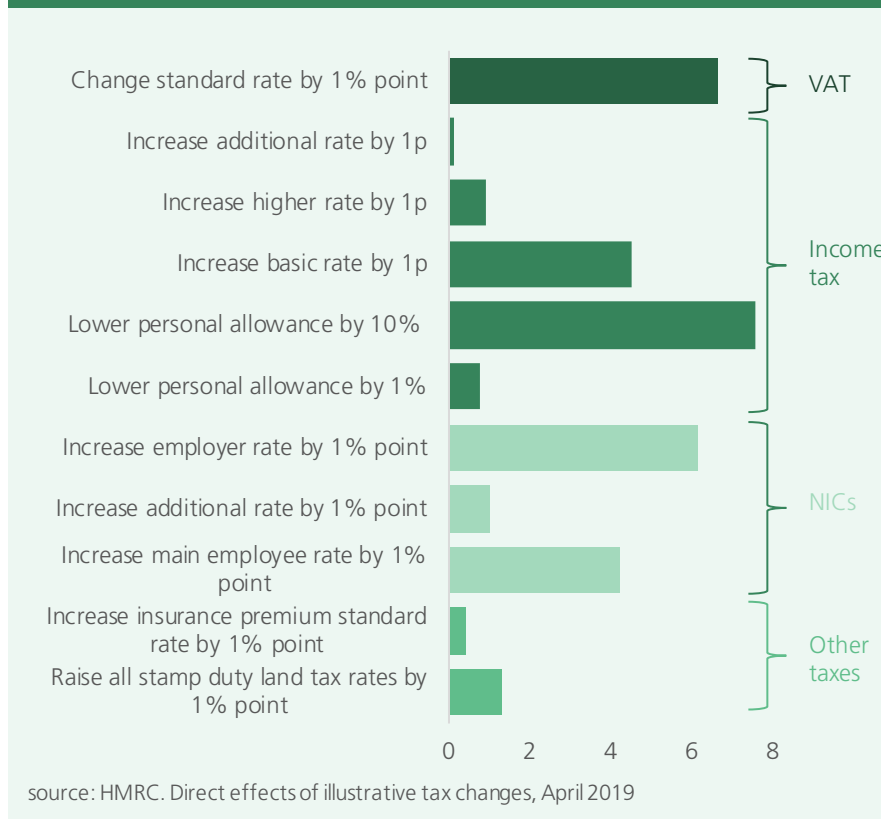
[HMRC publish estimates](#) of the effect of illustrative tax changes on tax receipts, in what is often described as its 'ready reckoner'.¹⁶

Clearly a range of options are available for increasing revenues from existing taxes. HMRC's ready reckoner includes illustrative changes to taxes such as: income tax; corporation tax; capital gains tax; inheritance tax; NICs; duties; VAT; insurance premium tax; and, stamp duty land tax.

HMRC's estimates only consider the direct impact of a measure on the tax base to which it is being applied, or to closely related tax bases. Effects on wider economic factors are generally excluded as are potential impacts on government welfare spending.

For purely illustrative purposes, the chart below lays out the potential revenues raised from some possible tax changes.

Larger revenues can be raised from making changes to the biggest taxes, such as income tax, VAT and NICs
Potential revenue raised in 2020/21 from illustrative tax changes, £billion



¹⁶ HMRC. [Direct effects of illustrative tax changes](#)

6. Tax reliefs

There are more than 1,000 tax reliefs in the UK system. In many cases they are an essential part of defining the scope and structure of a tax. Broadly speaking HMRC splits tax reliefs into 'tax expenditures' and 'structural reliefs':

- the effect of **tax expenditures** is to help or encourage particular types of individuals, activities or products for economic or social objectives;
- **structural reliefs** can be reasonably regarded as an integral part of the tax structure.

Some reliefs combine both expenditure and structural elements.

HMRC publish estimates of the cost of [principal tax reliefs](#), [minor tax reliefs](#), and a [list of reliefs where costs are not available](#). HMRC's figures are broad estimates as the loss of revenue from a tax relief cannot be directly observed and so the estimates are often based on simplified assumptions. They are not reliable estimates of the additional tax that would be raised if a tax relief were removed. As HMRC explains "if a relief was withdrawn, taxpayer's behaviour would often alter so the actual yield from withdrawing a relief could be very different from, and often much smaller than the estimate shown."

HMRC estimates that the most significant tax expenditures are for exempting the sale of main residences from capital gains tax (£27 billion in 2018/19); income tax relief for registered pension schemes (£26 billion in 2018/19); and, 0% VAT on food (£19 billion in 2018/19).

