

Notices of Assessment

It is a disgrace that ordinary taxpayers cannot read their notices of assessment. These could be set out in the same form as the eTax summary showing how their income tax was calculated.

Taxpayers could get a pie chart along with their assessment, showing how their tax dollars were spent, to involve them in the feeling of community that should accompany every payment of tax.

ITI System

We need to explain the income tax instalments system which confuses so many taxpayers. A one-page cartoon could work.

Tax Information Booklets

Our tax information booklets are extremely difficult to tell apart. Also the titles aren't easy to understand. We could re-jacket them with different colours and icons to illustrate the main topic of each.

I would like to see an ATO shopfront where a person could walk in and choose from a stand of brightly coloured, interesting DVDs. Copies could be made as required, saving printing costs.

Tax information booklets should be updated with access data for each tax office including bus numbers and bus stop numbers.

Tax Education for the Public

There are no simple DVDs about how the Australian income tax system actually works. These should be available to every high school student. Also teacher materials should be available, including the basic Business Activity Statements since so many high school students are forced to obtain ABNs and work as contractors.

Have a BAS catch up day around the country with ads and pamphlets to get everyone to complete their outstanding Business Activity Statements.

The franking system worries many elder Australians. It would be so simple to explain where the 30/70 comes from and how it affects their returns. Appended to that could be the LIC deduction, so opaque to many, such a simple concept, but not explained in any of our literature. We drive people to managed investment funds and tax agents because we don't give them the basic materials to work out the tax on their own shares.

Attend each country Show and show people a photo of a wage earner, his list of deductions, his tax return, his assessment, and his tax cheque.

Also a photo of a courier driver, his GST invoices, his input tax credits, his BAS statement and his integrated client account.

Make sure the staff at the show can answer simple questions about completing returns and BASs.

ATO Website

The terms used are not suitable for members of the public. Many officers use Google to find the information they require. It needs to be designed for practical navigation by taxpayers, not just have a Google-style search engine added.

Tax offices

Taxpayers should be able to pay tax at the tax office.

Call centre scripts should be updated with access data for each tax office including bus numbers and bus stop numbers.

Have a desk in the enquiry area manned with volunteers to help people with their tax returns.

Have a big calendar up with a smiling tax officer on it.

Tax officers

People doing non-contact work should be rotated through contact positions at least 6 months every 2 years. This prevents the build up of staff with little or no idea of current taxpayer issues, and improves (or tests!) the commitment of senior staff. Senior staff are engaged on their ability to learn quickly, they should not be cushioned from the real world in positions more and more remote from actual taxpayer service. Every tax officer should be able to explain in one sentence how they help taxpayers pay tax.

Requesting confidential information by telephone

We have teams of people cold calling taxpayers and asking them to provide formal identification details such as date of birth before they will tell them what the call is about. 98 out of 100 times, the taxpayers provide full identification details without being able to verify to whom they are speaking, because they are concerned they will otherwise be classed as uncooperative. This is an obvious path of abuse by criminals. The ATO should call taxpayers and ask them to call back. The ATO should advertise that they never ask for personal details by phone or email without first verifying who they are. This would require a central system for verification (upgraded from a generic switchboard).