

Bogus numbers

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The world really is full of crap. That's my abbreviation for Completely Rubbish Approximations to the truth. Take this report I saw yesterday based on an HM Revenue & Customs press release:

10,833,177 out of a total of 11,564,363 returns issued were filed by the deadline (94%). 10,129,234 returns were filed online (94% of the total filed).

With the very greatest of respect to whoever wrote this, it's pure and utter drivel.

HMRC has no idea how many tax returns are due. Large numbers of people - probably millions - do not declare self-employed earnings, rental income, investment income, capital gains and other liabilities that they have owing. The figure of 11,564,363 returns due is not just spuriously accurate, it is, I guarantee, hopelessly wrong. And seriously understated for these reasons.

And that's before we consider HMRC's failure to collect corporation tax returns, where the failure rate could be as high as 50%.

But the figure is also wrong because some of those asked for returns will have been asked for two. And some really do not need to submit one. So it's overstated too.

And then there's the number of returns submitted. Is that right? Really? Some will appeal, for example, and late returns will be accepted. So that too could be wrong.

HMRC impose a duty on taxpayers to be right. It's an absurd demand, but they make it. They should be more honest about their own data in that case. And that their systems are as deeply fallible as those of many who they heavily penalise for innocent error in tax returns, which has always struck me as injustice at the levels that they too often demand.