



HM Revenue
& Customs

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Research report

HMRC Stakeholder Research

Research carried out by Ipsos MORI among
HMRC stakeholders in 2013

February 2014

Corporate Communications – External Affairs

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Behavioural Evidence & Insight Team

HMRC Stakeholder Research*External Affairs*

The External Affairs team offers guidance and support across HMRC to help ensure communications activity is co-ordinated and aligned with our business objectives.

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HMRC Stakeholder Research

Research requirement (background to the project)

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by HMRC to undertake research among its stakeholders (corporates, politicians and journalists) to answer two over-arching research questions:

1. Understand perceptions of HMRC among this stakeholder group
 - How is HMRC performing?
 - What is driving attitudes?
 - How has this changed since 2012?
2. Obtain meaningful insight into how HMRC currently manages stakeholder relationships and how this can be improved
 - What are relationships with HMRC like? How has this changed since 2012?
 - How can HMRC better engage its stakeholders?

Methodology

This research was carried out by Ipsos MORI between 24th June and 7th August 2013.

These results are based on 128 quantitative interviews conducted over the phone and 24 qualitative interviews by phone and face-to-face. The sample was provided by HMRC and fell into three categories:

- corporate stakeholders (30 per cent are voluntary and community sector, 30 per cent are agents mainly representative organisations, 40 per cent are businesses, associations or industry groups)
- politicians (including Members of Parliament as well as members of devolved assemblies)
- journalists (both national and regional).

This report summarises the main themes arising from both the qualitative and quantitative research. The breakdown of interviews is as follow:

Quantitative interviews:

- 36 politicians
- 92 corporate stakeholders (including agents, businesses and the voluntary and community sector)

Qualitative interviews:

- 11 journalists
- 5 politicians
- 8 corporate stakeholders

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Main Findings

Overall views

As in 2012, the stakeholders were interested in what HMRC does and felt they knew a fair amount or a great deal about HMRC's work.

Overall, taking into account everything they thought was important, most stakeholders were favourable towards HMRC, while only a small number were unfavourable.

In contrast to the findings from 2012, this favourability is translating more into advocacy (people speaking well of HMRC) although only among corporate stakeholders, of whom almost half are advocates. The most common reasons for stakeholders being critical of HMRC were customer service and HMRC's ability to get on top of its relationship with large corporations.

The qualitative research revealed that, overall, many stakeholders felt HMRC had been improving, citing, for example, better communications and how it is dealing with large amounts of organisational change and new policies. Moreover, they had some sympathy for HMRC, with a few stating that it had a difficult job.

When asked to sum up their views of HMRC in the qualitative research, stakeholders expressed a range of issues from the positive (helpful, approachable, hardworking) to the less positive (bureaucratic, unresponsive, not transparent). Their ideal HMRC would be efficient, open and proactive. Although some thought that HMRC was already improving along these lines, most stakeholders would like to see more.

Performance

Overall, a slight majority of stakeholders thought that HMRC performed well as the country's tax authority, with the most common reasons for stating this being that HMRC did its best/does a good job and collects the right amount of tax.

The most common reasons for thinking that HMRC performed badly were that HMRC failed to collect tax from large businesses and pursued individuals aggressively or inflexibly to ensure they paid the correct amount of tax.

Trust in HMRC is fairly high among stakeholders, with a significant majority agreeing that 'HMRC is an organisation I can trust', up from a far smaller majority in 2012. Most believe HMRC can be relied upon to carry out its duties properly and professionally, up from half in 2012.

A slight majority of stakeholders, however, still did not think that HMRC treats all of its customers even-handedly, and fewer still think that HMRC can be relied upon to look after customers' interests.

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Views of HMRC's performance on specific issues were also mixed. A minority of stakeholders thought that HMRC's effectiveness in tackling tax avoidance, tax evasion, and implementing new policies and changes to tax and benefits system is good.

Staff and leadership

Stakeholders were twice as likely as in 2012 to rate the quality of HMRC leadership and management as good.

Views of staff at HMRC were generally positive. Most stakeholders felt that the technical expertise of the staff they deal with was good. A large majority said that HMRC take their issues/queries seriously, more than two-thirds were satisfied with the way staff take responsibility for finding solutions/answers and their promptness in dealing with issues/queries, and a larger majority still say that the staff they deal with are courteous and friendly. Less positively, just over half of all stakeholders, were satisfied with the number of different staff members or departments they have to speak to in order to deal with issues/queries.

The qualitative research revealed that many stakeholders were satisfied with their named point of contact at HMRC, but less satisfied when they have to interact with other parts of the organisation.

Journalist Perceptions

Despite this general favourability, journalists tend to remain neutral for the sake of professional ethics.

Most journalists feel generally favourable towards HMRC, and think that there are boundaries within which it works – such as issues of confidentiality and resource. Furthermore, journalists tend to recognise that, like politicians, they largely hear the negative stories about HMRC, not the positive.

Journalistic views of HMRC press offices were mixed. Positive points were appreciation of a single, central point of contact, and an understanding that HMRC are generally good at press releases and 'proactive' communication. However, there were criticisms regarding the press offices' response times, openness (within understood confidentiality constraints), and trust of the press.

Information and contact

Most stakeholders say they receive the right amount of information from HMRC. Levels of contact with HMRC are down significantly since 2012.