ATT Welcome: Some observations…

Welcomes

February 2026



29 January 2026

Welcome to my first column in 2026. Traditionally, we would begin by wishing all of you a Happy New Year in the January column, but our first print edition is in February this year. However, while *Tax Adviser* is now being printed bi-monthly, our monthly online updates mean that our conversations and commentary will continue throughout the year.

In some ways, though, wishing tax compliance practitioners Happy New Year in February feels wholly appropriate. I think sometimes that tax practitioners must operate in a parallel universe to the normal world. As I have written before, it can be helpful to ease the pressures of January by completing as much as possible before Christmas. I lost count of the number of people asking me if I was ‘winding down’ in December.

There are always articles about the melancholy of working in January, with the third Monday in January now labelled ‘Blue Monday’. Slogging through numerous tax returns may be tedious, but it is certainly not boring. I remember one January trying

to find a password to submit a Pension Scheme Return, and searching my emails from the previous January. I never did find it but I did discover correspondence from the clients I had just been dealing with. My favourite example was the client who, at 5.35pm on one 31 January, refused to sign his tax return because he said it was incorrect – despite the fact that the only entry on the return was a P60.

In my December column, I wrote that I was preparing my article before the November 2025 Budget. I made three 'observations'.

First, I said that I could see no point in the pre-Budget statement made by the Chancellor in early November. On Budget day, the Chancellor was severely criticised by the Deputy Speaker for making that statement. I also suggested that it would be better if the Chancellor undertook the political television round on the Sunday after the Budget rather than before – which she did. My *pièce de resistance* was recalling the Chancellor in 1945 who was forced to resign for leaking Budget information. We can now add Richard Hughes, the former Chairman of the Office for Budget Responsibility, to that list.

Another prediction is that the implications of Making Tax Digital (MTD) from April 2026 are now less than two months away. This represents a major change in how many sole traders and landlords will interact with HMRC. Understandably, it also places increased pressure on already busy practitioners, both in adapting to changes in their workload and in dealing with frustrated taxpayers.

When MTD for VAT was introduced, it was largely a change to the submission processes for most businesses. While some businesses using manual systems needed to change, the numbers were relatively small. By contrast, MTD for Self Assessment brings into the system a significant number of taxpayers whose previous interaction with HMRC was on an annual basis. It was therefore pleasing to see in the Budget that penalties for quarterly filing will not apply until 5 April 2027. Your go-to source for all things MTD is the ATT website at tinyurl.com/3vcfvjxn, where our technical team has compiled a wide range of very useful guidance.

Finally, in addition to my role as Deputy President, I am also chairman of the ATT Examination Steering Group. I was delighted last month to report to the ATT leadership team that the November 2025 examinations went well, and that we had many successful candidates. To those of you who passed, I send my congratulations. If you did not pass, please do not give up – try again in May 2026. Many candidates

are now exam-qualified and eligible to apply for membership, and I would strongly encourage you to do so. Membership brings access to a wide range of benefits, which are set out on our website at tinyurl.com/4dtvfm5n. It also provides public and professional recognition of the hard work you must have put in to achieve exam success.

For students resitting or sitting for the first time in May 2026, you will notice changes on the computer side of our examinations, as we have changed exam providers. The most significant change is likely to be the introduction of remote proctoring. These changes are designed to improve the computer-based experience for our candidates, while maintaining the integrity and reputation of our examinations. Until next time.