



# Voluntary Sector guidance for triaging clients with tax problems

## What's changing?

HMRC have closed their Enquiry Centres from the end of June 2014 as they believe a better, more targeted service can be provided by other means. Taxpayers and Tax Credit recipients who need additional help from HMRC will be dealt with by the "Needs Extra Support" (NES) Teams, including face-to-face mobile advice for those that need it. There will be teams for tax, tax credits and child benefit.

Previously, if a client contacted you with a tax problem one of the options available was to direct them to their local Tax Enquiry Centre if you felt that was the best way of resolving their problem; this option is no longer available. In future you will need to decide whether the most appropriate course of action is to direct the client to HMRC's Contact Centre, or to HMRC's NES team, or to TaxAid, or Tax Help for Older People.

## How the model works

HMRC have released a chart over page showing how the new service for customers will work.

## A new service for HMRC customers needing help

The starting point for taxpayers and claimants seeking help will be HMRC's online service, telephone help via their Contact Centres or the Voluntary Sector. The online and telephone services should be able to help most clients with relatively straightforward queries and these services are not changing. It is in cases which are more complicated and taxpayers and claimants who need more help to resolve the issue where the new services come into play.

If someone is deemed to need extra help with sorting out their tax affairs then they can be handed off to the new teams. HMRC will do this themselves for callers to their contact centres or the Voluntary Sector advice agencies who have made arrangements with HMRC can hand their clients over directly. Voluntary Sector organisations that have not made an arrangement should follow their usual practice, but see triage selection guidance below to help decide between HMRC's contact centres or the specialist tax charities.



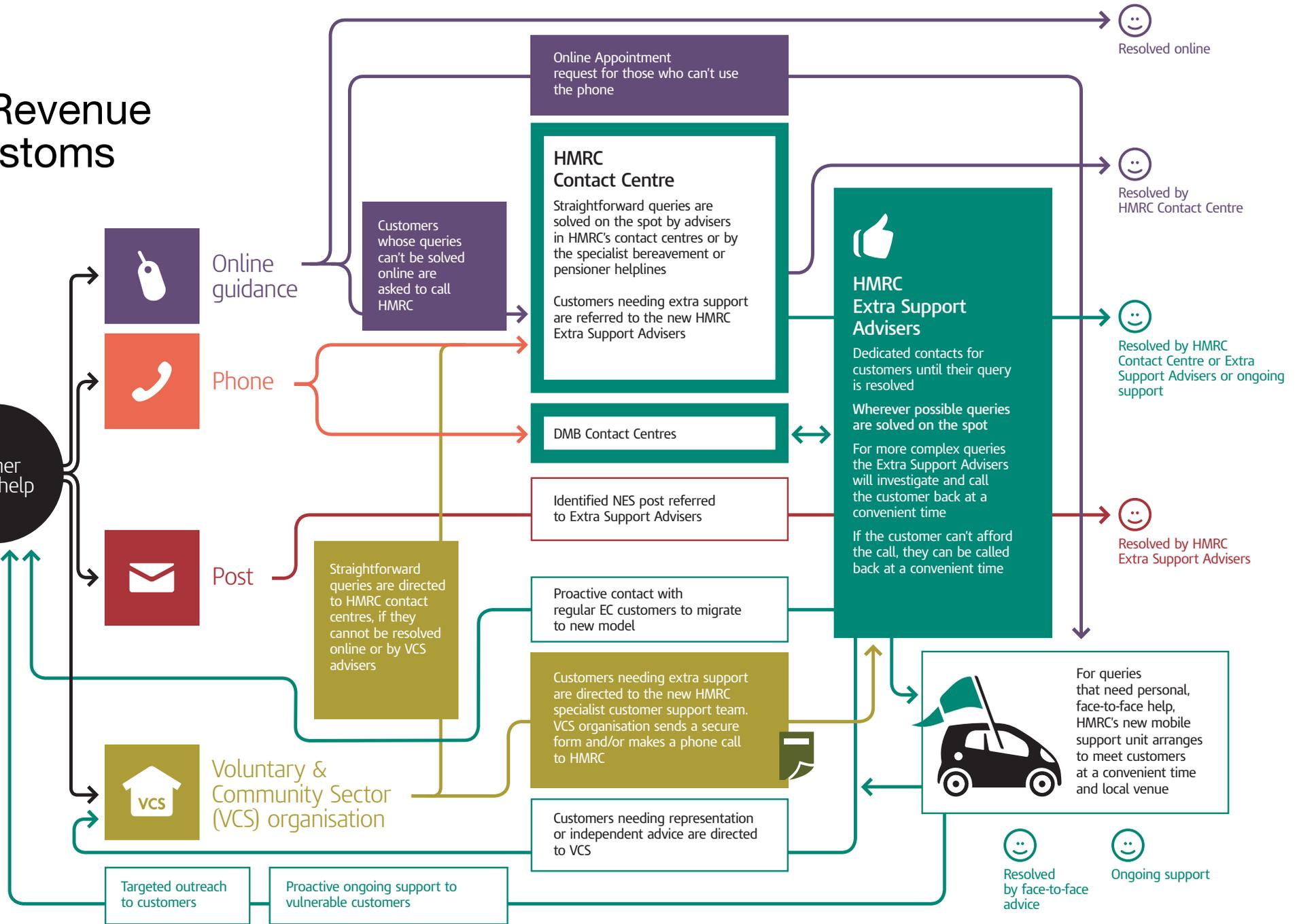
## TaxAid

TaxAid is a charity that provides free advice on tax and tax debt to the low paid who have not been able to resolve matters with HMRC. As a guideline, "low paid" is defined as £20,000 a year or less. Professional advisers respond via the helplines and hold face-to-face advice services around the country.



