



HM Revenue  
& Customs

## HMRC Professional Standards Committee

### Meeting summary – 14 October 2021

The Professional Standards Committee ('The Committee') met on 14 October 2021.

The Committee discussed four items over the course of the meeting:

1. Customer dissatisfaction
2. Building an effective relationship between state and business
3. Responding to our critics and apologising
4. AI & Machine Learning Strategy

#### **Customer dissatisfaction**

The first item focused on the work being done to refresh and improve HMRC's approach to complaints handling and the work of Customer Services Group to respond to customer dissatisfaction earlier in HMRC's interactions with its customers. This included discussion of the current complaints process and remedy scale, HMRC's complaints ambition and future plans for complaints handling. The Committee noted HMRC's approach to complaint handling as seeking to remedy the situation as soon as possible, apologise to the customer and take accountability for errors, alongside seeking to explain what went wrong in each situation.

The Committee noted that HMRC has developed a complaints remedy scale (based on the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman's [severity of injustice scale](#)), as part of a wider suite of products across complaints teams. The Committee discussed the need for a consistent approach to apologising to build trust and noted the need to embed effective lesson learning, building on the themes identified through recent complaints, in line with wider work under the remit of the Customer Experience Committee (who lead on complaint handling and customer dissatisfaction for HMRC).

#### **Building an effective relationship between state and business**

The second item related to research conducted by the University of Reading Centre for Cognition Research on building an effective relationship between the state and business. The Committee considered the tax obligations of businesses and discussed whether these were limited to just its legal obligations or whether a wider view should be taken, encompassing their social responsibility and social purposes. It further analysed the ideas raised by the external research as to how HMRC could better set out its purpose, noting the potential compliance benefits of clearly articulating the societal benefits of businesses paying their fair share of tax.

## **Responding to our critics and the HMRC relationship with citizens**

The third item focused on the ongoing work to correct factually inaccurate press reporting about HMRC and to develop HMRC's brand (one that would encompass HMRC's vision, values, purpose and charter, as opposed to internal or external branding), exploring links between this and the wider cross-departmental work on the development of a Trust Plan (wherein it was noted that the work should be aligned). The Committee heard about HMRC's approach to defending the department from inaccurate media reporting and the improvements in media sentiment and accuracy this had achieved, especially during the pandemic.

The Committee were presented with early ideas for where HMRC's brand could be focused, including consideration of an efficient, trusted and modern administrative organisation on one end of a spectrum, versus articulating tax as a social good and building a more emotional connection between HMRC, paying tax and the end benefits to society at the other end of the spectrum.

## **AI and Machine Learning strategy**

The final substantive item due to be considered related to the draft ethics framework for artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. A truncated version of the AI and Machine Learning Strategy was presented to the Committee; however, due to time constraints, this item will be brought back to the January meeting, with support in the interim from some of the Committee's independent advisers.