Technical Spotlight: Expert Panel on Promoting Digital Channel Shift for Income Taxes

Briefings

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The Expert Panel on Promoting Digital Channel Shift for Income Taxes brings together representatives from HMRC and professional bodies to discuss issues relating to HMRC's transition to digital services and communications for income tax.

The Expert Panel on Promoting Digital Channel Shift for Income Taxes ('the Panel') was formed following the consultation on 'Simplifying and modernising HMRC's income tax services through the tax administration framework'.

Its purpose is to discuss improvements to income tax services affecting individual taxpayers, employers and their representatives, and to facilitate the transitioning of more income tax services and communications to digital, or digital by default.

The Panel is chaired by HMRC and brings together representatives from the ATT, the CIOT and the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group, along with other professional bodies, software representatives and tax charities. Monthly meetings allow HMRC to receive prompt feedback on new ideas and services which are commonly in the developmental phase.

Since the Panel's formation, its role and importance have been strengthened by HMRC's Transformation Roadmap, which sets objectives for greater digitalisation and reduction in postal output, with a view to at least 90% of interactions with HMRC taking place digitally by 2030.

HMRC frequently consults the Panel on planned changes to digital services, as well as sharing 'beta' versions of new digital systems or enhancements to current services.

Previous examples of services covered include improvements to child benefit claims, providing better information on PAYE code changes, and digitising routes to appeal Self-Assessment penalties. Discussing early versions of these services allows stakeholders to suggest improvements before they are ultimately made available to taxpayers.

One limitation with the Panel is that new and improved digital services are commonly made available to taxpayers, but without equivalent improvements being made to agent services. ATT and CIOT representatives are always quick to remind HMRC that agents should have equal access to digital services – and this is one of the ATT's Top ten asks.

Since the Panel primarily discusses confidential HMRC plans for digitalisation and interim versions of digital services in development, professional body representatives are generally not permitted to share specifics with members. In overview, though, the Panel's role to date has often been to act as a critical friend in HMRC's transition to digital by providing insight on planned or draft improvements to digital services, and helping to refine HMRC's often iterative development of new digital functionality for income tax.

This frequently involves drawing on real-world experiences, including those reported by professional body members. This type of feedback is often very valuable to HMRC developers, who commonly cannot benefit from this type of insight without going through time-consuming user-research testing.

If you have any comments on the digitalisation of income tax services, or any digital services which are either missing entirely or in need of improvement, please contact our technical teams at atttechnical@att.org.uk or technical@ciot.org.uk.