

Before my Presidential year I had chosen the theme of encouraging more accountants to use technology more, to advance their skills in IT and to get into advisory work. Nothing could have been more important in the last 12 months as we all battled to deal with the pandemic.

We have embraced technology to continue to serve and advise our clients whether that be in practice or in business. Financial information, taxation work, corporate governance work still needed to continue. Audits and accounting still needed to be done, both to inform shareholders about businesses but also to allow management to have the confidence to continue their businesses or to deal with the pandemic. Clients needed much advice, and the accountants who came to the fore were those who happily worked, often without charge in the early days, to talk to all clients and set out options for them.

Accountants have been lifelines for their clients especially in this last year, often going to their rescue to keep them informed of government support and protection, funding availability, encouraging them to pivot their businesses into remote working or safe working practices for the times, to hope for the best but to plan for the worst. They have had to understand the myriad of government announcements and then the detail that came much later, whilst clients wanted to know the detail as soon as the announcement was made.

The High Street banks have not made it easy in the last twelve months, taking forever to answer the phone and to process applications for funding and then frustratingly to say No weeks later when an early NO would have helped the accountants and the clients more.

Our Institute had to pivot and support the ICAEW members as they worked to support their clients and employers. Training courses moved online and kept us all up to date, activities switched to the cloud and helped bring members together to give them confidence and someone to talk to when they needed it. Member engagement digitally went through the roof, with more hits on the ICAEW page about furlough than on the government's own website at one stage. For online activities it has proved more effective to run them at a West Midlands or even Midlands region as a whole and when I look at what is available, there are 40 more activities listed for the rest of 2021 in the West Midlands as well as 44 On-demand past events in 2021. The Essentials CPD Programme for 2021 consists of 36 sessions of which 7 are done and available on demand and 29 are still to do. Even in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020, engagement by participation in Midlands ICAEW events are up by 130%, slightly more than the increase in that same period across the whole country. As a Midlands region we have the highest participation after London and the East.

Unlike Presidents before me, I have not been to any dinners, meetings at Moorgate Place or conferences in nice hotels. I have appreciated the time saving through not travelling. I invested it back into a working party role looking at the future of our much loved District Societies so as to enable them to work even more closely with ICAEW to help our members.

Last month I very much enjoyed the online celebration of the London Society of Chartered Accountants 150th anniversary. Although our own District Society is much younger, it takes its place as one of the 23 such District Societies covering the country, supporting our members and trying to do our bit to influence the world we live in in a positive way.

My plea for the future – I would like all accountants to do more to encourage help for those less fortunate and to be a force for good and helping save our planet from climate change. And don't just act as scorekeepers for your clients businesses please help them more to win the game tomorrow.

I cannot really finish without thanking Sophie Dale-Black for all her work in the Midlands Region of ICAEW and to wish her well in her new role at the British Business Bank. It is only when I became President that I realised how much work our Regional Teams do to assist with the work of our District Society. We should be getting a new Regional Director in the next few months, once a big

reorganization has taken place in ICAEW centrally. And, of course, I am more than indebted to Linda Conway for keeping me on the straight and narrow and organizing so much – we could not do it without you Linda, thank you.

Thank you, members, for giving me the chance to serve as your virtual President in a challenging year. Thank you to my committee for continuing to do their roles and to help us to serve and influence.

John Capper

President 2020-21