



HM Revenue  
& Customs

Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duty) Regulations  
2011, section 149: How HMRC complies with its  
public sector equality duties.

31 January 2016

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## About this report

This document is the publication of equality information required by Regulation 2 of the Equality Act Specific Duty Regulations (SI 2011/2260). It covers the period 1 February 2015 – 31 January 2016 and shows how HMRC complies with the public sector equality duty in section 149 Equality Act 2010, in relation to its customer service and policy administration activities.

This report provides evidence to show how we carry out the duties listed below. It complements the evidence provided in the report for 2014-15 and the HMRC Workforce Diversity Data report for 2014-15. For future years, we will align our customer equalities report with the Workforce Diversity Data report.

We detail our equality objectives, and progress towards achieving these, in Appendix A.

The equality regulations require all public bodies to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Promoting equality of opportunity means public bodies have to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages for groups of people
- take steps to meet the needs of protected groups of people
- encourage all groups of people to participate in public life or other activity in situations where their participation is low.

## About HMRC

### Background information

We are the UK's tax, payments and customs authority, and we have a vital purpose: we collect the money that pays for the UK's public services and help families and individuals with targeted financial support. We do this by being impartial and increasingly effective and efficient in our administration. We help the honest majority to get their tax right and make it hard for the dishonest minority to cheat the system.

We were established by an Act of Parliament in 2005 as a new department replacing the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise.

We are a non-ministerial department, established by Commissioners as part of the Revenue and Customs Act 2005. This act gives responsibility for the administration of the tax system to Commissioners appointed by HM the Queen. The Commissioners are drawn from the department's top management.

We report to Parliament through our Treasury minister who oversees our spending.

The Treasury takes the lead on strategic tax policy and policy development. We are responsible for maintaining and implementing policy. This arrangement for policy making is known as the 'policy partnership'.

We:

- safeguard the flow of money to the Exchequer through our collection, compliance and enforcement activities
- make sure that money is available to fund the UK's public services
- facilitate legitimate international trade, protect the UK's fiscal, economic, social and physical security before and at our border
- collect UK trade statistics
- administer statutory payments such as Statutory Sick Pay and Statutory Maternity Pay
- help families and individuals with targeted financial support through payment of tax credits
- administer the Government Banking Service.

We aim to administer the tax system in the most simple, customer-focused and efficient way.

We are responsible for:

- income tax, Corporation Tax, Capital Gains Tax, Inheritance Tax, Insurance Premium Tax, Stamp, Land and Petroleum Revenue Taxes
- environmental taxes
- the Climate Change Levy, Aggregates Levy and Landfill Tax
- Value Added Tax (VAT), including import VAT
- Customs duty
- excise duties
- National Insurance
- tax credits
- Child Benefit
- enforcing payment of the National Minimum Wage

- recovering Student Loan repayments.

We collected record tax revenues of £517.7 billion in 2014-15.

Almost every UK individual and business is a direct customer of HMRC. Our customers include 45 million individuals and 5.4 million businesses in the UK and a large number of non-UK nationals who pay UK taxes. They also include legal entities, such as limited companies, partnerships, charities and trusts.

Our customers have a diverse and complex range of requirements and all protected equality characteristics can be found among them. Our activities range from supporting people to claim the right amount of tax credits and benefits and pay the right amount of tax, to giving advice on complex financial transactions.

Our enforcement and compliance activities create a level playing field for the majority of people and businesses who are compliant and tackle those who bend or break the rules and don't pay. We use a 'promote, prevent, and respond' strategy, making it easier for people to do the right thing, so we can target the minority who try to cheat the system.

The largest taxes we are responsible for in terms of both customer impact and yield, are income tax and National Insurance Contributions, which are collected primarily through the PAYE system and from VAT. In 2014-15, we collected £163.1 billion and £108 billion respectively.

We promote equality and diversity awareness among our employees through a long-standing strategy. Equality and diversity training is mandatory and additional training is available for managers – including how to recognise and prevent unconscious bias.

We are careful to ensure that we meet our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, including the need to recognise the impact that our decisions have on the nine protected groups. These groups cover: gender, race, disability, religion and other beliefs, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, and for the purposes of the requirement not to discriminate – marriage and civil partnership.

