Working Together – update

Personal tax

01 July 2015

Update on the latest WT activities and we bid farewell to Stephen Relf

I was hoping to report on the initial findings from HMRC after the digital workshops in February and March. However, at the time of writing, I am still waiting for feedback from HMRC. Although nothing much has happened with Working Together in relation to engagement with HMRC (the general election being the reason), we have continued to be active both within CIOT/ATT and also liaising with the other professional bodies.

First, my thanks goes to Barbara Harewood who has pulled-together a ‘telephone contact with HMRC questionnaire’, now posted on the Working Together forum. I would urge members to visit the forum and provide us with your comments, as this helps with the reporting of issues to HMRC.

Second, thanks to Alison Ward who has been gathering evidence of repayment delays from HMRC. This arose after reports of an increase in the time taken for repayments to be made, especially in connection with self-assessment but also other business streams. The information provided by members has helped us to gather enough evidence to raise an issue with HMRC on Shared Workspace.

Neither of these issues is new. They have appeared on Shared Workspace many times before, together with that old chestnut of ‘delays in the post’. The issues were discussed during recent telephone conference calls of the Issues Overview Group. In relation to telephone contact, we were told that HMRC intend to recruit approximately 2,000 additional staff to address this and a ‘hints and tips’ document for calling HMRC will be available shortly.

On 4 June I was invited to the HMRC Digital Delivery Centre at Longbenton in Newcastle, together with other members of the professional bodies. Although the work carried out there is focused on personal tax for individuals, and not geared

towards agents, it was interesting to learn how HMRC are developing their digital services in what they term an agile way. In simple terms, they are developing the service in bite-size chunks, testing as they go along and taking into account customer feedback at each stage. The aim is to release a service that has been thoroughly tested. The intended output, it is presumed, is the start of the process of creating digital tax accounts for taxpayers, which chancellor George Osborne announced would replace the need to complete self-assessment tax returns.

In my opinion, we are a long way off this becoming a reality, but it was refreshing to see how this particular section (of about 240 staff: 38% HMRC, 49% Ascenture and 13% local HMRC SME contractors) is adapting methods, successfully used by the likes of Microsoft and Apple in developing their software products, rather than use the historical HMRC approach of developing a new service and then finding it is not fit for purpose.

Finally my grateful thanks to Stephen Relf for all the hard work he has undertaken on behalf of the Working Together sub-committee during his time with the CIOT. We wish him well in his future career and it is great to know that Stephen will continue to be part of the sub-committee as a volunteer.

Keep reporting those issues on the Working Together email or forum.

CIOT WT Forum

ATT WT Forum