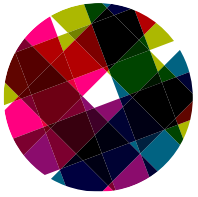




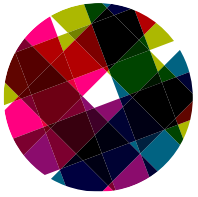
Vision up to 2021
and Business Plan for 2018-20



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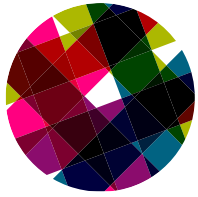


Foreword

Welcome to the Adjudicator's Office Business Plan for 2018-20. I was appointed as Adjudicator in April 2016 and this is our second business plan for the strategic cycle from 2016-21.



Helen Megarry,
The Adjudicator



In April 2016 we began a transformation programme, including development of a renewed purpose and customer focused vision for the Adjudicator's Office. During the past two years our focus has been on modernising our own service, implementing change to improve performance and customer service. We have developed a more collaborative relationship with HM Revenue and Customs and the Valuation Office Agency to encourage greater focus on learning from complaints. During the next two years we will support the department to improve complaint handling and broader customer service.

We will continue to improve the service that we provide to our customers. We will build on the work already done to reduce investigation times, including a new end to end casework process which is more flexible and responsive to individual customer's needs. We need to find ways to address problems caused by our outdated digital platforms. This is a matter of increasing urgency as continued lack of digital tools for communication with customers is an unacceptable barrier to access to the complaint process.

We are developing our own capacity to identify learning from individual complaints. We recently introduced categories for feedback and there are exciting opportunities, particularly in identifying the underlying thematic issues that drive customer dissatisfaction. We will work with the department to provide feedback that usefully contributes to their own drive for change in developing a 'customer-centric' approach. We have further work to do with the department to ensure that structures and mechanisms are in place so that feedback lands in the right place and appropriate action is taken.

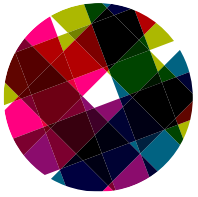
We continue to work closely with our own people in both London and Nottingham to deliver our transformation plans, while continuing to provide a high quality service to our current customers. Such a large scale change programme can be hard to live through and we continue to seek ways to make sure that all of our people are fully involved in delivering the changes. We have made enormous progress in the last two years and are well our way to becoming a values based, purpose driven organisation. In the coming period we will focus on learning and development, to maximise the talents of

our people and to achieve our aim to become a learning organisation.

Finally, we will build on the work that we have done to improve the governance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Adjudicator's Office. We have achieved breakthrough performance in this respect in the past two years and have plans to consolidate improvements in our processes and systems, including seeking further routes to address the deficit in our digital investment.

Thanks to all of our team for their hard work, forbearance and commitment to achieving the AO vision.

Helen Megarry,
The Adjudicator

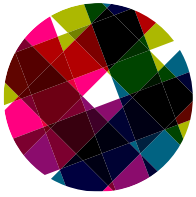


Our role

The role of the Adjudicator was created when HM Revenue and Customs, and the Valuation Office Agency (subsequently referred to as the 'department') introduced an independent tier of complaint handling, to provide customers with a higher level of service and giving the departments the opportunity to learn lessons from complaints and make improvements.



Jane Brothwood,
Head of Office



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 to 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.

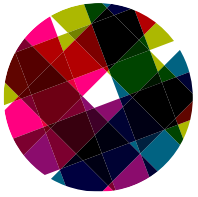
We will share good practice and role model the approach and behaviours that support effective complaint handling.

- **Uses insight and expertise to support the department 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.

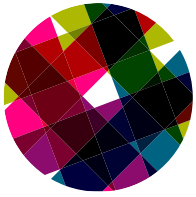
We will support learning from complaints to improve the service provided to customers, both by the Adjudicator's Office and by the department.



Our vision up to 2021

Our vision will be achieved by working with the department, 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, both by the department and the Adjudicator's Office. The Adjudicator will be independent and impartial.

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

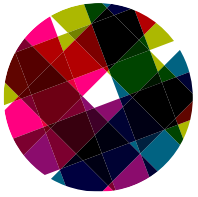
- **Responsive to customer needs**

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**

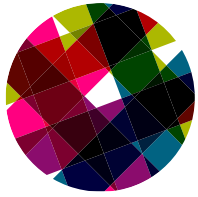
Our feedback has a positive impact on customer service and experience both within the department and the Adjudicator's Office.



