# **Private** Client

Contributing editors Anthony Thompson and Sara Walter



2018

# GETTING THE DEAL THROUGH

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# Private Client 2018

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# Guernsey

#### Matthew Guthrie, Mark Torode and Catherine Moore

**Mourant Ozannes** 

#### Tax

#### 1 How does an individual become taxable in your jurisdiction?

The Bailiwick of Guernsey is made up of three distinct jurisdictions each with its own tax legislation: Guernsey (which includes the islands of Herm and Jethou), Alderney and Sark. For these purposes, we will refer only to Guernsey.

Guernsey's principal tax is income tax. Guernsey does not have any capital gains, inheritance or gift taxes, nor any form of VAT.

Liability to taxation in Guernsey is determined by reference to residence, rather than domicile. As Guernsey does not have any inheritance or gift tax, domicile has no direct relevance to taxation, although it will be relevant to determine which rules of private international law apply to the devolution of a person's estate.

The Income Tax (Guernsey) Law, 1975 (as amended) (the Income Tax Law) distinguishes between individuals who are resident, solely resident and principally resident in Guernsey. We briefly describe each of these below.

#### **Resident in Guernsey**

An individual will be resident in Guernsey if:

- they spend 91 days or more in Guernsey in a tax year; or
- if they spend 35 days or more in Guernsey in that tax year and during the four preceding tax years, have spent 365 days or more in Guernsey.

A person is treated as being in Guernsey on any particular day if they are in Guernsey at midnight on that day.

#### Solely resident in Guernsey

Individuals will be solely resident in Guernsey if in any particular tax year they are resident in Guernsey and are not resident in any other place in that tax year. For these purposes, a person will only be treated as being resident in another place if he or she spends 91 days or more in that place in that tax year.

#### Principally resident in Guernsey

Individuals will be principally resident in Guernsey if:

- they spend 182 days or more in Guernsey in that tax year;
- they spend 91 days or more in Guernsey in that tax year and during the four preceding tax years, have spent 730 days or more in Guernsey; or
- they take up permanent residence in Guernsey in that tax year.

Individuals who are resident in Guernsey are taxable on their worldwide income unless they elect to pay the standard charge for that year (currently  $\pm 30,000$ ). Individuals who are solely or principally resident in Guernsey are subject to income tax in Guernsey on their worldwide income.

There is, however, an exemption for individuals who are resident but not principally resident in Guernsey, and who do not pay the standard charge where the sole or main purpose of their presence is for employment purposes. In order for this exemption to be applicable, the individual's only Guernsey source income must be bank interest and employment income (which must be subject to deduction of tax by the employer through the Employee Tax Instalment Scheme). Such individuals are also subject to income tax in Guernsey on any foreign income which they remit to Guernsey.

For individuals who are solely or principally resident in Guernsey, there is an annual tax cap of  $\pounds$ 110,000 for non-Guernsey source income and from certain Guernsey sources (such as bank interest). An individual may, however, elect for the tax cap to apply to their Guernsey source income, although this has the effect of increasing the cap to  $\pounds$ 220,000 per tax year.

Non-resident individuals are generally only subject to income tax in Guernsey on income from profits from a business with a permanent establishment in Guernsey and immoveable property situated in Guernsey.

#### 2 What, if any, taxes apply to an individual's income?

Individuals are subject to income tax at 20 per cent and social security contributions are also payable at variable rates.

#### 3 What, if any, taxes apply to an individual's capital gains?

Capital gains are not taxable in Guernsey.

#### 4 What, if any, taxes apply if an individual makes lifetime gifts? Lifetime gifts are not taxable in Guernsey.

# 5 What, if any, taxes apply to an individual's transfers on death and to his or her estate following death?

Guernsey imposes no taxes on transfers on death, or to or from an individual's estate following death.

On obtaining a grant of probate, a charge of circa 0.35 per cent is applied by the Ecclesiastical Court to the gross value of the moveable estate. Where Guernsey is the jurisdiction in which the first grant of probate is applied for, the 0.35 per cent charge would apply to the worldwide moveable estate of the deceased. Where a grant is obtained overseas, it is only the Guernsey estate that would be subject to the 0.35 per cent charge.

