Fireside chat with JP Marks at the Cambridge conference

Briefings



27 October 2025

The annual Cambridge conference is always a special gathering for the CIOT community – a chance to hear ideas directly from those shaping the tax landscape. This year's highlight was an engaging fireside chat with John-Paul (JP) Marks, Permanent Secretary and CEO of HMRC, who joined us for an open and thoughtful conversation.

JP Marks said the conference provides an opportunity to bring the tax agent community together – an audience he recognised as vital in building relationships and trust between tax agents and HMRC – and to hear about agent pain points so they can be addressed. Whilst noting the recent change in tax minister from James Murray to Dan Tomlinson, JP Marks confirmed that HMRC's priorities remain the same: improving customer service; closing the tax gap; and driving modernisation and reform.

The HMRC Transformation Roadmap has now been published and HMRC is beginning to meet service standards. The average time to answer a call has nearly halved in the last 12 months, and the correspondence timelines target has now been met. There is continued take up of the HMRC app. JP Marks was pleased to report improvements but noted that there is more to do. He went on to highlight the following key points:

- Driving channel change is fundamental, with self-serve being optimal for the vast majority of users, although there is recognition that those who are struggling need assistance. HMRC is working with organisations such as TaxAid to provide this support.
- The Customer Experience Directorate has been established to ensure changes are more user-led.
- HMRC is working with CIOT to build deep professional capability, for example through the development of the Tax, Customs and Compliance Academy.
- The Transformation Roadmap includes several digital improvement projects, as well as a project to modernise agent registration. CIOT has called for many of these improvements and HMRC has now secured investment to deliver them.
- In terms of agent registration and improving standards, some of the proposed changes are significant, particularly around agent registration but these are crucial to reducing the tax gap and improving standards.
- A major focus is on modernising HMRC’s underlying infrastructure and moving to cloud hosted software – a vital step to prevent further accumulation of technical debt in legacy systems. HMRC hopes to take advantage of the latest software and future upgrades through procurement.
- Improving cyber security remains a key area of focus.
- HMRC is also examining the use of AI carefully to ensure that its deployment is ethical and properly controlled.

JP Marks concluded by observing that tax will continue to be a central topic in public debate, forming an essential part of the social contract. He then took a range of questions from CIOT and the audience, followed by several one-to-one discussions during the tea break.