

CEOs welcome: Mixed messages

Welcomes

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22 June 2023

Earlier this month, the ATT, CIOT and LITRG issued press releases following the announcement by HMRC that it would pilot a new seasonal model for the Self Assessment helpline. This 'seasonal model' refers to the closure of the helpline for three months until 4 September.

The announcement gives mixed messages to the millions of Self Assessment taxpayers who a few months ago were being encouraged to file their Self Assessment returns early. HMRC was citing a number of benefits for early filing, such as avoiding the stress of last-minute filing, while taxpayers who know what they owe earlier can budget for the year and pay the tax bill in instalments if needed.

While the helpline is closed, taxpayers are being encouraged to use HMRC's digital services, including its online guidance, digital assistant and webchat. However, one major concern is that those unable to find the answers they are seeking will turn towards unofficial sources such as online forums, increasing the risk that they will receive inaccurate advice or no advice at all. This could lead to errors, non-compliance and more problems for HMRC and taxpayers alike further down the line.

Whilst it said that this was a 'pilot of a new seasonal model', it is clear that it is just another indicator that HMRC can't cope with everything it is being tasked to do, and simply cannot meet the demands of a growing and ever more complex tax system. HMRC really needs adequate and effective resources to provide the services needed by taxpayers to assist them with their filing obligations. This is something that both ATT and CIOT have repeatedly called for and without which it is unlikely that services will improve.

An unusual but positive impact of the closure for members is that it is likely to encourage more taxpayers who are frustrated with using the system to seek the services of tax agents, so we were pleased to note that the Agent Dedicated Line is unaffected by this change, and that agents can still call HMRC during this period. However, given the recent restrictions placed on the Agent Dedicated Line, we hope that the line is still operating as intended when you read this!

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee reviewed progress against our Action Plan at its June meeting. We are pleased to report that alongside our 'Returners to Work' workstream, we are making positive progress against our marketing and communication activities. Our new careers brochures, videos and other materials have been specifically designed with accessibility in mind. Take a look and tell us what you think. On 5 July, we are delighted to host an online Neurodiversity event in conjunction with the charity Neurodiversity in Business. It is aimed at our members who are symptomatic or have a diagnosis within neurodivergence. They form an invaluable part of the work culture, and the event will help them to navigate a happy and successful career path.

It was lovely to welcome new ATT members to the Admissions Ceremonies in June. We hope that those who attended had a lovely day and have a successful career in tax.

Congratulations to the East Midlands Branch, chaired by Dipti Thakrar, who hosted a 40th celebration conference and evening on 12 June in Leicester. We are looking forward to celebrating Manchester branch's 90th anniversary on 4 July and NE England's 40th on 6 July. Both are evening networking events and we

encourage you to come along and join the celebrations!