Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi

YMCHWIL GYMDEITHASOL Y LLYWODRAETH

GSR

GOVERNMENT SOCIAL RESEARCH

Analysis for Policy

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

www.cymru.gov.uk

Ymchwil gymdeithasol
Social research

Rhif/Number: 10/2016

# Evidence Synthesis - The Development of Charters

# Evidence Synthesis - The Development of Charters An evidence synthesis specifically focussing on Taxation Charters


## Ceri Greenall, Welsh Government


Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government


For further information please contact:
Ceri Greenall
Knowledge and Analytical Services
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ
Tel: 029 2082 5634
Email: ceri.greenall@wales.gsi.gov.uk



Welsh Government Social Research, 25 February 2016
ISBN 978-1-4734-5879-6



© Crown Copyright 2016

All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated.
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/

# Developing Charters – Evidence Synthesis

## Introduction

In Wales, the recent devolution of the Land Transaction Tax and the Landfill Disposals Tax has led to the Tax Collection and Management Bill which will be introduced as legislation next year. This Bill sets out a Taxpayers Charter which the Welsh Revenue Authority (WRA) must prepare. The Charter is to detail the behaviours and values expected of both the WRA and the taxpayers.

In anticipation of this Charter the Tax Policy and Legislation Division require a synthesis of the evidence surrounding charters in other countries, covering both taxes and other subjects. This information will help the development of a charter in Wales by identifying both enablers and hazards of the process. Evidence exists from around the world but it is currently disparate and covers a variety to themes and angles. The evidence review will characterise, compare and contrast different charters both within the UK and internationally.

The charters covered by the research will focus primarily on Taxation Charters, but will also cover other public service charters. This document synthesises this research, finds common messages, and places it in a Welsh context.

## Methodology

This paper synthesises evidence from a library search of literature. It is basically a rapid, non-systematic review and presents the evidence in a largely descriptive way. It does not, for example, make attempts to validate or critically examine the analysis contributing to the evidence reviewed.

The search terms were:

- Charters AND (rights AND obligations) AND Public service
- Taxpayer's charters
- Charters AND Public expectations

The literature identified through this search included 55 articles dating back to 1995. All articles were assessed for their relevance and evidence from them included if relevant to the review (some older information has been useful in understanding how charters have developed over time). However, as the process of producing a charter has improved over time, greater weight was given to more recent literature and evidence.

The search was undertaken in October 2015. The resulting evidence consisted mainly of government papers and guidance documents, and organisation reports (e.g. OECD) There were fewer journal articles and research reports. There were very few articles which evaluated the set up or impact of charters. Much of the literature reviewed was in the form of guidance documents. Therefore, the evidence as to how well charters have worked or how they've been enacted or interpreted by their beneficiaries is relatively weak.

Due to time constraints it has not been possible to follow up on leads presented in the literature to other relevant research. Nor has it been possible to explore further areas which area weaker in terms of the literature uncovered (how to measure the success of charters, and how to encourage adherence fall into this category). Further research may yield more evidence for such areas, but this may not be required at this stage.

**Background**

Citizen charters have a long history in the UK. One of the first internationally recognised charters was the Citizen's Charter introduced by John Major's Conservative government in 1991. Prior to this, charters had been used in the UK but mainly in local government. Charters were initially conceived as a way of guaranteeing service standards; citizens were recognised as consumers of public services with rights to redress if standards were not met. The Citizen's Charter paved the way for similar charters around the world and led to the launch of The Charter Mark, an award given to organisations able to demonstrate they met the principles set out under the Citizen's Charter.

Despite the widespread adoption of charters after the launch of the UK Citizen's Charter, their impact is varied and often difficult to assess. The Citizen's Charter itself did not stand the test of time and was re-launched as 'Service First' before being shelved. However, it generated some interesting lessons which can be applied to the production of charters in general.

Since Citizen's First, charters have continued to develop, improve and learn from past iterations. There are now many charters internationally, covering a wide range of services and functions, including taxation. In 2010, the OECD found that 48 out of the 49 countries they surveyed had a statement of rights for citizens, and 36 of these were set out in charters. The growing popularity of charters provides a wide variety of examples and learning which is particularly useful when developing a new charter.