To inform our decision-making on proposed policy measures, where appropriate, we carry out assessments of the likely impact on equality. These assessments are published by HM Treasury. This ensures that we consider equality when making a decision, developing a policy or implementing a change, and we include an equality analysis if appropriate.

### **HMRC's customer service**

Our customers increasingly want their services delivered through the immediacy and convenience of digital channels. We are looking across all of our work in order to present our customers with a seamless, joined-up, more highly-personalised service that is delivered increasingly in real time and through online channels. By April 2016, every individual taxpayer will have access to their own digital account – simple, personalised and secure, offering an increasing range of services.

We know that not everyone can use computers for a variety of reasons including illness, and disability. We have developed a range of support services via the Government Digital Service Assisted Digital programme for these customers. We have also worked with charities and the voluntary sector to make sure that they or their families and friends can do things on behalf of someone else, through our Trusted Helper service.

We also operate a volunteering scheme, providing opportunities for staff to develop a greater understanding of our customers' needs so that we can improve the service we offer. Volunteering with key customer groups enables us to understand better the problems they face, to build their understanding of tax and National Insurance and it also enables us to share our skills with them. Our staff volunteer with customers who need extra help, such as pensioners, disabled people, low income groups and migrant workers.

## How HMRC helps customers who need extra support

We offer services through a range of channels for those who really need them, including over the phone and through face-to-face visits.

We offer our Needs Extra Support (NES) service, where teams of telephone advisers can spend more time with customers who need extra help. They link up with other parts of HMRC so they can help customers with everything from debt management to Child Benefit, joining things up so the customer doesn't have to – they don't work on single taxes or follow scripts rigidly. They can also book face-to-face appointments with mobile advisers so we are able to arrange local, and even home visits, for those who really need it. We offer a personalised service that is tailored to a customer's individual needs.

From January 2015 to December 2015, our NES service:

- handled 93,730 telephone calls. During busy periods we arrange call back referrals, with all call back requests handled within three working days
- supported 22,518 customers face-to-face in community venues or in their homes
- resolved queries in almost 13,000 customer letters from March 2015 to December 2015.

Customers are also able to access the NES service through additional routes such as online or via our voluntary sector partners, ensuring that our vulnerable customers are able to access this enhanced service quickly.

Online access to the service is available for customers with visual, speech or hearing issues, where a telephone referral may not be their preferred option.

Our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners, such as TaxAid, are able to use a direct route to the NES service for customers they support. We have worked with VCS partners to develop digital technology to provide better support for our customers. This includes working with the Royal Association of the Deaf (RAD), whose staff use Skype software to enable translation into sign language to help hearing impaired customers using our telephony service.

We commissioned a public affairs research agency to evaluate the NES service. The evaluation found that levels of customer satisfaction with the service were high both during quieter and busier times of the year and that the referral process was largely working well for customers with explicit needs. Read more about the [NES evaluation report](#) published in July.

In limited circumstances, where a customer finds it particularly difficult to engage with the tax system as they might have a temporary or sporadic illness, including mental illness, they might be eligible for 'special relief'. This is a process, based on evidence of ill health, where we would not pursue the tax that is legally due, at that time, because it would be considered 'unconscionable' for us to take that course of action.

Read more about [special relief for people who are elderly or infirm](#) or [special relief for those with mental health issues](#)

Our grant funding programme was worth £2 million in 2014-15, giving financial help to social enterprises, co-operatives and large and small mutuals. These include building societies, co-operative and community benefit societies, credit unions, friendly societies and other registered societies. The programme aims to:

- help hard-to-reach and vulnerable customers to get the payments which they are entitled to and pay the right amount of tax
- improve the experience of hard-to-reach and vulnerable customers when they deal with us

- help us to understand better the needs of customers who seek extra support from the voluntary and community sector.

We value the help that unpaid agents, such as friends, family and charities can give to vulnerable customers and support voluntary sector organisations through our Voluntary Sector Taxes Resolution Service. We have also developed an online authorisation service for agents, which includes voluntary sector organisations.