#### 6 What, if any, taxes apply to an individual's real property?

Document duty is charged on the acquisition of residential real property and is charged on a sliding scale depending on the value of the property.

A tax on real property (local rates) is payable annually and is based on the size of the property.

# 7 What, if any, taxes apply on the import or export, for personal use and enjoyment, of assets other than cash by an individual to your jurisdiction?

There are only import taxes in relation to fuel, oil, cigarettes and alcohol, otherwise there are no import or export taxes on goods.

# 8 What, if any, other taxes may be particularly relevant to an individual?

There are no other taxes in Guernsey particularly relevant to individuals.

# 9 What, if any, taxes apply to trusts or other asset-holding vehicles in your jurisdiction, and how are such taxes imposed?

In addition to trusts, which are recognised in Guernsey, foundations, companies (whether limited by shares or by guarantee or cellular),

partnerships, limited partnerships (both with and without separate legal personality) and limited liability partnerships can all be established in Guernsey as asset-holding vehicles.

#### Trusts

The only tax potentially applicable to a trust with a Guernsey resident trustee is income tax. By concession, where all of the beneficiaries of a trust with Guernsey-resident trustees are themselves resident outside of Guernsey, the trustees have no liability to income tax in Guernsey, save in respect of their Guernsey-source income (and there is a specific exemption for Guernsey-source bank interest). Where there are beneficiaries who are resident in Guernsey or where the settlor was resident in Guernsey, this concession would not apply and income tax may be payable depending on the particular circumstances in question.

Where income tax is payable, it is assessable on the trustee and the trustee is required to file a tax return in Guernsey in relation to the income. It is possible for income tax to be assessed directly on the settlor where the trust is held to be revocable under the Income Tax Law (although this would only apply in respect of a Guernsey resident settlor).

#### Foundations

The exact tax treatment of foundations in Guernsey has not yet been formalised by legislation. However, it is anticipated that they will be tax-neutral where the founder and beneficiaries are not resident in Guernsey.

#### Companies

Companies resident in Guernsey, or non-resident companies with a permanent establishment in Guernsey, are generally taxed at a rate of zero per cent. Certain categories of income are taxed at 10 per cent, such as profits from banking, investment, insurance or fiduciary business, and others at 20 per cent, such as income from Guernsey real property.

#### Partnerships

Partnerships are treated as transparent for the purpose of tax in Guernsey.

#### Limited partnerships

Limited partnerships are treated as transparent for the purpose of tax in Guernsey.

#### Limited liability partnerships

Limited liability partnerships are treated as transparent for the purpose of tax in Guernsey.

#### 10 How are charities taxed in your jurisdiction?

Charities are exempt from income tax in so far as their income is applied solely for charitable purposes. Where an individual who is resident in Guernsey makes a donation to a Guernsey charity, the Guernsey charity may reclaim the income tax paid in respect of that donation.

#### **Trusts and foundations**

#### 11 Does your jurisdiction recognise trusts?

Yes, trusts are recognised in Guernsey, whether they are governed by Guernsey law or the laws of a foreign jurisdiction.

The Trusts (Guernsey) Law 2007 (the Trusts Law) governs the establishment of trusts in Guernsey. Some of the salient points about the Trusts Law are:

- Guernsey trusts can be of unlimited duration: there is no perpetuity period under Guernsey law;
- trusts can hold Guernsey real estate;
- the settlor can reserve to himself or herself or another person certain powers and the reservation of such powers will not invalidate the trust;
- beneficiaries are not automatically entitled to information on the deliberations of trustees or to receive copies of letters of wishes;
- non-charitable purpose trusts can be established under Guernsey law and are frequently used to create orphan structures. An enforcer must be appointed and the enforcer has a fiduciary duty to enforce the purposes as against the trust; and
- 'firewall' legislation provides that a Guernsey trust cannot be held as void because it avoids or defeats a claim under foreign

laws relating to marriage, civil partnership or forced heirship. The Trusts Law generally provides a strong defence against challenges to the validity of a trust by foreign courts based on particular issues, including the administration of the trust and capacity of the settlor, by preventing the application of foreign laws in determining such issues.

