

If Angela Knight is the answer on tax simplification I ...

Published: January 18, 2026, 5:08 am

If the Office for Tax Simplification had not existed I admit most people would not have noticed. In a world where one of the most common refrains is that tax is too complex this Office has done little to address the issue, in my opinion.

It's true that some remarkably out of date, and so now utterly inconsequential, tax reliefs have gone as a result of its work but on bigger issues it seems to have made remarkably little progress, although it must be said that that it has given PWC a permanent presence in the Treasury via former partner John Whiting and some seconded staff.

In that context the announcement that [Angela Knight is to become its new chair was surprising](#), but also disappointing. The surprise is that anyone so political should be appointed to such a post. My concern is not that Angela Knight is a former Conservative MP, because that is no bar to holding such a position. Rather, her track record as a right-wing MP who worked the Treasury is an issue, as is [her subsequent career](#), whether representing City interests, the British Bankers' Association or even the UK's energy companies, is what worries me.

The Office of Tax Simplification is not a think tank: its role is to promote changes in legislation to ministers that might have impact across the whole of the UK. In that case its role is much more akin to a civil service function than it is to a political function.

What that means is that anybody holding appointment should either be part of a balanced team (there was previously Labour representation in the Office) or should be seen as commanding a broad base of support and respect outside the political community.

I fear that the Office will no longer have this broad base of representation with Angela Knight in the chair because her track record would appear to be one that is persistently pro large business, persistently biased against the consumer, persistently associated with sectors where tax abuse has been prevalent and persistently unapologetic for that. I'm also aware that John Whiting, much as I respect him as a person, holds views that many would consider to be right of centre: I have heard him support the notion of

trickle-down economics, for example.

The result of this appointment is, then, that we now have an Office for Tax Simplification that will have a significant right wing bias in its leadership and this makes me wonder what the proposed direction of travel is. It is important to recall that when he was first appointed to the shadow Chancellorship George Osborne flirted with such things as flat taxes and all the associated, so-called, simplification that went with them and that he has, since then, made it possible for big business (alone) to avoid tax on its income arising outside the UK, which is something that flat tax proponents cherish as a goal, knowing how easy it is for those with wealth to move assets outside the country of their residence. My sincere hope is that this Office is not now used to promote this type of reform, which would be a cost to most people in the UK.

I stress I think there is work for the Office for Tax Simplification to undertake. It has not succeeded in tackling reform to most aspects of small business taxation, for example.

And, if it really wanted to simplify the tax system it would be railing against tax office closures and reforms that will push tax processing online when it is very obvious that most people need to talk to a real person on the end of the telephone, or in person, to solve the taxation issues that they face.

But, tackling the issues that are of concern to most people do not seem to be part of its remit and if that is the case then I worry where we're going next.