President's page: Tax is everyone’s issue

Welcomes

21 June 2022

Last month, we celebrated the Queen’s Jubilee. I am pretty sure that there won’t be many of us who manage to clock up 70 years of work. What an amazing achievement. On less regal matters, my sister is slowly getting used to the idea that she has now made a cameo appearance in a taxation magazine, whilst my husband has acquired a new nickname as my ‘first laddy’. For my part, I am relieved to have conquered some of my fears after the CTA Address.

Those of you that read my last page will know that standing up in public, and reading from a script, is not something I find easy. That said, I really do think that you must do things that scare you in order to move forward and knock down your own mental barriers. And it is true to say that it gets easier (never easy!) with experience.

So my first challenge in the ‘standing up and speaking’ stakes happened last month when I chaired the CTA address. The debate was wide ranging but one thing that particularly struck me was Dame Margaret Hodge’s comment that ‘tax is everyone’s issue’. Education is key and as good citizens, as part of our social contract, we should recognise that we pay taxes for the benefit of all. Tax receipts pay for our health service, to protect us and to provide benefits for those less fortunate.

The debate was fascinating but illustrated the scale of the challenge we face as tax professionals. It was also recorded so if you missed it you can watch it at tinyurl.com/hodge22.

Over the days following the debate, I was reminded of a couple of past events. One was when Rob Ellerby (President at the time) and I went back to my old school to teach a lesson on the tax system. To encourage the class of teenagers to participate and calculate tax and National Insurance on some earnings, we had managed to

persuade representatives from Ipswich Town Football Club to come along as well. We were asked lots of questions. I like to think that after our visit they had at least a slightly better understanding of the system than they did before, as well as understanding the importance of tax. I have had the greatest respect for teachers ever since!

The second event happened when I was out walking the dog with my son a few months ago. He suddenly started questioning me about non-domiciled status. He is an avid football fan. So, we ended up talking about footballers, their domicile status, image rights and taxes in much more detail than I'd ever had a conversation with him before about tax. And this conversation brought me back to the remarks made by our panel at the CTA Address about the importance of having a tax system that is transparent and easy to understand for the 'non-tax experts', as well as one that is fair.

Since I started working in tax, it's become increasingly difficult for people who are not represented to obtain help. Back then, HMRC had local tax offices which you could call into without an appointment to ask for advice. Now you must use web chat or phone a helpline staffed by employees who, quite often (and through no fault of their own) have had very little training or are reading from a script. Many people find this hard to engage with and this is where LITRG and the fundraising campaign 'Bridge the Gap' come in.

The campaign supports two tax charities – Tax Aid and Tax Help for Old People – in their provision of advice and support to those who can't afford to pay for expertise. It was good to hear more about them recently at the East Midlands Tax Conference.

The charities need both money (you can donate using the website www.bridge-the-gap.org.uk) and volunteer advisers, so if you can spare some time or want to find out more please get in touch with Tax Help for Older People (tinyurl.com/mr23utv4) or Tax Aid (tinyurl.com/2p8d8yxy).

Lastly, to those who have contacted me to wish me well in the role, to comment on my last page and who have attended recent events – thank you. It has been lovely to see, and hear, from both familiar faces and new ones!