The advent of the new Agent Forum



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The new Agent Forum is being tested at community.hmrc.gov.uk. CIOT's Richard Wild and ATT's Helen Thornley want you to try it out

How often when dealing with client affairs have you had to ask HMRC to correct something they had done, or found that their systems did not work as expected? What did you do about it? Write a strong letter of complaint, tell your professional body – or just accept it as part and parcel of your everyday working life? Do things have to be this way?

One option is to turn to the Agent Forum. Following the closure of local Working Together groups some years ago, the forum is now the first port of call for agents who want to raise concerns with HMRC about their systems or processes. HMRC launched a new platform for the forum in October, replacing the previous version which had been in operation for a couple of years. The ATT and CIOT are both

encouraging members to sign up to the updated forum and actively participate.

Using the new forum

Signing up to the forum allows you to report new issues with HMRC systems and see those that other agents have raised. HMRC will often be unaware that there is a problem until it is reported in this way. You can also see how other people have dealt with problems and add your own suggestions or experiences.

Issues or ‘threads’ raised on the forum are reviewed by a small team of HMRC staff, who will refer queries on to the relevant area within HMRC. HMRC will encourage agents to provide evidence to see if issues are widespread, and will communicate the outcome of their investigations, as well as any potential resolutions or workarounds. Whilst the Agent Account Manager service is for client-specific problems, the forum is designed to identify the ‘grit in the system’, highlighting issues that may affect a large number of taxpayers.

HMRC will normally post downtime and technical issues on their service availability and issues pages, but the forum is a good early warning of emerging problems that haven’t yet been reported by HMRC. Occasionally, HMRC will post information or announcements only on the forum, or post them there first.

Evidence is key

Even if an issue is reported by several agents, HMRC usually need to see specific examples so they can identify what happened and identify the likely cause. Details of a specific issue should be sent separately to agentforum.wt@hmrc.gov.uk so as to maintain client confidentiality. The more evidence provided , the better the chance of problems being resolved to the benefit of both tax agents and HMRC.

Our joint ATT and CIOT Working Together sub-committee and the Issues Overview Group discuss some of the key issues with HMRC. Of course, not every issue that is raised will be solved to our satisfaction due to time and resources, but highlighting problems to HMRC can help us raise their awareness among our members, as well as providing advice on what to do when you are faced with the issue.

How to sign up to the forum

The forum is at https://community.hmrc.gov.uk. It's easy to sign up, and instructions can be found on the ATT and CIOT websites. While it is in 'beta' form, the forum is restricted to members of professional bodies. The new platform is an improvement upon the previous one, and has better functionality. We continue to provide feedback to HMRC on how it might be further enhanced, so please pass on your feedback about the operation of the forum, or matters that need escalating further within HMRC. Send your comments to atttechnical@att.org.uk or technical@ciot.org.uk.

While some agents lament the loss of the face to face engagement in Working Together, the forum represents the greatest single route by which issues can be reported to HMRC. HMRC has invested in the platform and we need to prove its worth. As they say, use it or lose it!