We have improved our service for bereaved customers, which we developed with colleagues across HMRC, together with other government departments. We have introduced a more tailored process, enhancing the service we provide to approximately 400,000 customers each year.

This means that for PAYE customers (as we have most of the information we need through the details provided in real time by employers and pension providers to settle their tax affairs, an automated reconciliation can take place at any time during the year.

For Self Assessment customers, we issue personalised letters to match an individual's circumstances. We also settle tax affairs throughout the year, to give our customers certainty over their finances more quickly, rather than waiting until the end of the year.

We established our Needs Extra Support Team in Debt Management and Banking to provide support for vulnerable customers who cannot be served through our usual lines of business.

The Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD) offers an advocacy and advice service for British Sign Language (BSL) customers with complex tax issues or for those who need help when they communicate with us. The association uses BSL to communicate with customers using an online video link. It provides in-depth support for customers who would otherwise struggle with spoken or written English. If the RAD adviser needs advice from us to support the customer, they will contact our Voluntary Sector Taxes Resolution Service, or the NES team.

The association has also launched a new video relay service aimed at customers with hearing difficulties who want to handle their own affairs. Customers can book a time to use the new video relay service and use sign language with a BSL interpreter via a webcam. The interpreter links to one of our advisers to create a real time three-way conversation between the customer and us, via the interpreter.

The RAD also hosts a microsite, which provides access to the advocacy, advice and new video relay services – this is a website with an additional page or cluster of pages that supplement a company's primary website. It also includes information and BSL captioned web clips, linked to our guidance and Frequently Asked Questions. This is proving popular, with 3,000 hits since its launch in June 2015.

This new service was a runner up at the Compact Awards 2015, which celebrate excellent partnership-working between local and national government and the voluntary and community sector. It has also been shortlisted in the 'most accessible mainstream service' category for RAD's 175 Anniversary Awards in February 2016.

### **How our customer service and policy work comply with Section 149 of the Equality Act**

Our Central Customer Directorate has a dedicated customer equality team that has direct access to our leadership and decision-making powers. The team works with a wide range of external stakeholders, listens to concerns, and acts within the department to ensure that we comply with equality law, provide the best possible service for people in protected equality groups, and drive forward improvements in customer service.

The team builds its understanding of equality issues affecting customers from a number of sources. It has strong connections with the customer complaints policy team to ensure that all complaints, where discrimination is alleged, are analysed. The team has links with our appeals and internal review policy, and identifies and advises on appeals concerning discrimination issues. The team also runs a bi-annual Disabled

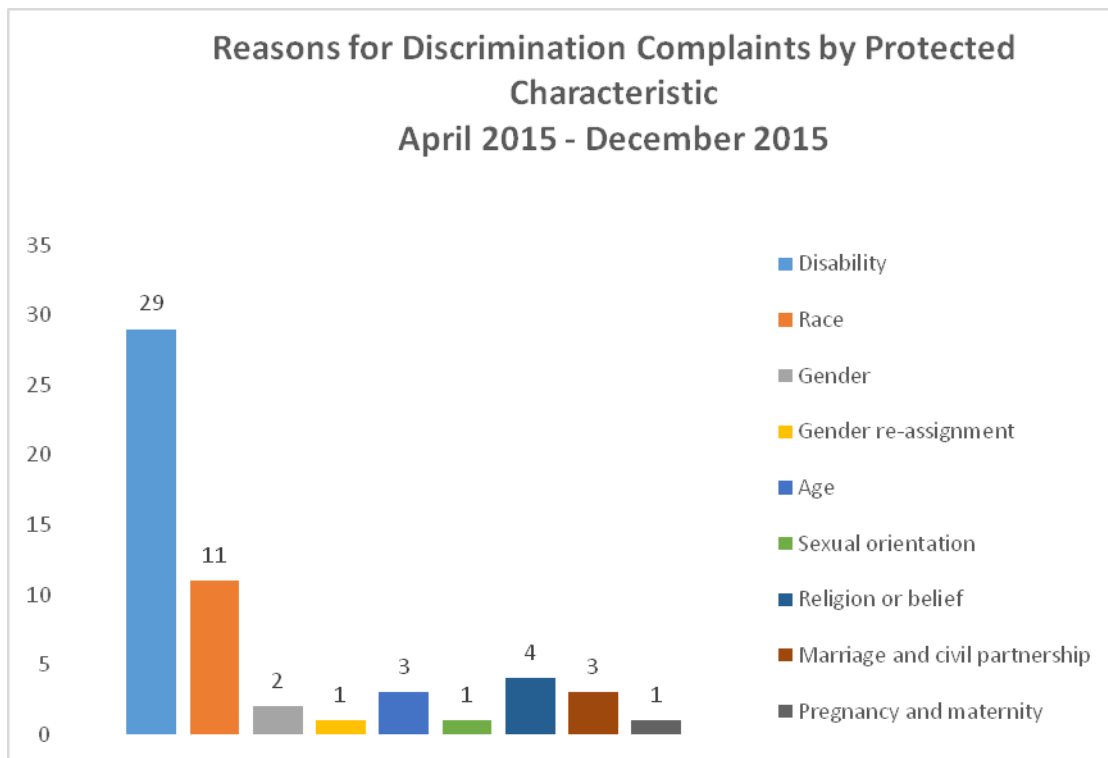
Customers Consultation Group with a number of external stakeholder groups. It hosts a mental health consultation forum to discuss issues faced by customers with mental health conditions.

