EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE SOCIAL SECURITY (COMPUTATION OF EARNINGS) (AMENDMENT) (NORTHERN IRELAND) REGULATIONS 2016

2016 No. 268

1. Introduction

1.1 This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland ("the Department") on behalf of HM Treasury and is laid before Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

2. Purpose of the instrument

2.1 This instrument amends the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 (S.R. 1996 No. 520) http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1996/520/contents/made ("the Computation of Earnings Regulations"), in consequence of the introduction, by the Scottish Government, of a Scottish rate of income tax, from 6 April 2016, being the start of the 2016/17 tax year. Its purpose is to ensure that benefit claimants get the correct award, taking into account the tax rules that apply to them. This instrument also updates the definition of "personal relief" in the same Regulations, aligning it with the appropriate reference in the Income Tax Act 2007 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/3/contents; and makes other minor corrections.

3. Matters of special interest to Parliament

Matters of special interest to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

3.1 None.

Other matters of interest to the House of Commons

3.2 As this instrument is subject to the negative resolution procedure and has not been prayed against, consideration as to whether there are other matters of interest to the House of Commons does not arise at this stage.

4. Legislative Context

4.1 The UK Government currently levies income tax on people at three rates: the basic rate, being 20% on their taxable income (over and above their personal allowance) up to £31,785; the higher rate, being 40% on their taxable income (over and above their personal allowance) between £31,786 and £150,000; and the additional rate, being 45% on their taxable income (over and above their personal allowance) over £150,000. The personal allowance is the standard amount of taxable income most people can have before they start paying income tax.

4.2 The Scotland Act 1998 ("the 1998 Act") http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/46/contents (as amended by section 25 of the Scotland Act 2012 {"the 2012 Act"} http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/11/contents/enacted) confers on the Scottish Parliament a power to vary the three rates of income tax for Scottish

taxpayers. A Scottish taxpayer is defined in the 2012 Act as someone who is a UK taxpayer and has their main place of residence in Scotland.

4.3 For Scottish taxpayers, the three rates will be calculated as per section 6A of the Income Tax Act 2007 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/3/contents (as introduced by paragraph 3 of Schedule 38 to the Finance Act 2014 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/26/contents/enacted) by reducing each of them by 10 pence in the pound and adding onto the reduced rates a single, new Scottish rate as set by the Scottish Parliament.

4.4 The Scottish rate of income tax will first be introduced from the start of the 2016/17 tax year, being 6 April 2016. In *Scotland's Spending Plans and Draft Budget 2016-17* http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00491140.pdf published on 16 December 2015, the Scottish Government proposed that the rate for 2016/17 would be set at 10 pence in the pound. The net effect is that the rates of income tax payable by Scottish taxpayers in 2016/17 will remain the same as the rates payable in the rest of the UK. However, that may not remain the position in tax years beyond 2016/17.

4.5 This instrument is needed in order to introduce definitions of a "Scottish taxpayer" and the "Scottish basic rate" of tax into the Computation of Earnings Regulations, and to amend references to the "basic rate" of tax to include references to the "Scottish basic rate" of tax, where appropriate. The Computation of Earnings Regulations cover the calculation or estimation of the net earnings of people claiming benefits such as Pension Credit and Carer's Allowance for the purpose of enabling the Secretary of State to determine the amount of benefit claimants should be awarded.

5. Extent and Territorial Application

5.1 The extent of this instrument is Northern Ireland.

5.2 The territorial application of this instrument is Northern Ireland.

5.3 Separate but corresponding provisions will be made for Great Britain by statutory instrument.

6. European Convention on Human Rights

6.1 As this instrument is subject to the negative resolution procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

7. Policy background

What is being done and why

7.1 The 1998 Act confers on the Scottish Parliament a power to vary the three rates of income tax for Scottish taxpayers for the whole of any specified tax year, through the introduction of a Scottish rate of income tax. The Scottish rate of income tax is only payable by Scottish taxpayers. It is the responsibility of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to decide who is and is not a Scottish taxpayer.

7.2 Depending on the rate at which the Scottish rate is set, the rates of income tax payable by Scottish taxpayers in any tax year might be higher or lower than, or the same as, the corresponding rates for the rest of the UK. It follows that the net income and earnings of a Scottish taxpayer might differ from those of a person with similar income levels who lives elsewhere in the UK.

7.3 The Department takes into account the net income and earnings of claimants (and, where appropriate, their partners) across a range of benefits, and in certain calculations as to how much maintenance a parent is to pay in respect of their child or children. Depending on the rate at which it is set, and on the particular circumstances of the case, the introduction of a Scottish rate of income tax for Scottish taxpayers therefore has the potential to affect a range of Departmental calculations, in any case where the claimant or parent has sufficient taxable income to pay income tax. This is an inescapable consequence of the change.

