Standards for agents: an update

General Features



18 June 2024

The HMRC standard for agents outlines HMRC's expectations of all tax agents and tax advisers in their dealings with HMRC, whether or not they are members of professional bodies which have their own codes of behaviour.

The HMRC standard for agents (the standard) can be found on GOV.UK at: tinyurl.com/38juevtw.

The Professional Conduct in Relation to Taxation (PCRT) is also a code, co-authored by seven professional bodies (including CIOT and ATT), that sets out the principles and standards of behaviour that all members, affiliates and students of those bodies are expected to follow.

The standard was updated in early 2023 with the intention of addressing a number of issues that HMRC had encountered in relation to their dealings with tax agents and advisers. However, the revisions included in the update also resulted in some inconsistencies with the standards set out in PCRT and the supporting ethical codes of the relevant bodies.

Following the update to the standard in early 2023, a small working party of the PCRT group was convened to discuss the revisions with HMRC. The working party have been collaborating with HMRC since this time and the joint work culminated in the publication of a further update to the standard on 17 May 2024.

The updated standard continues to endorse PCRT, and the revised wording ensures that there is consistent messaging between it and PCRT. Importantly, it also states that if agents are meeting the code of ethics of their professional body, the standard should not place further requirements on them. The updates to the standard also remove potential duplication and unnecessary compliance burdens where there is perceived misalignment between the codes of conduct when an agent is subject to more than one.

PCRT sets the highest standards for members and the bodies support the updated wording of the standard. The bodies welcome the collaborative approach taken by HMRC throughout the process in working to resolve the various points raised by both the bodies and their members. They also recognise the importance of raising standards consistently across the profession in light of the current focus on the potential future regulation of the tax services market.

The PCRT bodies issued a joint press release covering the update which can be found on both the CIOT (tinyurl.com/37pufju6) and ATT (tinyurl.com/ms7va74c) websites.

Marc Leach *mleach@ciot.org.uk*