

Hotseat guidelines

The information below explains more about how we run the Hotseat. Please get in touch with the Hotseat team if you think there's any information you think we should add.

Top tip: Don't forget to check that your question isn't one that someone else has asked and is awaiting an answer.

Once you have read the guidelines, please submit your Hotseat question.

What's the best way to make sure my question gets answered?

A simple, straightforward, politely-phrased question has the best chance of being answered. Equally, we won't answer local issues that are more sensibly tackled by line management. So:

- Keep your email short and to the point (150 words or less is ideal); if your question is like War and Peace, we probably can't tackle it
- One question at a time, please! The more stuff you throw into your question the less chance someone else has of getting theirs answered. If you're raising more than three points we may have to cut one of them
- Be polite. We won't send through anything that is rude, sarcastic or deliberately tests the boundaries. The Hotseat isn't the place for point scoring or getting people to tell you things you already know
- Be realistic. Is what you're asking deliverable or do-able?

Who will answer my question?

If your question is selected for an answer on the Hotseat, we will ensure it is sent to the most appropriate person to answer. This may be a senior manager, a director, a member of ExCom or someone else. The bottom line is it will be answered by someone who is best-placed to answer it.

How do you pick which questions you answer?

If we get, say, five questions on the same topic then we know it's something we need to get onto. For that reason we'd encourage everyone who wants a question answered to email in, rather than thinking 'oh, my colleague has asked that and they've ignored it so they clearly don't want to answer it'.

Otherwise we'll try to pick the most important issues. Often we'll base our decision on whether they affect lots of people, are controversial or are something we've already had feedback on (for example, to the newsroom).

When can I expect to see my question answered?

Hotseaters aim to reply to all of their questions within seven working days from time of referral.

Some questions may take longer. This can be for a variety of reasons including the number of questions they've received, the other demands placed on their time and the complexity of the question (particularly difficult when the answer crosses across many areas of work).

I want you to publish statistics, facts and figures to back up what you're saying

The Hotseat is, pretty much, about providing straightforward answers to straightforward questions. We're really not here to ferret out statistics to prove (or make) points one way or the other. There just aren't enough hours in the day and we firmly believe that answers from senior leaders should be taken, and accepted, at face value.

How many questions come into the Hotseat?

On average, we currently receive approximately 300 questions each month.

How many questions do you answer?

At the moment, around a third of all Hotseat questions are answered in the Hotseat. The majority of the remaining questions will receive a direct reply from the Hotseat team; this may be an answer to your question or a recommendation that you seek the answer via other available resources e.g. your line manager or HR Service Centre.

It's also worth noting that a huge proportion of the unanswered questions are duplicates where several people have raised the same or similar issues. The best example of this was during the 2008 pay round where we got something like 1,850 questions in all. After going through them all, we worked out that people were only really asking around 50 different questions, which we then got answered.

Why aren't questions anonymous any more?

We think people should stand by their questions and we want the Hotseat to be open and transparent. That means knowing exactly who is saying what. If you have a very good or pressing reason to ask a question anonymously then [email the team](#) with a brief explanation why.

Why don't you send through difficult questions?

We definitely don't weed out the controversial ones - that would be pointless and nine times out of ten they'll be exactly the ones we know people want answered.

Sometimes, questions will touch on something that we really can't go into. Often that will be because the answer would involve commenting on individual taxpayers or political decisions. These will be few and far between and, where we can, we'll try to go back to the person who asked the question to explain why. Equally, we won't send anything through that breaches the Department's conduct and discipline rules or is rude or sarcastic.

Why didn't you tell me that you weren't going to answer my question?

Very occasionally, a question may not receive a reply from the Hotseat team or have it published on the Hotseat. If you believe your question has been missed and it is a question that should be answered in the Hotseat (and you have tried other avenues, such as your line manager or local management team, to get an answer), do please email us to enquire what has happened to it.

We've also created a [Hotseat forum](#), the main point of which is to give you somewhere to talk about the answers posted on Hotseat. You can also use it to post questions where it may be useful to hear the thoughts of your colleagues.

Why don't you publish all the questions – even the ones that haven't been answered? That way we can see everything that people are saying

Two members of staff work on the Hotseat full time and we just don't have the resources to publish everything that comes in. As part of the revised Hotseat process (from 7 October 2013), we do now publish questions that have been sent for an official answer but where the answer remains outstanding. Once the answer is received, we will publish in the normal way.

I sent seven questions through last week – you only answered one!

We encourage people to raise all the issues that are important to them but think it's only fair that everyone gets heard. That means if you've sent lots of questions through and we have to make a decision between another one of yours and somebody else's we'll probably go for the other person's question.

What if I don't like the answer?

You might not like what the answer tells you but that doesn't mean the question hasn't been answered. If you really think it hasn't been answered properly because it was misunderstood or the answer just raises more questions we'd encourage you to send in a follow-up. You may also like to consider posting on the Hotseat forum to check what your colleagues think of the answer.

Everyone who has a Hotseat question answered on the Hotseat will receive a short questionnaire. This allows you to give feedback on the answer you've been given and we pass this information on to the director's office so they can see what you thought of the reply.

You posted an answer but it didn't answer my question or solve my problem

If it's a local issue then your line manager probably is the best bet. If it's a big HMRC-wide issue and you don't think it's been dealt with satisfactorily then why not send a follow-up question or raise it at the [dial-in](#)?

Is it true that you edit questions?

We try our best not to. Normally, the only changes we make are to tidy up the grammar and spelling (mainly to avoid emails from HMRC's legions of spelling and grammar-spotters). If a question has been substantially edited it's probably because:

1. You've raised more than one issue so, for the sake of clarity, we've broken it down into a series of points. Usually this means we've had to read the

question two or three times before we've understood what's actually being asked. We'd prefer people to only ask one question at a time but appreciate some issues are more complicated than others.

2. To simplify things a bit so the question can be more easily understood by everybody

3. To keep it to length. We ask that questions are no more than 250 words long (ideally, less than 150) but some can be two or even three times that. In that case, we'll remove any unnecessary background detail.

4. To take out any personal information – particularly if it's negative and might identify someone

5. It's flippant or even downright rude. We appreciate people get hacked off but won't send anything through that breaches the Department's conduct and discipline rules.

Is it true you ban people?

No. We don't ban people but we do operate under the Department's conduct and behaviour guidelines. If anything submitted is considered in contravention we will get back to the correspondent who will be asked to withdraw the comment or reword it. For really severe breaches of the guidelines we'll copy in that person's line manager so they're aware.