Vice President's page, October 2019

Welcomes

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Apprenticeship to Vice President: how did that happen!

For many years, the accepted wisdom was that the best route into the accountancy profession and tax was through university. Now we are seeing increasing numbers coming into tax via apprenticeships. While they may once have been looked down on, apprenticeships are now being given the respect they deserve – and I should know.

The CIOT is an approved End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPA) for the Level 7 Taxation Apprenticeship. This apprenticeship is an employer-designed standard in England, which offers a route to become a CTA.

The EPA assesses competence in the required knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship and comprises two elements:

- the CTA Case Study exam (Application and Professional Skills); and
- a Project Report.

There is lots more information on our website.

Despite the recent push towards apprenticeships, there has historically been a bit of a stigma surrounding them. I can relate to this. When I first joined Arthur Andersen as an experienced hire, I kept quiet about the fact I didn't go to university. Unlike many of my contemporaries, I started in tax on a civil service apprenticeship scheme, joining what was then called the Inland Revenue. The recruitment process involved an application form, a test and interview. Those who were successful then embarked on a two year programme with tests at the end. It was a great experience and taught me a lot.

I was reminded of this a few years ago. I was sitting at the Christmas tax team curry night next to one of the new recruits. At some point, we swapped stories as to how

we both ended up working in tax and he said something along the lines of ‘You have just made my day.’ When I asked why, he explained that it was because I provided proof that joining the tax profession after A levels could ultimately lead to partnership.

One of the most common misconceptions is that an apprentice will not achieve to the same extent as a graduate. This is why it is so important that we shout about the successes of those who don’t necessarily take a conventional career route into tax, as this will help to encourage others.

I know university isn’t for everyone. With costs increasing and with the nature of work changing dramatically, thankfully apprenticeships are one of several ways to kickstart a career in the tax profession.

Having different routes in should help to make sure we have more diversity in the profession, with a healthy mix of cultures and backgrounds, not to mention gender and ethnicity. I am still surprised for example that despite the Peterson Institute for International Economics findings that organisations with 30% female leaders can increase net margin by up to 6%, we have not made as much progress as I would like.

Unfortunately, the latest figures in the accountancy profession show that only 18% of partners at the top UK accountancy firms are women, compared to 82% men; whereas around 48% of our members are women. Gender is only part of the picture, but it is pleasing to see that finally we have a few firms with a 50:50 split in terms of board gender diversity. Closer to home, of course, all being well in two years’ time the CIOT will have both a female president and CEO.

Hopefully, we will see more projects and initiatives that help the sector move towards greater diversity all round. At least we are moving in the right direction and apprenticeships are just part of the jigsaw.

So, to the trainees we have seen register to start their career in tax on a Level 4 Professional Taxation Technician (ATT) or Level 7 Taxation Professional (CTA) Apprenticeship – good luck.

Hopefully, you will have a great experience and be as lucky as I have been in my tax career to date, able to work with a diverse group of people, and have some fantastic mentors and champions along the way (thank you team, you know who you are!).

And just remember, you can get to be a tax partner or even Vice President of the Institute one day should you wish to do so!