ATT Welcome, September 2016

Welcomes

01 September 2016

A glittering career awaits you

One of the great things about being a member of the ATT leadership team is that twice a year we have to approve the exam results, after all as an educational charity it is what we are all about. The August 2016 issue of Tax Adviser carried the results from the May 2016 exams. Congratulations to all of you who passed and particularly those of you who have now passed all your exams and have two years' experience, and can apply to join ATT. I look forward to meeting many of you at one of our House of Lords admissions ceremonies.

Just having to approve the results does mean I get it easy though. There is a huge amount of work involved in the exams, and not just from our 5,000 plus students burning the midnight oil with your studies. Sue Short and her team of examiners have to set six separate papers twice a year. That is not just writing questions but also making sure that the papers are consistent and fair. However, it is once the last question has been answered that the real work starts. For the May sitting there were almost 1,900 scripts to deliver to markers, bring back to Artillery House, review and moderate before the results could be collated into pass lists. This is tremendous logistical task and our examinations team of Jude Maidment and Gavin Thai-Low, together with Jeremy Coker, the chair of the Student Steering Group, do a fantastic job time and again. It is no exaggeration to say that there are regular late night telephone calls in order to meet what is a fairly tight timetable.

It is easy for old buffers like me to go on about how much harder the exams were in our day (shades of the Monty Python Three Yorkshiremen sketch), but we are wrong. Trust me on this we could not pass the exams now. The way we work means that we tend to concentrate on smaller and smaller areas as your career progresses and while you may know (or think you know) almost everything there is to know about that area you gradually lose the breadth and depth of knowledge you had when you

qualified. As a newly qualified ATT you probably have a better knowledge of more areas of tax than you ever will have in the future; but it is probably better not to say that too loudly near your boss!

All of this set me thinking about how things have changed over my career. Believe it or not when I started out we still prepared tax returns by hand, although not quite with quill pens, as desk top computers were just starting to appear. The basic rate of income tax was 30% and the main rate of corporation tax was a now unbelievable 52%. The tax system we had to deal with was also a lot simpler, even if it did not seem like it at the time. Butterworth's had one yellow and one orange book where as now the yellow book runs to six volumes and the orange book is two volumes. The UK now has the longest tax legislation in the world which is not, perhaps, what we need in order to attract business into the country.

Various taxes have come and gone over the years as well. Hands up who can remember stock relief or development land tax, never mind the investment income surcharge.

So why has the volume of tax legislation grown so dramatically? I suspect that there are two underlying reasons. The tax law rewrite project was supposed to be a move to simplifying things so that all income tax law was in one place and corporation tax in another. A laudable aim, but as they say in Ireland if I was going there I would not start from here, and the starting point was a lot of rules that applied to both individuals and companies so there was inevitably going to be a lot of duplication. Add to that the need to ensure that anti avoidance measures are included whenever anything changes and it is easy to see why we now have to cope with so much legislation.

Of course change and the new challenges which that brings is one of the things that makes working in tax so interesting. Brexit and the making tax digital process are both going to mean change in the future and there is always going to be a demand for qualified tax professionals. So congratulations to all of you newly qualified ATTs, you have a glittering career to look forward to.

Until next month.