ATT Welcome, May 2018

Welcomes

01 May 2018

No more bunnies out of hats!

This is my first welcome since the Spring Statement and for the first time in ages the sight of a Chancellor sitting down after giving a Commons speech at this time of year was not followed by tax professionals rising up in panic at the amount of fiscal change proposed. It was welcome proof that major tax or spending changes will now be made once a year at the Budget in the autumn. I would certainly join the CIOT in giving the Chancellor Philip Hammond's Spring Statement a 'thumbs up' as a significant step towards more considered and more effective tax policy-making.

This is one Easter period when we are glad to avoid seeing a 'bunny' pulled out of a hat.

I would encourage small businesses to take part in a seven-minute Treasury survey on the design of the VAT threshold, as set out in a call for evidence by the Government announced in the Statement. We must get the word out. I hope the results will make the Treasury aware that the negative impacts on small businesses of simply reducing the VAT threshold will be exaggerated by the imminent introduction of digital record keeping and reporting requirements, and Brexit.

On the topic of surveys, we went to the membership recently with a survey on rent-a-room relief. We decided on this course of action because it was a response to a Treasury call for evidence; we wanted to know how people in tax practice viewed rent-a-room, rather than whether a specific tax change will work well or not so well, which tends to make up the majority of our submissions to the Government. The 687 responses in total from ATT and CIOT members showed that both organisations have a membership that are engaged with their respective bodies. We are also grateful for the written responses to the open questions in the survey. Such surveys inform and add weight to our arguments with government departments – of course, you can

end up with results that show half the recipients in favour of something and the other half against, which is what happened! On this occasion, the obvious conclusion to draw was that there is no clear consensus in the tax profession to reform the increasingly popular rent-a-room relief.

Another interesting outcome from the survey was that 59 per cent of members felt that consideration should be given to merging rent-a-room relief and the £1,000 property allowance into a single relief for lettings of an individual's only or main residence. It may be worth watching this space with that.

The ATT President's Reception 2018 was held at the Churchill War Rooms. More than 140 guests attended the evening event including representatives from other professional bodies, employers of ATT members and students, some staff from Artillery House and other stakeholders. Many of the guests had a guided tour of the War Rooms and learnt about its role in some of the pivotal events in our country's recent history. Entertainment was provided by Jitterbug dancers who performed to 1940s swing music.

It was Sir Winston Churchill who said that no idea is so outlandish that it should not be considered with a searching but at the same time a steady eye. I suppose we hope to be a searching and steady eye on tax proposals made by government departments, for the benefit of the Government itself, the tax profession and the taxpayer.

To finish, I attended Branches Conference with Ray McCann, my opposite number in the CIOT hierarchy. It was entitled 'New Risks, New Opportunities'. I introduced Ray as the 'opportunity' and me as the 'risk', when we met with the Branch Network, which went down well. A total of 40 volunteers, representing 25 branches from across the UK and other territories, attended.
I took the opportunity to talk fondly of my time volunteering with Sussex Branch and was pleased to note that among members of ATT Council, including the current President, Graham Batty, many were Branch Network friends; some of whom had volunteered for a number of branches, two or three times over the years, first as Treasurer and then as Secretary, etc.
ATT is a broad church and volunteers are welcomed from all areas of its diverse congregation. For more information on volunteering get in touch with Jane Ashton or contact your local branch chair.

Until next time, goodbye!

Tracy Easman
Deptuy President, ATT