HMRC could save 1.7 million hours by eliminating ‘progress chasing’ calls

Briefings

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HMRC could save an estimated 1.7million hours of call handlers’ time every year if it implemented an automated tracking system for taxpayers to check the status of their queries, a study by CIOT and ICAEW has found.

The two institutes published their report, ‘Tackling HMRC’s customer service challenge’, on 11 December following a six-week project tracking attempts to contact HMRC across phonelines and webchats. They found that more than one-third of contact attempts were made to chase progress on existing enquiries, rather than to make a new enquiry.

The institutes pointed to key findings which showed that, while improving customer service performance remained crucial, a significant reduction in the need for agents and taxpayers to contact HMRC in the first place was vital.

Ellen Milner, CIOT's Director of Public Policy, said: 'We are grateful to the firms whose participation in our study has, for the first time, provided a comprehensive dataset evidencing where HMRC customer services are not meeting agent needs, and the impacts this has.

'We hope HMRC and the government will take our proposals into account in their work to improve customer services and in providing facilities like progress trackers when drawing up the much-anticipated digital roadmap, which we expect to see in the spring.'

Frank Haskew, ICAEW Head of Taxation, said: 'One of the most effective ways to reduce pressure on HMRC's traditional support channels is to minimise the need for agents to call in the first place.

'We found that over a third of calls to HMRC are for progress chasing and we'd like to see the introduction of a dedicated mechanism to meet this demand. Developing better online services would pay for itself and secure significant savings in HMRC staff time.'

See '***Tackling HMRC's customer service challenge: CIOT and ICAEW joint report***' for a full report on the study's findings and recommendations.