**Developing a charter**

Due to the range of charters covered in this review, the terms 'citizens', 'service users', 'taxpayers' and 'customers' are all used to mean to the public side of the relationship. Before developing a charter, thought should be given as to the most meaningful terminology. With taxpayers charters, most often the public are simply termed taxpayers reflecting the fact that everyone pays taxes of some sort or another even if the reason why they refer to the charter is in the context of benefits, or on another taxpayers behalf.

**Setting objectives**

Defining the objectives of a charter is crucial in the development process. Charters are used for a variety of reasons across the spectrum of service areas. Some of the most common objectives of charters are:

- Increase quality of service delivery
- Enhance public sector management
- Increase satisfaction

- Reduce corruption and increase trust
- Manage expectations
- Form a framework for consultation with service users
- Increase in transparency
- Drive equity of access
- Remove deference towards service providers
- Clarify the responsibilities and accountability of both parties
- Draw attention to complaints procedures

The evidence from the literature shows that charters can have success in all these areas as long as their development is well thought out.

In terms of reducing corruption and increasing trust in administrations, this point was largely sourced from literature on less developed countries. However, research comparing the Australian Taxpayers' Charter and the UK Taxpayers Charter highlighted this as one of the main uses of a successful charter in all situations. Unger (2014) argues that charters "increase taxpayers' trust and confidence in the revenue administration, in turn increasing tax morale, which ultimately increased voluntary compliance." In self-assessment tax situations, this is particularly beneficial.

The clarification of the responsibilities of both parties is an important objective to focus on, especially in the case of taxation where there is an obvious onus of responsibility on both the taxpayer and the authority.

The danger of a charter not having clear objectives is highlighted by the Public Administration Select Committee in their review of the Citizen's Charter (15 July 2008, HC 411, para 43). The Committee refers to evidence around the 1991 Patient's Charter, stating that the Charter contained the following distinct types of commitment:

- Formalisation of best practice relating to, for example, standards of catering and accommodation;
- Statutory entitlements, such as access to medical records and informed consent;
- Targets, such as waiting times for treatment; and
- Broader policy objectives, such as the promotion of community support.

The Committee concluded that this inconsistency ran the risk of confusing the public about the nature of their entitlements to public services. Most confusion comes about as what the commitments actually mean "Sometimes they indicate a broad commitment to good practice; sometimes they indicate a specific target to demonstrate that commitment; sometimes they indicate in the broadest way the aim of the organisation".

**Step by step guides to setting up a charter**

Research by James, Svetalekth, and Wright (2007) suggests that the development of tax charters is more successful when it follows a strategic approach including consulting with customers and taking on board a views of a wide range of stakeholders. Australia produced a taxpayers charter using such an approach whilst, although the UK was an early adopter of a Charter, it took more of an ad hoc and prescriptive approach to development. Australia's charter has stood the test of time and been deemed successful, whereas the UK Charter has had a number of incarnations and been criticised.

There are numerous guidance documents on the actual steps which should be taken to produce a charter. The literature recommends a relatively structured approach as each stage is crucial to the success of a charter. It is generally agreed that internal buy in is as important as external. Reflecting this, the Irish Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has set out the following steps to be taken internally in preparing for a Charter:

1. discussions at senior management level about the purpose of, and approach to, the initiative;
2. assigning overall responsibility for the task to a member of senior management;
3. adequately supporting the Charter initiative by ensuring adequate staff and, if required, financial resources;
4. establishing structures for undertaking the task, ensuring that staff are involved throughout an organisation;
5. communicating with staff about the initiative;
6. ensuring that the process is linked to the wider business planning process
   within the organisation; and
7. if appropriate, discussing the Customer Charter initiative with the relevant
   Minister at this stage.

In terms of wider guidance for producing charters, there are useful documents from individual countries (Australia (Customer Service Good Practice Guide 2015), the Netherlands (Workbook e-citizen charter 2006), Ireland (Customer Charter Initiative 2015) to name a few) as well as the World Bank and the OECD. Additionally both the OECD and a collaboration of taxation professional bodies (CFE, AOTCA and STEP) have produced sample/model taxpayers charters which provide a wealth of information on setting up a charter (Cadesky, Hayes and Russell, (2013), OECD Committee of Fiscal Affairs Forum on Tax Administration).

