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The last 12 months especially saw a great deal of change in the customs arena. It is not an area of business that stands still at any time, but a great deal of the role the team and I face is keeping on top of the sheer amount of change, as it obviously affects how and what you advise a client.

We deal with an incredible number of commodities – literally thousands of different products – and if you bear in mind that their corresponding customs tariffs and codes can vary on a daily basis you get a sense of the scale of what we are dealing with. You cannot take for granted that if you checked a code yesterday for a client that it will be the same again today and for the client any shift can mean a significant financial difference.

My team does an excellent job at managing this and we work closely with HMRC to ensure that we are always dealing with the most up to date information.

The role is very technical in that way, as it is highly operational and transactional, but it is also about what the implications are. What used to be considered more of a data entry job has shifted and we are very much consultants these days. We are in an advisory role with the team being relied on as true customs clearance experts by our clients.

Some of this change has been added to by the shift in clearance platform from CHIEF to CDS and like any move to a new system, there have been some teething issues early on. The team has handled this well and navigated the transition very professionally. I think that CDS is beneficial, it educates you much more as to why certain information is required so you have greater understanding with that. It is certainly not a box ticking exercise. It has also been useful for HMRC to hear from teams like ours on what works well and what doesn't and that has been part of the learning.

Issues with Brexit are still ongoing too and it is important to educate people, especially those who may have been out of importing within the EU for any reason over the past 2-3 years.

Educating our clients and communicating the implications are two fundamentals, as we can guide and advise, but not necessarily act on their behalf. Most clients want Burhill to take care of everything, which we can provide but the end decision does have to be the importers, so their understanding is vital.

The fact that we continue to grow in customs clearance, especially through referrals from clients, is testament to the quality of the service provided by the team.

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