What do tax advisers want for Christmas?

General Features

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We each have our own wishes, but in our day-to-day work one thing that we all want is an efficient, informative telephone service from HMRC. At the moment that is far from being provided.

One aspect that would make life easier is the addition of agent dedicated lines (ADL), particularly for PAYE/RTI and corporation tax. Through Working Together, CIOT and ATT, along with other professional bodies, have asked for a PAYE for employers' ADL. A year ago, however, HMRC announced that there was no evidence to support that request and closed the topic. Consequently, the Working Together sub-committee created a form to collect evidence to submit in support of the request. It was publicised at Association and Institute conferences and also at branch meetings over the past year, as well as being made available online at the Working Together forum. The responses have already been sent to HMRC.

A year on, there are considerable changes. HMRC is moving to digital by default and leading the restructuring of the Working Together process. Service standards are to be a permanent agenda item at the online meetings. In the current fiscal climate, HMRC need to know how best to direct their resources and how we can contribute to create a system that works to our mutual benefit. Agents can help by providing the raw data on which the decisions can be based. Therefore, it is essential that members tell us about their experiences of telephone contact with HMRC.

HMRC are aware of long waiting times for telephone enquiries and have recruited 3,000 staff, to increase to 4,500 in the next year. We will need to monitor the progress of this initiative to ensure that the standards that we expect of HMRC are being maintained. If we find that they cannot deal with our queries, and we have to wait more and more for call-backs from the technical departments that are also trying to answer our letters, little will have been achieved. That is where the ADLs

can make a difference. Again, we will need the evidence to support our feedback to HMRC.

In his inaugural speech as CIOT President, Chris Jones referred to the relationship between the Institute and HMRC and the need for us to have a dialogue in which we back up our concerns ‘by hard, fact-based evidence’. This applies as much to procedure and the interface between HMRC and the taxpayers and agents as it does to the legislation. We can do this only with information from our members – so please, instead of complaining to your colleagues or ranting at the phone, complete and submit the form, which can be obtained by emailing technical@ciot.org.uk. Who knows, next Christmas we may start to see the effects of these initiatives!