



## YOUR VIEW

## A helpline would help

IFA fellow **Carl Parker** is frustrated at stilted communication with HMRC, a situation exacerbated since the Covid-19 pandemic.



**O**ver the last 18 months the service issued by HMRC seems to have deteriorated to an all-time low - highlighted by the Covid-19 virus. Correspondence appears to be ignored, and something that should take ten minutes to resolve can often take up to 12 months with needless to-ing and fro-ing.

We used to have a good point of contact by telephone at our local tax office, where things were dealt with accurately and promptly. Those days are gone but we at least had all access to an agent priority helpline 0300 200 3311. Although they did not always resolve issues on this helpline it was

useful to have this contact point. We have been advised by HMRC that this has been scrapped and when calling the number it reverts to the normal contact number for all taxpayers, hence unreasonable delays and frustration. This needs to be addressed urgently by HMRC and restored as the first point of contact [*Editor's note: a version of the prioritised helpline has now been reinstated*].

Obviously if it is not possible to speak to HMRC to sort things out by telephone, the only other option is to formally write to them, which again is becoming extremely long-winded and frustrating. I have personally found that when writing to HMRC they very rarely deal with the initial letter within

a month, and I feel that when the first appeal letter or query is raised with HMRC, it is a foregone conclusion that my firm will end up chasing them again. I then believe the best course of action is to drop them a further line after approximately four weeks and ask them to deal with the correspondence and, at that point, issue a formal complaint to HMRC in writing c/o the Complaints Department to the address you are writing to.

If that fails, ask for your case to be escalated to a second-tier complaint, and if you are still not happy ask for a referral to the arbitrator. This is very useful and, if successful, they often ask HMRC to reimburse agent fees.

### Up the ante with HMRC

Another point to remember is that if you feel you are not progressing or getting anywhere and letters are being persistently ignored, I recommend that you contact the client's member of parliament (MP) or ask the client to contact their MP and pass on correspondence to them. HMRC then resolves matters much quicker, often telephoning me to discuss cases and resolve things that would have taken months if the MP had not been involved.

By way of reference, in February 2021, HMRC cleared 44% of correspondence within 15 days and 74.9% within 40 days of receipt. The consequences of this for direct taxpayers is incorrect bills, unpaid demands and inappropriate fines being issued. More importantly, it leads to a waste of taxpayers' money as, in many cases, HMRC had to reimburse costs in relation to additional work caused by their failings. ☑

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