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Circular 02/2024

19 January 2024

At: All Employing Authorities

Dear Colleagues,

Monthly Returns to NILGOSC – revised submission deadline dates and go live phases

This Circular details changes to the deadline date for the submission of monthly returns to NILGOSC for employers who have been onboarded onto i-Connect. It also sets out revised phases and go live dates for those employers not already onboarded and draws employers' attention to upcoming changes relating to i-Connect administration in the draft Pensions Administration Strategy.

The implementation of this project to transition employers from a once-yearly annual return to monthly returns has been very successful to date. The implementation began in January 2022 and I am pleased to report that 120 out of 169 employers are now fully onboarded and using i-Connect as the portal to remit member pay and contribution details on a monthly basis. I would like to thank those employers as this has taken considerable input and effort from their payroll staff, their respective software providers and the i-Connect team at NILGOSC. As a bonus, those employers who are onboarded by March 2024 will not need to submit an annual return this year.

Revised Monthly Submission Deadline Date

NILGOSC's Finance Department has experienced delays reconciling payments received each month to the i-Connect submissions. In some cases, we have not received the i-Connect submissions until several weeks after the payment has been made. It is now apparent that this interval has led to lengthy delays in allocating contributions to member' pension accounts and the calculation of leavers' benefits.

All employee and employer contributions must be paid over to NILGOSC as soon as possible after the close of the pay period to which they refer, and in any case, no later than the 10th of the following month e.g., December’s contributions must be received no later than 10th January.

To improve administration and, in particular, timely payment for new pensioners we intend to align the dates so that the deadline for both the contributions payments and the i-Connect submissions will be the same – no later than the 10th of the following month. **From 1 March 2024** all i-Connect submissions must be received by the 10th of the following month i.e., the payment of the March contributions and the i-Connect submission must be no later than 10th April 2024.

Please let me know if you foresee any difficulties implementing the above change within the period set out.

Revised Go Live Phases

While progress with the smaller employer online returns on i-Connect has been very successful there have been delays with some larger employers who require payroll software programming for extracts. In a few cases the delays have also been a consequence of the large volume of work required to match the employer’s payroll and membership data to that held by NILGOSC. Each employer who is expecting to provide a payroll extract should have already provided the payroll extract specification to their payroll software provider and the programming should be in progress.

We have therefore revised the Go Live phases for the remaining 49 employers. These phases and implementation dates are set out in the Appendix.

Changes to the Pension Administration Strategy

At the end of 2023, NILGOSC consulted for three months on changes to its Pension Administration Strategy. This updated Strategy document sets out the responsibilities and performance levels required by both NILGOSC and employers to enable and provide a framework for the delivery of a cost-effective and high quality pension administration service.

The following Employer Service Standards will apply to i-Connect:

Event	Service Standard	Target
Monthly return – employers using i-Connect	Submission by the 10th of the month following the month in which the contributions were deducted	100%

Event	Service Standard	Target
NILGOSC raises queries following receipt of i-Connect online return	Errors are rectified before the next monthly submission	100%
i-Connect data file is rejected	Data file is corrected and resubmitted to NILGOSC within 5 working days.	100%

The following items in the Strategy are drawn to your attention as they relate to charges for failure to comply:

Failure	Charge (plus VAT as appropriate)
Failure to fully implement i-Connect in line with agreed onboarding date.	All administration and time spent will be recharged up to £5,000 if an employer has not fully onboarded by the next 30 April meaning an annual return is required. Note: part or all may be waived at NILGOSC's discretion.
Late submission of monthly pension payroll data via i- Connect.	£150 per occurrence plus a further fixed penalty of £10 per day after the deadline Note: part or all may be waived at NILGOSC's discretion
Submission of incorrect pension payroll data via i-Connect, as defined as a submission with either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 10% of the members with a submission event error or • More than 10% of the members with incorrect pensionable pay and/or contributions needing manual correction. 	£100 per occurrence plus a further fixed penalty of £5 per day after the deadline.

If you have any queries or wish to speak to us, please email in the first instance to i-connect@nilgosc.org.uk and we will either call you to help with any issues you might have or reply to your query. Please also let us know if you need another copy of the specification for the payroll extract.

Yours sincerely

John Wheeler

i-Connect Implementation Manager

Appendix 1 – Employers by Onboarding Phase

Phase 4 – to be completed before 31 March 2024 (11 employers)

Ards and North Down Borough Council (provisional, otherwise Phase 5)
Armagh Observatory and Planetarium
Ballymena Academy
Belfast City Council
Belfast Royal Academy
Drumragh Integrated College
Libraries NI (provisional, otherwise Phase 5)
Omagh Integrated Primary School
Royal School Armagh
Sport NI
St Malachy's College

Phase 5 – to run from April 2024 to 31 March 2025 (33 employers)

Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
Apex Housing Association
Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Belfast Metropolitan College
BWUH Limited
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council
CCEA
Choice Housing Ireland Limited
Citybus Limited
Dalriada School
Derry City and Strabane District Council
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Greenwich Leisure Limited
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Mid Ulster District Council
Newry Mourne & Down District Council
NI Fire & Rescue Service

NI Housing Executive
NI Railway Company Limited
NI Transport Holding Authority
North West Regional College
Northern Regional College
Probation Board for NI
Radius Housing Association Limited
Slemish Integrated College
South Eastern Regional College
South West College
Southern Regional College
Stranmillis University College
Tourism NI
Ulsterbus Limited
University of Ulster

Phase 6 – to run from April 2025 to 31 March 2026 (5 employers)

Education Authority
Enniskillen Primary School
Erne Integrated College
Oakgrove Integrated College
Oakgrove integrated Primary School