

HMRC don't want to be quoted

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I mentioned in two blogs earlier today that I spoke at an event at the Social Market Foundation this morning.

In [one of those blogs I referred to comments made by an HMRC director](#).

This afternoon the Social Market Foundation called me. HMRC had rung them asking them to ask me to take down the name of the director in question. They did not ring me directly, although I'm pretty easy to find ***.

I refused at first. The meeting was not stated to be under Chatham House rules. But now I'm told it was. So I'll respect the retrospective notification from the Social Market Foundation and take down the Director's name but not the fact she works for HMRC.

But I make three comments in addition. The first is that literally the first thing the director in question said to me this morning was "I hear you met David Gauke recently". [I did](#). Not that he agreed to the meeting in question - we bumped into each other, almost literally. He's assiduously avoided such a meeting ever since being in office whilst happily making speeches about me, no doubt drafted by HMRC staff on his behalf. Who knows, perhaps the Director in question is his ghost on such issues? If so she is then she follows in a tradition of HMRC briefing against my work on the tax gap - all from behind a convenient veil of anonymity that they're obviously very keen to maintain.

Secondly, the director in question admitted that country-by-country reporting will definitely help developing countries collect tax today - but clearly that was not enough to make her think it was of any benefit from a UK perspective. I should have added that in the original post.

Third, the Director in question made the most absurd claims on the corporate tax gap - [whilst utterly ignoring the fact that it's calculated on the basis of the 65% or so of corporate tax returns that HMRC collects](#) out of those that they demand be submitted - a failure to collect data on HMRC's part that she happily swept aside saying "we know these small companies don't make money". "How", I asked, "when you don't collect tax

returns from them?" That she never answered, tellingly.

No wonder she wanted her blushes spared.

Addition at 19.45:

**** Now the Social Market Foundation say this is not true. They say now HMRC did not call them. They apparently just communicated to the SMF that they wanted the Director's name to be taken down. But according to the SMF HMRC said they "didn't want to censor me."*

With respect to the SMF, I've faithfully reflected what I was told by them earlier today in this blog. And if they don't make clear at the start of a meeting it's under Chatham House rules - that's their problem.

I think you can take it as read that I won't be doing another gig for the SMF if this is the hassle they deliver.

Addition at 20.15:

[The Chatham House Rule](#) says:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed

To be operative it has to be said to be operative. As Chatham House say:

The world-famous Chatham House Rule may be invoked at meetings to encourage openness and the sharing of information.

It wasn't invoked in this case. Therefore it did not apply. Therefore I did not break it. Therefore HMRC and the SMF were both wrong to seek to retrospectively invoke it.