



HM Revenue
& Customs

Briefing Note – Jan/Feb 2014

Agent Online Self Serve and HMRC digital services

We thought that agents would like an update on the progress HMRC is making on the introduction of new digital services.

Our last Briefing Note explained that Government is investing more than £200 million to enable HMRC to become an increasingly digital business – providing customers and their agents with the choice and flexibility to deal with tax affairs online or through other digital applications whenever they choose to do so.

HMRC's Digital Vision is to provide all of our customers with their own individual tax account.

The first new digital services for our customers will start in 2014. They will eventually include:

- Digital PAYE services for people in employment (benefits in kind)
- A digital self assessment service
- Improved tools and tax dashboard for small businesses, and
- A new system for tax agents to use digital services.

All of our new digital services will be built on a new “digital tax platform” that will over time replace the current HMRC Portal and be the default platform for new customer-facing services.

Agent Online Self Serve (AOSS)

AOSS is part of the first wave of new digital services. It will provide a new digital agents' registration service (previously referred to as a Unique Agent Reference) that will enable agents to deal with HMRC on a range of taxes. We're also developing a new and improved online authorisation process – so that agents can quickly and securely identify themselves and HMRC can link them easily to their clients.

Agents will be able to see authorised client data and services in one place through a personalised cross-tax dashboard or webpage. This will allow agents to tailor the information they see about their clients to fit their business need. It will also mean that where an agent is acting for a client in respect of more than one type of tax they will no longer have to navigate multiple systems to access each service they need.

HMRC obviously needs to ensure that the new systems are secure. The last couple of years have seen a marked increase in all forms of cyber crime (it's second only to terrorism in its threat to UK stability) and it is essential that government departments are able to confirm that an individual, or a business, is who they say they are when they transact with us digitally and that they are authorised to do so.

Identity Assurance (IDA)

[Identity Assurance \(IDA\)](#) is a cross government programme that will enable people to assert their identity online safely and securely through the services of existing, trusted identity assurance providers.

Cabinet Office (the Government Digital Service) is leading the IDA programme and we are working closely with them on how IDA will assist the design of our new services by providing us with the verification of identity we will need.

IDA will provide robust assurance of an agent's (or agent firm's) identity so IDA credentials will be used to enable agents to securely "log on" to Agent Online Self Serve and access new digital services. We need to establish how this will work but 'user testing' will play a significant part in the IT development and there will be opportunities for agents to get involved and help us to design a service that works for all.

In time the new IDA capability will replace the Government Gateway credentials that are used to access HMRC's online services. Customers will be migrated from the Government Gateway gradually and the Government Gateway login will not be removed until the new systems are firmly established. In time, it is expected that all government transactions will move away from the Government Gateway.

Timing

The introduction of AOSS is linked to IDA and we're aiming to develop an initial service for use by some early adopters during October to December 2014. Initially this will offer access to a limited range of digital services including agent registration.

This service will then be scaled up to include additional digital services during 2015 and beyond (as new services are developed for customers and agents).

Other new digital services – what else is in the pipeline?

PAYE for Employees

This is [a new service to help employees](#) deal with their tax affairs, such as tax codes and employer benefits, online.

A pilot (known as a private beta) of the new service will be tested this month (Feb 2014) with a small number of customers reporting changes to car and car fuel benefits that will automatically amend their tax code. The pilot will also test the 'logging on' process using IDA credentials.

Digital Self Assessment (SA)

Over 80% of SA customers and agents file their returns online. Despite this we send large volumes of paper to SA customers and their agents. Digital SA aims to improve the SA experience by enabling customers to opt to receive outputs electronically.

A pilot (private beta) of the SA Digital service will be launched this month (Feb. 2014) enabling a selected number of customers to opt into receiving email alerts instead of paper.

Agents will be able to take advantage of this service soon too. As agents predominantly use 3rd party software to file their clients' SA returns we are working with software providers to ensure that their products provide the option for accessing digital messages.

Opting in to Digital SA will enable customers (including agents) to receive up to date information more quickly.

Your Tax Account

Previously known as Tax for My Business, this new service is aimed principally at 4.9 million SME enterprises. It brings together in one set of screens access to key online transactions (for SA, CT, VAT and PAYE for employers) along with tailored online help and information.

From April 2014 a personalised homepage will enable SME customers to: register, file and pay for the four main taxes (PAYE, VAT, SA, CT) and access online help and information.

As with PAYE for employees and Digital SA a pilot of this service will also start this month.

Background

The new digital services are being developed using the "agile" method of IT development that is being widely rolled out across Government. This process allows us to build and test quickly, learn from feedback as we go, make changes and move incrementally towards a final system - rather than designing something in full at the outset. The result is a system which allows the needs of users to be recognised and catered for as it develops and as a result works better for everyone when it is implemented.

We are committed to designing new digital services for customers which are capable of being used by agents on their clients' behalf provided a valid agent/client relationship can be verified. This important aspect now underpins the development of all of our digital services.

HMRC will continue to provide regular updates during the coming months and do keep an eye on the HMRC web pages about the Tax Agent Strategy and new online services for agents for the latest information.

[HM Revenue & Customs: Updates on the Tax Agent Strategy - a new relationship with HMRC](#)