

**Disabled Customers Consultation Group**  
**17<sup>th</sup> October 2013**  
**100 Parliament Street, LONDON SW1A 2BQ.**

**Attendees**

Tracey Abbot ( <b>TA</b> )	Business Disability Forum
Martin Benson ( <b>MB</b> )	Civil Service Learning
David Brooker ( <b>DB</b> )	Royal National Institute for the Blind
Jane Hunt ( <b>JH</b> )	Action on Disability and Work UK
Fiona Jones ( <b>FJ</b> )	Civil Service Learning
Meredith McCammond ( <b>MM</b> )	Low Incomes Tax Reform Group
Penny Melville-Brown, OBE ( <b>PMB</b> )	Disability Dynamics Ltd
Elaine Norris ( <b>EN</b> )	Dept for Work and Pensions
Jane Shillaker ( <b>JSh</b> )	TaxAid
Judith Smith ( <b>JSm</b> )	Charity for Civil Servants
Robin Williamson ( <b>RW</b> )	Low Incomes Tax Reform Group
Catherine Ahmad ( <b>CA</b> )	HMRC, Customer Capability and Assurance Team
Jeff Dawson ( <b>JD</b> )	HMRC, Needs Enhanced Support Team
Lin Homer ( <b>LH</b> )	HMRC Chief Executive
Dymphna Kelly ( <b>DK</b> )	HMRC, Digital Services Strategy
Lucy Makinson ( <b>LM</b> )	HMRC, Central Customer & Strategy Unit
Julie Mortimer	HMRC, Diversity and Engagement
Anthea Watson ( <b>AW</b> )	HMRC, Customer Capability and Assurance Team
Tony Verran ( <b>TV</b> )	HMRC, Customer Capability and Assurance Team
Helen Fuller	BSL Interpreter
Julia Jacobie	Speech To Text Recorder

**Apologies**

Jan Hutchinson	Centre for Mental Health
Jane Altimes	Mencap
Sharon Palmer	Royal National Institute for the Blind
Chris Fitch	Royal College of Psychiatrists
Colin Trend	Royal College of Psychiatrists
Kathleen Rawlinson	HMRC, Communications and Marketing
Janet Wilcock	HMRC, Customer Capability and Assurance Team
Janet Davison	HMRC, Customer Capability and Assurance Team

**1) Introductions and action point updates – Tony Verran - Slides 2 to 4**

**TV** welcomed everyone to the meeting, covered the domestics, and asked each attendee to introduce themselves.

The minutes of the last meeting had been issued previously and were agreed.

Action Points from April 2013 meeting:

	<b>Action Point</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	To find out whether care and support employers are included in the RTI pilot.	Dymphna Kelly	Cleared. It is not clear whether these employers were included.
2.	To circulate RTI forms for comment.	Dymphna Kelly	Cleared – circulated.
3.	To provide suggestions on what should be included in an explanatory note to customers on the ITA process.	All	Cleared – none received. Barbara Abraham suggested that

			Emily Gravestock send out a draft for comment but Emily preferred not to.
4.	To consider the possibility of providing a prompt for advisors when a customer has previously bypassed voice recognition.	Emily Gravestock	This suggestion has been added to the suggestion list, and will be considered with other ideas in due course, but it is not technically possible to deliver this in advance of go-live.
5.	To provide feedback on the YouTube videos.	All	Cleared.
6.	To progress the addition of subtitles to the YouTube videos.	Tony Verran	Cleared - Business Tax are reviewing videos.

## 2) Chief Executive – Lin Homer

2.1 LH was keen to keep her introductory comments short, allowing more time to hear from others. She was pleased to announce that HMRC's new Chief Information officer, Mark Dearnley (joining HMRC from Vodafone), would be taking on the role of Disability Champion, retaining a valuable link between disability and technology at the senior level.

2.2 At Permanent Secretary-level, LH led on disability within the civil service. This included celebrating success at the Civil Service Diversity Awards, where LH was presenting the newly created Disability Champion award. Although services to disabled customers fell under DWP Ministerial responsibility, LH was keen to join up what the civil service does as an employer of disabled staff with the wider work to improve services to disabled customers.

2.3 LH had visited staff involved in the Needs Enhanced Support pilot, talking to them and listening to calls to the new telephone line. She was impressed with the quality of support and the range of issues staff managed to resolve. LH was particularly struck by the impact of mental health issues on customers, making it much more difficult for them to deal with HMRC. Although the issue of enhanced support was not yet solved, it was good to see the quality of support, ownership and follow up, and how rewarding this was for staff.

2.4 JH felt that HMRC's Charter had helped. LH agreed that the Charter Committee provided space to think about customer service standards more generally.

2.5 PMB asked about equality and diversity within departmental compliance; LH commented that Enforcement and Compliance (along with Personal Tax) had significant day to day contact with customers, and while she couldn't be confident that standards were always met in every case, HMRC was continuing to work towards this, including through unconscious bias training rolled out as part of internal performance management.

