

Vision
up to 2021

Business Plan
for 2016-18



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Foreword

Welcome to my first business plan for the independent Adjudicator's Office. I took up post as the Adjudicator in April 2016 and this business plan takes us up to March 2018. The Adjudicator's Office reviews complaints made by customers of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Valuation Office Agency (VOA), referred to below as the 'departments'.



Helen Megarry,
The Adjudicator

Foreword

It is an exciting time to join the Adjudicator's Office, with HMRC and VOA in the midst of transformational change with their emphasis on improving customer service and learning from complaints.

Modern approaches to complaint handling endorse a focus on achieving positive outcomes for customers as the most effective way to resolve such disputes. Effective complaint handling requires attention to process and systems as well as culture and behaviours. Resolving complaints early provides a better experience for customers and reduces painful and costly escalation through the complaints process. Well-handled complaints provide valuable, real time feedback directly from customers about the services provided, reduce costs, and improve customer satisfaction.

Over the year ahead we will explore opportunities to develop an accessible and flexible service for customers who complain to us. This requires an overhaul of our processes and modernisation of our technology. We'll consult with customers about how they prefer us to deliver our service and will develop an approach to complaints that encourages respectful dialogue with both customers and the departments about what has gone wrong and why.

When reviewing individual complaints we'll hold the departments to account on behalf of individual customers; to follow their policies and procedures fairly and to treat their customers in accordance with their charters. If we find that nothing has gone wrong we will try to make sure that our customers understand what has happened. Our feedback to the departments will be fair and will encourage and support them to improve.

HMRC and the VOA have made considerable progress in improving complaint handling. From our independent perspective and with our insight directly reflecting customer's experience we will support them to improve further. We'll work with the departments to develop the systems needed to embrace and act on the feedback customers give through complaints. Learning from complaints will also inform wider improvements such as; preventing mistakes and wasted effort, reducing future complaints and improving services to all customers, not only those that complain.

We'll seek to build on good practice, to develop trust and dialogue and to work with the departments to create a common purpose, to achieve fair outcomes of complaints and improve services for customers.

I am confident that we are fully supported throughout HMRC and the VOA in maintaining our independence in terms of pursuit of our mission and vision, our decision-making and processes. I am impressed with the regard in which the Adjudicator's Office is held and hope to provide the balance of challenge and support to help them to achieve their goals.

Under our governance arrangements I will report directly to the Board of HMRC and VOA Chief Executive, and in my annual report, on the issues that get in the way of improving effective complaint handling and learning from complaints.

Thank you to all the people across the Adjudicator's Office team who continue to work with amazing commitment to providing a quality service to our customers throughout the upheaval of transition in leadership at the Adjudicator's Office. We are in a strong position to build from and I value the contribution that they have all made to shape the vision of the future that will help us to make a real difference to the services provided by HMRC and the VOA to their customers.




Helen Megarry,
The Adjudicator

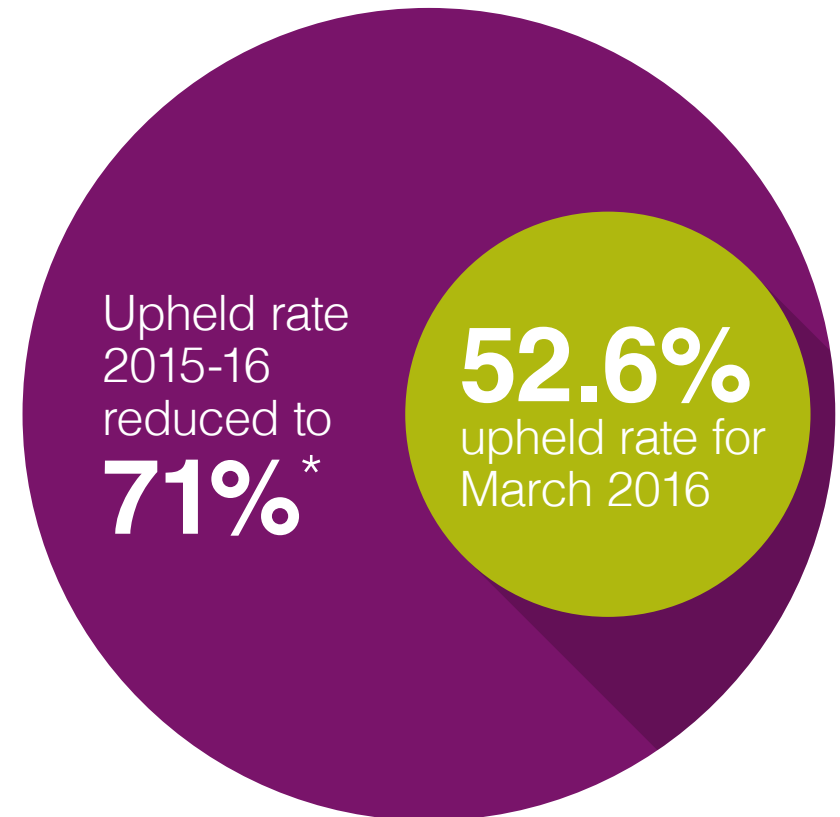
Our achievements 2015-16

13,000 
enquiries handled

1,267 
complaints received

10.7 
average monthly
clearance time for
partially upheld cases
(as at March 2016)

