



Taxing Matters

Episode 5- Women in Tax Network: Connecting Professionals

Alice Hello, and welcome to Taxing Matters, your one stop audio shop for all things tax brought to you by RPC. My name is Alice Kemp and I will be your guide as we explore the sometimes hostile and ever-changing landscape that is the world of tax law and tax disputes.

Taxing Matters brings you a monthly roadmap to guide you and your business through this labyrinth. In case any of you miss any crucial information or just want some bedtime reading, there is a full transcript of this and indeed every episode of Taxing Matters on our website at www.rpc.co.uk/taxingmatters.

Alice We all know the benefits which networking and creating a supportive space in which to learn and ask questions can bring to our individual practices. Today we want to highlight one of the award-winning networks which is helping to develop networking opportunities within tax, together with the benefits it can bring, as highlighted by two of its amazing committee members.

Women in Tax was the 2022 winner of the 'Not-For-Profit' Award at the 'Tolley's Taxation Awards'. Set up in 2015 with the aim of helping raise the voice of women working in all spheres of tax, making their knowledge visible and creating a supportive network that connects people, facilitates skill development and promotes the sharing of ideas. The Women in Tax network has gone from strength to strength. The current Women in Tax committee is a good example of this. Joining me to talk more about the 'Women in Tax network' and the benefits it can bring for professionals, we have the Chair, Tasneem Kadiri and Events Committee Member, Alexis Armitage.

In addition to putting her excellent organisational skills to use for the Women in Tax network Alexis is also a solicitor in RPC's Tax Disputes Financial Crime and Regulatory team, where she specialises in advising both individuals and corporate clients on a broad range of contentious tax issues - involving direct and indirect taxes.

Tasneem is a chartered accountant and chartered tax advisor with experience in both practice and industry. Currently, in addition to chairing Women in Tax, Tasneem is responsible for managing all the UK and Ireland tax affairs for L'Oréal. Tasneem is the winner of the 2020 Tolley's Taxation Award for 'Best In-House Tax Lead' and for her contribution to the wider tax community.

So, welcome both Alexis and Tasneem!

Tasneem Thank you so much for having us Alice, really excited to be on this!

Alexis Yeah, thank you Alice!

Alice So, starting us off, Tasneem, can you give us a bit more about the background to the 'Women in Tax network' and your role as the chair?

Tasneem Sure. Women in Tax was formed in the UK in 2015, it was formed by Heather Self - as I think most of the tax profession know - and the aim of it is raising the voice of women working in all spheres of tax, making visible their knowledge and experience with a supportive network that connects people, facilitates skills development and promotes the sharing of ideas.

Over the years the network has expanded across the UK and spread internationally which is really, really great. We bring together women working in tax in the profession, in house, HMRC or anywhere else for events throughout the year.

Our mission is to empower, support and promote women. Sadly, we still find instances where there is not enough female representation, whether that is at senior levels within firms, or even speaking at events, women in tax strive to make a difference by creating and making connections in the industry, facilitating sessions to help women grow, flourish and reach their true potential - taking a stand for all women in the tax profession so that one day we can get to true gender parity in the tax profession. Certainly, we have made great strides in the last number of years but there is still a long way to go. The Women in Tax network - I should add - is run entirely by volunteers, so we are really, grateful to all of our committee for all the work they do to help create more gender parity in the tax profession.

My role as chair is overseeing the whole committee. We have an event that takes place almost every month on different areas, whether its boosting women's confidence, soft skills, technical skills etc. My role is also expanding the network to bring more women into the Women in Tax network, to then get more opportunities for us as well in the tax profession for women. So, I'll give you an example: last year I was approached by 'Tax Journal' and we were asked to take over an entire edition and I was asked to source female writers in tax.

What my role as chair is? It's really to help more women in the tax profession to flourish, to get more opportunities and, also collectively as a committee, hold the ladder up for other women, help inspire other women in the tax profession who might be encountering issues, we really want to show them that anything is possible - nothing is impossible.

Alice And Alexis, what does the Events Committee Member do?

Alexis Yes, thank you Alice. The Events Committee Member just helps Chair, Tasneem, design the events schedule for the forthcoming year. As Tasneem said, we have on average on average one event every month, sometimes in person events, sometimes virtual events. We like to have a mixture so that lots of different people can attend. We are aware that we've got lots of people in the network juggling all kinds of things in addition to work and so virtual events we find a lot of people can attend because it just provides that flexibility. Liaising with the Chair, liaising with all the other committee members. Various committee members have assigned different organisational roles depending on which event they are organising.

