

Background Information

HM Revenue & Customs: Benefits and Credits Consultation Group

The Benefits and Credits Consultation Group is the main forum for HMRC Benefits & Credits (B&C) to consult with customer representative organisations on general tax credits and Child Benefit policy and operational issues. The group works to improve overall engagement with customers and also provides a sounding board for Ministers and for new initiatives in B&C

The Consultation Group meet every two months. Full minutes of the main meetings are published on the HMRC website at www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits/meetings.htm. Sub-group meetings are also held, when required, to discuss specific issues such as disability, claims from migrant workers and appeals.

B&C are not currently looking for new members of the Group. If you have any general queries related to HMRC Benefits & Credits policy or operational issues, you may wish to raise them through one of the existing member organisations which are:

- Age UK
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)
- Children's Society
- Citizens Advice (CA)
- Disability Alliance (DIAL)
- Gingerbread
- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG)
- National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers (NAWRA)
- Shelter
- Tax Aid
- The Grandparents' Association
- Turn2Us

B&C worked with a sub group of the Benefits and Credits Consultation Group to develop the 2011 tax credit marketing campaign. Particular products have been specially developed to support our third sector partners, for example a desk aid for

Citizens Advice staff covering the specific changes made to tax credits this year and highlighting areas that customers often had problems with.

We have provided members with the opportunity to review our main paper products this year. Our focus is on content that informs areas/groups of people who are considered to be vulnerable or who have specific needs, for example foster carers, to help them complete the forms correctly and claim their entitlement. HMRC have provided funding and seconded a member of staff to LITRG to help with the development of a new website they have produced for intermediary advisers (www.revenuebenefits.org.uk).

Customer insight framework

B&C Customer Service Team have developed a customer insight framework which, for the first time, pulls all B&C customer data from multiple sources together in one place. The database aligns with tax credits & Child Benefit processes and provides up to date insight on various customer segments. It has been used to answer questions about customer behaviour and helps us to understand our customers better, resulting in informed changes to our procedures & processes.

Bereaved Customers

We now offer customers who report bereavement an assisted telephone claims capture service. This is helping customers to get it right which means they get their money faster as the claim is more likely to be correct and complete. Customers who take up the telephone capture process should save on costs as it reduces the need to for the customer to contact B&C by phone or letter.

We have streamlined the finalisation process for bereaved customers by gathering all details at the time of the bereavement. This reduces the need to contact the customer at a later date to ask for information relating to their claim.

Foster Carers

Working with Consultation Group reps we have improved the guidance about foster carer claims for our staff and the advice given to new foster carers to help them claim correctly. The guidance has been clarified and we have introduced an assisted claims service to help foster carers identify whether they are eligible for Working Tax Credit as a self-employed foster carer rather than Child Tax Credit for which they are not eligible.

Renewals 2011-10-12

Each year customers need to finalise tax credits claims and renew for the following year. This causes a high peak in the number of customers trying to get in touch with us by phone, some of whom cannot always afford to keep trying

HMRC learned important lessons from the renewal period in 2010 that helped us improve customer service for the renewal period this year. We introduced changes to

make the process simpler for customers, for example, by making the process automatic where possible. This helped to reduce demand on the help line enabling customers who need to speak to us to get through on the phone and finalise and renew their claim. HMRC recruited an extra 1,000 temporary advisors this year to take calls during the peak period.

Reducing Demand on Contact Centres

HMRC Benefits and Credits have been working with Contact Centre Directorate to improve our processes by reducing the need for customers to call us but at the same time maintaining or improving levels of customer service. We use call classification data as the foundation for problem solve activities to improve our processes.

Since summer 2010 we have reduced demand in our Contact Centres. By investing time in managing customer expectations, we have cut the length of time we need to keep the customer on the phone. By streamlining our processes we have identified calls that are of low value to the customer and HMRC and eradicated them without damaging customer experience. This benefits the customer by making it easier for customers who need to call us to do so and reduces cost because they either spend less time on the phone each time they transact with us, or have their query answered by interactive voice recording which means they do not need to speak to an advisor. For instance, by identifying customers who would be automatically renewed by the colour of envelopes in which we sent out our communications we were able to tell customers, by voice messaging, whether or not they needed to stay on the line to speak to an advisor.

Child Benefit

We redesigned the Child Benefit claim form resulting in a reduction in critical error by 55% (i.e. error where contact with the customer is necessary to rectify); a reduction in single error cases by 40%; efficiency savings of £1.9m for HMRC and a reduced burden for the customer of £800k over 5 years; this improved customer confidence - 54% said it was easier to complete.

Tax Credits guidance notes

We have reduced the tax credits guidance notes from 55 pages to 24 with no increase in customer error.