

News

Interview: Simon Bevan, Association of Partnership Practitioners



AccountingWEB.co.uk consultant practice editor Mark Lee speaks to Simon Bevan, the current chairman of the Association of Partnership Practitioners (APP).

The Association of Partnership Practitioners (APP) is a multi-disciplinary organisation of almost 400 UK partnership and LLP practitioners. Launched in March 1998, the project was the brainchild of lawyers Ronnie Fox and Clare Murray and today provides members with technical information as well as the opportunity to network. At the time of its launch I was a partner in the professional practices group at BDO Stoy Hayward and joined the APP along with many of my colleagues and competitors.

Simon Bevan, one of my erstwhile partners during my time at BDO Stoy Hayward, is the latest chairman of the APP. He joined the committee in 2003 and describes the APP as “an invaluable resource for all of us involved in both partnerships and professional services firms”.

Simon has been on the APP organising committee for a number of years and says that through a variety of media, it aims to “effectively encourage debate and knowledge sharing on many of the complex and technical issues surrounding partnership law and practice”.

Tackling key issues

The organisation arranges six workshops per year which aim to provide interactive learning sessions to encourage debate and discussion on a variety of issues. Recent workshops have covered topics such as ethics in professional practice; building capital value in professional services firms; de-equitisation of partners; and leading a professional services firm (especially if you aren't from the same profession). Through these workshops, the APP aims to create a forum for the exchange of experience and knowledge for those who specialise in the various areas of partnership law and practice.

Over the last 11 years there have been more than 60 of these workshops and the numbers attending have grown from 50 or so initially, to over 100 at present, with waiting lists building up quickly due to their popularity. In conjunction with the practical workshop events, the organisation also publishes electronic newsletters, which are circulated to members three times a year. These newsletters provide a summary of the discussions within the workshops and include contributions from members giving insight into many of the current issues facing partnership law and practice.

One important feature of the newsletters is the legal update section, which provides members with a summary on significant legal cases. “The newsletters draw on the experiences and knowledge of different individuals within the partnership arena and ensure that our members receive expert advice on a timely basis”, says Simon.

Technical insight

Along with participation in the workshops, members may also be invited to join a working party, which researches and reports on issues that are of relevance to the APP's members. There are two types of APP working party: the first are those created in response to ad hoc issues, typically when the government releases consultation papers on matters relevant to partnerships (examples include LLPs and age discrimination), while the second focus on more permanent issues, such as taxation, insolvency and multi disciplinary practices.

"The submissions by working parties highlight the active role that members take and the way that the APP provides a coordinated voice for partnership practitioners", says Simon. "The organisation has been recognised by bodies such as HMRC and the government departments as being a relevant group with which to consult on appropriate matters".

A recent project that an APP working party became involved in was the Companies Act 2006 Implementation. The DTI published a consultation paper in March 2007 in relation to the implementation of the Companies Act 2006 which has a section on LLPs. An APP working party drafted a response to this consultation and submitted their response to the DTI paper.

Events and forthcoming projects

Alongside the more formal workshops, there are several events that offer invaluable networking opportunities. The annual general meeting and dinner is a members' only event that offers the opportunity to meet other members on a more social level. The 2009 AGM was sponsored by Butterfield Private Bank and the guest speaker was Jon Moulton, founder and Managing Partner of Alchemy, a UK based private equity firm.

There are also occasional social events, with a more recent focus on events for younger members, to give them the opportunity to network, develop relationships and build up a portfolio of contacts. "We hope that this forum of younger members will increase the confidence and visibility of the newer members of the APP", says Simon.

The APP is also about to launch its Directory of Partnership Dispute Arbitrators and Mediators. Experienced partnership dispute arbitrators and mediators who wish to be included in the directory should submit their applications now. The initial directory will be finalised and open to the public by 1 July 2009.

"We are pleased to be able to make this new service available to the public", explained Simon. "Discussions with members have demonstrated how difficult it is for many, both within and outside the professions, seeking arbitration or mediation services to identify suitable experts in the partnership field.

"The APP's Directory of Partnership Dispute Arbitrators and Mediators is designed to address this difficulty and allow access to a wide-ranging list of practitioners to be able to choose someone who is most suitable. We believe it is being launched at a time when the economic climate is contributing to an increasing number of disputes in partnerships."

Membership

Members of the APP now include nearly all of the leading practitioners in the field of partnership law and practice - principally lawyers, accountants, tax advisers, management consultants and bankers. However, membership is not just for those who advise partnerships and professional services firms; it's also open to those manage such firms.

"We are actively seeking new membership from all professionals and business leaders who wish to contribute to a forum that debates issues surrounding partnerships and professional practice. We rely on members playing an active role within the APP to ensure the workshops and working parties are run professionally. We have been lucky to find that it has always had a very open, collaborative and sharing culture – and many people give a lot of their time freely to make it a thriving organisation", says Simon.

Applications for membership to the APP can be made online at www.app.org.uk

*Mark Lee is chairman of the **Tax Advice Network** and consultant practice editor of AccountingWeb.co.uk.*