#### 12 Does your jurisdiction recognise private foundations?

The Foundations (Guernsey) Law 2012 (the Foundations Law) introduced the concept of a foundation into Guernsey law.

A foundation is an entity with separate legal personality that must be established for a purpose. The purpose can be to benefit beneficiaries but the beneficiaries do not have a proprietary interest in the foundation's assets.

A foundation contracts in its own name and can sue and be sued. The foundation's assets are owned legally and beneficially by the foundation.

A Guernsey foundation must have a charter setting out the purpose for which the foundation has been established and will usually also have a set of rules which govern such matters as the appointment and removal of council members. The founder must provide an initial endowment to the foundation.

A foundation is administered by a council and it is permissible to have a single councillor. The council must act in good faith in the exercise of their functions and its duties are owed to the foundation.

The founder can reserve certain powers to himself or grant these to a third party. However, the power to amend, revoke, vary or terminate the foundation may only be reserved to the founder during his or her lifetime (if he is a natural person) or for a period of 50 years (if the founder is a legal person).

A unique feature of the Foundations Law is the concept of 'enfranchised' and 'disenfranchised' beneficiaries. Enfranchised beneficiaries are entitled to certain information about the foundation, while disenfranchised beneficiaries are not. Where a foundation has disenfranchised beneficiaries, it must have a guardian to enforce the terms of the foundation. A guardian is also required where a foundation is established for a purpose other than to benefit beneficiaries.

Where neither the council nor the guardian includes a licensed fiduciary, a Guernsey licensed fiduciary must be appointed to act as the foundation's resident agent. The resident agent is required to keep certain information in relation to the foundation in Guernsey and must file certain information with the Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Legal Persons pursuant to The Beneficial Ownership of Legal Persons (Guernsey) Law 2017.

A foundation must be registered to come into existence and will exist for so long as it remains on the register. Foundations can also be migrated into and out of Guernsey.

#### Same-sex marriages and civil unions

# 13 Does your jurisdiction have any form of legally recognised same-sex relationship?

The Same-Sex Marriage (Guernsey) Law 2016 came into force on 2 May 2017 and extended the recognition of marriage to those of the same sex and therefore people of the same sex can now marry in Guernsey and such marriage will be recognised. In addition, same-sex marriages in a foreign jurisdiction will now be recognised in Guernsey.

# 14 Does your jurisdiction recognise any form of legal relationship for heterosexual couples other than marriage?

Only religious or civil marriage between heterosexual couples is currently recognised in Guernsey.

#### Succession

# 15 What property constitutes an individual's estate for succession purposes?

All moveable and immoveable property owned by an individual forms part of their estate.

The exception to this is jointly owned property (unless the presumption of joint ownership is rebutted), which will vest automatically in the co-owner.

However, the value of jointly owned property may be taken into account when calculating the value of the deceased's net estate for the

purposes of an application under section 5 of the Inheritance (Guernsey) Law, 2011 (the Inheritance Law) for a claim for financial provision.

# **16** To what extent do individuals have freedom of disposition over their estate during their lifetime?

There is no restriction on the disposition of assets during an individual's lifetime. Lifetime dispositions made with an intention to defeat any claim for financial provision under the Inheritance Law made within six years of the date of death, may be set aside pursuant to an application brought under the Inheritance Law.

# 17 To what extent do individuals have freedom of disposition over their estate on death?

With effect from 2 April 2012, individuals domiciled in Guernsey have complete freedom of testamentary disposition. However, Guernsey's forced heirship rules will still apply in respect of wills executed before 2 April 2012, unless the testator executes a codicil stating that they wish the new rules to apply. It is also permissible to amend an existing will by codicil and for the forced heirship regime to continue to apply, if the testator so wishes. The advantage to a will remaining subject to the forced heirship regime is that this regime did not permit any challenges to a will on the basis it failed to make financial provision for any person.

Following the introduction of the same-sex marriage legislation referred to in question 13, wills made after the commencement of such Law are interpreted in accordance with the principle that 'marriage' and related expressions includes same-sex marriage, unless provision is made to the contrary.