The team also liaises with other government departments including HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Government Equalities Office.

We monitor equality complaints to ensure that our products and processes do not breach the Equality Act 2010. We also use complaints information to help us to improve our customer services.

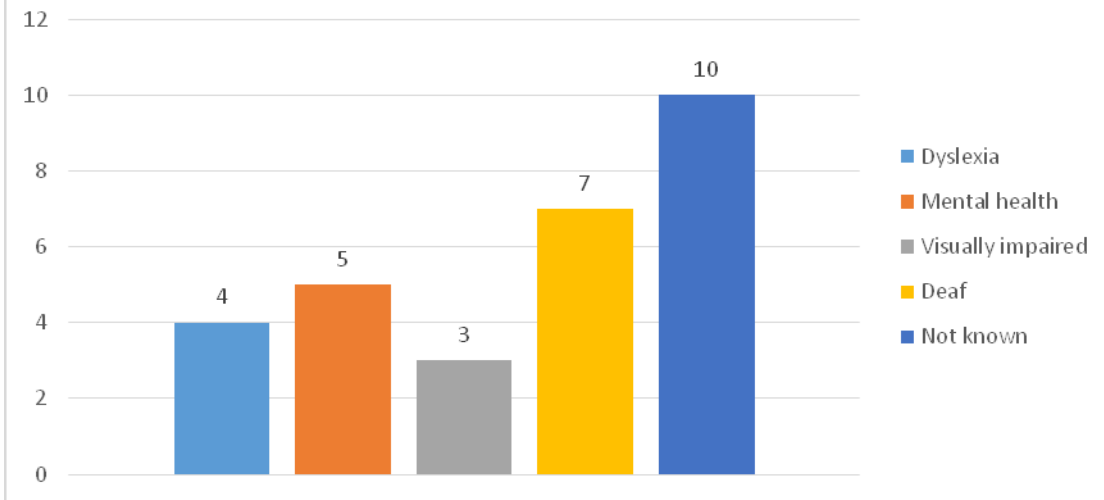
The following graphs illustrate the amount and category of equality complaints recorded on our Enterprise complaints and correspondence system between April and December 2015.

The first graph shows complaints by protected characteristic. The second chart gives further information about the type of disability complaints that we have received, where known.





## Complaints by Disability April 2015 to December 2015



We received 104 equality-related complaints during the period from 1 February 2015 to 25 January 2016. To put this in context, we receive between 70 and 80,000 complaints from our customer base of 45 million individuals and 5.4 million businesses.

### The Budget process

In partnership with HM Treasury, we advise ministers on measures that are included in the annual Budget cycle. We help to ensure that equality considerations and impacts are taken into account as part of the policy decision-making process.