Realising our vision

Our Business Plan 2018-20 sets out our objectives and what we will do during this period to reach our vision. There are four key themes in our plan:





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; and



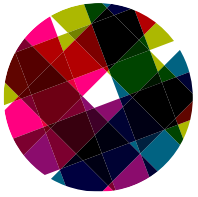
Learning from complaints:

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



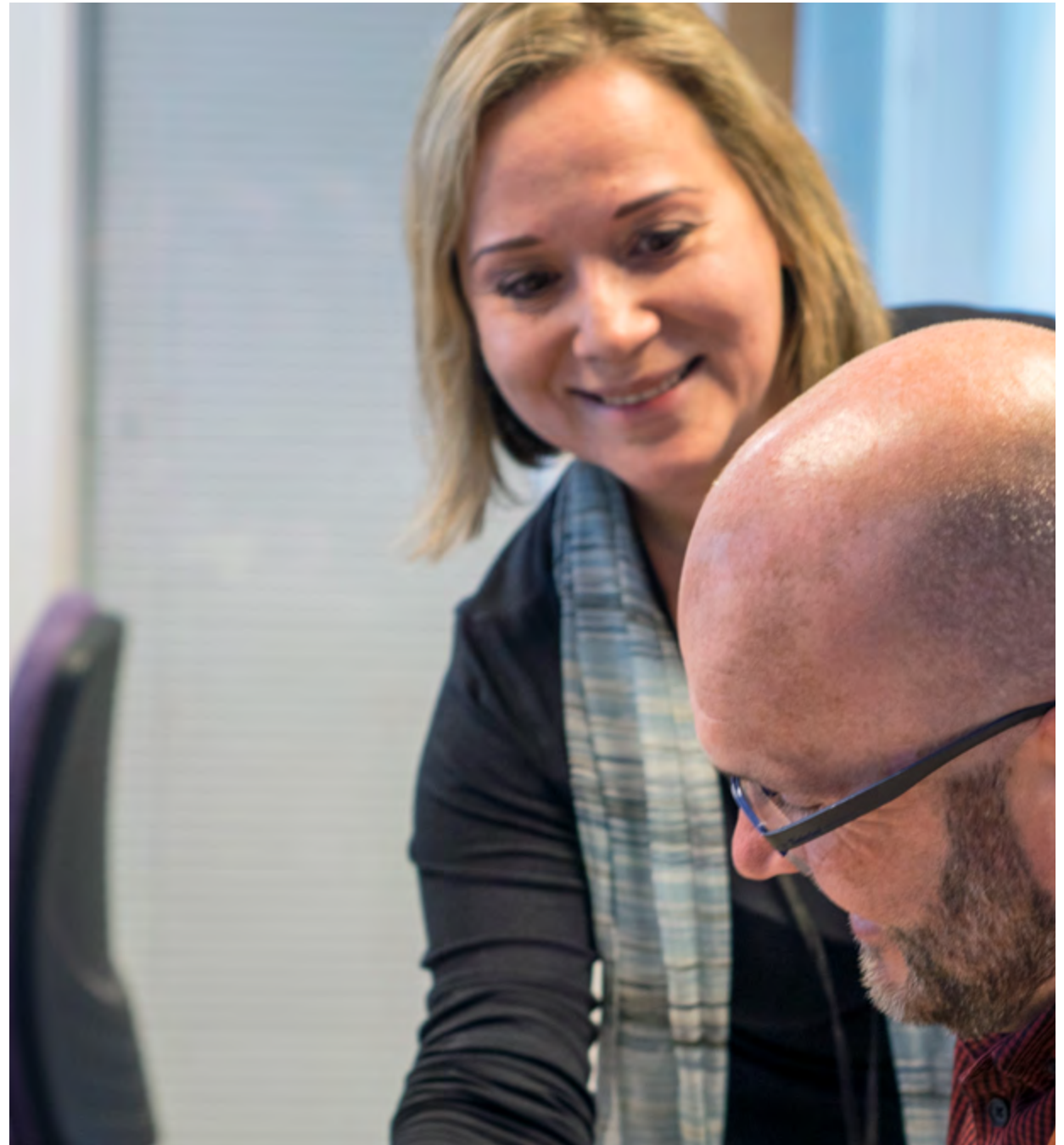
Our organisation:

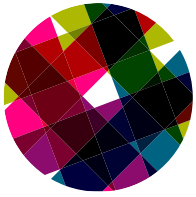
we will transform the way we work, responding to the needs of our customers in order to become a more efficient and accountable organisation.



Our achievements 2016-18

The focus for the first two years of our transformation was on individual complaints, implementing huge changes to significantly improve our customer service. The Adjudicator's Office Annual Reports 2017 and 2018 highlighted key achievements during the period 1 April 2016-18 31 March 2018.





Our achievements included:



Our customers:

We redefined our measures of success, from the number of complaints resolved, to reducing the length of time a customer waits for resolution of their complaint.

