Simplification on the agenda at President’s Networking event

Briefings



20 April 2023

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On Monday 20 March, CIOT President Susan Ball hosted a networking event at the Great Scotland Yard Hotel in London. Over 70 guests attended the evening, which brought together tax policy makers and leading figures from the tax profession. This was a new event for CIOT, and we were delighted to welcome Jim Harra, Chief Executive of HMRC, as our guest speaker.

In her opening remarks, Susan Ball said that, while there were some measures to welcome in the recent Budget, one disappointment had been that there was nothing in there about increasing HMRC’s resources. ‘I know Jim doesn’t need me to tell him how challenged service levels still are. And I know he and his colleagues are doing their best. But HMRC continues to be asked to do more, with less. If the government is serious about improving growth and productivity, we need a properly funded and

efficient HMRC, supporting business, providing prompt refunds and answers to queries.'

The CIOT President presented her predecessor Peter Rayney with his Past President's certificate and badge at the event. She also paid tribute to the Institute's Director of Public Policy, John Cullinane, who is shortly to retire.

In his speech, Jim Harra acknowledged frustrations over service levels and spoke of the 'key challenge' of meeting demand for services with ever-shrinking resources. 'We want to improve our customer service levels,' he said, but continued: 'In a world of limited and falling real terms budgets, we can only do that by getting even more taxpayers to use our digital services and to self-serve online.' He said that every pound HMRC spends 'represents an opportunity cost and I can't go cap in hand to the Treasury for additional funding for customer services because some customers who could self-serve choose not to do so.'

The HMRC chief executive said that during the coming years HMRC would be 'bringing together digital services under one consistent brand and providing an improved digital experience through a new online account designed around taxpayer tasks and needs. We will add new digital features and services regularly to improve the customer experience, such as moving child benefit online, or making it easier for customers to change their personal details or find out their National Insurance number.' He added that HMRC is planning to extend Self Serve Time to Pay to VAT customers this year.

Jim Harra said that working closely with tax professionals is at the heart of how the tax authority wants to modernise and build trust in the tax system. 'It's through working closely with yourselves, and your members, as well as wider stakeholder groups, that we can identify the pain points, challenge ingrained problems, find solutions and simplify the tax system. We might not always see eye to eye, but together we have a shared purpose to create a healthy tax system – helping citizens and businesses meet their obligations and receive their entitlements.'

He paid particular attention to tax simplification, saying that measures in the Budget – alongside the government's statement that new policy, as well as existing tax rules, 'will be subject to more scrutiny to make sure that changes are as easy to administer as possible' – shows that HMRC means business. 'Simplification lies at the heart of HMRC's tax administration strategy and we will work closely with

stakeholders such as the CIOT to get this right.’

Following the speeches, those at the event split into 10 groups to consider ideas for how HMRC could effectively embed simplification into the tax system. The notes from this exercise have been collated and are being fed back to HMRC.