We publish all Budget tax measures with a short summary of equality impacts in Tax Impact Information Notices (TIINs) on GOV.UK at the time of the Budget and Autumn Statement. The customer equality team monitors each measure and provides advice on identifying and mitigating any impacts. Further information on [HMRC TIINs](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

Information about completing Equality Impact Assessments and a wide range of equalities guidance is available on the intranet to all staff.

All organisational change programmes and projects are required to consider equality when they identify the impact on customers.

We work with external stakeholders to provide greater insight into these, identifying alternative approaches where appropriate. All change projects have equality on their risk registers and we use these registers to help ensure that we give appropriate and proportionate regard to equality issues. The customer equality team provides advice on how to identify equality impacts in change projects and details actions that we might take to minimise any risks and impacts.

### Procurement

We are committed to ensuring responsible practices when we procure buildings, goods, works and services. A non-discrimination clause is built into all contracts with suppliers. We have also produced a suppliers'

charter (in partnership with the Home Office) as part of our sustainable procurement strategy setting out a range of objectives, including equality. Suppliers are encouraged to:

- ensure they have effective equality and diversity policies in place
- ensure all their staff have equality and diversity awareness training
- ensure they have a clear equality and diversity governance structure
- complete self-assessments and commit to completing an improvement plan according to the self-assessment results
- communicate this agenda and their requirements throughout their supply chain
- ensure they apply government and HMRC principles and policies on equality when acting on their behalf.

## Digital services

We carried out a thorough equality impact assessment ahead of the development and rollout of our Assisted Digital service. The Government Digital Service launched the current Digital Inclusion Charter in 2014 to reduce the number of individuals who do not have basic digital skills – assessed at 10.5 million people in 2014.

Alongside this, the government also committed to:

- increase Broadband coverage to 97% of premises by 2017
- reduce the number of people who are offline by 25% by 2016 and continue to do this every two years, so that by 2020 everyone who wishes to use digital services has everything they need to do so.

Over the past year, we have focused on the following key initiatives to support our customers:

- developing the skills of our contact centre advisers so they can support customers who need additional help, to get online or use our new digital services, such as tax credits renewals
- working with charities to develop services and piloting a new service with RAD
- developing a nine-month digital inclusion delivery plan working with private and public sector organisations to support customers in deprived areas
- involving our advisers in a number of outreach sessions with private and public sector organisations
- linking to the Digital Friends initiative on GOV.UK – a scheme to encourage civil servants to teach their digital skills to friends, family, neighbours or colleagues who are offline. By increasing awareness and encouraging people to teach digital skills, civil servants can help to reach the estimated 21% of the UK population, assessed in 2014, who lack the basic skills required to benefit from the internet. Helping more people to get online will also help to address wider social issues and support economic growth. They are able to share their experiences on Facebook and Twitter using the tag #DigitalFriends.

The Tinder Foundation, a not-for-profit social enterprise supporting digital engagement, has helped 244,000 people to gain the basic digital skills needed to get online safely and securely, since October 2014. As part of our engagement, in 2015-16 we will support an additional 50,000 individuals.

We are focusing on specific customer groups among the highest number of digitally excluded people, including:

- those in social housing – 37% of those who are digitally excluded are social housing tenants (from the Government Digital Service Inclusion Strategy, 2014)
- those on lower wages, or unemployed – 17% of people earning less than £20,000 never use the internet, compared with 2% of people earning more than £40,000. Figures from the Government Digital Service Inclusion Strategy, 2014 also show that 44% of people without basic digital skills were on lower wages or unemployed
- people with disabilities – 33% of those with registered disabilities have never used the internet. On a wider measure, this group of people forms 54% of the total number of individuals in the UK who have never used the internet.

We develop digital services that aim to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2 (AA) to comply with the Government Digital Service 'digital by default' standards.

We do this by:

- designing web pages and forms, otherwise known as user interfaces, that are intuitive, use good levels of colour contrast and are responsive to enable them to work on a range of devices and screen sizes
- writing content that is concise and in plain English
- carrying out external user testing with elderly (over 75s), and disabled users at least twice during development (using a third party company)
- acting continuously on feedback once the new service is launched
- having a digital accessibility champion who has input into all of the services we are developing
- providing accessibility awareness training for all new employees, such as developers, designers, automated testing engineers and user researchers
- writing an accessibility checklist which focuses on building services for people to carry out transactions with HMRC
- testing assistive technology such as screen readers, screen magnifiers and speech recognition products (using a third party company)
- offering online webinars to help educate employers about accessibility.

