HMRC Director General questioned on service levels

Briefings



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HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, Myrtle Lloyd, was among the guest speakers at CIOT's Spring Virtual Conference on 27 April.

Questioned by members about HMRC service levels, Myrtle Lloyd said she was 'really sorry' for recent poor service levels at HMRC and that continued partnerships with organisations such as CIOT were 'ever more important' in helping drive improvement. She added: 'You play such an important role with your membership and during the pandemic we have shown that working together delivers for our customers.'

Lloyd told the conference that extra resources alone would not solve service level issues at HMRC, making the case that customers must make the shift from traditional to online platforms to ease pressure. She said that many customers now prefer to engage with HMRC via online platforms, including mobile applications, and the growing customer base requires more automation to relieve the pressure on

human agents. She added that resourcing was an issue due to increased demand and complexity of tax queries. ‘This means not only more customers, but more customers with more complex tax affairs,’ she said.

Measures to encourage customers to move to online platforms include QR codes on correspondence and removing the phone number from the website.

Lloyd said that simplification was at the heart of HMRC’s administration strategy and they will ‘work closely’ with the CIOT and others ‘to get this right’. ‘We know that transforming the tax system has got to be about simplifying,’ she added, as complexity increases mistakes by taxpayers, which leads to non-compliance.

Responding to comments from the audience that the root of service issues at HMRC is a lack of staff, Lloyd said there was a ‘fine balance’ between government funding for more resourcing and the need for customers who can ‘go digital’ to do so to relieve pressure. She said recent figures show around 65% of phone enquiries relate to information available online. Helping those customers to use the digital platforms would increase capacity for phone agents. She added that service problems are exacerbated by spikes in customer contacts, often around deadlines for tax returns, with HMRC still ‘chasing’ after the delays and disruption caused by COVID-19.

Specifically addressing long delays for VAT applications, Lloyd said HMRC has only just returned to usual service levels following last year’s cyber-attack, but that it was a good example of where most applications will not require human interaction and can be automated. Lloyd said that failing to properly utilise digital channels would only amount to a ‘sticking plaster’ on service levels. She said some of the results from new platforms have been ‘phenomenal’ but appreciated that they can take time to get up and running.

Those with a member login can watch at: https://ciotspring23.tsc.events

The CIOT’s Autumn Residential Conference will take place at Queens’ College, Cambridge on Friday 15 to Sunday 17 September 2023. The Institute’s first residential conference for almost four years will feature a line-up of topical and practical lectures by leading tax speakers, along with a group session and displays of tax books and software. The conference is open to members and non-members. Find out more at: www.tax.org.uk/arc2023).

Members can send in feedback on service standards to technical@ciot.org.uk and atttechnical@att.org.uk.