#### 18 If an individual dies in your jurisdiction without leaving valid instructions for the disposition of the estate, to whom does the estate pass and in what shares?

The Inheritance Law sets out the order of the devolution of an individual's estate where they die intestate. Different provisions apply to intestate succession of immoveable property and moveable property.

In the case of immoveable property:

- the surviving spouse or civil partner inherits the whole of the real property absolutely if there are no descendants;
- the surviving spouse or civil partner inherits an undivided one-half share of the matrimonial home, an undivided one-half share of any other real property of the deceased and a life interest (usufruct) over the remaining one-half share of the matrimonial home until they re-marry or form a new civil partnership if there are descendants;
- the descendants of the deceased (being the deceased's children and remoter issue through all degrees) inherit equally (with representation being permitted per stirpes through all degrees of descent) if there is no surviving spouse or civil partner;
- the privileged collaterals (being brothers and sisters of the deceased and their descendants) inherit equally if there are no descendants;
- the ascendants (being those from whom the deceased is descended) inherit equally if there are no privileged collaterals; and
- the remaining collaterals (being those who are descendants, together with the deceased, from a common ascendant) inherit equally if there are no ascendants.

For moveable property:

- the surviving spouse or civil partner inherits all of the personal property absolutely if there are no descendants;
- the descendants inherit all of the personal property absolutely if there is no surviving spouse or civil partner;
- the descendants take a one-half share and the surviving spouse or civil partner takes the remaining half absolutely if there are descendants and a surviving spouse or civil partner; and
- the privileged collaterals inherit, followed by the ascendants and finally the remaining collaterals if there are no descendants and no surviving spouse or civil partner.
- If there is no one to inherit, immoveable property and moveable property passes to the Crown as bona vacantia.

19 In relation to the disposition of an individual's estate, are adopted or illegitimate children treated the same as natural legitimate children and, if not, how may they inherit?

Adopted and illegitimate children are treated the same as natural and legitimate children under the Inheritance Law.

# 20 What law governs the distribution of an individual's estate and does this depend on the type of property within it?

Moveable property is governed by the lex domicilii of the individual, while immoveable property is governed by the lex situs of the property.

# 21 What formalities are required for an individual to make a valid will in your jurisdiction?

In Guernsey, the general rules are that:

- a will must be made in writing;
- the will must be signed by the testator or testatrix, or by some other person in their presence and at their direction, and the testator or testatrix must have intended by his or her signature to give effect to the will;
- the testator or testatrix's signature must be made or acknowledged by the testator or testatrix in the presence of two or more witnesses present at the same time; and
- each witness must either attest and sign the will or acknowledge his or her signature in the presence of the testator or testatrix.

Holographic wills may be made in respect of moveable property in Guernsey and must be entirely handwritten and signed and dated by the testator or testatrix at the end of the will.

One will can cover both immoveable and moveable property. However, for privacy reasons separate wills are usually prepared as the will of immoveable property will be registered at the Greffe as evidence of title to the property.

# 22 Are foreign wills recognised in your jurisdiction and how is this achieved?

The Execution of Wills (Bailiwick of Guernsey) Law 1994 governs the validity of wills.

The Courts in Guernsey will recognise a will as being valid if its execution conforms to the internal law in force in:

- the territory where it was executed;
- the territory where, at the time of its execution or of the deceased's death, the deceased was domiciled or had their habitual residence;
- a state of which, at either of those times, the deceased was a national; or
- in so far as the will disposes of real property, in the territory where the property is situated.

#### 23 Who has the right to administer an estate?

This will depend on whether the property is moveable property or immoveable property situate in Guernsey.

Immoveable property vests automatically in the deceased's heirs following the principle le mort saisit le vif. No conveyance or otherwise is required.

Moveable property situate in Guernsey will vest in the deceased's personal representatives. Where there is no will, the surviving spouse is the preferred administrator followed by the deceased's children (with the elder children preferred to the younger, in order of age). Where there is a will but no executor, one of the beneficiaries would be the preferred administrator.

# 24 How does title to a deceased's assets pass to the heirs and successors? What are the rules for administration of the estate?

See question 23 in respect of immoveable property.