In essence the steps which many documents suggest can be summarised as:

1. Commit to a service charter internally and identify your objectives
2. Identify your customers/service users
3. Make a list of services
4. Consult with customers/service users stakeholders
5. Set service standards using priorities identified with stakeholders and internal information to inform targets

6. Analyse complaints and other feedback
7. Publish a charter
8. Monitor performance
9. Report on performance and use as feedback for service improvement and charter revisions

McGuire (2001) identifies the consultation stage as crucial. Where charters have failed, their downfall can often be traced back to the lack of engagement with stakeholders and customers during the development phase. More detail on the various stages is covered where appropriate in the remainder of this document, however, it does not attempt to produce detailed guidance – this can be found in the referenced literature.

**Characteristics**
Most current charters share the same characteristics; clear and simple language, realistic and measurable performance standards, a dedicated grievance redress mechanism, and an effective public relations strategy to increase users' awareness about the charter (Post and Agarwal (n.d.)).

In terms of the grievance redress system there is evidence that enforcement through an ombudsman has advantages over a legal route. The need to involve the courts to seek redress is likely to be complex, expensive and off-putting for many service users. The Public Administration Select Committee (2008) concluded that avoiding the use of lawyers and the courts in the redress system would be more likely to achieve the aim of empowering service users.

**Balance of responsibilities**
This is highlighted in the literature as one of the objectives of a charter. Clarification of what taxpayers can expect from a revenue agency and what is expected of them is central to the creation of a Taxpayers Charter. The argument that service users should fulfil certain responsibilities recognises that public services are provided in the context of limited resources, which need to be used efficiently and effectively. There is a view that efficient and fair service provision warrants placing obligations on people claiming their rights to public services (Public Administration Select Committee 2008).

Linked to this is the perspective that the charter takes. Citizen's First was widely criticised for focussing on the provider perspective rather than recognising the role of both the agency and the consumer. This has been one of the main areas of progress over time; the current literature reflects that charters are now seen as a publication of the responsibilities of both the consumers and the delivery agency.

There are various examples of governments outlining rights and responsibilities of both the public and agencies (Cabinet Office, 2009). The combination of rights and responsibilities is exemplified by Australia's 'Compact with Young Australians' which sets out an entitlement for all under-25s to education, work or training, with corresponding obligations on young people.

Crucially, a charter helps the taxpayer, particularly those who are underrepresented, find their rights.

**Style**

Style is important in producing a charter. Many charters in the literature are moving towards a dual list of rights and responsibilities. The Netherlands e-charter is written from the citizen's perspective and consists of 10 quality requirements for digital contacts. Each requirement is formulated as a right of a citizen and a corresponding duty of government. Presenting the information in this way highlights the fact that both agencies and individuals have a part to play; it is a partnership of sorts (albeit with a very unequal distribution of power).

The literature is conclusive in recommending that all charters should be short and easy to read, with no jargon or confusing terms (for example Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2012)). Charters are designed as documents for the public and this should be considered at every stage of development.

The content of the charter should not be too standardised, rather it should reflect the revenue authority and the situation in Wales. There is obviously a balance to be struck in terms of standardisation and specifics. Charters have been criticised on both counts. Unger (2014) states that the 2008 HRMC Taxpayers Charter was criticised for not making clear that a taxpayer as obligations as well as rights, nor making it clear what was expected of people.

All the guidance confirms that the performance standards set out in the charter should be realistic and measurable. A charter is not a place for aspirations which have no chance of being realised. Inclusion of such would misleadingly raise taxpayer expectations. At the opposite end of the spectrum, standards should not be set too low. Consultation with taxpayers is crucial in understanding what is considered acceptable and balancing this against resources and what is achievable.

There is a danger in setting performance standards that these reflect simple service outputs such as answering the phone within five rings. These are readily accessible and measurable, but don't reflect the core aims of the charter. Standards should be chosen because they tell an important message, not because they're easy to get hold of or easy to explain.

The tone and wording of the contents should not be antagonistic. Consultation Responses to the 2009 draft HMRC Charter show that this criticism was levelled at the proposed sentence "*pursuing relentlessly those that break or bend the rule*[1]". The HMRC Charter was also criticised for its title 'The HMRC Charter'. This title gave no mention of who the charter was for and was felt by some to reflect the little attention that HMRC gave to the rights of taxpayers[2].

