I am in the departure lounge ready to leave

Technical

01 March 2015

‘This train is ready for departure. If you are not planning on travelling with us today, please leave the train now.’

How many times in the past two years have I heard that announcement and ignored it as I did want to travel and was staying put? However, the time has come for me to leave the LITRG train and when you read this I will be back in the HMRC fold.

Here it is then: my last piece, all about my secondment experiences, the memories and skills I will take with me and the legacy I hope to leave.

The new girl

After working for HMRC for more than 30 years you can appreciate that any move to a new organisation, even on secondment, would be daunting. The fact that it involved working from home after years in an office with a team around me posed a real challenge. I shouldn’t have been concerned because the transition was smooth; it is all about having the appropriate components in place and maintaining contact, which is something LITRG does really well.

The customer service aspect drew me in and I looked forward to helping LITRG meet its charitable aims, which I believed in. I was raring to go and wanted to get my teeth into making a real difference, seeing outcomes and feeling the effects.

The diversity and complexity we cover as a team was an eye-opener from the start: personal tax, welfare benefits, social services, European law, policy documents, white papers, calls for evidence and working groups and forums, to name a few. I became like a child in a sweet shop, spoilt for choice: with wide-eyed wonderment I was free to taste and feel whatever I wanted.

It truly is a team effort and that is a significant part of what makes LITRG such a trusted source in government as an advisory and challenging group. There is always support and help, with time for debate and discussion, opportunity to challenge and a desire to share knowledge and understanding. I have learned so much about areas of work I never realised I would be involved in.

More importantly, this translates into the excellent service and support we offer to people on low incomes and the other voluntary and community sector (VCS) advisers that support them; and why, since John Andrews first mooted the idea, LITRG has been a huge success. Helping people on low incomes to meet their tax obligations is a necessary cause, and LITRG has fantastic backing and support from the CIOT/ATT brethren and many volunteers.

Digital

I had done my homework and, on joining the team, immediately expressed an interest in the digital agenda and particularly exclusion, which has been renamed in the positive – to ‘inclusion’. Digital is in my blood and, having worked with it and in it since 1999, I saw no reason to change that! It did mean a shift from the bits and bytes to the support for those who struggle.

I enjoyed the interaction with colleagues and members and hearing their concerns when representing clients from the move to GOV.UK, to the digital by default agenda and the ‘paperless’ society. There is still much to do in this arena with HMRC, their assisted digital team and other government departments, but we can be sure digital will not go away; we must all learn to embrace it and help those who struggle or cannot engage with it to continue to interact with government services.

Needs extra support

It is not often I see all aspects of a project through from policy-making and legislation to delivery and operation, but this has been an exception and the opportunity immense. As the HMRC enquiry centres closed the idea for the new HMRC service emerged, and it truly has been a collaboration of many. Together with members, other professionals and voluntary community sector organisations, we have challenged HMRC and ministers with results from our mystery shopping and by trawling through research to develop an exemplar seen as groundbreaking for the government and already award-winning. The service should continue to develop and

improve, and I will be keeping a close eye on how it evolves.

Favourite times

Autumn statement and Budget: the buzz of the days and the excitement of the proposals, the working together to understand implications, the joint effort and supporting each other, the recognition from the media and respect from government departments. The LITRG technical team amaze me with their breadth and depth of knowledge and the ground they cover and I am in awe of their expertise.

Networking at events and forums: the sharing of ideas, the development of the organisation and the trust that members and staff have for each other, showing that indeed it is one big happy family with a common goal to serve others in their affairs and to understand the complex tax regime.

I have been to places I never thought I would see; the Tower of London this year has to be the highlight. I felt so privileged to have been a part of the 25-year celebration of the ATT and to see the new talent brimming with enthusiasm made my night.

The legacy I leave behind and skills I take with me

I hope to have left a footprint that will serve LITRG and CIOT/ATT well.

My joint working with representatives in our Tax in Education Group in pursuit of our vision to educate pupils and students in tax was a bonus. I hope that the plethora of stakeholders I have built up and my detailed project plan will allow the vision to become reality.

Also, I am interested in continuing collaborating with my local branch committee, promoting the work that LITRG does to members and showing how we can all work together to serve taxpayers.

The Bridge the Gap campaign, which spreads the word for those who cannot afford to pay for professional help, is one I believe in and I intend to be an ambassador in my area. I extol the great work of the two tax charities – Tax Help for older People and TaxAid – and feel privileged to have worked alongside many of the staff and volunteers.

For HMRC, the skills I have obtained will be put to good use in my new role to put the customer, especially those on low incomes, at the heart of design and development. I will approach all my tasks as I have done while in the LITRG team and look forward to future collaboration on joint projects.

So I have picked up my luggage, departed on the train and am travelling in a different tax direction. I do hope to see you all on the shared platform again one day!