## **Our achievements**

Our key highlights which we delivered for all of our customers during 2014-15 included:

- introducing PAYE for employees and digital Self Assessment
- launching Your Tax Account (YTA), which was used by more than 4 million customers between December 2014 and January 2016
- offering the tax credits online renewals service – enabling 750,000 customers to renew online by the 31 July 2015 deadline
- gaining a 96% satisfaction rating for our digital Self Assessment service from the 60% of the 1.99 million customers who opted to go paperless

- installing a new telephony system enabling us to answer more calls from customers, and more quickly at busy times
- using our new Contact Centre telephony system so we could answer 94% of calls first time on tax credits deadline day in 2015. In January 2015 our telephony supported more than 620,000 inbound calls for Self Assessment and 3.9 million calls in total
- moving our HMRC website successfully to GOV.UK.

## Stakeholder engagement

We consult with more than 50 stakeholder groups on a range of topics. This includes the Disabled Customer Consultation Group (DCCG) with representatives from a wide range of disability groups. It currently meets twice a year, and we have more regular, informal contact. Read further information about our [Disabled Customer Consultation Group](#), including minutes of past meetings.

We also have a Mental Health Forum comprising representatives from relevant external organisations, such as MIND and TaxAid.

Following a review, we revised HMRC's [Your Charter](#). The revised charter includes seven rights and seven obligations, setting out what customers can expect of us and also what they should do to get their tax affairs right.

We have also established a new Charter Committee strengthening how we are tested and measured against the charter's principles and ensuring that our broad customer base is represented in holding us to account.

## Research

We conduct research into a wide range of customer interactions and preferences. Many of these publications are equality-related, and this research feeds into our decision-making at both policy and operational levels. Find further details about [HMRC's External Research Programme 2015 to 2016](#)

## Equality Act 2010: HMRC's customer objectives

We first published these objectives in April 2012, representing the key priorities at the time. We will update these further in April 2016.

**1. Customer understanding** – we aim to improve understanding of the impacts that HMRC's services have on diverse groups of customers.

We plan to:

- recognise the need for enhanced support within equality groups by improving our broader understanding of those customers who need enhanced support
- increase stakeholder engagement through a variety of consultation networks
- improve our customer service by increasing our understanding of equality-related customer complaints.

We will measure our progress by:

- publishing research that highlights how customer groups, such as disabled people, are represented within the category of needing enhanced support from us
- using feedback from stakeholders to develop new policies and operational proposals
- identifying improvements that we can make to our customer service equality information reports.

Our progress so far:

We published research in May 2015, carried out by an independent research company that showed customer satisfaction for our Needs Extra Support (NES) service in its first year was high. More than 75% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

The evaluation included a total of 177 qualitative interviews and 715 quantitative interviews with our NES customers. They took account of 50 qualitative and 343 quantitative interviews with former Enquiry Centre users and 68 qualitative interviews with our staff and an online survey with 188 responses.

We publish online feedback from HMRC's Disabled Customer Consultation Group (DCCG), a group of external stakeholders. We also publish the [minutes of DCCG meetings](#)

We are reviewing our methods so we can continue to engage with stakeholders and receive feedback in the most effective way. We operate a Mental Health Forum with a range of external stakeholders, such as MIND and TaxAid.

We publish our annual reports on customer equality in January each year, to identify any customer service improvements, which we could make.

We review those complaints cases that relate to equality to identify issues and trends. Where we identify any issues, we consider if we need to adjust our approaches to customer service, and take the appropriate action if required.

We:

- review all proposed measures in the Budget, Chancellor's Autumn Statement, and consultation documents – dealing with 137 in the past year
- review all policy change requests and complete Equality Impact Assessments – completing approximately 50 in the past year
- consider how customers are likely to be affected by new policies.

**2. Electronic forms** – we aim to provide online forms that are accessible and usable by the widest possible range of customers.

