Our Christmas wish list

Welcomes

December 2026



26 November 2026

Hello and welcome to the Deputy President’s page for December. By the time you read this, the dust should have settled on the Chancellor’s Budget of 28 October.

Budgets have a habit of generating speculation long before the Chancellor stands at the despatch box, and this year was no exception. By Budget day, taxpayers, businesses and advisers had been treated to months of rumours about possible tax rises, reforms and changes.

For tax advisers, the Budget is only the beginning. The real work starts as we work through the detail, identify who is affected and, perhaps most importantly, what the announcements actually mean for our clients. That is why our profession matters so much, and why I value the fantastic work our technical team undertakes in supporting members and demystifying announcements. Tax policy might be announced in a speech sometimes lasting a couple of hours, but its consequences can last for years.

Take William Gladstone’s famous 1853 Budget. His speech lasted four hours and 45 minutes and included proposals to extend income tax for seven years, while simultaneously reducing or abolishing hundreds of customs duties. He intended to simplify the tax system, with income tax eventually disappearing altogether. Unfortunately for Gladstone, and perhaps fortunately for future Chancellors, the outbreak of the Crimean War changed the financial picture rather dramatically and income tax has never ‘disappeared’.

It is a useful reminder that even the most carefully constructed fiscal plans can encounter unforeseen events. And perhaps that is particularly relevant today. Governments may set out their intentions, but economic conditions, international events, public finances and political priorities can all intervene. For us as tax advisers, that means being prepared not just for what is announced, but for what happens next.

As well as being ATT’s Deputy President, I am also a partner in a thriving multi-disciplinary firm, helping clients to navigate complicated rules, meet deadlines, resolve problems and, sometimes, simply make sense of what the government has announced. That work will continue long after the headlines from 28 October have faded.

By this time of year, our thoughts have also started to turn to a much happier event – Christmas. For tax advisers, Christmas is never entirely free from tax. There are the familiar questions about Christmas parties, gifts to employees and clients, trivial benefits and VAT. Of course, all this is followed by the rush to get the remaining Self Assessment tax returns into HMRC by 31 January. And this year we also have MTD filing to contend with.

Perhaps this year we should add a few items to the profession’s Christmas wish list for Santa. For me, the first thing would be more certainty. Tax advisers do not expect governments to stop changing the tax system. We do, however, hope that changes are properly thought through, clearly legislated and accompanied by timely guidance. Certainty may not make the most exciting Budget headline, but it makes an enormous difference to those who have to operate the system.

Secondly, we would like simplicity. Like Gladstone, every Chancellor talks about simplification. Yet the tax system continues to become more complicated. New rules are often layered on top of existing rules, creating exceptions, transitional provisions

and anti-avoidance measures. For us tax advisers, the challenge is not simply knowing the tax law; it is navigating the increasingly complicated architecture around it.

Thirdly, a little more recognition for the people who make the system work. Tax advisers sit between taxpayers and HMRC. They help individuals and businesses to understand their obligations, correct mistakes and comply with an increasingly digital and complex tax system. Good advisers are an important part of tax administration, rather than an obstacle to it, and this should be acknowledged and appreciated more by Treasury and HMRC alike.

And finally, perhaps we could ask for fewer surprises. Not the good kind, of course – a genuine surprise Christmas present is always welcome. But a surprise tax liability, unexpected compliance requirement or last-minute legislative change is rather less popular.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous, slightly less complicated and hopefully less surprising 2027.