Working Together update

General Features

01 June 2016

Working Together goes digital. Here’s what’s happening, and how you can be involved.

Members involved in the Working Together (WT) initiative will know that it is changing. Those who aren’t involved may wonder what is happening or even think that nothing is happening at all. More background to the WT initiative can be found on the CIOT and ATT websites (as well as on GOV.UK), but let me explain what is changing.

What’s changing?

Historically, WT has operated on a regional basis, when most towns had a tax office and local WT meetings could be held between agents and HMRC. In some areas these worked well, in others they did not. The increasing centralisation and specialisation of HMRC activities, alongside increased digitisation, have resulted in either local HMRC offices closing or having no influence over the issues and problems faced by agents in the area. Against this backdrop, in September 2015 the WT meetings were moved to a digital footing, allowing agents from around the country to participate.

Initially, the plan was to retain the geographical structure: HMRC would allocate a specialist agent manager (SAM – an individual dedicated to the WT initiative) to one of ten regions, and each professional body involved in WT would assign a volunteer or representative to each of them. This latter part proved difficult for professional bodies, and we also questioned the need for a geographical structure if the meetings were to be held digitally.

The professional bodies suggested to HMRC that, instead of having a regional structure, the SAMs could instead be allocated to a particular professional body.

Each organisation would, therefore, collate issues raised by their members, and have a direct route into HMRC through their SAM. He or she would link in with the other SAMs to consider whether the issue had been raised by other professional bodies and therefore may represent a widespread problem.

We are grateful that HMRC considered this request, and that it has been approved by them and the WT Strategic Group (broadly, professional body representatives who guide the direction of the WT initiative), and at the time of writing this is being rolled out.

WT digital meetings

As noted above, WT meetings recently moved to a digital format – broadly a webinar without the pictures (a relief for those running the meetings, and no doubt for participants, too!) – and WT has therefore been renamed Digital Working Together (DWT). DWT meetings were held at the beginning of April and May. They are currently being run by members of the Issues Overview group (IOG – volunteers and staff of the professional bodies) from their individual locations. These will continue to be run by the IOG bi-monthly for the rest of 2016. Do bear with us as we become accustomed to running these meetings – but we would welcome constructive suggestions for improvements.

Many of the issues being discussed are reported in HMRC's *Agent Update*. These are also published bi-monthly, and provide not only a summary of some of the main issues addressed as part of the DWT initiative but also other useful information.

Currently, the DWT meetings can be attended only by the 800 or so agents who have previously been involved in the WT initiative. If you are one of them, try to participate in the next meeting in early July. We have averaged around 60 agents for the past two DWT meetings, so there is room for improvement, although the feedback from them has been broadly positive. Soon, it is intended that DWT meetings will be opened to all agents, and we will let members know when this happens.

Conclusion

I am convinced that the professional bodies (including the CIOT and ATT), and importantly HMRC, are committed to the DWT initiative and want to make it work,

and we remain indebted to our Working Together volunteers. Of course, not all issues can be resolved (remember, one-off client-related matters may be better directed at the agent account manager (AAM) service – see GOV.UK for more details), but the more evidence we receive about problems or 'grit' in the system, the more chance we and HMRC have to address them. Check the Working Together pages on the CIOT and ATT websites for more information. To get involved in DWT, or if you would like to raise an issue, email *wt@tax.org.uk*.