ATT welcome

Welcomes

02 March 2021

The promise of better times

Who would have imagined that a year on we would still be in lockdown and our daily lives still so disrupted by Covid-19? When we closed the office last March and set up all staff to work from home, we could not envisage that we would be working from home a year later and still with no clear timeframe on when it is safe for all staff to return to our office.

Despite all the anxiety, uncertainty and grief that Covid-19 has unfortunately caused, the past 12 months has not been without its occasional happier revelations: for example, everyone has been able to work from home, we can do the same things we do in the office and many people really like it because it gives them a better work/life balance. It has also been an opportunity to look at all the ways we did things and consider if there are better ways of doing them.

After the initial challenge of getting all staff set up from home and equipped to carry out their day-to-day duties, we started to consider how we would continue to meet our charitable objectives. How would we deliver our examinations which were held in venues up and down the country and how would we deliver our conferences that were also held in different locations throughout the UK?

Our long-term plan was to put our examinations online within three years – but we managed to do it in three months. We learned an awful lot from the first examination session in June where just one paper was available to sit. This enabled us to improve our systems and offer all our examinations online in November. Feedback is extremely positive and, although we will continue to make improvements to the examination experience, we will not be going back to handwritten examinations.

In a similar vein, we moved all our conferences online. We presented some sessions ‘live’ and encouraged delegate participation through the technology we used, and we recorded some sessions for delegates to watch in their own time. This has enabled members and non-members from all round the UK to participate in these events without the expense of travelling to venues or the stress of finding them. We will offer all our conferences online again this year and, even if we return to venues in the future, we will still offer an online alternative for people who for various reasons are unable to travel to the venues.

Our brilliant technical team has never been busier. They are working tirelessly to ensure that all visitors to our website have the latest information on the many and varied government initiatives that have been announced. On occasions we have updated the same pages twice in the same day to keep up with the announcements, with the result that we have had over 335,000 views of the pages in our dedicated Covid-19 hub. We have increased our engagement with HMRC to get answers to members’ queries and have produced four free webinars together with CIOT colleagues that were viewed over 3,800 times. Alongside this, we have been writing articles and clarifying legislation on home offices, working from home and even ‘virtual’ Christmas parties.

What else can we look back on with pride from the past 12 months? We held our AGM online giving all our members the opportunity to attend without leaving their homes. We held our Steering Group and Council meetings online, cutting down the travelling time of our volunteers who come from around the country, not to mention reducing our carbon footprint. We will continue to offer online facilities for all our meetings even if we go back to some of them being face-to-face. Hopefully, this will enable and encourage more members to become volunteers and help their Association.

Looking ahead to the rest of 2021, no doubt the ‘new normal’ will look and feel different but we will continue to support our staff who are working with or without interruptions from family members or pets, and with or without home schooling and caring responsibilities. We will continue to support our members and students to ensure they have the skills to be the best possible tax technicians of the future and we will continue to provide timely up to date tax information for all via our website.

With the promise of better times on the horizon, keep well and stay safe.

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