Outgoing President’s Speech : Serving through the summer of tax

Briefings

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Outgoing CIOT President Nichola Ross Martin will share highlights of her year in office in her speech to the Institute’s AGM on 4 June.

It has been a great pleasure and privilege to serve as President for the past year. What a year; it went by in a flash. As president I have chaired CIOT’s Council. We are all volunteers and I would like to thank each and every one of you for your enthusiasm in this role and your friendship and support.

This year we waved farewell to departing Council members Penelope Tuck, Gary Ashford and Peter Rayney. Both Gary and Peter are former presidents. I wish you all well in your future endeavours.

Future proofing the Institute

One task for CIOT and its Council is ongoing: how to future proof the Institute and its qualifications. It's a challenge second-guessing what 'the world of tax' will look like from the screen of Gen Alpha. Following extensive consultation with stakeholders last year, we have agreed a revised CTA qualification and education governance structure. The new CTA will apply to exam sittings from 2028.

This has been a challenging task and I want to say a special thank you to CIOT's Director of Education Vicky Purtill and her team for their work on the new CTA.

On our technical side, there has been a review of committees and an update in terms of governance.

Recently I attended a lunch to thank members of the advisory board of CIOT's Low Incomes Tax Reform Group. LITRG was founded in 1998 as an initiative to support people on low incomes who cannot afford tax advice. Its work remains as important and relevant as ever.

My year kicked off with our Tax Technology Conference in Birmingham. I enjoyed a lot of discussion on the shortcomings of the AI large language models. AI solutions in tax involve asking the right questions. That is difficult without having the appropriate level of tax knowledge. Of course, if you have the appropriate level of knowledge you probably don't need to ask the question. It's a 'which came first: the chicken or the egg?' type of conundrum.

Encouraging debate on tax reform

Summer 2025 was the summer of tax. Budget speculation was in the press, online and wherever I went. This made it easy to choose topics for tax debates. I chaired discussions on taxing wealth at the party conferences in Liverpool and Manchester. Joint debates with the IFS explored international tax co-operation, property tax reform and the success and failures of tax devolution. Our CTA Address looked at how we can harness technology to tackle tax crime.

A big part of the presidency is supporting the CIOT's branch network. It's been a pleasure to participate and often speak at conferences held by our East Midlands, London, Home Counties, Jersey, South West, and Somerset and Dorset branches. I played Christmas bingo in Leeds, danced late into the night in Manchester, and took part in a taxing business game in South Wales, supporting students of Cardiff and

Swansea universities. Well done to all the branches and thank you for inviting me.

I handed out prizes at our admission ceremonies, recognising the brilliant achievements of our students, and visited many of the great halls of the city of London, including dining with the Worshipful Company of Tax Advisers, who do such great charity work.

A year ago, in my opening speech as President, I complained that while there is plenty of argument about rates and burdens in Parliament, there is very little about reform and design. We did our best to rectify that during the year.

A few more ideas

Here are a few more personal suggestions before I sign off as President. We could merge income tax and NIC: for me this is a no brainer. Why collect two taxes when you could do the same with one?

We could finish the job on employment rights reform: move to single worker status and line up employment rights with employment status for tax. No one understands the differences and they just serve to confuse workers, employers and HMRC.

I also believe that the purpose of a tax system is not simply punitive: why can’t it be used to motivate and inspire? We need meaningful incentives to encourage entrepreneurs.

And then council tax, all economists agree that valuations need updating, and it’s unfair to have bands at different levels depending on your postcode.

I also urge government to review the full tax impacts of all new policies in order to avoid any further unexpected or unintended consequences. For example, it has only just been noted that there is an SDLT consequence of the Renters Rights Act 2025: something now to be corrected with retrospective legislation. Or, in the case of landlord taxes, will driving private landlords out of the system be productive? What replaces them?

A low point in my year was finding that Parliament was willing to pass broadly drafted and unclear legislation in respect of the mandatory registration of tax advisers. I hope it will not cause significant issues in law enforcement, compliance and legal interpretation, but I fear the worst. I cannot see the point in parliamentary

drafting guidance if it is not followed.

I would like to thank friends, and colleagues at 2020 Innovation, for all their support and enthusiasm.

As I hand over to Paul Aplin, and wish him well for his year, I am conscious that in just a few days' time, the first returns will be filed under MTD for income tax. This next year is going to be a testing time for all concerned.

And finally, I would like to give thanks to everyone who has done so much to support me in my year as president, including our CEO Helen and her team and my fellow members of Council.

This speech has been abridged. The full speech can be read at www.tax.org.uk/blog/1