



Welcome to our autumn newsletter. In this edition, we take a look at the upcoming Autumn Statement, potentially the last before a General Election. If you're on the way to needing to register for VAT, we have a few words of advice. And for any first-time buyers out there, we have some top tips on property viewings. We're still working hard to support charities, and we're delighted to welcome two new trainees to our team.

Autumn Statement: What the Chancellor might unveil

The Autumn Statement has been set for November 22 and rumours are already swirling about what the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt might or might not do. Here are our thoughts.

At a time where tax revenues are at their highest, and the cost of living has risen, there still seems to be pressure for the Government to increase taxes. However, any such move will not go down well with the Tories and is never popular with the electorate.

That said, neither the Chancellor nor the Prime Minister have shied away from introducing difficult taxation or political changes, so we need to bear this in mind to understand if we think taxes will change.

Already, some tax plans are known: the annual Capital Gains Tax exemption is halving to £3,000 in 2024/25; the basic rate band is frozen to 2027/28 (which brings more tax revenue); the VAT limit is frozen at £85k; and the annual pension contribution amount has risen to £60k per annum, and the lifetime limit allowed has been lifted.

What might the Chancellor change? We think it is unlikely Income Tax bands will be touched. However, few would be surprised if Capital Gains Tax increases. Inheritance Tax is again in the news, with rumours that it might be abolished. The last big change to this was in 2017, when the tax-free amount was increased. But on balance, we don't think this is likely to change.

VAT has been getting a lot of attention, with increasing numbers of businesses needing to register as they reach the threshold, and HMRC being painfully slow in sending out VAT numbers. The Government seems determined not to lift the threshold so, again, we believe this will remain unchanged.

We do think the Chancellor might look at the electric car tax. Currently rates are frozen until 2025, but they could be in line for an increase.

What we would like to

see is action taken on tackling inflation and reducing interest rates, which is affecting thousands of people coming out of their fixed mortgage rates. This puts pressure on wages, which in turn puts pressure on businesses.

We await the Autumn Statement with interest!



Fundraising takes the cake for our team

Fancy a cuppa? We certainly did when we ran a coffee morning in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The event raised £80 and is just one of many regular fundraising events we stage.

Recently, Directors Mike Blaken and Rob Stokes took part in a charity golf event in aid of Emily's Gift, a children's cancer charity in Gloucestershire. And a big well done to our Payroll Manager Liz Grange, who successfully completed an ultra-marathon, running 50km (31 miles) in aid of our charity of the year, Swindon and Gloucestershire Mind.

"We believe it's important to do our bit and give back to the community which we live and work in, as well as to help with national fundraisers like the Macmillan Coffee Morning," said Operations Director, Tracey Heath. "Plus, it's fun to take part in, and a great way for the team to bond, and enjoy cake at the same time."



TRAINEES ADD UP FOR OUR ACCOUNTANTS!

Two new accountancy and audit trainees have joined the team - Megan Attwood and Mckenzie Wallace.

Megan has been working in retail since leaving Cirencester College. She said: "I wanted to go into more of a career-based role, and the opportunity at Optimum came up. It sounded really interesting and I like numbers and how they work. It was challenging at first, but everyone here is really great and I am enjoying it."

Mckenzie has had part-time jobs alongside school and college since he was 14, including working in a chip shop, as a waiter and in retail. In fact,

he still has one of his part-time roles, stewarding at Swindon Town FC home games. He said: "I finished my A-levels in the summer and had originally planned to go to university, but I decided to look into apprenticeships instead. I had always wanted to go into accountancy when I was at school, so I decided to apply."

Tracey Alexander, our Accounts Senior, said that Megan and Mckenzie were a great addition to the business. "They are doing really well, settling in with the team and have a great positive attitude and we can't ask any more of them at this stage."



About to hit the VAT threshold?

If your business is on the verge of reaching the threshold for VAT, then it is advisable to apply for registration sooner rather than later.

HMRC admits it is taking 40 working days to complete a registration and provide a VAT number. In reality, it can take even longer.

What are the implications of trading without a VAT number?

Not having a VAT number presents a problem. A business must start accounting for VAT from the 'effective date of registration'. This is the end of the month following the relevant month from which the business was obliged to register. This obligation kicks in as soon as the business's turnover exceeds £85k during the previous 12 months.

Businesses which voluntarily register will have agreed their date with HMRC.

From the date of registration, all invoices should include VAT. However, the business is technically unable to charge VAT without a VAT number.

While waiting for the VAT number, HMRC recommends that businesses adjust their prices to reflect the gross amount received. VAT should not be shown separately on any invoice.

The disadvantage is that customers are likely to raise concerns that they will be unable to claim this amount back.



The business should later follow up their invoices with a VAT number once it has been issued by HMRC, but this adds an additional burden. Our advice is to plan ahead and apply for a VAT number as early as possible.

Checklist for first-time buyers

If you're buying your first property, there's so much to think about, it can be easy to get caught up in the excitement and bowled over by the first property you see.

But it's important to take a measured approach at a property viewing, and know what questions to ask of the estate agent and what telltale signs to look out for.

Remember that it's essential to take your time during the viewing process and not rush into a decision. Consider creating a checklist and taking notes during each viewing to help you compare different properties effectively.

Here are things to look out for at a viewing, and a few questions to ask:

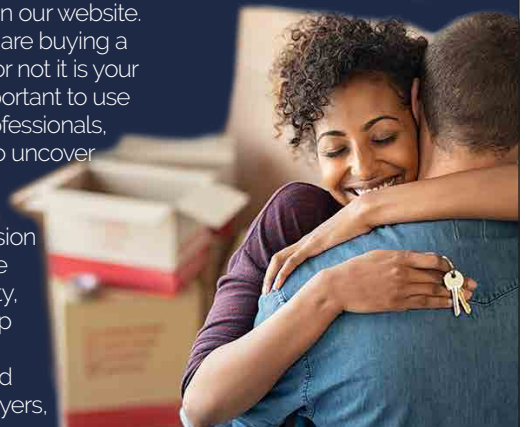
- Ask how old the boiler is, and when it was last serviced
- Turn on the taps and make sure water is coming out.
- Look out for signs of pests or infestation
- Look out for signs of damp, as this can be problematic, particularly in older properties
- Carefully inspect the overall condition of the house. There's a big difference between needing a lick of paint, and clearly having mould on the walls.
- Make sure the windows all open (and close afterwards) and, if they require keys, that these are all present
- Turn all the lights off and on, to make sure they work
- Find out what appliances there are (such as an oven or integrated dishwasher) and ask how old they are. Also, check which of these will be remaining and which the homeowner plans to take.

You can read more advice for first-time buyers on our website. Remember, if you are buying a house – whether or not it is your first time – it is important to use the services of professionals, who will be able to uncover any hidden issues.

We advise our clients to commission a full survey before they buy a property, as this will throw up any issues.

Use experienced conveyancing lawyers,

like the team here at Optimum, who will undertake all the necessary searches, paperwork and negotiations on your behalf and ensure the purchase of your home goes as smoothly as possible.



For more information about Optimum's services please email info@optps.co.uk or visit www.optps.co.uk.

To talk to the team, call our Swindon office on 01793 538 198 or our Cheltenham office on 01242 384 936. Our offices are at Vicarage Court, 160 Ermin Street, Stratton, Swindon, SN3 4NE and The Site, 24 Chosen View Road, Cheltenham, GL51 9LT.