970 
complaints resolved



* compared to 84% in 2014-15

Our role

The role of the Adjudicator was created when HM Revenue and Customs, and the Valuation Office Agency decided to introduce an independent tier of complaint handling, to provide customers with a higher level of service and give the departments the opportunity to learn lessons and make improvements.



The Adjudicator's Office:

- **Resolves complaints that come to us by providing an accessible and flexible service and making fair and impartial decisions**

We provide a high quality, impartial and independent review of complaints for individual customers.

We are flexible in our approach to promote resolution.

We will try to identify the specific issues that prevent resolution and address those in the quickest and most effective way.

When appropriate we will investigate and make formal recommendations.

We will focus on what is important to our customers and help them to make complaints in the ways that best suit their needs.

- **Supports and encourages effective resolution throughout the complaint handling process**

We encourage and empower effective complaint handling in the department's processes.

We will focus on customer experience and achieving positive outcomes.

We will share good practice and role model the approach and behaviours that support effective complaint handling.

- **Uses insight and expertise to support the departments to learn from complaints and improve services to customers**

We will identify and feedback on the trends and issues that drive complaints or negative customer experience.

We will provide an external perspective to feedback which is informed directly by our customers.

We will support learning from complaints to improve the service provided to customers, both by the Adjudicator's Office and by the departments.

Our vision up to 2021

Our vision will be achieved by working with HM Revenue and Customs and the Valuation Office Agency, using our independent insight and expertise to achieve positive outcomes for our customers.



Positive customer outcomes:

- **Complaint handling is trusted as fair**

This applies to complaint handling throughout the process of both the departments and the Adjudicator's Office. The Adjudicator will maintain the reputation for independence and impartiality.

We will seek feedback that differentiates between the complaint outcome and the customer's perception of their treatment.

- **Responsive to customer needs**

The service is designed around customer need and is provided in a way that suits our customers.

People feel that it is worthwhile complaining because they are respected and listened to and understand our decisions.

- **Insight from complaints improves services for customers**

Our feedback has a positive impact on customer service and experience both within the departments and the Adjudicator's Office.

Realising our vision

Our Business Plan 2016-18 sets out our objectives and what we will do during this period to meet them.



There are four key themes in our plan:



Our customers:

We will improve the service we give to our customers



Our people:

We will develop and engage our own people in order to benefit from their experience and potential



Learning from complaints:

We will use our insight and expertise to learn from complaints to improve services to customers (departments and within the Adjudicator's Office)



Our organisation:

We will transform the way we work, responding to the needs of our customers in order to become a more efficient and accountable organisation



Our customers

We will:

- **engage with our customers to better understand their needs and improve our services through:**
 - exploring and developing ways to capture customer feedback on service experience
 - developing methods to best utilise customer service data.
- **seek out opportunities to introduce choice for our customers in how to contact us, and provide additional help to those who need it**
- **generate innovative ways of working to resolve complaints more efficiently and effectively by:**
 - reviewing the use of phone and email during the course of complaint handling, and early discussions with customers at the outset to agree the key issues of their complaint
 - reviewing our investigation communications to ensure expectations are well managed with clear explanations of process and timescales.
- **consult with stakeholders and examine customer feedback to develop and publish customer service standards**
- **update our corporate information to provide clear and current guidance and advice for our customers through:**
 - continually reviewing and refreshing all our existing internet content, so customers can easily and intuitively find the information they seek about the Adjudicator's Office and how the complaint processes operate
 - consideration of financially viable opportunities to build and launch a new internet site on an alternative official platform.



