A joint welcome from the Presidents of ATT and CIOT

Welcomes

01 July 2020

We are committed to ensuring that all our members, students and volunteers feel welcomed, valued and supported, regardless of their background or identity. We will reconfirm at every opportunity our values of diversity, inclusion and equality.

The light of transparency can be very powerful in tackling conscious and unconscious bias. We encourage every member who is responsible for managing a workplace to regularly review the diversity of that workplace, from all angles; and to audit all relevant matters, such as employee satisfaction, supplier selection and their marketing to customers.

This month, and in the August and September issues, we will celebrate diversity amongst our members, staff and volunteers; the thoughts of some members are included in this welcome. But first, some personal remarks from each of us...

Glyn Fullelove

The most thought-provoking event that I have attended as President was not directly to do with tax. It was the Women in Tax event last October focusing on intersectionality called 'Eye can't see a problem'. The most memorable part of the evening, for me, was a video in which a large group of diverse young people lined up for a race. However, before the race started, a list of social advantages and disadvantages was read out. Each time an advantage that a participant had enjoyed was read out, they took a step forward. Each time a disadvantage was read out that they had not suffered from, they also took a step forward. The starting line was thus converted to a starting grid. At no time in this process was ethnicity specifically mentioned. However, by the time the grid was fully formed, those at the front of the grid were overwhelmingly white; and those at the back, overwhelmingly black.

That led me to question my perception of my own privilege. I entered the workforce in the mid 1980s. It was undoubtedly a more inclusive workforce than the one my father entered in the 1950s. However, the 1980s workforce, even in the professions, was dominated by, and largely designed around, white males. Although, yes, I had to work hard, study and pass exams to succeed, I was working in a culture to which I, as a white male, did not have to adjust; unlike my female and BAME colleagues. I do not think I recognised at the time the level of unfairness that this very basic difference represented.

The workforce of today is different from the one I joined. Governments and employers have made changes to encourage greater equality of opportunity. Anyone attending a CIOT Admissions Ceremony cannot fail to be struck by the diversity of those entering our profession. At the last ceremony, the only group receiving certificates which was dominated by white males, was those receiving 50th anniversary of membership certificates. The leading employers in tax are also recognised as leaders in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. However, the very fact that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies are required is proof of the fact that there is still much to do.

In this article and the two to follow, we will celebrate the diversity of our profession; but we will also reflect on what more needs to be done so that no-one needs to make a 'cultural adjustment' of any kind on entering the profession or progressing through it. We are already in the process of making some changes, such as how people are appointed to Council, which will be covered in later articles. However, I am certainly aware that I need to be doing more listening than talking on this subject.

I am looking forward to hearing our members, staff and others tell us what we, as Institutes, need to change, and for them to lead us in such change.

Jeremy Coker

Both our organisations understand the importance of being part of a team where equality, diversity and inclusion are valued by all. We must promote an environment that welcomes and values diverse backgrounds, thinking, skills and experience, and which allows members and staff to thrive and fulfil their potential.

In recognition of this, last year we set up a Joint Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, chaired by Tina Riches. This small step was an acknowledgement that we should always be conscious of providing equal opportunities to our members, volunteers and staff, as well as doing everything that is within our power to protect them from being discriminated against.

We understand that we need to try harder to recognise, respect and value the differences in people, and to increase consciousness among ourselves that this is not always immediately apparent. We want to continuously improve our policies so that our members, volunteers and staff feel valued both within their own workplaces and in the wider society at large. Recent events make us even more confident that this is the right decision.

Implementation, though, will come with challenges. As Glyn writes above, we would really appreciate your input in helping us move this in the right direction.

We hope that you have found this Welcome both informative and thought provoking. Next month, we will focus on diversity among our staff. We would appreciate your comments. Please send them to: membership@att.org.uk or membership@ciot.org.uk.

