Technical Newsdesk: June 2025

Welcomes



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HMRC recently announced the closure of their online community forums, which can currently be found at https://community-origin.hmrc.gov.uk. These currently consist of a customer forum, which HMRC describes as a place to help find answers to common queries, and an agent forum, where agents can report issues about HMRC systems that are affecting taxpayers and their clients. Both forums will close on 30 June 2025 and, in preparation for the closure, they will stop accepting new queries from early June.

HMRC say that the closure aligns with their Digital Channel Strategy, which prioritises services that are quick and easy to use, allows customers to self-serve and provides automated solutions with real-time support. They signpost their digital assistant, webchat and social media channels as offering a range of tailored support for customers, designed to address queries quickly and efficiently with online guidance, and often remove the need to get in touch at all for many enquiries.

We have longstanding concerns about the operation of HMRC's online forums. Occasional 'dipping into' the customer forum reveals the dangers of answering

questions without seeing the full picture. Some answers (where the customer hasn't simply been referred to guidance) are ambiguous or simply wrong. As a former VAT adviser, I wonder how many times I have used the words 'it depends' before answering a technical question.

The agent forum was set up around five and a half years ago, and my ATT colleague Helen Thornley and I wrote about it in the December 2019 edition of *Tax Adviser* (tinyurl.com/mu8wsywm). It's fair to say that we had high hopes for the agent forum, which replaced the traditional 'Working Together' activities – and which had themselves transitioned from face-to-face meetings into virtual ones. Unfortunately, the agent forum also had its problems. Despite everyone's best intentions, it was difficult to gather evidence to demonstrate the widespread nature of problems with HMRC's systems (particularly as only a tiny proportion of agents actually used the forum) and over time enthusiasm waned to the point where it became almost redundant.

Does this leave a gaping hole in HMRC engagement and support? From an agent's perspective, I would like to think they can take some reassurance in the level of engagement that professional bodies have with HMRC and other policymakers. The CIOT has recently published a schedule of the engagement groups that it participates in (tinyurl.com/wd47e85a). It is a member of around 80 forums – mainly with HMRC but also with other policymakers in the UK and EU. ATT and LITRG also have significant levels of engagement. So if there is a problem with (for example) HMRC's systems, the chances are that there is a forum at which this can be raised and progressed. Please do send examples of such issues to technical@ciot.org.uk or atttechnical@att.org.uk.

Perhaps the greatest impact will be on the unrepresented and whether they can obtain the guidance and answers they need through the alternative channels signposted by HMRC. I think we can only 'watch this space' and monitor the impact on, among other things, call volumes to HMRC, the tax charities, the resources and guidance produced by LITRG, and ultimately on the level of tax compliance.