As regards moveable property, this will depend on the type of asset. The legal mechanism to transfer each type of asset will need to be followed. For example, if the moveable property is shares, a share transfer form will be required and the heir will need to be registered as the shareholder in place of the deceased.

# 25 Is there a procedure for disappointed heirs and beneficiaries to make a claim against an estate?

Where a will is made on or after 2 April 2012, a person can bring a claim where they can establish that the deceased did not make reasonable financial provision for them under their will.

Those who are eligible to make a claim are a spouse or civil partner, a former spouse or civil partner who has not remarried or formed a new civil partnership, any person living as if spouse or civil partner for at least two years before death, a child of the deceased, a person treated by the deceased as a child of the family and any person who was being maintained by the deceased.

A spouse or civil partner can claim for such financial provision as it would be reasonable in all the circumstances for a spouse or civil partner to receive, while all other eligible claimants are only entitled to receive such amount as is reasonable for their maintenance.

A claimant must file their claim within six months of the date of death.

#### Capacity and power of attorney

# 26 What are the rules for holding and managing the property of a minor in your jurisdiction?

A guardian, known as a tuteur, will hold moveable and immoveable property on behalf of a minor. A tuteur has parental responsibility for the child and a duty to act en bon père de famille when dealing with the property of the child. Their responsibilities include safeguarding, preserving and otherwise dealing with the child's property (pursuant to the Children (Guernsey and Alderney) Law 2008, as amended).

Guardianship of a minor will terminate on the minor attaining the age of 18 or if they marry earlier (and such marriage must be with the permission of the guardian).

Where a child's parents are married at the time of the child's birth, they both acquire parental responsibility at that time. Where the father is not married to the mother at the time of the child's birth, he will acquire parental responsibility:

- if he marries the child's mother;
- if he is registered as the child's father;
- · upon the making of a residence or parental responsibility order; or
- by written agreement with the child's mother.

#### 27 At what age does an individual attain legal capacity for the purposes of holding and managing property in your jurisdiction?

At 18 years of age.

# 28 If someone loses capacity to manage their affairs in your jurisdiction, what is the procedure for managing them on their behalf?

Where a person loses capacity, a guardian (known as a curateur) may be appointed to manage their affairs pursuant to the Curatelle Rules 1989, by way of an application in a specified form. Medical evidence (usually in the form of an affidavit by the individual's doctor) must be submitted with the application.

The family council must appear in court either personally or by attorney to confirm their approval to the appointment of the guardian. The appointment is an official court procedure whereby the guardian is then sworn into office. A curateur owes the same duties as a tuteur as regards the property of the individual.

In addition, one off decisions for someone who lacks capacity can be authorised by the court on application under Schedule 3 of the Mental Health (Bailiwick of Guernsey) Law 2010.

There is currently legislation being drafted which will apply to those aged 18 and over and sets out a process for establishing whether someone lacks capacity and aims to support them in making their own decisions where possible while protecting their basic rights and freedoms. The Law will allow people to decide how they would prefer to be treated and cared for in case they lack capacity at a later stage and also allows for them to appoint a trusted person to make decisions on their behalf.

#### Immigration

#### 29 Do foreign nationals require a visa to visit your jurisdiction?

Guernsey forms part of the Common Travel Area with the UK (and certain other territories) and UK immigration statutes are extended to Guernsey.

A British Citizen or a citizen of one the European Economic Area (EEA) countries or Switzerland may travel to Guernsey without a visa.

Visa nationals (persons who need an entry clearance to enter the United Kingdom and Guernsey) for whatever reason, and non-EEA and Swiss nationals seeking entry for more than six months, will need an entry clearance.

30 How long can a foreign national spend in your jurisdiction on a visitors' visa?

See question 29.

31 Is there a visa programme targeted specifically at high net worth individuals?

No.

32 If so, does this programme entitle individuals to bring their family members with them? Give details.

Not applicable.

33 Does such a programme give an individual a right to reside permanently or indefinitely in your jurisdiction and, if so, how?

Not applicable.

 34 Does such a programme enable an individual to obtain citizenship or nationality in your jurisdiction and, if so, how?
Not applicable.

# **MOURANT OZANNES**

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