Learning from complaints

We will:

- **develop and manage strategic relationships with key stakeholders by:**
 - producing detailed stakeholder mapping and planning
 - developing and implementing a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan.
- **give a formal and structured mechanism for providing feedback to the departments and for reciprocal reporting of action taken as a result of our feedback through:**
 - identifying areas for learning
 - developing and consulting on best practice complaint handling guidance
 - developing systems to collate, analyse and identify themes, trends and learning from case outcomes.
- **improve our feedback, to help customers better understand the outcomes from their complaint and how the Adjudicator's role and remit was used in their case.**

Our people

We will:

- **build a high performing, engaged and flexible workforce that is committed to delivery of our strategic objectives by:**
 - developing our leaders to ensure they are role models of our values and the behaviours, which support and encourage a positive complaint handling environment and are well skilled at setting future direction, managing change and performance, building capability, developing their people and delivering results
 - engaging with our people so they understand and are committed to our vision up to 2021, and they have clear strategically aligned performance objectives and receive regular constructive feedback from their managers
 - identifying, acknowledging and making appropriate recognition of beyond expectation achievements and contributions
- providing more opportunities for our people to voice their views on how we operate and influence improvements in the ways we work; through such mediums as more inspiring communications, bulletins and activities, and a Community Group with the scope to take forward improvements
- increasing focus on capability through our investment in learning and development in accordance with our strategic objectives and goals.
- **develop and embed a learning and development culture that engenders the best practice in complaint handling and behaviours, which support and encourage a positive complaint handling environment by:**
 - engaging with our people so they understand our values and behaviour expectations, and become role models for both
 - providing the technical, digital, IT and other skills support and training our people require at the time they need it so they can be effective and confident in applying their new knowledge from the outset
- developing our people, their skills and expertise through provision and support for appropriate opportunities such as job shadowing, job experience, coaching, training and profession events and courses of study, such as those of the Operational Delivery Profession
- engaging with our people to make effective and full utilisation of their annual five day allocation of learning and development to support their own continuous improvement.
- **promote diversity, inclusion, social mobility and positive behaviours in our workplaces, supporting programmes and initiatives that encourage these and will not tolerate any form of bullying, harassment, discrimination or negative behaviours.**



Our organisation

We will:

- **provide a clear vision for the Adjudicator's Office, where we are heading and how we will get there, and provide our people with opportunities to help determine and achieve our vision**
- **introduce a structured approach to present, measure and monitor improvements for customers by:**
 - developing quality standards for complaint handling
 - reviewing and subsequent streamlining of our processes and to implement a new quality control and assurance regime, which is both more efficient and drives up quality
 - exploring and developing different methods for complaint resolution and testing and evaluating new ways of working prior to implementation
 - developing and consulting on a plan for dissemination of good complaint handling principles
 - modernising our IT systems and digital services to improve efficiency and increase online accessibility for our customers.
- **operate within our allocated budget and identify continuous improvement year-on-year efficiencies and cost savings through:**
 - redesigning our business operating model and associated organisational structure
 - developing a strategic workforce management plan and implementing a robust and accurate forecasting regime aligned to location and resource requirement plans.
- **demonstrate our corporate commitment to improving social mobility, community wellbeing and the environment at large by:**
 - supporting programmes and initiatives that can make a positive difference to people, such as providing apprenticeships and outreach work with schools
 - reducing our carbon footprint by making greater use of telephony, video conferencing and digital tools and keeping business travel to a minimum
- optimising use of our available floor space and rationalising our estate
- critically reviewing our procurement requirements and identifying alternatives with less negative impact.

Measuring our success

We will:

- **develop our data capture and reporting mechanisms. This will help us to establish a suite of quantitative and qualitative measures to reflect our performance and delivery against our vision and business plan outcomes.**
- **draw on a range of information sources which will collectively help us to measure success across all areas of responsibility within our four key themes:**
 - Our customers
 - Learning from complaints
 - Our people
 - Our organisation
- **present our findings in our annual reports.**

Managing our risks

Our Senior Leadership Team regularly reviews our organisational performance against business objectives and continually re-evaluates the risk landscape, identifying significant risks to our current and future business performance.



Managing our risks



We will:

- **develop a mitigation plan to actively manage our risks.**

The present key risks to achieving our vision and the delivery of our business plan are:

Our customers:

- New services are developed and delivered without understanding our customers needs and preferences resulting in the loss of trust in our handling of complaints
- We fail to put methods in place that would reduce the time it takes to review a complaint.

Learning from complaints:

- We don't act or pass on feedback to learn from complaints and seek service improvements
- The departments don't respect us and accept our decisions or act on our feedback with the result that end to end complaint handling is not improved, and there is no overall improvement in customer service.

Our people:

- We don't develop the capability of leaders to deliver our business goals
- We don't develop strategies and practices to develop an engaged workforce who understand and are committed to our vision
- We don't cultivate a learning culture that ensures everyone role models expertise and positive behaviours and has the right skills to offer a professional service.

Our organisation:

- The pace and scale of our transformation has a negative impact on efficiency, accountability and the service offered to our customers
- We don't secure the sustainable funding necessary to support the delivery of our transformation agenda
- We don't take action to work in a more sustainable way to reduce adverse impact to the environment
- We don't have the capacity to handle the volume of complaints received about the departments.



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