

We need the tax system to work, which means Rachel Reeves.

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The [Guardian has reported](#) that:

Labour has appointed an expert panel to advise the party on ways to tackle tax avoidance following its plan to reap £5bn from a crackdown on tax dodgers.

The party's shadow financial secretary, James Murray, said the independent group would also advise on how to modernise the tax authority, which has come under fire from MPs for failing to claw back an "eye-watering" amount of owed tax. He said the panel offered decades of experience.

So, who are they? The Guardian suggests that:

Sir Edward Troup, a former Treasury special adviser on tax and head of HMRC, will be joined on the panel by Bill Dodwell, former tax director of the Office for Tax Simplification and a retired senior accountant at Deloitte.

The four-person group will also include the Labour MP Dame Margaret Hodge, a former chair of parliament's public accounts committee, and Mike Bracken, founding partner at the consultancy Public Digital, and founder and former executive director of the UK Government Digital Service.

I should note that I know three of the four: the exception is Mike Bracken.

There are a number of things to note.

The first is that this panel is a long way short of being an [Office for Tax Responsibility](#), which is what we really need to monitor the preparation of [tax gap data](#) and to undertake [tax spillover assessments](#) to really understand just what is not functioning properly within the UK tax system. This panel does, in that case, fall seriously short of a plan for what is needed.

Second, if this group is meant to tackle the tax gap, 56% of which arises amongst small businesses [according to HMRC's own data](#), picking Ed Troup, who has only worked with large corporate clients, and Bill Dodwell, who did likewise at Deloitte, and Margaret

Hodge, who has no tax experience at all - as she once willingly told me - is not the way to go. Nor is picking a data specialist when HMRC's Making Tax Digital programme is not an answer to any known question.

We need an Office for Tax Responsibility. But what we also need is that people with experience of the real problems that we face should advise on solutions.

The Federation of Small Business should be advising.

So should a small accounting practitioner.

HMRC staff need to be represented.

And given the history of the impact of the tax justice movement, it too needs to be on board so long as the representative knows something about tax, and right now, almost none of those engaged in those campaigns have any actual tax experience at all.

Then, this panel needs to ask the awkward questions:

- * Is the tax gap data right?
- * How do we know?
- * What is motivating abuse?
- * Why has the small business tax gap got very much worse of late?
- * To what extent does HMRC's own behaviour encourage the tax gap?
- * Is the tax system riddled with loopholes that could be closed, with ease, and how could that be done?
- * Is there a problem with the ease of access to limited liability in the UK?
- * What is the plan to co-ordinate action on all these issues, and others?
- * What is the budget for this panel to commission work to assist the delivery of advice they supply to Rachel Reeves?

We need the tax system to work better than it does.

To achieve that, we need a stronger panel than Rachel Reeves is appointing, and that panel needs to have teeth as an Office for Tax Responsibility.