Working Together – the digital future

General Features **Management of taxes**

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The digital future

After an extended delay we now have the feedback from the workshops in February and March 2015 to discuss the future of Working Together in a digital age.

Due to the closure of all HMRC enquiry centres and most of the regional offices, action needed to be taken to prevent Working Together withering on the vine.

In the past few years there have been model Working Together groups that have conducted their business in accordance with the Working Together agreement and were particularly proactive in raising issues and highlighting these to HMRC.

It is imperative that we nurture these individual volunteers from all the professional bodies in the new digital age because it would be sad if we were to lose these valuable assets.

Conversely, engagement across all Working Together groups has been variable and, in recent years, attendance has been significantly down to extent that some meetings have been cancelled.

Time will tell whether the work carried out by HMRC to develop agent digital products and platforms to refresh and support Working Together will be accepted by a majority of agents. However, I believe it is the role of this Institute, and the other professional bodies, to contribute fully in this process to establish a platform for members to continue to raise issues that affect our working lives. Further, we should be able to bring these to the attention of HMRC in a simple and transparent way so that they are resolved in a timely and sensible manner.

New proposals in brief

- It is planned that future Working Together meetings will be in the form of live webinars, with podcasts available, centred on 10 UK regions.
- All regions are to have a named, dedicated contact with HMRC.
- There will be a rolling programme of meetings to be jointly held with HMRC and agents.
- Agendas will have a standard format to update Working Together issues, plus other items.
- The intention is that the regions can discuss specific issues or particular topics, or subjects with experts, which agents and HMRC agree should be included.

Face-to-face meetings will be held where, for example, there is a need for:

- workshop issues relevant to business issues and also the agent strategy; and
- HMRC will also look for opportunities to support agent-sponsored events.

It is hoped that agents not previously involved in Working Together will become involved and that they will be encouraged to attend the live webinar meetings. Agents will have the opportunity to attend all Working Together meetings during the year, or just those hosted by their own region, or those they particularly chose to attend.

Other areas being considered are:

- an online formal forum to raise possible widespread issues;
- using social media, such as LinkedIn, as a way to engage with HMRC and other agents to discuss issues; and
- an informal forum to enable agents to ask questions and to have these answered by HMRC, or other agents.

Conclusion

The new format is a work in progress and there a planning meeting was held in mid-July to agree the format of the first regional meeting in September, which I will attend on behalf of the Institute, and is centred on the good practices established by the former Oxford Working Together group, led by the ICAEW representative, Rob McCulloch.

HMRC have requested feedback and questions so I urge everyone to read their document, *Digital Agent Engagement Working Together in a Digital Age*, issued on 1

July. This has been posted on our website and is also referred to in the CIOT weekly newsletter, published on 3 July.

In July and August HMRC will hold two digital meetings to give agents an opportunity to comment and input to the finer details of Working Together in a digital age. We appreciate that this is peak holiday season, but would encourage members to attend one of them. Details will be relayed to our members through the usual channels when they are released by HMRC.

Finally, remember to email any issues to wt@tax.org.uk and we will ensure that these are raised with HMRC.