President's page, June 2018

Welcomes

01 June 2018

Breaking down barriers

It is a privilege to be your President for the next year. Building on the work done by John Preston, not to mention Bill Dodwell and the late Chris Jones, will be no easy task.

A little about me: I was in HMRC from 1975 until 2006. My connection with the CIOT goes back to 1979 when I started studying at home for what was ATII. I managed to scrape a pass and was one of the (then) relatively few Revenue CTAs. I am also an ATT member and member of the Chartered Management Institute. Revenue moves from Glasgow to London via the Scottish Borders, Suffolk, and Peterborough meant that I was lucky to work in all the best parts of the Revenue and with really great people. In 2006 I joined PwC followed by McGrigors (now Pinsent Masons), New Quadrant Partners and currently Joseph Hage Aaronson. I am grateful to all of those firms for the opportunity, it can't have been easy!

With encouragement from Penny Hamilton I joined Professional Standards in 2006 and Chaired Standards for two years. I joined Council in 2012. I also volunteer for Tax Help so know how challenging tax is for people on low income and the elderly, which is why we should all be proud of what LITRG has achieved. LITRG celebrates its 20 anniversary this month, with TaxAid and Tax Help (which LITRG helped set up) many rely upon it, including the Government. More recently Bridge the Gap has raised over £250,000 to help fund this work. Getting involved and balancing family, the 'day job' and a voluntary role is challenging and rewarding; if you have not tried, there is no time like the present!

So to the year ahead, we are ambitious: to maintain our position as the Professional Body for tax advisors we need to be. And not just in the UK. Our CEO Peter Fanning has helped us build strong links with the Australian and Irish Tax Institutes and we

are still building; ADIT gets stronger each year and Peter and John Preston recently met members of the Chinese Tax Institute and firms working in China.

At home we have strong relationships with the ICAEW, ICAS and STEP and the other bodies with whom we partner on PCRT and of course critical relationships with Government, HMRC and HM Treasury. The late Chris Jones referred to us as an ‘honest friend’ but now we need to be more. The integrity of our tax system can be assured only where Government, HMRC and we work better together. Protecting our members means we must adhere to the highest professional standards and the updated PCRT together with an independent Taxation Disciplinary Board means there is no place for those who abuse the tax system. But HMRC must be more willing to acknowledge that compliance levels are higher where there is an adviser who is a member of the CIOT or ATT and it is good that they are now doing so. On HMRC, I am regularly asked whether tax people in firms are ‘better’ than those in HMRC? It’s too simplistic a question but a key difference I think is that the interconnection between taxes and surrounding UK and international legal framework is better understood in the profession. It was this stronger understanding of how taxes interconnect and fit within the broader UK legal framework that was an important part of becoming a CTA and I would encourage anyone, whether in HMRC or not, to do likewise. For HMRC, working with us, listening to our concerns, recognising that some of our members are among the most experienced and knowledgeable tax people around and ensuring that they are fully engaged in helping you deliver major change will bring rewards as tax becomes digital.

More broadly we need to identify any barriers preventing our members, whatever their background, from getting involved. The gender balance of Council has been improved but challenges remain, we have a rich ethnically diverse membership of amazing people but this is not yet fully reflected in our leadership. While I expect some will find another male President disappointing, I hope not and although I would understand, we should be under no illusion: we are reliant upon those willing to volunteer. For some just being a member is enough. Others do want to be involved and are ambitious to be successful so we must improve transparency, whether you just want to attend a Branch meeting, sit on a Committee or Council or be the President that takes us to even greater heights. It would be amazing if we had waiting lists!

More, I am sure, on all these issues in the months to come. In the meantime, our Branch network is a great place to start. You just don’t know who you might meet! I

am looking forward to seeing you.