

Free thinking on HMRC

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A man called Bob Mountain, who as far as I know I have never met, has an article out on the [Open Democracy web site](#) about HMRC and its lack of resources. Bob should know something about this. His biography says:

Bob Mountain was formerly a senior Inland Revenue official, and one-time head of the Oil Taxation Office; in retirement a local CAB adviser, and Family Court chairman.

His argument is:

Lots of information doing the rounds has been known about for years. The real problem is that HMRC have had their budget slashed, and they have adopted an extremely soft stance toward tax cheats.

As he points out, almost everything about the HSBC revelations was known to some people - and had been talked about on sites like this, that of the Tax Justice Network and at the PAC. As he says:

The fresh news was the confirmation of the Swiss bank's active promotion of tax "mitigation" strategies for depositors; and confirmation of HMRC's light-touch response to the whole business.

I agree. And Bob offers explanation:

In practice, HMRC isn't now able to operate a credible prosecution policy (or operate a half-decent telephone helpline service for ordinary taxpayers and claimants) because its resources have been virtually halved in a decade.

No one will be surprised that I agree with that.

He also offers a solution:

The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise departments, formerly two bodies with distinct identities, separate from the Treasury, are now merged and housed with the

Chancellor and his ministers. On HMRC's reformed Board it would be good to see some freethinkers, like Sikka, or Richard Murphy of [Tax Research UK](#), other members of the [Green New Deal](#), or John Christensen of the [Tax Justice Network](#).

Instead, we find former tax planners Ian Barlow (formerly KPMG), John Whiting (formerly PWC), and Edward Troup (formerly Simmons and Simmons). And moving lately in the opposite direction was Dave Hartnett, now working for Deloitte, and HSBC.

This is not self promotion, but I do think at least someone from the list Bob mentions should be on the HMRC Board. The reason is obvious, I would have thought. Whilst HMRC has moved from failed policy to PR disaster to poor management to justified accusation of bias, one after another, a small group of people in civil society have been innovating the solutions to tax problems that are now being adopted to tackle the real issues HMRC should be facing. It's time that was reflected in its governance. But as yet it isn't. And that's undoubtedly part of its problem.