

Minutes

Date/Timing	20/05/13, 14.00 – 16.00
Group	Joint Tax Agent Strategy Steering Group
Location	Room G/57, 100 Parliament Street, London
Agent Representatives	Brian Keegan (CAI), Stuart McKinnon (ATT), Brian Palmer (AAT), Andrew Pickering (ATT), Chas Roy-Chowdhury (ACCA), Patrick Stevens (CIOT), Elspeth Orcharton (ICAS), Peter Fanning (CIOT), Frank Haskew (ICAEW) Anthony Thomas (LITRG)
HMRC attendees	Jenny Cowles, Jim Harra, Val Barton, Martin Stevens, Ian Heron, Connie Kirk, Jo Penny, Denise Walsh, Ellie Lusty
Apologies	Theresa Middleton, Lin Homer, Rebecca Benneyworth (ICAEW)

1. Introductions

Jenny Cowles (JC) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Denise Walsh (DW) and also Connie Kirk (CK) as the new member of the team. All attendees introduced themselves and apologies were noted.

2. Minutes of previous meeting & open action points

There were no comments on the minutes of the last meeting held in March 2013. All open actions are now closed. JC proposed that in future meeting notes should be approved and published more quickly rather than waiting for each meeting to approve publication. This was agreed providing a final version was circulated prior to publication.

Action point 1: Secretariat to publish the minutes once all comments have been received.

3. Access to self authorisation service

Martin Stevens (MS) presented a paper proposing that access to self authorisation should include agents who register for Anti-Money Laundering purposes with a Professional Body listed in Schedule 3 of the Money Laundering Regulations (as well as agents who are members of such bodies). Agents would therefore use their Anti-Money Laundering Supervision Registration Number rather than their professional body membership number to register for AOSS. The professional bodies felt it was a good idea and agreed that the Agent Engagement Group (AEG) should consider how to apply these criteria in practice. They asked in particular for consideration to be given to how they would apply to group tax directors and members of the professional bodies acting on behalf of family members.

The professional bodies also asked about an appeal process for those agents who do not get access to self authorisation. MS advised that the HMRC Programme Board would be considering the question of access levels, including appeal routes, in June.

4. Communications and engagement plan

Val Barton (VB) confirmed that the next communications burst is being planned for June. The professional bodies agreed to provide comments by 31 May on the 'Core Brief' circulated with the papers and on a factsheet and roadmap which were handed out at the meeting. VB confirmed that feedback will also be sought from the Working Together groups.

Action point 2: VB to send electronic versions of the communications material to the professional bodies and confirm the deadline for comments.

The professional bodies felt it would be helpful for the core brief to spell out exactly what agents needed to do to cleanse their client lists and made the point that HMRC should bear in mind before a full roll-out that such work may be best done in the quiet period over the summer. Ian Heron (IH) confirmed that HMRC was exploring the extent to which existing client relationship data held by HMRC could be used during the transition to the new services. This may be possible for Corporation Tax but is more problematic for Self Assessment and it will not be possible for VAT and PAYE as these systems could not create client lists for each agent.

5. Programme update

IH updated the group on the programme work:

- Agent services will be included in the next phase of HMRC's digital development work. Work is expected to start in June on a prototype of the self authorisation service, with user testing beginning later in the summer.
- User testing will involve a variety of formats and different groups including agents drawn from the volunteer pool. Professional research agencies may need to be engaged to identify 'hard to reach' user groups such as friends and family agents.
- Following the development and testing of prototype services during 2013/14 the planning aspiration is to launch the first live services from April 2014 with incremental delivery and transition during 2014/15.
- Evaluation of the first Agent & Client Statistics pilot is almost complete and will be discussed at the next meeting of the AEG. Planning for the next pilot, involving interventions to repayment agents, is well underway and this pilot is expected to start in July and run to November.

6. Next phase of Agent Strategy

Denise Walsh (DW) advised the professional bodies that she is aiming to publish the Consultation Document in July with a closing date for replies of September/October. She and JC will be talking to each of the professional bodies to help develop the Consultation Document, covering:

- What do agents need and want to be able to do for their clients
- What will they expect/need from HMRC
- What do they feel are the key issues eg marketplace, assurance of an agent
- How do professional bodies play a role going forward
- How best to structure this document and pose questions to get useful evidence back.

The professional bodies endorsed the strategic aim to leverage greater compliance through professional agents and suggested that HMRC should incentivise customers to use agents e.g. by supporting agents that perform more pre-submission return checks. However, they stressed the importance of preserving the relationship between agents and their clients. Agents must not be seen as acting on behalf of, or working for HMRC.

7. AOB

The group discussed the timing of the next meeting and agreed to meet (in person or by teleconference) towards the end of July, to review early feedback on the Consultation Document.

Action point 3: Secretariat to arrange a meeting for the end of July.