CIOT President inaugural speech: Susan Ball: ‘I want to be the “in the room” President’

Briefings

24 June 2022

New CIOT President Susan Ball gave her inaugural speech at the Annual General Meeting on 31 May 2022.

Image



Susan began her speech by thanking her predecessor, Peter Rayney, and paying tribute to Her Majesty the Queen in the week of her Platinum Jubilee celebrations. She noted that she is just the fourth female president the Institute has had, but that

as the new vice president, Charlotte Barbour is in place to become the fifth in two years' time.

Diversity and inclusion

The Institute takes diversity seriously. How can we represent our wonderfully diverse membership effectively if we do not reflect that at every level?

I am proud of the steps forward we are taking:

- the work of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee;
- the results of our New Speaker Programme and other efforts to improve the diversity of our panels; and
- our Council and senior management, more diverse than ever before, with Nik Mehta as the Council's EDI champion.

But we still have a long way to go, and continuing to make progress in this area is a priority.

Thanks to volunteers

I initially got actively involved in the Institute as a branch volunteer, when 15 years ago I was part of a small group of us who set up the Suffolk branch.

There are more than a thousand volunteers involved with the Institute in its branch and other committees.

We have a wonderful team of professional staff, but ultimately, we are our members. Without their work, insight and all-round contribution our branches couldn't run, our events would not succeed, and our representations would not be listened to. Thank you to all of you who contribute your time, your effort, and your expertise as Institute volunteers.

Embracing change

As we emerge from the pandemic, the Institute is determined to cater both for members keen to get back to face to face meetings and events, and those who want to continue to meet and get their CPD online – as well as those who want a mix of the two.

This hybrid approach will require some extra work and some extra cost, but it will enable us to reach many more members than before, and we are determined to deliver on it.

In this, as in so much else, technology is our friend.

Looking at the decade ahead, I see three big, ongoing trends which will reshape the tax system and we must consider the role *we* can play – embracing change to ensure we remain relevant and delivering on our public benefit obligations.

Technology is the first of these.

This means not just thinking about how we provide *our* services but about how technology will change how our members work and what kind of tax system they are advising on.

That's why an Institute Working Party has developed a syllabus for a new Diploma in Tax Technology. This qualification is aimed at both existing tax professionals who wish to enhance their awareness of tax technology, and at those outside the profession who might wish to work in this area. We aim to launch this new qualification by the end of the year.

And it's also why our technical committees and Low Incomes Tax Reform Group are looking closely at HMRC's plans for digitalisation and use of data. Of course, if technology can make HMRC more efficient that is a good thing, but there must be safeguards. Taxpayers who struggle with accessing services online must be protected. And those who wish to have an agent act for them must be able to retain that right in a digital world.

The second big factor shaping our world is climate change.

What does this mean for the Institute?

Well, first it means looking to our own actions, making sure we embed environmental awareness into our culture and practice. And, working with an external consultancy, we've already begun doing just that.

But it also means thinking about the role of tax in tackling climate change. That's why we set up our Climate Change Working Group, why we published our Climate Change Tax Policy Road Map last year, and why we held two separate debates last

year exploring the role of tax in getting to net zero. We don’t claim to have all the answers, but we can act as a gathering point for debate and provide a tax practitioner perspective on how different kinds of carbon pricing and other green incentives can be implemented effectively.

The third big factor is internationalisation.

Yes, there are ups and downs, trade disputes and sanctions. But the long-term trend is one of increased co-operation on matters such as tax. This is most obviously visible in the continuing work of the OECD around base erosion and profit shifting, including the plan for a global minimum corporate tax rate, but we also see it in improved information sharing between tax authorities and in efforts to combat climate change.

What does this mean for CIOT? Well, just as tax authorities are working together, so it makes sense for us to join with tax bodies elsewhere in the world – learning, sharing best practice. We continue to be one of the most active members of CFE Tax Advisers Europe. And we are continuing to build the international CTA community, announcing just two weeks ago the addition of the South African Institute of Taxation to the ranks of those bodies we license to use the designation Chartered Tax Adviser, recognising that, in their jurisdiction, they offer a standard of professional excellence equivalent to our own.

We also, of course, continue to grow our ADIT qualification, now being studied in around 120 countries by tax professionals keen to obtain the world’s leading qualification in international tax.

The advance of technology. The fight against climate change. Internationalisation. Three big changes affecting our world, impacting on the tax system, and on which our Institute has a significant role to play.

Cost of living crisis

A more immediate issue right now is the cost of living crisis.

Last week’s announcement of a temporary windfall tax on oil and gas companies will jar with some in the tax profession. We prefer our tax policy planned, stable and consulted on.

But with inflation at 9% and rising, and energy bills expected to double in just six months, these are exceptional times. And I think they justify exceptional measures.

The Institute is, of course, carefully politically neutral, but we do seek to enable debate and help policy-makers understand the practical implications of policies they are considering.

So at the autumn party conferences, when we join once again with IFS, the subject of our debates will be the role of tax in tackling the cost-of-living crisis.

As money gets tighter so the tax advice charities become even more crucial. I encourage anyone in a position to do so to support the Bridge the Gap campaign.

And in a similar vein, the role of our own Low Incomes Tax Reform Group becomes even more important, in providing guidance, and speaking up for taxpayers on low incomes.

As an employment tax specialist, I must briefly mention the debate on employment status, the lack of an Employment Bill and the new Matt Warman review into the future of work announced on 12 May.

It is now nearly five years since Matthew Taylor's Good Work report recommended that the level of NIC paid by employees and self-employed people should be moved closer together. More recently, the House of Lords expressed concerns on the lack of clarity around determining status. It is time we made progress on some of these matters.

Standards

Another issue which will occupy us during the next year is the regulation of the tax profession.

The government is considering various options for raising standards within the profession. We understand there will be a further consultation in the summer.

Our position is clear. Rather than creating a costly new government regulator, the most effective way forward in this area would be to build on the good work *already* being done by professional bodies such as CIOT.

Our PCRT rules *already* protect taxpayers and make clear that there is no place in the tax profession for those who devise, promote, or sell tax avoidance schemes.

HMRC service levels

Additionally, we continue to be concerned about the difficulties both advisers and taxpayers face getting timely responses and action from HMRC.

While we have seen improvements in recent months, targets have been missed and problems persist. We are looking at ways in which HMRC's processes and service levels might be improved and will be asking for your views on a range of ideas, including how taxpayers and agents could be allowed to do more themselves, thus easing the pressure on HMRC's resources.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion I just want to say how proud I am to be your president for the next 12 months.

If Peter was, through circumstance, a 'Zoom President', I want to be as much as possible the 'in the room' President, meeting as many of you as I can.

Our Institute is just a little younger than Her Majesty. I like to think that, like her, we combine a respect for tradition with a willingness to adapt, with the ethos of public service running through everything that we do. As we celebrate *her* Platinum Jubilee this week let us remember *our* objects, as set out in the Royal Charter she granted to us:

- to advance public education in taxation;
- to prevent crime; and
- to promote the sound administration of the law for the public benefit.

These are goals to be proud of. With your help, I will do *my* best to pursue them with vigour and tenacity over the year ahead.

This speech has been slightly abridged for space reasons. The full speech can be read or viewed at tinyurl.com/ciotsusan