7.4 This instrument introduces definitions of a "Scottish taxpayer" and the "Scottish basic rate" of tax into the Computation of Earnings Regulations, and amends references to the "basic rate" of tax to include a reference to the "Scottish basic rate" of tax. There are no references to the "higher" or "additional" rates of tax in the substantive Regulations, so no comparable amendments are required.

7.5 This instrument also updates the definition of "personal relief" currently to be found in the Computation of Earnings Regulations, aligning it with the reference to "personal reliefs" under the relevant provisions of the Income Tax Act 2007.

7.6 Regulation 2(3)(a) of this instrument omits regulation 4(2) of the Computation of Earnings Regulations, which is no longer relevant. This change is made in response to a Commissioner's decision (R(IB)7/03) which held that the paragraph in question (which permits a decision-maker to take into account notional earnings where a person is working for nothing or for less than that paid for comparable employment in the area) was ultra vires. This means that, in these circumstances, a claimant cannot be treated as possessing earnings which that person does not in fact possess. Whilst the provision has remained on the face of the legislation, it has never been applied. The provision is now being omitted.

7.7 Regulation 3 of this instrument makes a revocation consequential upon the omission of regulation 4(2). The sole purpose of the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2000 was to make an amendment to the text of regulation 4(2). Since that provision is now being omitted, the Regulations are being revoked.

Consolidation

7.8 Informal consolidated text of instruments is available to the public free of charge via 'The Law Relating to Social Security' (Blue Volumes) on the Department for Work and Pensions website at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/specialist-guides/law-volumes/the-law-relating-to-social-security/ or the National Archive website http://www.legislation.gov.uk/. An explanation as to which instruments are maintained on each site is available from http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/lawvolnews.pdf.

8. Consultation outcome

8.1 No consultation has been carried out on the provisions of this instrument. Consultation was not considered necessary as the amendments are considered to be technical and comprise, principally, changes to pre-existing definitions in legislation consequential upon the introduction by the Scottish Government of a separate rate of income tax for Scottish taxpayers.

8.2 With the exception of the revocation introduced by regulation 3 of this instrument, proposals to make equivalent changes to the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 were scrutinised by the Social Security Advisory Committee on 2 December 2015, under the provisions of section 173 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/5. The Committee decided that it did not require the proposed changes to be formally referred to it and, accordingly, it did not conduct a public consultation exercise on the proposals.

9. Guidance

9.1 No instructions have been developed in relation to this instrument because, principally, it does no more than introduce new definitions and expand existing ones in consequence of the introduction, by the Scottish Government, of a Scottish rate of income tax.

9.2 Instructions relating to the introduction of a Scottish rate of income tax itself are being developed for staff in the Jobcentre Plus offices who advise customers, staff in benefit centres who determine benefit claims and administer awards, and staff who make child maintenance calculations.

9.3 Claimants will be informed about the changes, where relevant, at their interviews with their advisers. Leaflets and gov.uk will be updated as necessary.

9.4 HMRC has issued a letter to all people whose main residence is (according to its records) in Scotland, advising them that the Scottish rate of income tax will apply to them, and asking them to let HMRC know if their main place of residence is not in Scotland, or of their new address if they move home. Once the Scottish Government has set the Scottish rate of income tax, HMRC will advise people classified for their purposes as Scottish taxpayers as appropriate.

10. Impact

10.1 This instrument, in itself, has no impact on business, charities or voluntary bodies. Once the Scottish Government has set the Scottish rate of income tax for any particular tax year, HMRC will notify employers as appropriate.

10.2 This instrument, in itself, has no impact on the public sector. On the potential impact of the introduction of the Scottish rate of income tax itself, it follows that, regardless of the rate at which it is set, the only people who will be affected by its introduction are those with sufficient taxable income to pay income tax. The only Departmental calculations which might need to have regard to the Scottish rate of income tax relate to people who move their main place of residence from Scotland to Northern Ireland at any time after April 2016, but who nevertheless continue to be classed (by HMRC) as a Scottish taxpayer for the tax year of the change of address itself (because the location of their main place of residence for the majority of the tax year was in Scotland). Any effects, however, would be a consequence of changes made by the Scottish Government rather than of these Regulations.

10.3 An Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument.

11. Regulating small business

11.1 The legislation does not apply to activities that are undertaken by small businesses.

12. Monitoring & review

12.1 The operation of the Regulations will continue to be reviewed through the normal avenues of guidance, enquiries received from the Department's offices and correspondence from members of the public.

13. Contact

13.1 Hasan Mustafa at HM Revenue and Customs Tel: 03000 586718 or e-mail: hasan.mustafa@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk can answer any queries regarding the instrument.