# HM Revenue & Customs

Customer needs help



## Needs enhanced support customer model



## Who gets extra help?

HMRC recognise six drivers of need which indicate that someone might require the extra help and they are access, confidence, mental or emotional state, capability, intricacy or where there is an HMRC driven need.

- **Access** (limited communication, limited time, limited mobility) - a client could have difficulty contacting HMRC because of their own disability (e.g. hard of hearing or visual impairment) or they could be a carer for a child or other family member with a disability. They could be elderly or ill which could make it difficult to contact HMRC. HMRC have stated that language difficulties or the cost of calls might be additional factors when assessing whether your clients are in need of extra support.

- **Confidence** (new to tax, over cautious, fear of modern channels) – this can be where they are new to tax and do not understand what is required of them. They could be anxious and need things to be explained in greater detail. They could be afraid of the telephone or internet and in the past have visited an Enquiry Centre as they perceive that they can only be helped via a face-to-face meeting.

- **Mental/Emotional State** (mental health, emotional stress) – this could be permanent or temporary and does not need to be medically certified. For example stress due to bereavement or other life crises could cause problems in dealing with tax matters.

- **Capability** (low literacy, learning difficulties, low IT skills) – this covers many areas including learning difficulties including dyslexia, memory problems, low literacy with difficulty completing forms, combined with lack of English, or lack of IT skills.

cont'd...

## Examples to help you decide if your client needs extra help:

### Help with forms:

A client has all of his records and the form he needs to complete but he is dyslexic and is concerned he might put a figure in the wrong box. He would meet the condition for being helped by the NES team on the grounds of capability. If this could not be resolved on the phone the NES adviser may arrange for a local face-to-face meeting with one of the NES team.

### Explanation and information:

A second client contacts you because she has received a tax demand for underpaid PAYE and she does not know how it has been calculated. She has called HMRC several times but still does not understand (capability) and she says she cannot continue calling as she has a disabled son (access). The NES team should be able to arrange a convenient time to contact the client and take the time to ensure she completely understands.

Note: this might not be the end of the story. Once she understands the background she might still need independent advice to challenge it.

### Correcting HMRC-held information:

A third client with learning disabilities has got into difficulties in the past because he had two jobs. He had previously underpaid tax because both of his employers gave him a personal allowance and he is now repaying the tax by monthly instalments. He is anxious that all tax codes are correct to avoid any further underpayments. The NES team should be able to arrange for new notices of coding to be issued to his employers reflecting how he wants his allowance to be allocated.



## Who needs extra help cont'd...

- **Intricacy** (complicated issue, multiple sources of income) – the level of intricacy will vary and could depend on other factors for example someone with learning difficulties would not be able to deal with a calculation someone without those problems would find straightforward. Seasonal or migrant workers would fall into this category.

- **HMRC Driven Need** (confusing letters, coding issues) – this could be where a mistake has been made by HMRC or previous attempts to resolve the problem have failed. Consider whether the client needs independent advice: if in dispute with HMRC it is more appropriate to hand them to TaxAid (or Tax Help for Older People). NES teams will not be able to provide tax advice or help with cases where a decision needs to be made of what figure should be put on a form.

### The Next Steps: Triaging

Once you have determined that a client has one of the drivers of need, the decision you need to make is where to send them next. At this stage you should assess whether the issue is routine or complex.

Examples of routine issues when it is sufficient for clients to be given Contact Centre phone numbers include matters where it is clear what is to be done and the requirement is to ask HMRC to undertake a “transaction”, for example in changing a tax code, or accessing information held only on their systems. This might be sufficient help even when clients may qualify as NES. Examples are:

**Asking for routine information:** How much do I owe? How do I pay? When do I get my refund? When will I get a reply to my letter? Have my tax returns been processed? Do I need to complete a tax return?

**Telling HMRC something, for example that impacts on their PAYE code:** I have decided to start drawing my pension but will continue part-time work. I have ceased self-employment. I have started a second job.

**Straightforward cases** should continue to be signposted to HMRC’s online or telephone help:

HMRC Online: [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)  
 Contact Centre: 0300 200 3300  
 or for those in Self Assessment  
 0300 200 3310

**For clients who cannot afford the call** you should let them know that HMRC will call them back if they ask, and fit the criteria for needing extra help.

If your advice agency does not have an arrangement to hand-off vulnerable clients for extra help, you need to decide if the client’s needs are suited to HMRC’s Contact Centre telephone operators (who can choose to forward into NES team if deemed to meet the drivers of need) – or to TaxAid or Tax Help for Older People as per your usual practice.

