CIOT Vice President's page: A community

Welcomes



25 September 2024

When I was asked to write my first piece for *Tax Adviser* as Vice President, my inclination was either to reflect on the main tax changes I have seen since I qualified back in 1989 or to talk about some tax topics close to my heart. When I chaired the CIOT Autumn Residential Conference, last month, at Queens College Cambridge, however, I realised that it provided a far better subject.

The first thing that struck me when we assembled on the Friday afternoon was the buzz in the room. That is something you just don’t get with a webinar.

As a regular speaker, I know how important the connection between speaker and audience is and how a face-to-face event can give you the opportunity to change your presentation on the spur of the moment. It also gives the audience a far more engaged way to ask questions and for ideas to be pursued, whether during the lecture, in the group working sessions, over coffee or over dinner.

Webinars have a vital place in the post-Covid world of flexible and remote working; they also offer the chance to watch on demand if you can’t join live. But they cannot replicate the spontaneity of a face-to-face conference.

The second thing that struck me was what a diverse community we are in 2024, a real cross section of society with a common bond, the CTA. We have become a far more inclusive profession than we were in 1989 and that is something we should all take pride in.

Some things do not change. Within minutes of arriving, I met two old friends, Robert Jamieson and Peter Rayney. I first heard Robert speak in the early 1980s while I was still studying; his topic then was capital transfer tax and when I mentioned this to him, he not only recalled the lecture but the
exact location (Exeter Golf and Country Club).

I first heard Peter lecture a few years later and the fact that these two gentle giants of our profession are still so actively involved with our institute and that they are so generous with their time and knowledge when talking to conference delegates says a great deal about our CTA community.

Rebecca Benneyworth reinforced that point by delivering a brilliant, practical and completely impromptu session on MTD after her scheduled lecture on Saturday.

The conference covered a wide range of topics, some in great technical depth (but peppered with practical insights), while others challenged our perceptions of the future of the profession.

On Saturday afternoon, I chaired a panel session on AI in tax. Matthew Vick, Head of Futures and Innovation at HMRC, shared a tax authority perspective on how AI is being used in chatbots to deal with taxpayer queries and in the identification of tax risk to better target enquiries. Esther Mallowah, Head of Tech Policy at ICAEW, looked at the importance of risk management, good governance and ethics and Kunal Nathwani talked about the issues surrounding automated decision making in tax in the context of his recent paper for the IFS Tax Law Review Committee.

There is no doubt that AI is going to change the way we do tax – it already has – and we have to ensure that we are not only aware of the issues it creates, but in a position to actively steer things in the right direction for the future. Our core skills as professionals will be as important as ever, using our technical knowledge to assess

the accuracy of AI generated output, exercising judgement, professional skepticism and, of course, human empathy with clients.

My overriding impression as I left the conference was of that very real sense of community and common purpose. The feedback from delegates was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. One comment particularly struck me: ‘As someone from a smaller firm, I didn’t think it would be for me, but I really enjoyed it. I didn’t know anyone when I arrived, but left having made new friends and I’ll certainly be back next year.’

If you missed the conference this year, why not join us next year? Aside from the technical discussions, it was also – especially with Eddie the Eagle as our after-dinner speaker – great fun!