CIOT President's Page, June 2017

Welcomes

01 June 2017

Moving forward on all fronts

Hello! I am incredibly honoured to be taking over from Bill Dodwell as President. Bill has had an excellent year, as did a long succession of people before him, and I can only promise to do my very best to try to follow in their footsteps.

My background is that I trained as a chartered accountant with a medium size firm and then joined the tax practice of Price Waterhouse (as it then was) in 1982. I decided I needed to do our Institute's exams if I really wanted to be a tax specialist and became a member in 1984. In 1985, I went on secondment to the firm's tax training department to work for one John Whiting (who as most of you will know also went on to become CIOT President). John suggested a speaker was needed at short notice to speak at a Member's Conference, and I was hooked! I've been involved in Institute affairs ever since. I've chaired Education, Membership & Branches and Exam Committees and have been a Council Member for more than 17 years (in two stints). I was a partner at PwC for 23 years specialising in financial services clients and where I served on both the UK and Global Tax leadership teams. I withdrew from the partnership in 2014 and am now a NED and a consultant.

So what do I see as the priorities for the year ahead? Well, we don't have standalone presidential 'themes' anymore because the Elected Officers meet regularly and work closely with our Chief Executive, Peter Fanning and his executive team to implement our strategy. As I said in my address to the AGM, I see this strategy effectively as a constant drive to add value to all our stakeholders be they members, students, firms, government in the widest sense, other professional bodies or the public. I thought about calling for 'permanent evolution' but I had a feeling it might be misunderstood especially in the heat of an election debate!

Accordingly, I want to see us move forward on a wide variety of important fronts and I'll be writing about a number of these in future articles. For now, let me just mention a few. It is fundamental that our exams are seen as attractive and test skills that are relevant to today's tax specialists, whether in private practice or elsewhere. We have therefore conducted a comprehensive review of our entire exam system to ensure it continues to meet those requirements. After extensive consultation, proposals will be put before Council in July and, if approved, will be publicised later this year.

We will be looking at our successful conferences and branches programmes to see if they can be made even better and more attractive, especially to those not in professional practice and to newer members of our profession.

On the public policy front, we will continue to support the principle behind Making Tax Digital while doing all we can to try and ensure that a sensible policy isn't damaged by poor and too rapid implementation. Further, we will be encouraging whoever wins the election to take the need for simplification of the tax system seriously. On our side, we have to be cognisant of the expectations of the Society of which we are a part and demonstrate we understand that public attitudes to aggressive tax avoidance have changed. The new rules on Professional Conduct in Relation to Taxation (PCRT) are a reflection of this.

Encouraging diversity has always been a key priority for me throughout my career so I hope to use my year to see what more we can do further to promote diversity within our profession. This is something that a number of professional bodies are looking at and we will seek to work with them to move this agenda forward.

We are of course an educational charity and we are rightly proud of the fantastic work our Low Incomes Tax Reform Group, in particular, do and we will continue strongly to support these activities. At the same time, the work of the Bridge the Gap charities is increasingly important but they need more funds to help all the people who need it. I recognise that there are a huge number of demands on your charitable goodwill. Nonetheless, in an environment where the activities of tax professionals are so often criticised – however unfairly – isn't it valuable to be able to show how we are working to help those who fall through the cracks in the tax system? Look out for an article in next month's Tax Adviser on how Bridge the Gap helps vulnerable people, and how you can help them with their work.

As I say, I’ll write more about all these areas in the coming months. In the meantime, I look forward to working with your other Officers to ensure our Institute remains the leading professional body dealing solely with taxation