Jeremy and Glyn

SOFIA THOMAS

Sofia Thomas pursued a different path to a career in tax by studying for her CTA and ATT qualifications at PWC through their school leaver programme. Sofia worked hard to balance her early career alongside raising her son. After five years with PWC, she branched out to create a niche business providing tax advice to family law firms. Her book *Tax Implications on Family Breakdown* was published by Bloomsbury this summer. Sofia also sits on ATT's Technical Steering Group. Sofia said: "Being a part of a technical committee has highlighted to me how much tax affects a cross section of society."

On diversity in the tax profession, she said: "Diversity gives more depth to policy. We need more people that make policy to reflect the public which, I believe, would lead to better outcomes." She finds the CIOT and ATT have 'excellent' speakers but would like to see more speakers from BAME backgrounds and from people with disabilities.

Having used a coach to gain confidence in public speaking, Sofia suggests that the CIOT could schedule training in public speaking as part of their offerings to members. This could encourage more speakers from diverse backgrounds who may have had fewer opportunities to gain experience in this area.

KIRET SINGH

Kiret Singh's passion for tax led him to study for the CTA exams before spending three years at Wilkins Kennedy. He is now into his sixth year at Grant Thornton, advising banks and asset managers on the tax aspects of financial transactions.

Is a career in tax what he expected? When asked, Kiret said: "I have found that there are so many connections to the outside world in the work we do as tax professionals."

Kiret finds the need to do 'deep dives' into complex matters 'thrilling' for a proactive and intellectually curious mind. He suggests that firms should look to recruit and develop talent with a focus on countering the 'unconscious bias' that is prevalent in certain pockets of the profession.

Kiret, a member of the ATT CIOT Harrow Branch, said: "We should keep talking about diversity because we want merit, talent and work ethic to prevail and to principally drive success in the profession. Everyone should have the same platform to develop and succeed; and by focusing on countering 'unconscious bias', we should eradicate any residual injustices. This, in turn, should promote excellence, which is what drives us as a tax profession and what the CIOT stands for."

RUTH PUNTER

Ruth Punter is a Director in PwC's Tax Reporting and Strategy team, working with organisations to deliver tax digitally, strategically and operationally. She joined the CIOT as an associate in 2002, having taken up a 'Big' graduate position in tax, based on its fit with her degree in economics and the opportunity to study for a professional qualification.

Ruth says she has not experienced any particular challenges in the tax profession as a gay woman. She does believe though that having 'out' role models early in her career, and an open-minded (if not particularly diverse at that time) group of colleagues, has encouraged her 'to be myself' and has been hugely important.

On the imperative for diversity within the tax profession and business more widely, Ruth's view is that it is not simply 'good for business' or even just 'the right thing to do'. She said: "Diversity shouldn't just be about bringing different perspectives to the same old questions but also asking entirely new questions. The tax system can be a lever for change but we must also accept that it is part of the artefacts and assumptions of the paradigm we currently operate within, which narrow our view of what change is needed or possible."

LAKSHMI NARAIN

Lakshmi Narain suspects that in the early 1970s when he started out, he was the first person of colour with a graduate training contract in an accountancy practice in Bradford, something remarkable given the multicultural community in the Yorkshire city then and the popularity of accountancy among the British Asian community now. The applied physics graduate stumbled into tax while training as an accountant at Thornton Baker and went on to take his CTA in 1977 (and Fellowship in 1979). He said: "Colleagues treated me as one of them and I was involved in all aspects of the company, including the social life. Throughout my career, I have found people in tax to be incredibly supportive." Membership of CIOT has been pivotal in terms of both the technical and personal support: members across the country have been generous in sharing their experiences.

He said: "Organisations which have really taken diversity to heart create inclusive working environments and reap the benefits. It allows them to manage their staff, arguably their most valuable resource, in an efficient and effective way. Businesses are part of a diverse society and by embracing diversity, firms can provide services that people want, in the way they want it."