**Triaging to HMRC’s NES team:** they deal with many of the cases similar to the above examples involving tax codes, completion of forms (including tax returns) where the client has all of the information and queries which involve information requests either from the client or HMRC. Front-line advisers in VCS organisations in the new scheme should look out for additional complexity and identify one or more drivers of need.

**VCS organisations within the scheme** would use an electronic handover form to ensure that the client was handled by the NES team for a call back. NOTE that HMRC block their number when returning such calls: this may be of concern to vulnerable clients.

If you believe a client should be dealt with by the NES teams you can call them direct and hand over the client. There are specific, confidential, numbers released to voluntary sector organisations within the scheme. Although this document does not deal with tax credits or child benefit we suggest that you complete the numbers below for specific queries:

Tax	0300 200 ....
Tax Credits	0345 302 ....
Child Benefit	0300 200 ....

These numbers are dedicated to voluntary agencies within the scheme and should not be given to clients. Your organisation will have details if within the scheme.



### Help from the specialist tax charities

There will be situations where the client would be better dealt with by TaxAid or Tax Help for Older People and to help identify these there are a few examples adjacent column. Generally, TaxAid can help where calculations are needed, if the case is complex, long-running, or if the client is in dispute with HMRC and needs independent advice.

**If you want help from TaxAid** we have a dedicated advice line for advisers in the voluntary sector and this is on **0300 330 5477** between 10am - 12.30pm and 1.30pm - 4pm Monday to Friday. This number is just for advisers so if you are signposting clients to us for them to call please give them our usual helpline number. This is **0345 120 3779** and is available 10am to 12pm Monday to Friday. Our advisers will often be able to resolve problems over the phone but if a face-to-face appointment or casework is needed we shall arrange it with the client.

All TaxAid advice staff and volunteers are qualified professional tax advisers who support the voluntary sector with specialist tax advice for their clients. Resource constraints mean that we are unable to help people with corporate tax (i.e. those with limited companies) or with Tax Credits, or those on incomes of more than £20,000 a year.

For taxpayers with incomes above our remit we are not able to recommend individual paid tax advisers, but suggest that you find one through institutions such as the Institute for Chartered Accountants of England and Wales [www.icaew.com](http://www.icaew.com), the Chartered Institute of Taxation [www.tax.org.uk](http://www.tax.org.uk), the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland [www.icas.org.uk](http://www.icas.org.uk), or the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland [www.icai.ie](http://www.icai.ie).

## TaxAid

**HMRC have provided funding for TaxAid to provide free online tax awareness and triage training to VCS organisations: please go to [www.taxaid.org.uk](http://www.taxaid.org.uk) to access.**

## Clients who need TaxAid

### **In need of calculations and a potential appeal against the penalties:**

A client comes to you with late filing penalties. He has several years tax returns outstanding and some of his records are missing. He therefore needs help working out the figures to be put on the returns and then preparing the returns themselves. HMRC (including the NES teams) cannot help individuals in this situation.

Appealing a late filing penalty or getting tax returns withdrawn will generally be a matter of dispute and independent advice is likely to be required.

### **Breakdown of a debt repayment agreement:**

Another client you are advising on his debts in general tells you he had a time-to-pay arrangement with HMRC. However he stopped paying it when he lost his job but he did not discuss this with them. You are dealing with his other debts but he needs help negotiating a new arrangement with HMRC. Any client dealing with tax debt which has proceeded to enforcement stage is likely to need independent advice.

### **In dispute with HMRC:**

A third client has received tax calculations for two years. However he believes some of the income they have included is not his. He has contacted HMRC to try and explain it to them, but they repeatedly told him that they have been sent the pay and tax details by the employers and he needs to take it up with them. Challenging PAYE tax underpayments will generally be a matter of dispute and independent advice is likely to be required.



### Checklist – Suitable for sending to HMRC

- |  |                                     |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Simple cases, where the client has all the figures       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                                     |
| If also one – or more – of the 6 drivers of need         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Consider handoff to the NES service |
| Needs calculations of income and tax                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                                     |
| Disputes, advocacy, appeals or challenging an assessment | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                                     |
| Previous contacts with HMRC have not resolved the issue  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                                     |

*If not suitable for HMRC and within remit (of £20,000 income) signpost to TaxAid, Tax Help for Older People or paid for professional tax advice*

### Checklist – sending to the tax charities

- |  |                                     |  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| HMRC cannot or has failed to help                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |  |
| On income of above £20,000                           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Tax Credits  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Consider handoff to the NES service or front-line advice agencies like Citizens Advice                     |
| Corporate tax problem (those with Limited Companies) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Likely to need paid-for professional tax advice  |
| Over 60 years of age and <u>not</u> self-employed    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Consider Tax Help for Older People: <a href="http://www.taxvol.org.uk">www.taxvol.org.uk</a> 0845 601 3321 |
| Under 60 years, PAYE or self-employment issues       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Consider TaxAid: <a href="http://www.taxaid.org.uk">www.taxaid.org.uk</a> 0345 120 3779                    |

