



THE END OF AN ERA...

It's true! HMRC's enquiry centres are to close during June 2014. So, what do you do if visiting one of these centres was the way you dealt with your tax affairs? All is not lost, if you need to make contact with HMRC you must call their main telephone helpline numbers either 0300 200 7950 (cheaper for some people) or 0845 300 0627 opening hours 08:00 – 20:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 – 16:00 Saturdays. You may be thinking that this isn't a great improvement, especially as call waiting times have not enjoyed the best press in recent years, but HMRC are working on their call 'pick up' times. Once through to the contact centre, if the adviser is unable to resolve your issue and assesses that you might need a little more help, they will have a new option that allows them to transfer you to a specialist team that can offer you extra support and where the officer you speak with will stay with you until your query is resolved.

This new team is made up of experienced HMRC officers who can liaise with other departments within HMRC, hold three way conversations and even call you back once they have investigated your query. They will endeavour to find out what your issue is and resolve it over the phone. If this is not possible, they are able to arrange for a face to face appointment at a venue local to you or if deemed necessary arrange a home visit for you. More importantly, they can spend time with you and deal with all of your tax issues in one go. Even better if you need to, you can call them back and speak to the same person.

Another important development is that HMRC officers can offer and transfer you to the services of the voluntary sector if your query is difficult for them to deal with. For example, if you want to complain about their service or an underpayment, or you want to appeal a penalty or even because your relationship with HMRC has broken down and you need help talking to them.

The service was piloted in the NE of England during the latter part of 2013 and proved successful for those who experienced it.

Can't get through on the HMRC numbers? The new service can also be accessed via the voluntary sector - Citizens Advice, Tax Help for Older People and Tax Aid being the main ones. (Age UK will transfer Tax queries to Tax Help for Older People.) All of these organisations will follow their own guidelines to decide how best to deal with the tax issue which, may or may not include transfer to the HMRC's new service.

If you have difficulty in using the phone due to a disability, but are happy using your computer there is an online form on HMRC's website (You do need to meet the criteria for using this form. If you don't, it's no use wasting your time because it will be refused). Go to <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/tools/visits/visit-request.htm>. You can also use text relay or text phone.

HMRC already offer an enhanced service for customers who don't have English as their first language, the Big Word translation service. Big Word is a translation service that HMRC use (and pay for). You should be able to access this service via the numbers above or the form on the website.

This article is by Tax Help for Older People (operated by registered charity No. 1102276), offering free tax advice to older people on lower incomes. Our Helpline number is 0845 601 3321 or geographical 01308 488066.