[1] As a result of the consultation responses to the proposed charter in 2009, the language was changed to 'tackle' (rather than 'pursue relentlessly').

[2] In response, HMRC retained the HMRC branding but entitled the charter 'Your Charter'.

**Publication**
One area which must not be overlooked is the publication and publicising of the Charter. As one of the aims of a charter is to highlight to taxpayers their rights and responsibilities, there is obviously a need to spread the message. The literature is clear that this is a crucial stage in development and important in achieving success.

The literature makes suggestions of various ways of publicising charters. For instance, the Irish Customer Charter Initiative (2012) suggests posters in public offices, leaflets, websites, pledge cards and including information in speaking opportunities. These are not ground-breaking, but do highlight the need for charters to be as readily available as possible, and also in as many formats as possible.

However, the literature warns against pushing a charter at every opportunity. Thought needs to go into the appropriate channels so that taxpayers are not overwhelmed with information. As an example, the Australian Taxpayers Charter was initially mentioned in all correspondence with taxpayers. However, it transpired that this was inappropriate in many circumstances and could cause unnecessary complications for taxpayers. Instead, letters simply have to conform to the Charter without having to explicitly mention it. James, Murphy and Reinhart concluded that a charter should be published on the relevant website under a 'your rights' section, rather than 'charter'. This was found to be more accessible and understandable for taxpayers.

International evidence shows that it is beneficial to have one summary document and supporting documents to provide detail where necessary. This ensures that the main charter can be simple and short but allows more detailed commitments to be made and information provided on measurement and evaluation. In Ireland, Customer Action Plans (CAPs) form these detailed documents supporting the Customer Charter (Per.gov.ie, 2016), whilst in Australia the Taxpayers Charter is presented on a web page and detailed in a linked document 'Taxpayers Charter, what you need to know' (Ato.gov.au, 2016).

**Measuring success**
In order to determine the success of a Charter, its performance needs to be monitored. The information gathered informs decisions, identifies points of weaknesses, and helps with planning and setting targets. There are well rehearsed warnings associated with performance indicators; they may become the absolute focus and divert attention and resources from other equally important issues, they often focus on short-term measures and they can be manipulated. Performance indicators in the public sector tend to focus on outputs, outcomes and productivity although outputs are evidently the easiest to identify and attribute. Quality would also be beneficial to measure. Commitments should move beyond response times to other targets measuring the quality of service offered focussing those issues that matter to customers. This is likely to be in terms of satisfaction with the service provided.

There are issues with measuring satisfaction, particularly in Taxation Charter circumstances. Often because of the complexity of the tax system, taxpayers may be unable to judge whether they were given the correct information or advice. Therefore satisfaction judgements are more likely to reflect the interaction with the tax official, including the time they had to wait for resolution, whether the person was friendly, and whether they were treated with dignity and respect. Although these are important issues they are unlikely to measure accurately the commitments set out in the charter.

Guidance on setting up charters from Ireland (Customer Charter Initiative, 2012) in particular offers useful tips on setting targets. It suggests that targets should be 'stretch targets' which are set out as minimum standards rather than the limit of ambition. An organisation should aim to improve performance above and beyond these targets. This is somewhat at odds with messages from other literature which propose that targets are ambitious but achievable. In effect the key is likely to be finding a happy medium between customers' expectations and deliverable targets.

The Irish guidance also suggests that targets should be updated regularly. During the lifetime of a charter, new requirements will arise, partly as a result of the feedback loop from complaints and evaluation. It makes sense for these updates to be included in commitments so that charters evolve over time.

Evaluation methods cited in the literature as being useful for monitoring the performance of charters in general include:

- customer surveys;
- customer panels/focus groups;
- complaint systems;
- comment cards;
- face-to-face interviews;
- mystery shopping;
- tracking systems (e.g. telephone & correspondence tracking);
- employee surveys/staff suggestion schemes; and
- external validation or self-assessment schemes.

These methods are rather general and would need to be considered in the context of taxation. The literature also highlights the importance of feedback mechanisms. However, performance indicators would need to be decided upon once the commitments are set and following consultation with stakeholders. There was less evidence in the literature on the nature of performance indicators and few recommendations on what they could cover. One point which came up frequently is that indicators should not be limited to levels of interaction such as response times to communications.

