

Opening a Venue

About an hour to read against your plan, and the order matters more than the speed: half of these have statutory lead times, and the expensive mistakes are the ones done twice.

Venue Target opening Licence holder

Everything below has a deadline that counts backwards from opening night. The food registration needs 28 days, the premises licence commonly needs longer, and the insurance must exist before the first tradesperson walks in, let alone the first customer.

1. Before you sign the lease about 10 minutes

☐

Check the planning use class allows a restaurant

Class E covers most cafes and restaurants; drinking establishments sit outside it. A change of use is months, not weeks.

☐

Read the lease for opening hours, extraction and licensing clauses

A landlord veto on late opening or a ban on ducting decides the business model before you do.

☐

Price the rates, not just the rent

Ask for the rateable value and check the current hospitality relief; it changes at Budgets and it is never guaranteed to continue.

2. Registrations with statutory lead times about 15 minutes

☐

Register the food business at least 28 days before opening

With the local authority, free, and it cannot be refused. Opening unregistered is an offence, and the first inspection sets the hygiene rating on the door.

☐

Register as an employer with HMRC before the first payday

PAYE takes days, not weeks, but payroll software, pension duties and the tips policy all hang off it.

☐

VAT: decide the position before the till is programmed

Registration is compulsory over £90,000 on a rolling twelve months, and most venues pass that in months. The VAT Registration Checklist does this properly.

THE 28 DAYS NOBODY BUDGETS

Food business registration must reach the council at least 28 days before you open. It is free and unrefusable, and it is still the deadline most new venues discover three weeks out.

3. Licences about 15 minutes

☐

Premises licence for alcohol, with a named DPS

A personal licence holder must be the designated premises supervisor. Allow weeks for the application and the consultation period.

☐

Music: TheMusicLicence for recorded or live music

PPL PRS collect jointly now. Background music counts.

☐

Pavement licence for outside tables

From the council, with a consultation window. The furniture is the easy part.

☐

Late night refreshment if serving hot food after 11pm

Part of the premises licence, easily missed by cafes extending hours.

4. The people file about 10 minutes

☐**Right to work checks before anyone works a shift**

Originals or the online service, copies kept. The New Staff Onboarding Checklist runs the full sequence.

☐**Auto-enrolment pension duties from the first hire**

Duties start on day one of employing anyone, not at some comfortable later date.

☐**The written tips policy, before the first tip**

Required since 1 October 2024 wherever tips are paid more than occasionally. The Tronc Records Workbook is the trail.

5. Insurance and the last week about 10 minutes☐**Employers' liability at £5 million minimum, certificate displayed**

A legal requirement from the first employee, including trial shifts. Public liability is not legally required and commercially essential.

☐**Gas safety and extraction interlock signed off**

Commercial kitchens need the interlock; the certificate is what the insurer reads after a fire.

☐**Fire risk assessment written before opening night**

Required under the fire safety order, written once five people are employed, sensible always.

☐**Book the first stock count for opening day**

The GP figure is only ever as honest as the opening count. Start the habit before the first service.

Zazen Tax

Accountants for hospitality. zazentax.com/contact

General information, not advice for your circumstances. Rates and thresholds are 2026/27 for the UK and change from time to time. Licensing items are England and Wales.