Technical Newsdesk: August 2026

Welcomes

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As I sat down to write this, an alert popped into my inbox announcing the publication of HMRC's Annual Report and Accounts for 2025-26 (see tinyurl.com/4emv2zh3). At 329 pages, it is not exactly a holiday read, but it does contain some interesting insights into HMRC's performance.

One of HMRC's headline ambitions is that 90% of customer interactions should be digital by 2030. According to the report, digital interactions accounted for 78% of customer contact in 2025-26. HMRC say that puts them ahead of the trajectory needed to reach their target, although growth has slowed compared with earlier years. HMRC attribute much of the increase to the success of the HMRC app, which now has 7.6 million users, compared with 3.8 million only two years ago.

There are signs of progress elsewhere too. Telephone performance has improved significantly. More than 85% of attempts to reach an adviser were successful, compared with 71.5% the previous year and 66.4% in 2023-24. Average wait times remain far too long at over 12 minutes, but those figures show improvement. HMRC maintained overall customer satisfaction for telephone, webchat and digital services at around 80%. Taken together, these figures show some progress towards HMRC's transformation goals. However, the statistics only tell part of the story.

Alongside the annual report, HMRC has also published the latest findings from the Charter Stakeholder Group (CSG), on which CIOT, our Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG) and ATT are represented (see tinyurl.com/4w8ubtj8). The group's annual survey gathered more than 700 responses from taxpayers and agents, and provides a valuable reality check on how HMRC are performing against their Charter standards.

The contrast with the headline performance metrics in the annual report is notable. Respondents were asked to score HMRC's performance against each standard on a scale of 1 to 10. The findings indicate that HMRC's performance against key Charter standards remains a worry, with significant concerns about responsiveness, ease of use, accountability and accuracy. Scores were particularly low for HMRC being responsive (2.8 out of 10) and for making things easy for customers (3.25 out of 10). Concerns were also raised about digital services, staff expertise and the practical challenges agents face when trying to help clients, such as the need to make multiple contacts and the excessive length of time to rectify a HMRC error.

Perhaps the most telling result was that 82% of respondents felt HMRC are not held sufficiently accountable for their Charter commitments. Many comments reflected frustration that taxpayers face strict deadlines and consequences, while HMRC can take much longer to respond. Agents were particularly concerned about barriers to representing clients, creating a tension with the Charter commitment to recognise a taxpayer's right to appoint someone to act on their behalf.

For me, a key point is that transformation cannot simply be about moving more people online. Digital services must be easy to use, trusted by taxpayers and agents, and supported by effective alternatives for those who need extra help and for more complex cases. The annual report suggests some progress is being made, but the Charter survey shows us there is still far more to be done.

This month's Technical Newsdesk highlights the wide range of work going on across CIOT technical, LITRG and ATT, all aimed at making the tax system work better for everyone, including HMRC.