2.6 PMB clarified that she was interested in HMRC's way of ensuring compliance within the department with the relevant equality laws, policies and guidance. LH highlighted that HMRC was very good at impact-assessing its proposals; TV added that it was his team's responsibility to ensure compliance across the department, and they had intervened

successfully with many teams, often influencing decisions and actions through their input on equality.

2.7 RW was keen to meet the new HMRC Disability Champion.

**AP1 – TV to explore setting up a meeting with Mark Dearnley's office.**

**3) Mental Health – Tony Verran – Slides 4 to 10**

3.1 TV described a case (Haworth vs Cartmel and HMRC) in which the High Court found against HMRC for having taken bankruptcy action against a disabled customer who had a documented mental health problem. The High Court ruled that HMRC had failed to establish a proper tax liability in the case, but had also failed to make reasonable adjustments in light of the customer's known problems in opening her post as part of her condition. This highlighted the need to improve HMRC's capability in dealing with customers with mental health issues.

3.2 The case for gripping this issue was clear: HMRC wanted to improve customer experience and equality and diversity practices, and to support people to get things right; and it had legal obligations under equalities legislation. The Equalities Team was also receiving regular requests from the business for advice on dealing with customers with mental health issues.

3.3 HMRC commissioned some research from MIND on tax and mental health in 2009. The findings included 23 recommendations, broadly around: recording data; use of intermediaries; flexing deadlines; staff training and awareness; introduction of mental health advisers across HMRC; and an internal helpline for staff. While not all 23 recommendations could be fully adopted, aspects of all of these are being taken forward.

3.4 The current situation in HMRC is that there is a lot of good work going on across the business – for example, Debt Management and Banking has a dedicated, Samaritans-trained team to support staff working with vulnerable customers, including those with mental health challenges – but initiatives are not sufficiently joined up and there remains a need for greater general awareness.

3.5 The DCCG sub group taking forward the MIND report findings and the Equalities Team agreed there was a need for a mental health policy. An early draft was prepared covering training for staff and managers, specialist teams and partnership with the third sector.

3.6 TV invited DCCG members to contribute ideas on taking this forward, including the communications plan, role for the new Disability Champion, and ensuring HMRC's customer strategy reflects thinking on mental health.

3.7 PMB noted that the case TV outlined illustrated that HMRC had not complied with requirements to consider reasonable adjustments, going back to her earlier point on ensuring compliance within the Department. She added that the figure of 1 in 4 people experiencing mental health problems would be higher in some specific customer groups. Also, life events were a key consideration – including events triggered by HMRC – and these could bring on a crisis. A way to focus HMRC resources would be to concentrate on those life events. DWP had some good examples of this approach.

**AP2 – TV to seek examples of targeting life events from DWP.**

3.8 JSh observed that there was a societal bias against those with mental health conditions and this would be equally true of HMRC staff – overcoming this would be a challenge. JSh added that mental health issues would also be affecting staff so if some were struggling to support customers in this respect, they were probably also struggling to support their colleagues and staff too. DB highlighted that not all people with a mental health condition would recognise that they did or would have been formally diagnosed. JSh added that mental health often reaches a crescendo or crisis point when a diagnosis is made, but often the person has had ongoing issues for some time by then.

3.9 MM observed that recording details of mental health needs on tax payer records was currently haphazard – thought this was a delicate balance between not creating pre-judgement and customers not having to continuously repeat their needs. TV acknowledged the importance of recording, though IT constraints had made this challenging to address. DK offered to explore the possibility of capturing or addressing these issues in the 4 digital “exemplars” HMRC’s digital team were working on. LH was keen to explore this if not for the 4 lead exemplars then for future services being developed given the opportunities for personalisation in the digital developments.

#### **AP3 – DK to explore opportunity to flag/record special needs in digital exemplars**

3.10 PMB clarified that HMRC systems should only detail the customer’s needs/reasonable adjustments, not their condition, given sensitivity of the information and associated security issues. JSh agreed – a flag to make staff members aware of the need to check for particular needs and details of their particular requirements was sufficient.

3.11 JH emphasised the importance of how HMRC communicated with customers – making letters less complicated, tailoring them appropriately, and even using different coloured envelopes (rather than brown) could all help. LH confirmed that Tax Credits had trialled use of envelopes that were not brown and hand written addresses to improve chances of customers opening the letters.

3.12 LH was heartened by the amount of work underway on mental health in HMRC but agreed it was important to join it up in the centre and also to learn quickly – customers and the courts would expect this from HMRC.

3.13 JD found listening to the comments very valuable, and felt they chimed with wider research on customers who needed enhanced support, particularly the themes around flagging customers with particular needs and training staff. The pilot was still running, and the team was working up the future strategy for consideration by the HMRC senior team.

3.14 LM asked DCCG colleagues for examples where supporting disabled customers, including those with mental health issues, was done well. PMB suggested that the retail sector would provide the best examples –Tesco online shopping had received positive reviews. TA suggested that Lloyds Bank and KPMG had strong records on support to disabled customers. DK informed DCCG that the digital team was meeting Lloyds in a week’s time.