One example of how indicators can be developed comes from the Netherlands. Since 2008, the Netherlands Government has used a Charter to examine and benchmark the performance of its services. Quality codes have been developed to turn the general principles of the Charter into specific implementation measures which can then be used to measure compliance with the Charter. There is a large public involvement in both the measurement and enforcement. Measurement is partly based on citizen reported satisfaction measures and a programme called Citizenlink, along with a "People's Panel" and online discussion boards support the enforcement of the Charter.

**Success factors**

Evidence shows that there are specific activities which, if done well, are more likely to lead to a successful charter. Some of these have been mentioned earlier in this document but they will be explored more fully here.

Firstly, the literature shows that engagement is key. This is not limited to the engagement of external taxpayers and stakeholders, but also the engagement of staff. By engaging and consulting externally, charters are more likely to reflect the issues which stakeholders feel are important. Engagement internally has been shown to increase the chances of staff being 'on board' and understanding the importance of a charter, as well as encouraging the integration of the charter's aims into day to day activities (some of the literature refers to this commitment as being the DNA of the organisation). Evidence shows that this can also be encouraged through staff incentives via performance management. Linked to this is the need for management buy in. As shown by its inclusion in many step by step guides, this is seen as crucial.

As discussed in the publication section, high awareness of a charter is also pivotal. For instance, the Taxpayer Bill of Rights developed by the IRS in the US is sent to millions of taxpayers when they receive mail from the IRS, and is also displayed publicly in all IRS facilities. In their review of the Citizen's Charter, the Public Administration Select Committee (2007-2008) drew attention to the fact that *"many minimum standards for public service provision exist already, but public awareness of these standards appears to be very low. We recommend that, across all public services, the Government should make a systematic effort to publicise and communicate these standards as an initial step".*

Complaints are a valuable source of information in terms of charters. They offer an opportunity for service improvement as they highlight areas of weakness or failure. In order to fully utilise this knowledge, the literature recommends a monitoring system for complaints which goes beyond the service delivery units to a higher cabinet who can give oversight and have a greater power to act. Research also shows the importance of a variety of channels for complaint (or suggestions), the information about which is often publicised on the charter itself. Complaints procedures themselves need to be simple to ensure that more disadvantaged groups are able to access them. The Cabinet Office (2009) suggests that if this is not the case, *'those who complain are not those who have most to complain about.'*

The best ombudsman systems make it easy for everyone to use them and to know about their entitlements, through investing in public awareness, single telephone lines and direct online ‘petition’ systems.

Redress is also seen as very important to success. Often charters do not offer monetary compensation but restorative action. Swedish health services, for example, offer citizens health care in another area and travel costs if waiting time entitlements are not met.

Implementation is seen as a key success factor. Unfortunately there is little solid evidence regarding the enablers of implementation and plenty of rhetoric. Thomassen et al. (2012) attempted to distil the evidence from all relevant research papers published before 2013. The study grouped enablers into three clusters and several sub clusters. The table on the next page illustrates a summary of the findings and the most important one or two enablers under each cluster.

| Cluster | Sub cluster | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Leadership | | |
| | Vision with respect to customer orientation, leadership and commitment | Top management is committed to its service charter<br>The service charter is positioned within the organization as an instrument for improving the quality of service |
| | Stakeholder involvement | From the outset of the implementation process there was a focus on sensitising all stakeholders |
| | Trust of managers in employees | Managers trust their employees in the task of compensating customers |
| | Customer orientated culture | The organization has a customer-oriented culture |
| Empowerment of employees | | |
| | Support by employees | Employees are involved in the development of the service charter<br>Employees believe that the contents of the service charter can be adequately met in daily practice |
| | Authority to act | Employees are authorized to help customers immediately if they have problems because the contents of the service charter have not been properly met |
| Continuous Improvement | | |
| | Reflecting, learning and improving | The organization learns from situations in which the contents of the service charter are not met so that it can improve its service quality<br>The organization regularly measures the extent to which it has met the terms of the service charter |
| | Voice of the customer | Information based on resources provided by the customers, such as complaints analyses and satisfaction surveys, are used to define the content of the service charter |
| | Use of capabilities | The experiences of frontline employees with respect to the wishes and expectations of customers are used in the development of the service charter |
| | Control | Top management stimulates the control of, and compliance with, the contents of the service charter |

