President's page, May 2019

Welcomes

01 May 2019

Open and transparent

Welcome to May, the end of my year as President – and with time quickly running out a busy sense of panic has set in. The East Midlands Branch conference at the National Space Centre (the only place where tax will take you further than the CIOT) was followed by our Spring Conference in Cambridge. This splendid event was sold out, for which much credit goes to our Conferences Committee led by Peter Rayney. He surprised us with the news that he had married Patricia, whom he had met at a previous Cambridge conference! April also saw the Spring Admissions ceremony and as always it was great meeting our newest members, ADIT graduates, those celebrating 50 years of membership and their families.

April's big event was ATT President Tracy Easman's reception, the ATT's official 30 th anniversary celebration. I am sure that we all warmly congratulate Tracy and the whole ATT on this tremendous milestone. I wish Tracy well for the remainder of her year as President.

Over the past year I tried to bring something different to the role of President on issues that are important to me, and I hoped, to you. Safeguarding our reputation, maintaining high professional standards, encouraging diversity and inclusion, improving the transparency of Council, and, of course, our relationship with HMRC.

An open and transparent organisation in which all of our members can contribute is key to us being relevant in a changing tax world. So, involving those outside of Council in what we do and being interested in, and acting upon, what they say is central to having a Council that is in touch with the whole of the CIOT. Over the past year Council has continued to build upon the work of past Presidents and a change process led by Glyn Fullelove will see new faces and different skills increasingly supporting the work of a Council entrusted with a large and successful charitable

business.

I am determined, as is Council, that there should be no watering down of our educational requirements or our high professional standards so there was no easy or obvious answer to the issue of unqualified advisers. Yes, there is noise but no clear plan has emerged as to what might be done. Key to this of course is HMRC; if HMRC are not willing to treat you, i.e. CTAs, in a way that recognises your full value then why should an unqualified adviser bother? But when the next tax scandal hits the headlines the focus will once again fall on us, irrespective of cause, risking a knee jerk reaction from Government that does not address the real issues or rebuild the confidence of the public in the tax profession.

On diversity and inclusion, I want the CIOT to lead. Having a stellar all female panel support a highly successful female politician deliver the CTA Address last May was a statement of intent. But such statements must also make strong business sense; if only 10% of our female members decided to attend the Spring conference it would be sold out three times over before any male members turned up! Our membership and student base is incredibly diverse. Understanding the extent to which all our members (regardless of such things as age, gender, race, background, religion, disability, or sexual preference) feel encouraged and able to participate fully in the CIOT is the first step to ensuring they can.

Then there is our relationship with HMRC, quite! I am certain that I am not the only former Inspector (or CTA) who looks on with disbelief at how HMRC behaves at times. The lack of pragmatism, willingness to drag issues out for year after year and the pursuit of trivial amounts of tax and penalties all contribute to the increasing discontent in HMRC's performance. Issues such as the loan charge have resulted in widespread concern that HMRC is 'out of control' (in the words of the March parliamentary report). In truth HMRC depends upon the UK having an honest taxpayer population where most taxpayers do their best to be compliant. Setting or expecting standards that are utterly divorced from real life so that even doing your best is not good enough does not increase confidence in the administration of tax. Instead it risks removing it altogether. We expect (and are entitled to expect) better.

So finally thank you to my fellow elected Officers, Glyn, Peter, and John for their support. I wish a Glyn well for his term as President. To everyone on Council, the Officers of the CIOT (Peter, John, Paul and Roz), and to all of the CIOT staff for the

incredible work you do, not least our events team who ensured that I was always in the right place at the right time. To George, Hamant and Chris in our media team, if, despite your efforts, I said the wrong thing at times, that was all down to me. And to all of you, the members of the CIOT, it has been great meeting so many of you on my travels, you know how valuable you are. See you around.

Ray McCann
President, CIOT