HMRC service standards

General Features

01 February 2016

HMRC service standards

As a member of the Issues Overview Group, I have been involved in obtaining feedback from members over the past year on issues relating to HMRC service standards, resulting in three items making it on to the Issues Register:

1. Delays in post dealt with by HMRC.
2. Problems contacting HMRC by telephone.
3. Delays in HMRC issuing tax refunds.

In October last year, HMRC held two workshops with stakeholders to discuss service standards in general. One was hosted by ICAEW and the other by CIOT and ATT jointly.

Stakeholders were asked to consider various questions ahead of the workshops, including in which area agents might be willing to accept a reduced service. The message was clear: there is no extra resource available to address any problems (aside from the recent intake of 3,000 extra staff) so improving service in one part of the system may have to come at the expense of resource elsewhere.

At the second workshop hosted by CIOT and ATT, the discussion focused on drawing out particular problems with processes or services that drive agents to contact HMRC by phone. The group then worked towards identifying ways in which this contact could be reduced. For example:

- Calls to HMRC to make changes to the tax code – this contact could easily be reduced by providing a digital facility for agents to make changes, something that is due to be brought in eventually through agent online self-serve (AOSS).
- General delays in dealing with correspondence results in agents calling HMRC to chase a response – HMRC advised that the extra 3,000 staff are being

trained and the effect of the extra staff should start to be felt soon.

- Requests for SA306s for mortgage applications – as discussed in our article 'Mortgage lenders – verification of income for clients' on page 50 regarding mortgage lenders, a new process has recently been brought in where agents can obtain the necessary documents via 'self-serve' through third party software and self-assessment online. HMRC has assured us that SA306s can still be requested from them until the new system is fully embedded. However, as noted, HMRC has recently advised that SA306s will no longer be issued by fax. The reason for this is that the call centre operative must move away from their desk to send the fax when they could be answering other telephone calls.

Following on from the two workshops, HMRC compiled a log of the suggestions that were made to help improve service standards with a view to researching the practicalities of implementing each one. The stakeholder group was provided with a brief update of HMRC's research shortly before the Christmas break, and HMRC is due to report their findings to the joint initiative steering group in early 2016. After that, CIOT and ATT hope to provide further updates to members.

In the meantime, we are still keen to hear from our members about issues they are experiencing in dealing with HMRC and our questionnaire on contacting the Revenue by telephone is still available on the CIOT and ATT websites.