The enablers identified in the above study correspond with the five principles of Total Quality Management (TQM): customer focus, process focus, teamwork, employee participation and continuous improvement. The research suggests that a charter should be implemented as part of a wide focus on

quality rather than a stand-alone exercise. Other studies show that charters are usually connected with other management initiatives such as Balanced Scorecards, however, there is no consensus as to whether the connection is important or not.

There is less focus in the literature on what should be done with the data that are collected to monitor performance. It seems that often this is published in reports on websites and used internally, but is not frequently audited or externally evaluated. Performance on the whole seems to be monitored over time rather than benchmarked against other areas. Torres (2005) found that some charters in Spain use SERVQUAL as a point of reference. This tool measures satisfaction and expectations, and looks at the gap between the two. Australia is the one country that is often cited in the literature as making best use of data. Data relating to the Australian Taxpayers Charter are monitored and regularly feed into reviews. The Australian Audit office also regularly audits the Charter.

**Key challenges**

Many of the challenges faced when developing a charter can be read across from the inverse of the success factors; if the development ensures that these are taken into account then many of the challenges are overcome. The Canadian Government has produced a useful account of challenges when developing and managing service standards (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2016). Although not specifically aimed at the development of charters, many of these are applicable and their lessons useful in this context. Key challenges raised throughout the literature are summarised in the bullets below;

- Secure necessary approvals for proposed service standards – management buy in has proved to be vital, so it is important to plan this from the start. This extends to Ministerial approval; working with the Minister's office from the outset helps to ensure ongoing support.

- Writing standards in such a way as to not create legal liabilities - Legal affairs should also be involved early on to identify and mitigate potential challenges.

- Balance of ambitious and challenging standards with safe and achievable standards – Charters will raise the aspirations of service users so care needs to be taken to manage expectations. Charters should not promise more than they can reasonably deliver.

- Ensuring engagement of employees – motivating staff, involving them in the production of a charter and keeping them informed of the progress are all vital to ensure they are engaged and view the charter as an integral part of their work. Thomassen et al. (2012) concluded that charters are more likely to fail if they are seen as a disciplinary device or as a criticism of the service offered. Designating a member of senior staff as a 'Champion' can help momentum and focus. The UK

Citizen's Charter was found to lack ownership by civil servants who sometimes regarded it as yet another initiative. In contrast, James et al. (2007) surmised that the Australian Taxpayers Charter is seen to be more than a set of rules and is more about a standard of service which is ingrained in official's ways of working.

- Achieving a charter that is of value to stakeholders – as already stated, this is absolutely key. Numerous charters have failed largely owing to the lack of consultation in their development. Engaging with users leads to charters that reflect user priorities, ensure their buy in and reduces the likelihood of complaints regarding the charter contents.

- Delivering a charter which is used – there is a danger that considerable time and effort go into the development of a charter, only for it to sit unused in the depths of a website. Once a Charter has been produced, it needs to be promoted and readily available in a variety of formats.

- Charters shouldn't be used as the sole service improvement mechanism – redress is also vital. The 2009 UK Cabinet Office review of the world's best public services found that people want simple, accessible redress. Those systems which provide easy, immediate redress, tied to specific guarantees are the most effective. This avoids bureaucratic processes and costs associated with complex complaints and litigation. The Cabinet Office also found that such systems are more effective drivers of improvement than aspirational charters.

- Clarity of objectives – the Public Administration Select Committee (2007-2008) summarised criticism for the UK Citizen Charter Programme, stating that it was muddled in approach, particularly how its promises translated into action (what could people claim, what the government aimed to achieve). The promises were also criticised as so vague as to be meaningless.

**International Evidence**

This section draws on international evidence of either particularly well respected charters (the Netherlands and Australia), or charters which have useful guidance or have evidence as to the impact of the charter (Ireland and Spain).

In 2004 the Dutch government set a requirement that all government organisations that had frequent contact with the public should develop a service charter in consultation with service users in order to improve quality and transparency. The charters are published on the Burgerlink website (www.burgerlink.nl) along with guidance on how to produce a charter.

