

20,000 new staff are welcome at HMRC - now can we have t..

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The [Press Association has reported:](#)

*Revenue and Customs is to recruit up to 1,000 extra staff to tackle delays in getting through to call centres. The move is aimed at achieving a target of answering 90% of calls, two years earlier than planned.*

*Around £9 million of extra investment will be made this year, and up to £25 million in 2013-14 to reach the call centre industry standard by next spring.*

As they also note:

*Performance has improved from 48% of calls handled in 2010/11 to 74% in 2011/12, but HMRC said more needed to be done to provide a better service.*

Those statistics are astonishing. So badly has HMRC been denuded of staff, and so low was morale under Dave Hartnett, that less than half of phone calls were answered. The fact that this staff increase has been announced days after he left is, I am sure, no coincidence.

But there's much more to the statistics than that. This is the most basic job HMRC does, taking calls and with dealing routine enquiries. If staff to do that have been reduced to this level of inefficiency by management choice and action what must have happened to more complex operations, like the tackling tax gap?

HMRC like to say that this is just £35 billion and only an issue of limited concern. They're wrong on the scale of the issue, [as I explain here](#). And their attempts to close it are half hearted - not helped by Osborne's desire to promote corporate tax haven abuse.

I've long said we need 20,000 new HMRC staff, located in local tax offices, dealing with taxpayers (not customers) face to face. Then we'd really close down the tax gap. And at £25,000 a head (HMRC's estimate, mine is twice that, bringing my total cost to £1 billion) I think £20 billion a year could be recovered.

But whilst HMRC deny the scale of the problem - to suit an agenda of small government that reflects the corporate capture of the management of the department - that's not going to happen and we're going to get cuts in public services instead.

That's a choice, and it's the wrong choice.