ATT welcome, August 2018

Welcomes

01 August 2018

It’s just not cricket

By the time you read this, Tracy Easman will be President of the ATT and England will, VAR permitting, have done really well at the World Cup. I will also be ATT Deputy President.

I remember seeing the press release when I was appointed Vice President. It is not that I did not know it was happening, I wanted dearly to be at the vote, but last minute work commitments got in the way.

I have since been asked quite often whether I work for the ATT. I usually answer ‘yes’ because it is harder to explain how we are all volunteers who hold down regular jobs and also ‘make time’ for ATT. This is why I would not be true to myself if I did not use my first article to thank all the other volunteers out there who do the work of both the CIOT and the ATT. I should also thank our employers because their support is fundamental to what we do. I would add that volunteering does definitely give you the opportunity to acquire skills that you may not necessarily get the chance to develop in your day job – so, if you are thinking of it, just do it.

I am so proud to be given the opportunity to serve. A quick look down the list of past holders indicates that the bar has been set very high, but the good thing is that, unlike the case in a certain North London football club (the best one, seeing as you ask), there are a large number of ex officers willing to assist. As I look forward to the next 12 months, the pace of change within the profession means that if there is an algorithm that can predict what a post-Brexit, post-MTD, post-OPBAS tax world will be, do we still do postcards?

So how exactly did I get here? Well, after not particularly impressing in a game against a junior Nigerian national football team, the only other option was to train as

a chartered accountant. Post qualification, I moved to the UK. It was however only when I experienced the ‘colourful and animated’ face to face interactions that tended to arise out of explaining tax to entrepreneurial clients in rural Hampshire that I became hooked. Now based in London, I cherish the vibrant culture of the city and am always amazed to discover new corners of it.

As a past Chairman of the London branch, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the branches are joint ATT and CIOT branches. This means if you are a CTA but not a member of the ATT, we need to talk. There are ‘no brainers’ (such as you get a hard copy of the Finance Act, a Tolley’s Tax Guide, Tax Tables and a mouse mat) and then there is not being a joint member!

At work, I currently deal with most aspects of direct taxation in relation to owner managed businesses as well as small and medium sized enterprises. I am also involved in some private client work. Within the ATT, I chair the Education Steering Group, which oversees our educational strategy. A previous chairman of what is now the Examinations Steering Group, I was part of the working party that helped deliver the Tax Pathway.

I recently had the pleasure of attending the ATT Annual conference. These continue to be a most excellent way to get your CPD. The approach is practical and the quality of presenters, supported by our able technical officers (Will, Helen and Emma), is impressive; and that is an understatement.

I finally got to watch LITRG’s Victoria Todd appear before the Treasury Sub-Committee inquiry looking into the conduct of tax enquiries and resolution of tax disputes. The amount of work that LITRG does, representing those who would normally not have recourse to professional advice, is remarkable. The evidence given to the committee that day touched on an aspect of the tax system that continues to give a lot of our members, who I meet at various events, cause for concern – penalties! Their incidence and impact upon those less likely or willing to be able to challenge them is a worry. This argument was put rather more eloquently by Keith Gordon at the same hearing.

In this regard, I hope that an observation, made at the recent Lord Mayor’s tax debate, that penalties were not imposed often on larger entities (as they had not ‘failed to take reasonable care’) means that, even if this discussion may still have some way to run, there is room for change. As we bask in the glory of a great World

Cup run by England, perhaps HMRC, having been gifted the powers to impose really harsh penalties, should consider their own version of VAR?

On that hopeful note I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can in the coming year.

Have a good month.

Jeremy Coker

ATT Deputy President