HMRC estimates that the most significant structural reliefs are for the income tax personal allowance (£107 billion in 2018/19); the NICs employer threshold (£30 billion in 2018/19); and, the NICs employee threshold (£26 billion in 2018/19). The estimated cost of the income tax personal allowance – the point at which individuals start paying income tax – has increased in recent years. This is a result of the Government making above inflation increases to the personal allowance.

7. Key sources

Recent years and forecasts

- OBR. [Public finances databank](#)

The 'receipts' tab of the databank provides a time series for most receipts from 1999/00. The OBR's most recent forecasts are also included.

- OBR. [Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2019](#)

For more of a discussion of the latest data and forecasts see the [public sector receipts](#) section of the OBR's latest economic and fiscal outlook. [Table 4.3](#) shows data for the latest year and all forecast years.

- ONS. Public sector finances, [Public sector current receipts: Appendix D](#)

This data-only release includes monthly receipts for most receipts. It also includes a summary table showing comparisons for the latest month's data and aggregates for financial recent financial years.

Regional comparisons

- ONS. [Country and regional public sector finances](#)

Experimental data from the ONS, which estimate public sector receipts (and spending) by UK region. The data includes estimates for individual taxes. The Library briefing [country and regional public sector finances](#) summarises the data.

International comparisons

- European Commission, [Taxation trends in the European Union](#)

This report contains a detailed statistical and economic analysis of the tax systems of the 28 Member States of the European Union, plus Iceland and Norway.

- OECD, [Tax Database](#)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) tax database provides comparative information on a range of tax statistics – tax revenues, personal income taxes, non-tax compulsory payments, corporate and capital income taxes and taxes on consumption – that are levied in the 35 OECD member countries.

Taxpayers

- HMRC, [Numbers of taxpayers and registered traders](#)

HMRC statistics related to numbers of taxpayers and registered traders.

Households: Effects of taxes on households

- ONS. [Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income](#)

This ONS release looks at how taxes (and benefits) affect the distribution of incomes in the UK. It includes estimates of the taxes paid by retired, non-retired and all households, by level of income.

Income tax: breakdowns and further analysis

- HMRC. [Income Tax statistics and distributions](#)

HMRC's tables provide breakdowns of income taxpayers and Income Tax liabilities by age and gender, marginal tax rate, income source and tax band, and by country and region. Includes estimates for recent years.

- HMRC, [personal income by tax year](#)

HMRC's tables provide detailed information on individuals liable to UK Income Tax and their incomes. The statistics include gender, age, income and tax distribution, income source, country and geographical area.

The statistics in this HMRC release are less timely than those discussed above, but they provide a greater level of detail, and include data for parliamentary constituencies.

- OBR, [Income tax](#)

The OBR's in-depth analysis of income tax discusses recent trends, forecasts, policy changes, and other information.

Other individual taxes

- [Statistics at HMRC](#)

This landing page provides links to statistics covering HMRC's main work from collecting tax to paying tax credits and child benefit.

- OBR, [in-depth: tax by tax](#)

In these pages the OBR gather together their published information on key taxes including [income tax](#); [National Insurance Contributions](#); [VAT](#); [Onshore corporation tax](#); [Oil and gas revenues](#); [Fuel duties](#); [Capital gains tax](#); [Inheritance tax](#); [Tobacco duties](#); [Alcohol duties](#); [Council tax](#); [Air passenger duty](#); [Bank Levy](#); [Betting and gaming duties](#); [Vehicle excise duty](#); and, [Landfill tax](#). For each the OBR describes what the tax represents in the real world, how the amount of money raised has changed in recent years and sets out the most recent forecast and how it is performing against the latest data. It also provides background information about how each forecast is produced, how they have evolved over time and other issues.

Commentary/discussion

- House of Commons Library, [Key documents: taxation](#)

This note lists some of the most useful sources on tax law, tax policy and tax statistics, as well as guidance for taxpayers. It also provides a checklist of official documents and briefing material on Budgets since 2010, and gives a short selection of other reading on the Parliamentary scrutiny of government taxation and spending.

The Library publishes many [briefings on taxation](#).

- IFS, [Tax revenues: where does the money come from and what are the next government's challenges?](#), 2017

This briefing note provided background material for the 2017 general election. It provides trends in tax revenues, changes in the distribution of taxes and challenges for tax receipts and policy.

- IFS, [The changing composition of UK tax revenues](#), 2016

An in-depth look at trends in tax revenues.

- IFS, [The coalition government's record on tax](#), 2015

Discusses policy changes between 2010 and 2015.

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