



In an era of economic uncertainty and global change, careful private client planning has never been more important.

Global political and economic instability has increased the focus on asset protection and cross-border planning. Individuals with international connections, whether through family, business, or property, may find themselves subject to multiple tax regimes. The instability in the Middle East may also lead individuals and families to consider relocating, an issue addressed in Jordan Jackson's article in this newsletter.

In the UK, the continued freezing of inheritance tax thresholds and restriction on reliefs, alongside rising property values, means more estates are being drawn into the inheritance tax net. At the same time, evolving HMRC scrutiny of lifetime gifting, trusts, and international status reinforces the importance of ensuring that tax and estate planning is both well-structured and up to date.

Fortunately, planning opportunities still exist. Thoughtful use of trusts, family investment companies, and lifetime gifting strategies can help preserve wealth for future generations. Equally, ensuring that Wills and Lasting Powers of Attorney are up to date provides vital protection and peace of mind. Post-death variations of a person's estate may also provide planning opportunities - a subject discussed in Vicki Bennett's article overleaf.

We encourage our clients to view planning as an ongoing process rather than a one-off exercise. By staying informed and seeking tailored advice, individuals can navigate complexity with confidence and safeguard their legacy for the future.

Nevertheless, for various reasons including economic pressures, international issues and the complexity of many modern families, our Disputes team see increasing numbers of executor and trustee disputes. Inside this newsletter, Emma-Louise Green and Emma Mason of our Disputes team look at how to avoid executor disputes and what to do if one arises.

Finally, this newsletter also throws a spotlight on some of our recent joiners, exam success and a personal profile of Mark Terrar, a partner in our Disputes team.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and if you'd like to discuss any of these themes in more detail, please get in touch with me or one of the team.



Jon Croxford
MANAGING PARTNER

IN THIS ISSUE

Post-death planning

Middle East conflict

People behind the practice

Executor disputes

Meet Mark Terrar

Post-death planning: How Deeds of Variation can reshape an estate.

A **Deed of Variation** is a legal document that allows beneficiaries of a Will to change how an estate is distributed after someone has died. It can be a useful tool for families who wish to adjust the terms of a Will for practical, family, or tax reasons.

Normally, a person's estate is distributed according to their Will (or the rules of intestacy if there is no Will). However, beneficiaries may decide that a different arrangement would be more appropriate. A Deed of Variation allows them to redirect all or part of their inheritance to another person or, for example, into a trust. To be effective for tax purposes, the deed must usually be completed **within two years of the date of death** and must be signed by all beneficiaries whose entitlement is affected.

The main tax advantages relate to **Inheritance Tax (IHT)**, because when certain conditions are met the law treats the deceased as having made the gift. For example, assets can be redirected to a spouse allowing the **spouse exemption** to apply, or to a **charity**, which is exempt from IHT. There may also be Capital Gains Tax advantages, as the variation can be treated as occurring at the value at the time of date of death (hence at no gain) rather than the value at the time of entering into the variation.

A common use of a Deed of Variation is "**generation skipping**." For instance, a parent who inherits from a deceased relative may decide that the assets would be better passing directly to their own children (the deceased's grandchildren). Without a variation, the parent would inherit the assets and could then make a gift to their children, but they would need to survive that gift by seven years for it to fall completely outside their estate for IHT purposes. By contrast, if the assets are redirected using a Deed of Variation, they are treated as passing directly from the deceased to the grandchildren, avoiding that additional step and potential tax exposure.

A Deed of Variation can also redirect assets **into a trust** rather than to an individual. This may be helpful where beneficiaries are young, financially inexperienced, or where asset protection is a concern. Trusts can also allow more structured long-term planning, although they have their own tax rules which must be considered.



In the past there have suggestions that the tax advantages of such variations could be removed but this has not materialised so far. There are also legal constraints on how deeds of variation can be used. For example, a minor cannot legally consent to a variation, meaning any change affecting the minor's entitlement will usually require **court approval**. This can increase both the cost and timescale involved, and there is no guarantee that approval will be granted by the court.

Therefore, while a Deed of Variation can sometimes be useful to "fix" issues after death and provide planning opportunities, it should not be relied upon. Careful **lifetime planning and properly structured Wills** remain the best way to manage estate planning outcomes.

Please speak to one of our team to discuss any of the issues raised above.



Vicki Bennett
PARTNER

Middle East Conflict: The importance of tax planning for those returning to the UK.

The Middle East conflict has compelled individuals with connections to the UK to reconsider their living arrangements and, in some cases, to return sooner than anticipated.

Returning to the UK can carry significant tax implications that require careful planning, so what advice should individuals take before returning to the UK, and are there alternative jurisdictions offering a more favourable tax position?

UK tax residence

Individuals contemplating a return to the UK should understand the Statutory Residence Test (SRT) and carefully assess when their return might trigger UK tax residence, particularly given that split-year treatment may be available to limit their UK tax exposure to the portion of the tax year following their arrival.