The average length of time before customers receive a decision on their complaint reduced from 10.4 months in 2015-16 to 7.5 months in 2017-18.

Learning lessons from complaints to make customer service improvements is central to our vision: as well as providing feedback and evidence to the department, we also analyse complaints about our service in order to make customer service improvements for our customers.

We make earlier decisions on whether complaints are within our remit to consider. When we cannot investigate we explain why to our customers and where possible we offer advice on the correct route to take their complaint.

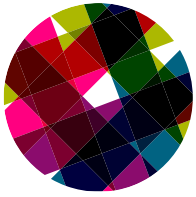


Our people:

Results from the Civil Service People survey confirmed increased engagement with our people. Our overall engagement score rose from 34% in October 2015 to 57% in October 2017. In eight of the nine measurement categories we equalled or exceeded the highest performing Civil Service teams.

In consultation with our people, we developed and agreed our four core values-Dynamic, Respect, Integrity, Professional - and began work to embed them.

We redefined all roles in the organisation to ensure direct links between our activities and achieving our vision. We reviewed our ways of working to make clear that development of our people's individual capability and personal authority is also key to delivery of the vision.



Learning from complaints:

We transformed our definition of success, from focussing on the number of complaints resolved, to providing evidence to the department to inform customer service improvements.

We introduced complaint categories and thematic reports to provide the department of evidence of the impact of complaints on their customers.

A new Service Level Agreement between the Adjudicator and the department underpins the cultural shift in complaint work, the agreement now shows clearer definition of the independence of the Adjudicator's Office. It sets out the full scope of our role; both in supporting effective complaint handling and in identifying thematic/systemic learning for the department to support customer service improvement.

We engaged with HMRC to address key systemic areas for learning on issues of application of discretionary powers. These brought new clarity and consistency to HMRC's work and improved customer service.



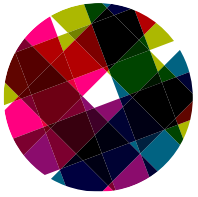
Our organisation:

We reviewed our use of existing IT to ensure it provides value for money and made changes to exploit opportunities this allowed.

HMRC internal auditors confirmed the governance framework we are using to support our transformation planning is in line with best practice.

Increased use of data analysis supports planning and delivery of workload management, finance management and risk management under our transformed ways of working.

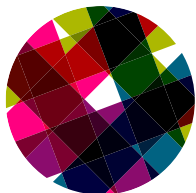
We consolidated our organisation into two locations, Nottingham and London. Our Newcastle team members returned to the department and our Derby team have been integrated into our Nottingham office.



Delivering our vision 2018-20

Our focus for the next two years will be to develop our role in supporting the department to improve complaint handling and broader customer service through learning from complaints.

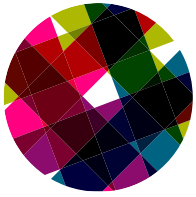




Our customers

We will:

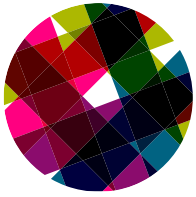
- **engage with our customers to better understand their needs and improve our services through:**
 - analysis of customer feedback on service experience. We will use the same complaint classifications to identify systemic/thematic learning on our service as we do when providing evidence to the department.
- **seek out opportunities to introduce channel of choice for customers and provide additional help to those who need it:**
 - due to wider departmental budget pressures, HMRC have not approved the funding we require to update our digital systems including providing email services for our customers. This is a barrier to customers who want to complain, and disadvantages our customers. We will explore options and make further representation to HMRC for funds to bring our service up to the same level they offer their customers.
- **generate innovative ways of working to resolve complaints more efficiently and effectively through such means as:**
 - developing the capability and personal authority of our people to resolve complaints on behalf of the Adjudicator
 - improving direct access to evidence held by the department.
- **publish customer service standards**
- **update our corporate information to provide clear and current guidance and advice for our customers:**
 - our current website will provide information to customers about our service
- due to wider departmental budget pressures, HMRC have not approved the funding we require to make use of the GOV.UK website, which disadvantages our customers. We will explore options for our existing website and make representation to HMRC for funds to bring our digital platforms up to the same level they offer their customers.



Learning from complaints

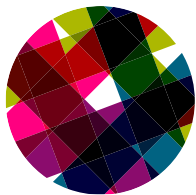


- **Key to our work in this area is the introduction of new categories of complaints. We now give the department feedback on complaints under six categories, highlighting opportunities for learning. These are:**
 - Policy and Process (e.g. were processes followed correctly? Did process issues contribute to the complaint?)
 - Decision making (e.g. was decision making fair, reasonable and consistent? Was the decision made at the right point?)
 - Customer Focus (e.g. did the complaint handler department show empathy and understanding? Was the impact on the customer acknowledged?)
 - Culture and Behaviours (e.g. were departmental values demonstrated? Did the complaint handler take ownership of the complaint?)
 - Communication (e.g. were communications clear? Was the tone of response appropriate?)
 - Complaint Procedures (e.g. did the department demonstrate learning from mistakes? Was the complaint procedure followed?)