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#### **15 minute comfort break.**

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#### **4) Civil Service Learning – Fiona Jones & Martin Benson – Slides 11 to 16**

4.1 FJ opened by stating that 70% of the civil service (280k people) worked in diverse roles in the Operational Delivery Profession (ODP) most in the five large delivery Departments: Ministry of Justice; Home Office; HM Revenue & Customs, Department for

Work and Pensions; Department for Transport. These people were the public face of government, and shaped the public's opinion of government. It was therefore important they were proud of what they did and as professional as possible. The ODP team were segmenting those people to work out who they were, where they worked and what they did so that communications and learning could be tailored to their needs.

4.2 A key objective of the work was to create "parity of esteem" so that ODP roles were perceived as being as professional as, for example, legal or accountancy professions. Another aim was transferability of skills, creating more movement between departments. Identifying and retaining talent, including through continuous professional development, was also important. This needed to be linked to the new competency framework and easy to access. Current plans were for diplomas at levels 2-4 with City and Guilds and levels 5-7 with the Chartered Management Institute. In all this work, the ODP team was seeking to be responsive to customers and their business needs, rather than working on learning in isolation.

4.3 Diversity was a key theme for ODP: they wanted disabled staff to have the same access to development as their colleagues without a disability. There was also a specific diversity and equality group focused on bringing up levels of representation of BAME and disabled staff at all grades across departments.

4.4 FJ introduced MB – working on a new learning product to enable people in the civil service to support better disabled customers and those in vulnerable situations. MB thanked DCCG members for their input into iterations of the learning package and apologised for the IT issues that made it difficult for stakeholders to access the test versions. The cause was a problem with the Civil Service Learning platform rather than the package itself.

4.5 Consultation on this product had been very wide and showed a broad spectrum of views. MB was grateful for the candid views and hoped that the final product would offer a good middle ground. A common steer was to avoid a very technical approach and focus on supporting the individual customer with their needs, taking responsibility for reasonable adjustments, and being aware of personal bias.

4.6 One area that did not seem to be covered well anywhere was the approach in the civil service to helping people at risk of self harm and suicide. This would form part of the new package.

4.7 Expected timescales for the new package were for the full version to be available by the end of October, with launch to staff in early November. MB invited comments and questions.

4.8 JH had volunteered to help but had not heard back. TV volunteered to follow this up outside the meeting to ensure JH was involved in this work.

#### **AP4 – TV to follow up JH's involvement in the CSL learning package**

4.9 PMB was concerned about the decision to cover both disability and vulnerable customers in a single package, given that these were separate concepts and groups of customers. Support to disabled customers was around recognising needs, making reasonable adjustments and moving on. While some disabled people would also be vulnerable, plenty of non-disabled customers could also be vulnerable due to life circumstances or indeed the intervention of government. Learning how to support vulnerable customers was more sophisticated, a specialism.

4.10 PMB also made the point that departments needed the right policies, practices and procedures, plus properly trained line managers, before staff were trained so that the right

support was in place to make the training successful. FJ said the ODP team was working closely with departmental specialists to ensure they were doing just that.

4.11 MB said that most departments had technical or process learning around this area, and some of it was very good. This new product provided a common foundation, raising awareness and signposting specific learning in the departments.

4.12 FJ told DCCG that LH had provided an introductory video for the package (both embedded within the product and as promotional material). JH asked to see this.

#### **AP5 – FJ to provide LH introductory video to DCCG once available**

4.13 PMB asked how ODP planned to measure the effectiveness of the learning package, demonstrating what return on investment there had been for the time invested. Civil service learning (CSL) had a common approach comprising 4 levels of evaluation: the immediate “happy sheet”; checking with the individual once they were back in the office; checking with their manager; and identifying business benefits. The final level was hardest and departments worked with CSL on this element. JM confirmed that HMRC already worked with CSL on this, measuring before and after interventions, using indicators like surveys, engagement, complaints, grievances and tribunals.

4.14 MB confirmed that the final product would be on stable platform, would be useable on mobile devices (or from home as a last resort), and that video content was embedded in the learning so that it worked in departments where video player was routinely disabled. He also confirmed that CSL understood the standards for assisted technology across departments and the learning product would work with all of these within the government secure intranet – this had been tested.

4.15 JSh asked whether the learning would form part of the continuous professional development. FJ confirmed that it would be a module attracting credits towards qualification.

4.16 FJ and MB thanked DCCG again for their help in taking this project forward.

#### **5) AOB**

5.1 TV informed DCCG that the next meeting was expected to take place in April 2014 – date to follow. He suggested an agenda item following up the Needs Enhanced Support pilot and future strategy, and invited ideas for a further agenda item. TV invited AOB items from other attendees.

5.2 PMB suggested that TV put forward DCCG as an exemplar for the “Fulfilling potential” consultation that was underway. She also highlighted guidance implications for procurement of the Public Services and Social Value Act.

5.3 MM asked whether there had been any follow up from discussion at the last DCCG meeting about Voice Recognition by-pass. DCCG had not received the update paper on this.

5.4 TV promised to re-circulate the update paper and explained that there have been various hold ups and the system was not live anywhere at the moment. JH explained that she had been asked to test the effectiveness of the voice recognition technology.

#### **AP6 – TV to ensure IVR update paper was circulated to DCCG members**