The SRT's "exceptional circumstances" provisions may be relevant, enabling some days in the UK to be ignored. HMRC guidance confirms this concession can apply where an individual returns to the UK following FCDO advice to avoid all travel to the relevant country.

Tax issues for former UK residents

Individuals who were previously UK resident and return within five years face the risk of the temporary non-residence rules. These can bring into charge income and gains realised while abroad, including:

- Certain pension payments
- Gains on life assurance policies
- Dividends from close companies
- Gains on share disposals by business owners

These rules can be punitive in practice, potentially taxing multiple years of income in a single tax year. Anyone who has been UK resident within the past five years should seek advice before returning.

The Inheritance Tax (IHT) tail

From 6 April 2025, individuals are subject to IHT on worldwide assets once resident for at least 10 out of the previous 20 tax years. The "IHT tail", ranging from 3 to 10 years, keeps individuals within the scope of IHT after leaving.

Crucially, if an individual becomes UK resident during their tail period, they begin accumulating residence years afresh. Those who have left will therefore need to weigh the benefits of returning against the risk of resetting their progress towards escaping the UK IHT net.

Relocation strategies

Malta, Greece and Italy offer investor residency programmes coupled with favourable non-dom tax regimes – generally taxing only local-source income or remitted income. Malta's Permanent Residence Programme can be processed in four to six months, whilst Italy's Golden Visa process is similarly efficient.

Jersey and Guernsey, where residency can sometimes be approved within weeks, offer attractive options for those wishing to remain within the British Crown's orbit with low rates of income tax, as well as no capital gains, inheritance, or wealth taxes.

The importance of early planning

For those who have concluded that a return to the UK is necessary, early planning is crucial. Strategies may include delaying a return beyond the five-year temporary non-residence window, timing arrival to secure split-year treatment, or after 10 years of non-residence – benefiting from the UK's four-year FIG regime.

Whether a return to the UK is voluntary or compelled by circumstances, the UK tax landscape has changed significantly, and careful planning is more important than ever.



Jordan Jackson
SENIOR TAX MANAGER

This article is intended to provide general guidance on UK tax planning considerations for individuals returning to the United Kingdom. It does not constitute legal, tax, or immigration advice tailored to any individual's specific circumstances.

Whilst we have outlined certain visa and residency programmes, we do not specialise in immigration law and readers should seek independent specialist immigration advice before considering relocation.

The application of HMRC's "exceptional circumstances" provisions is highly fact-specific and subject to HMRC's discretion, which may evolve over time. Individuals seeking to rely on these provisions should obtain tailored advice.

Nothing in this article should be relied upon as a substitute for professional advice specific to your personal situation. We strongly recommend that anyone affected by the matters discussed herein consults with qualified tax, legal, and immigration professionals before making any decisions regarding their residence or tax affairs.

Executor disputes: How they can be avoided and what you should do if one arises.

An executor is a person named in a Will to administer an estate in accordance with the testator's wishes. This can be an onerous role, depending on the size and complexity of the estate. A testator can appoint up to four executors; where there are beneficiaries under 18, at least two must act.

Disputes can arise between beneficiaries and executors, or between the executors themselves. Whilst some are unforeseen, we have seen disputes arise as a result of poor planning, poor drafting, or a failure to have difficult conversations at the Will preparation stage.

What steps can be taken to avoid executor disputes at the drafting stage?

When someone prepares their Will, it is crucial that they fully understand the role that their executors will have in their estate administration and how important the decision is that they are making.

- **Appointing multiple executors can be the source of disputes.**

We often see testators appointing multiple people to act as their executors. Executors need to work together to administer the estate. Appointing people who do not get on, have different perspectives, or have a conflicting financial interest may not be sensible.

- **Personal conflicts of interest should be considered.**

For example, an executor living in a deceased's property who has not been left that asset may be motivated to delay a sale. Asking probing questions at the drafting stage can flush out such issues.

- **Practical considerations matter too.**

An executor who lives abroad, has poor organisational skills, or is unwell may renounce the role or face criticism from beneficiaries further down the line.

- **Discuss and review.**

Testators should consider liaising with potential executors in advance and undertaking regular reviews of testamentary documents to ensure named executors remain appropriate.



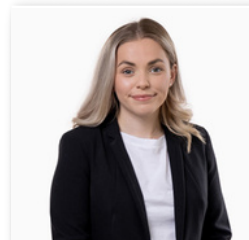
What steps can be taken to avoid executor disputes at the estate administration stage?

Executors should always consider obtaining independent legal advice when the deceased passes away. They act in a fiduciary position, with strict time limits and key early steps to take: securing and insuring property, freezing bank accounts, and informing key organisations of the death. Administration should be attended to in a timely manner, as beneficiaries have the right to receive key information about the estate. If an executor is perceived as slow or unreasonable, beneficiaries may escalate, including through High Court litigation and adverse costs orders against the executor personally.

What to do if an executor dispute arises?