We will:

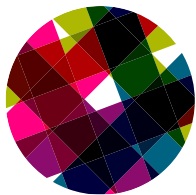
- **develop and manage strategic relationships with key stakeholders by:**
 - identifying each set of stakeholders on an issues basis, engaging at the right level to achieve customer service improvements in the end to end journey of a complaint for customers of the Adjudicator's Office and the department.
- **support the department to develop and embed a systemic and structured approach to giving and receiving feedback by:**
 - development and introduction of the feedback mechanism with the department, which is set out in the new Service Level Agreement
 - embedding the use of our six complaint classifications in feedback to the department on individual cases as the way to understand thematic/systemic learning opportunities
 - publishing quarterly reviews of thematic/systemic issues that highlight areas for learning.
- **analyse the reasons why customers approach the Adjudicator when their complaint is not in our remit or is premature and provide learning for the department on why customers approach the Adjudicator's Office. Use the analysis to improve the information available to customers, including about the avenues available to escalate their complaints either to the Adjudicator or elsewhere.**



Our people

We will:

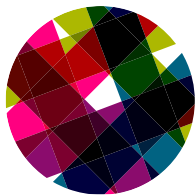
- **build a high performing, engaged and flexible workforce that is committed to delivering our strategic objectives by:**
 - developing our capability and capacity to identify and give the department effective insight on positive customer service improvements
 - capturing, analysing, and acknowledging feedback from our people where they see evidence of wider thematic/systemic customer service improvement themes
 - developing our ability to delegate authority from the Adjudicator to take decisions on complaints
 - making full use of the options available to recognise and reward effective performance.
- **develop and embed a learning and development culture which engenders the role modelling of expertise in complaint handling and behaviours, and which supports and encourages a positive complaint handling environment by:**
 - clearly setting the expectation that individuals should act on feedback to drive up the quality and standards of the way we work
 - having positive performance development discussions that link feedback to our quality standards
 - have clear avenues for discussion of emerging topics.
- **develop our approach to learning from complaints and provide service improvements to internal and external customers by further embedding our values and improving our leadership and management skills**
- **use our four core values of Dynamic, Respect, Integrity and Professional to support changes to our organisational culture and promote diversity and well-being.**



Our organisation

We will:

- **become a learning organisation, sharing feedback and taking a flexible approach to the way we work**
- **continue to embed the vision in the Adjudicator's Office and its principles in our work with the department**
- **measure ourselves against the Ombudsman's Associations service standards and identify opportunities to improve services for customers**
- **innovate to develop improvements, delivering**
 - services and outcomes that are better designed
 - changes that take into account interrelationships between processes
 - a faster response to change.
- **introduce a structured approach to present, measure and monitor improvements for customers**
- **developing effective communication channels with the department to influence positive service improvements, which is set out in the new Service Level Agreement**
 - establishing mechanisms for feedback from the department on the effectiveness of our evidence and learning points, as well as what the department has done as a result
 - creating baseline assessments to monitor new complaints to us on issues where we have given particular feedback to the department.
- **operate within our allocated budget and identify continuous improvement year-on-year efficiencies and cost savings through:**
 - using lessons learned in our successful workforce changes to play our part in HMRC's Building Our Future aims, including the policy of regional centre accommodation.
- **demonstrate our corporate commitment to improving social mobility, community wellbeing and the environment at large by:**
 - delivering on the promise of giving recognised and transferable skills and qualifications so our apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeships.



Managing our risks

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

The key risks to delivery of our vision were set out in our Business Plan 2016-18. There are mitigation plans in place for each. Our governance of risk and the associated mitigation plans has been audited by HMRC Internal Audit.

Our plans have reduced the residual risk in each area, and our Annual Reports for 2017 and 2018 have described some of the actions we have taken, but we will continue to develop new methods of control. Our key risks 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 adopt an outcome focused approach to review complaints for timely resolution.

Learning from Complaints

- We fail to act or pass on feedback to learn from complaints and seek service improvements.
- The department do not respect us and do not 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 fail to develop the capability of leaders to deliver our business goals.
- We fail to develop strategies and practices to develop an engaged workforce who understand and are committed to our vision.
- We fail to 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 fail to have the technology or secure the funding for technology to support the delivery of our transformation agenda.
- We fail to take action to work in a more sustainable way to reduce adverse impact to the environment.
- We do not have the capacity to handle the volume of complaints received about the departments.



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