The Australian Taxation Charter is widely regarded as a well constructed and effective charter. The Charter itself came about as a result of a report in 1993 by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts which highlighted concerns about the imbalance of power between the Australia Tax Office (ATO) and taxpayers. The subsequent Taxpayers Charter was introduced in 1997. It sets out a relationship of mutual trust and respect between the tax office and taxpayers. The Charter has been regularly reviewed and updated. How it is presented has changed, however, the underlying themes have remained constant. The ATO considers its Taxpayers' Charter, Brand, and Compliance Model to be the three pillars of its communications with taxpayers. The ATO uses these to build community confidence which it views as essential in a self-assessment tax system. The drivers of the success of the Australian Taxation Charter are likely to be the commitment to the Charter itself. The ATO has a dedicated Charter Team who monitor the Charter, its performance, complaints and also keep abreast of charter developments internationally. In addition, the Australian Taxation Charter is regularly reviewed by the Australian National Audit Office and the recommendations made have led to changes in the Charter itself and its implementation. A review of audits of charter objectives by the Australian National Audit Office reported that charters had contributed to improvements in complaints handling

In Ireland the Customer Charter Initiative was launched in December 2002 and requires all Government Departments, Offices and other public bodies to publish charters covering a 3 year period and based on a four step cycle (Consultation, Commitment, Evaluation and Reporting.) Additionally, they are required to publish Customer Action Plans, setting out in detail the methods that they will use to achieve the targets set out in their Charters (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2014)).

An evaluation of Charters in Ireland (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2007)) found that service standards had continued to rise since Charters were introduced, customer perceptions linked to Charter areas have improved (e.g, the handling of complaints) and there has been an increased focus on quality customer service (e.g, customer consultation, quantitative targets, their measurement and complaints procedures). Although these improvements cannot be directly linked to the introduction of Charters, the improvements shown coincide with the same time period and occurred during a period of increased demand on public services. The evaluation also concluded that there are specific pre-conditions which enable Charters to succeed;

- leadership,
- strong partnership,
- a well-disposed corporate culture within the organisation,
- clarity about customers and services,
- networking and
- sharing of good practice (e.g. through the QCS Officers' Network),
- and the necessary internal
- systems to maintain high quality customer services (e.g., IT systems)

“Charters and QCS-type processes generally are therefore more important in the non-commercial public sector since it lacks the immediate corrective mechanism that the market provides whereby customers can “take their business elsewhere””.

A review of charters in Spain by Torres (2006) states that although the contribution of service charters to improvements in service quality have not been measured, they have had positive impacts on employees and service users. In terms of employees, charters were found to have contributed to changing internal procedures, improved organisational knowledge, improved quality-standard control, increased the internal perception of service quality, and created greater team cohesion. Torres (2005) also found that after the implementation of service charters, service users perceived better service accessibility, greater transparency, and a higher quality and more streamlined service.

**Conclusions**

The evidence reviewed was somewhat limited in substance, with many documents being government or other organisation guides rather than independent research studies or evaluations. However, taken as a whole, the literature demonstrates some key considerations when developing a charter.

1. The rationale for producing a charter and the objectives need to be clear.
2. Buy in from both internal employees and external stakeholders is vital to development and success.
3. The charter should be simple, short and easy to read
4. There should be details of a complaints and redress system
5. The charter should be published and publicised
6. Its progress should be monitored, published and used make improvements

The literature reviewed had little detail on adherence or measurements of success. These areas may be useful to explore in future research.

**Bibliography**


Ato.gov.au, (2016). *Taxpayers' charter - what you need to know | Australian Taxation Office*. [ONLINE]
Available at: https://www.ato.gov.au/About-ATO/About-us/In-detail/Taxpayers--charter/Taxpayers--charter---what-you-need-to-know/
[Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]

Cabinet Office, (2009). *Power in People's Hands: Learning from the World's Best Public Services*. London: Cabinet office, p.1-74. [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/archive/powerpeoplehands.pdf
[Accessed 17 December 2015]

Cadesky, M., Hayes, I. and Russell, D. (2013). *Towards a greater fairness in taxation*. The Hague: Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners.

