



Enterprise Management Incentive Schemes (“EMI”)



What is an EMI Scheme?

The Enterprise Management Incentives (“EMI”) Scheme was introduced in the Finance Act 2000. It aims to assist small potentially high-risk trading companies in attracting and retaining key employees.

An EMI Scheme allows a qualifying company to grant options over shares with a value of up to £250,000 per employee (up to a maximum of £3million for the Company as a whole) on flexible terms. An EMI Scheme offers favourable tax treatment making it attractive to both companies and employees.

Which companies qualify?

Broadly, an EMI Scheme is aimed at companies which satisfy conditions similar to those under the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and the Venture Capital Trusts (VCT) scheme:

- The gross assets of the company (or the group if a parent company) must not exceed £30million. Gross assets broadly comprise all assets shown in the balance sheet when drawn up in accordance with standard accounting practice.
- The company must have fewer than 250 full-time employees (or equivalent).
- The company must be independent and not under the control of any other company. Control for these purposes is defined as the ability of a person to secure that a company acts according to their wishes, whether through share ownership or provisions in the Articles of Association of that company. Shares in a subsidiary therefore cannot be used in as part of an EMI option.

- Companies may be quoted or unquoted.
- There is no requirement that the company be resident or incorporated in the UK but the company’s trading activities must be carried out wholly or mainly in the UK.
- Group companies can offer EMI options in the parent company to employees of its subsidiaries, provided that all subsidiaries in the group are qualifying subsidiaries. Broadly, this means that the parent (or another subsidiary) must own at least 75 per cent of the share capital and that no other person or entity should control (as defined above) that subsidiary.
- Certain trading activities do not qualify. Excluded trades include leasing, financial activities, property, shipbuilding, steel and coal producing companies. For a group, the activities of all group companies will be treated as a single business. Any excluded trade which is merely incidental to the trade carried on by the company or the group of companies will be disregarded.

Which employees qualify?

To qualify, employees must:

- work for the company (or, if relevant, any group company) for at least 25 hours a week or for at least 75 per cent of their working time (which includes time spent in self-employed work);
- not have a “material interest” in the company (or, if relevant, any group company) (defined very widely by reference to a holding of more than 30 per cent of the share capital of that company).

Employees may hold options over shares

under a savings-related share option scheme and under a Company Share Option Plan (CSOP) in addition to EMI options. However, CSOP options are taken into account in determining the limit of £250,000 per employee (see below).

Are there any restrictions on the grant of options?

Each employee can only hold unexercised options worth a maximum of £250,000 in any 3 year period under the EMI. Any further options granted to an employee over and above this sum would not qualify for the favourable tax treatment. The 3 year period will begin to run from the date of the grant of the last option that took the total held to £250,000.

Companies are free to set their own option period, but options should be capable of exercise within 10 years of being granted and be exercised within that period. After 10 years have passed, the tax benefits of an EMI option no longer apply on the exercise of any outstanding options.

Companies are also free to set the option price which may be more or less than the market value of the shares on the date the option is granted.

The shares over which options are granted must be fully paid up ordinary shares. It is not possible to grant an EMI option over redeemable or convertible shares.

How is an EMI Scheme operated?

A company is likely to have Scheme Rules in place, and a separate agreement will be required in respect of each option granted to an employee. This enables the company to tailor each grant of an option to the particular employee.



Does HM Revenue & Customs supervise the operation of the EMI?

Before each option grant you should agree the price of an ordinary share with HMRC. This is not a legal requirement but is good practice. The Company must then register the share scheme and notify HMRC within 92 days of an option being granted. This is done online through the HMRC ERS service on the Government Gateway.

A company can also seek advance informal assurance from HM Revenue & Customs that it is a qualifying company.

Companies who grant EMI options will need to make a return to HM Revenue & Customs within three months of the end of each tax year.

What other requirements are there?

The employee must be prohibited under the terms of the grant of the option from transferring any of their rights under the option.

If the option is capable of being exercised after the employee's death, it must not be capable of being exercised more than one year after their death.

There are provisions in the legislation for dealing with the EMI options if the

company which granted them is the target of a successful take-over. In certain circumstances the holder of the option can agree with the acquiring company to surrender the option in return for a replacement option over shares in the acquiring company.

What are the tax advantages of EMI options?

No income tax or national insurance contributions (NICs) are payable on the grant of an EMI option.

Where the option price is equal to or greater than the market value of shares on the date that the option is granted, then no income tax or NICs are payable on the exercise of the option.

Companies may set the option price at a discount (or even at nil). However, where this is the case then, on exercise of the option, income tax will be payable on the discount (the difference between the market price of the shares on the date the option is granted and the option exercise price paid by the employee when they acquire the shares). Where the shares can be readily converted into cash when the option is exercised (for example if the company is being sold), any such income tax must be accounted for under PAYE and NICs (employer and employee) will also be payable on the taxable amounts.

When shares obtained on exercise are

eventually sold the employee will be liable for capital gains tax (CGT). They should also be entitled to Entrepreneur's Relief which will reduce the rate of CGT from 20% to 10%.

In addition the annual CGT exemption (currently £11,700) will be available.

The costs of setting up and administering the EMI scheme will be a deductible expense for the company when calculating its profits for the purposes of corporation tax.

Can the tax advantages be lost?

If at any time prior to the exercise of an option a "disqualifying event" occurs then, on a subsequent exercise of the option, an employee will be subject to income tax in the usual way as on the exercise of an unapproved share option. However, the gain will be calculated by reference to the market value of the shares on the date of the disqualifying event. Examples of disqualifying events include:

- the employee ceasing to be a qualifying employee; or
- the company ceasing to be a qualifying company.



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Charles Purdy
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