We plan to build online, accessible forms to be used by all our customers that can be completed online and submitted electronically.

We will measure our progress by delivering online forms that meet the international standard for website accessibility (WCAG2.0 AA).

Our progress so far:

We have invested in an ambitious programme to transform our online and digital services.

We aim to offer fully digital and accessible services by:

- providing tax accounts for individuals
- providing tax accounts for businesses
- giving a personalised user experience, similar to online banking
- publishing a set of procedures, protocols, and tools for building software and applications, as well as encouraging innovative digital solutions from our suppliers.

We have more than 40 digital projects underway at present. We set out a 'digital roadmap' with the key points in our digital journey through to March 2016. In December 2015, we published [Making tax digital](#), our roadmap until 2020.

Our progress during the past year includes:

- developing ten new services including the Business Tax Account, Digital Self Assessment, tax credits online, and PAYE for Employees
- enabling our customers to download our iForms on 2.6 million occasions, instead of using paper forms. This reduced the number of printed forms we dealt with by four million. We also saw a 10% reduction in customer errors

- enabling our Self Assessment customers to submit 250,000 more online returns in 2014-15. We were able to send 500,000 email prompts to replace paper ones for digital Self Assessment, and we printed 770,000 fewer annual Tax Summaries for tax credits with 408,000 customers renewing online for the first time in 2014
- rolling out more digital services for businesses has been at the heart of our developments – including Your Tax Account, the forerunner to the Business Tax Account. In the 2014-15 financial year, more than 1.9 million PAYE schemes with employees and pensioners reported PAYE in real time, submitting almost 45 million individual live PAYE records
- reducing the need for all our customers to contact us with new initiatives and switching from 0845 to cheaper 03 prefix helplines for those who may still choose to get in touch
- utilising a team dedicated to Assisted Digital services. The team helps to ensure that the 18% of UK adults who do not use the internet at present, are able to get the support they need to use our digital services.

**3. Customer service** – we aim to improve our customer service delivery in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, to diverse groups of customers.

We plan to:

- ensure that our public sector duty is reflected in appropriate customer related policies, processes, projects and training
- align the equality requirements in the act with Northern Ireland Section 75 requirements and agree these with the Northern Ireland Equality Commission
- continue to provide funding to voluntary and charity sector organisations who give advice and support to a diverse range of vulnerable groups, including migrant workers, disabled, elderly and low-income customers.

We will measure our progress by:

- reporting improvements in our equality information reports
- reaching agreement with the Northern Ireland Equality Commission on a Northern Ireland Equality Scheme to demonstrate compliance with legislation
- provide funding which leads to:
  - more eligible people claiming the tax credits, benefits and tax allowances to which they are entitled
  - an increase in how we and our customers are able to identify tax liability
  - greater tax compliance and awareness of the tax system
  - improved customer experience as they understand better their obligations and entitlements.

Our progress so far:

We subject all of our policies to careful analysis to ensure that we address any impacts on equality. We publish equality analyses, Tax Impact and Information Notes (TIINs), and policy consultation documents. TIINs describe the impact of new, or amended, fiscal measures. We have reviewed our processes recently to ensure that they remain to be effective.

Our discussions are continuing with the Northern Ireland Commissioner as we work towards an agreed position on our approach to an equality scheme.

Our grant funding has enabled a greater number of voluntary and charity sector organisations to give advice and support to a diverse range of vulnerable groups, including migrant workers, disabled, elderly and low-income customers.

One effect of our funding has been the introduction of enhanced support for British Sign Language customers, including a video relay service in collaboration with the Royal Association for the Deaf.

In the past year, our Needs Extra Support service handled 91,160 telephone calls and supported 22,435 customers face-to-face in community venues or in their own homes. More than three-quarters of customers said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

We have built equality into our processes. For example, the Marriage Allowance includes the provisions from the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. This was passed on 17 July 2013, and the first marriages of same sex couples took place on 29 March 2014.

We participate at many PRIDE events around the country as part of the Civil Service Rainbow Alliance. We take a positive stance against discrimination and violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in order to promote equal rights and increase our visibility to all customers.