Customer Service Good Practice Guide - South Australian Government (2015). *Customer Service Good Practice Guide - South Australian Government - Service Monkey*. [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://servicemonkey.com.au/index.php/knowledgebase/becoming-a-customer-centric-organisation/customer-service-good-practice-guide-south-australian-government
[Accessed 17 December 2015]

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2016). – *Customer Charter*. [ONLINE]
Available at: http://www.per.gov.ie/en/customer-charter-2/
[Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2016). – *Customer Action Plan*. [ONLINE]
Available at: http://www.per.gov.ie/en/customer-action-plan-2/
[Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2014) *Review of Customer Chartersand Customer Service Action Plans in the Civil Service* [ONLINE]
Available at: http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Report-on-Review-of-Customer-Charters-2014.pdf
[Accessed 06 January 2016]

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2012) *Customer Charter Initiative*. [ONLINE]
Available at: http://www.per.gov.ie/en/customer-charter-initiative/.
[Accessed 17 December 2015]

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ireland (2007) *Evaluation of Customer Charters* [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Fitzpatrick-Evaluation-of-Customer-Charters.pdf
[Accessed 06 January 2016]

HMRC (2009) *Consultation Responses Document July 2009 – Your Charter* [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://old.tax.org.uk/attach.pl/8464/9951/TaxpayersCharter%20HMRCresponseDoc200709.pdf
[Accessed 06 January 2016]

James, S., Svetalekth, T. and Wright B. (2007) *Tax charters, performance indicators and the case for a more strategic approach to tax administration* University of Exeter, Discussion Papers in Management 07/12

James, S., Murphy, K. and Reinhart, M. (2005) *The Taxpayers' Charter: a case study in tax administration* Centre for Tax System Integrity, Australian National University, Working paper 62*, February 2005.*

McGuire, L. (2001). *Service charters – global convergence or national divergence? A comparison of initiatives in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States*. Public Management Review, 3(4), pp.493-524.

OECD Committee of Fiscal Affairs Forum on Tax Administration (n.d) *Taxpayers' Rights and Obligations – Practice Note* [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://www.oecd.org/tax/administration/Taxpayers'_Rights_and_Obligations-Practice_Note.pdf
[Accessed 17 Dec. 2015]

Post, D., Agarwal, S., (n.d.). *How to Notes: Citizen Charters: Enhancing Service Deliver through Accountability - World Bank.* [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1193949504055/4348035-1298566783395/7755386-1301510956007/CC-Final.pdf.
[Accessed 17 Dec. 2015]

Public Administration Select Committee. (2007-2008) *From Citizen's Charter to Public Service Guarantees: Entitlements to Public Services* 15 July 2008, HC 411.

Thomassen, J., Ahaus, K., Van de Walle, S. and Nabitz, U. (2012*). An Implementation Framework for Public Service Charters: Results of a concept mapping study*. Public Management Review, 16(4), pp.570-589.

Torres, L. (2006). *Service Charters in Spain: Transparency and Citizen Empowerment or Government Marketing?* Public Money & Management, Volume 26, Number 3, June 2006, p159-164

Torres, L. (2005*). Service Charters: Reshaping Trust in Government-The Case of Spain.* Public Administration Review, 65(6), pp.687-699.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, (2016). *Guideline on Service Standards*. [ONLINE]
Available at: http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=25750
[Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]

Unger, K. (2014)*Ethics codes and taxpayer charters: Increasing tax morale to increase tax compliance.* eJournal of Tax Research, Volume 12, Number 2

e-Citizen Programme (2006). *Workbook e-citizen charter* [ONLINE]
Available at: http://www.osce.org/eea/90191?download=true.
[Accessed 17 December 2015]

**Suggested Reading**

Cadesky, M., Hayes, I. and Russell, D. (2013). *Towards a greater fairness in taxation: A Model Taxpayer Charter*. The Hague: Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners.

OECD Committee of Fiscal Affairs Forum on Tax Administration
Taxpayers' Rights and Obligations – Practice Note OECD
General Administrative Principles - GAP002 Taxpayers' Rights and Obligations [ONLINE]
Available at:
http://www.oecd.org/tax/administration/Taxpayers'_Rights_and_Obligations-Practice_Note.pdf
[Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]