Sometimes a dispute arises that could not have been prevented. Unlocking executor disputes requires specialist advice from a contentious probate solicitor as soon as possible. Advice sought late in the administration, or after a Grant of Probate has been obtained, can be more problematic and costly to resolve.

For any queries relating to executor disputes or contentious probate more generally, please do not hesitate to contact our specialist contentious probate team.



Emma Mason
ASSOCIATE



Emma-Louise Green
ASSOCIATE PARTNER

People behind the practice

Recent joiners and exam success.

Our firm has recently welcomed a number of new faces to the team. Here's a little about each of them.



Kati Kalia-Hona

HEAD OF RISK AND COMPLIANCE

Kati is a dual qualified barrister (England & Wales, and Republic of Ireland) and accredited AML specialist (Dip AML) with over 10 Years' PQE in financial crime prevention and regulatory compliance.

She works closely with the partners and collaboratively with our teams on regulatory compliance and anti-money laundering requirements. Kati plays a key role in supporting and embedding compliance into the firm's strategy, practice, and culture.

Outside of work, Kati enjoys travelling and keeping fit. She completed the Bath 50km Ultra Challenge in March 2026!



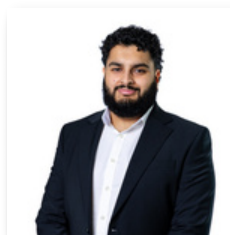
Will Jones

ASSOCIATE

Will advises on all aspects of private client law, including the preparation of Wills, Lasting Powers of Attorney, and estate planning. As part of his estate planning experience, he is able to advise clients on inheritance tax planning and the creation of trusts.

Will's experience means that he is able to assist clients to navigate complex matters, often at what is a very difficult time for them. He is known for his empathetic approach and his broad range of experience enables him to understand his client's needs and work with them to provide pragmatic solutions, tailored to their needs.

Outside of work Will enjoys spending time with his young family, running and walking his dog.



Hamza Ayaz

TAX ADVISORY ASSISTANT

Prior to joining Meridian, Hamza was a Tax Professional at HMRC, spending almost four years working on a variety of compliance investigation projects covering Income, Capital Gains and Property taxes.

Hamza now works with the tax advisory team, assisting with research and preparation of reports on a broad range of private client tax matters, including those with international and corporate aspects. Outside the office, Hamza enjoys working on cars, hands-on DIY projects and boxing.



Olivia Huntbatch

SOLICITOR

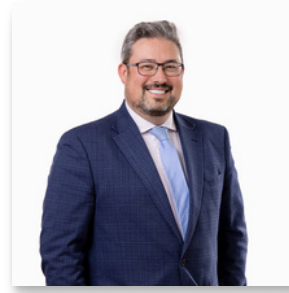
We also want to highlight Olivia Huntbatch for recently passing her STEP exam with a Distinction.

The STEP Advanced Certificate in Administration of Estates is the benchmark qualification for trusts and estates, recognised globally.

The hard work doesn't stop there. This is the first of four exams Olivia will sit. We are extremely proud that she is off to such a strong start!

Meet the Team

Mark Terrar



Mark Terrar
PARTNER

Mark Terrar is a partner in the Disputes team. He joined Meridian in 2018.

What is your role in the firm?

I am a partner in the contentious trusts and probate team. We deal with all manner of disputes arising out of estates and trusts, such as will disputes and claims for financial provision. We are noticing that disputes between executors and trustees are becoming ever more common place.

Why did you choose law?

According to my parents I was quite pedantic and argumentative as a child – I thought law, and specifically dealing with disputes, would be a good way to channel that. I had no awareness of the area of practice I am now in when I started my legal career, but as soon as I sampled it I knew it was what I wanted to specialise in.

What's the most memorable piece of advice you've had in your career?

Treat others as you wish to be treated yourself.

What advice would you offer someone starting their career in law?

I think it is underestimated how much of our role is about communication. Whether that is internally with colleagues/your supervisor or with clients and other lawyers. The junior lawyer who quickly gets to grips with effective communication is in a good place. This means things like translating legal jargon into something that a client can understand, following up on something without looking demanding or impatient or ensuring that supervisors know that something is in hand and a deadline is going to be met. Clearly, technical skills need to be present but that can be taught and learnt. Being able to communicate and having a can do attitude is in my opinion really important.

What key challenges for clients do you see on the horizon?

The costs incurred in respect of a dispute are always a big challenge for clients to deal with. Legal advice is expensive and, in the area of work I deal with, the course a matter takes can be very unpredictable. That creates challenges when trying to budget for a dispute and as to its affordability generally. We need to be focussed on resolving disputes as quickly as possible in many circumstances.

If you could choose a different career, what would that be?

I want to say professional golfer but that is an aspiration too far! I love cooking and as a complete alternative to law I would have a crack at running my own restaurant or café. It would probably be focussed on Asian cuisine of some sort.


What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Spending time with my children, golf and cooking.

Where is your favourite place to visit?

South East Asia – Vietnam is my favourite country I have visited. I found everything about it fascinating, and the food is incredible.



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