My job is basically to make sure everything is on-track and everyone is doing what they should be doing. I am rather odd in that I love organising events! I am really pleased to be doing this role this year. I am really excited at what we can achieve!

Alice Great! So, what is the purpose of the Women in Tax network. You've mentioned a couple of different things, but really when you boil it down, what are we doing?

Alexis In a nutshell the whole 'Women in Tax network' is, essentially, a support network for women outside of their normal working environment. As Tasneem has already said it encompasses anybody working in tax, anybody at all that is working in the tax sphere, really. The idea is that we get together at these events, or virtually, share knowledge and ideas. The whole purpose of it, really, is for it to be an informal and relaxed inclusive environment.

The most important thing, I suppose, is if you work on your own or you work in a very small organisation - it is particularly important for those people, I think - because then they have that added network of support and they can exchange ideas and it, basically, it leads to a lot of variety and fresh perspectives that they might not otherwise get in their own organisations. Or, even if people are self-employed working in tax, it's quite a good way of meeting new people, a way of networking as Tasneem has already said.

It's a not-for-profit organisation, so we do try to keep most of our events free so that we are as inclusive as possible. Obviously, sometimes - on the rare occasion - we do need to charge for events just because we've got certain minimal costs, but we do try to keep most of the events free and it's good just to have women at all levels of tax working across the industry, so if you've got an issue there will be somebody who has already had that issue, they are ten steps ahead of you and they can advise you on what to do.

Alice You've both, obviously, got very different backgrounds. Tasneem, you have had the chartered accountant, chartered tax advisor, private practice and, also, now in an in-house role, and Alexis, you are coming in from a tax disputes, legal challenges perspective where you are a solicitor in a law firm. What do each of you get out of this network? What has your own personal experience been? Tasneem, if I can turn to you first?

Tasneem	<p>I am in an industry role which you obviously have small tax teams etc, so for me it was great having that wider 'connectivity' and that network UK wide - and also overseas - I think that was really beneficial because you have other heads of tax, it makes you feel like you have a bit of a network. Whereas, when you work in a practice, there is a lot more of you and you can discuss things etc, so I think that was fantastic.</p> <p>I'd say the other point - where I found I have got a lot out of it - diversity, equity and inclusion is a real passion of mine. I love working on those areas. Yes, of course it's work on top of the day-job and I do this in my spare time, but I really enjoy it because I really want to make a difference in this area and it's something that I enjoy.</p> <p>My career path hasn't always been easy, being a mum, being an ethnic minority, a female, etc. So, I have had various obstacles along the way but having overcome them I think it is really important to give something back. Even though there have been obstacles in my career path I have also been very fortunate to have had some amazing mentors, not just in tax but outside of tax, quite a few of my mentors have not actually been in tax. I really feel quite passionate that if one is given the right support, anyone can reach their true potential and nothing is impossible. So, I guess for me, it's a network but it's also a passion and giving something back, as well, to the community.</p>
Alice	<p>Excellent. And Alexis, what has your experience been?</p>
Alexis	<p>Yeah, I pretty-much echo everything Tasneem has said.</p> <p>I have been a member of Women in Tax for a number of years, but I have become more involved, I suppose, in the last twelve, or eighteen months - largely because I have, definitely, started to see more of the value in the network as I got to know more and more people.</p> <p>My recent maternity leaves were, definitely, the reason I got more involved. I came back from my first maternity leave the week of lockdown. I had got, obviously, very used to being at home for a long period of time and trying to deal with that transition of going back to work while being at home - and the pandemic going on - was, actually, really quite difficult and although I have a very supportive tax team at RPC there are only ten or twelve of us. So, it's really nice for me to have that added network of support. Women at all different levels as well that are, obviously, a lot more senior than me and have a lot more experience, and it's just been really-good to talk to them and hear what their struggles have been with balancing the never ending 'mum juggle' and, actually, it's really nice to hear the success stories of the women that have done it. It's really good to see five, or ten, years ahead of what they are doing and what you can achieve - as Tasneem said- and also to give something back to all of the tax juniors that are coming into the industry at the moment and talking to them about things they might do from the outset to make their lives easier.</p>
Alice	<p>You've described, both of you, some of the people that are in the Women in Tax network but what does your membership look like? If someone is looking at it, will there be a place for them?</p>
Tasneem	<p>I would say, "absolutely!" There is a place for everyone in the tax profession, whether they work in practice, whether they work in industry, whether they work in a law firm - HMRC - doesn't matter what organisation they work for in tax, there will always be a place for them in the 'Women in Tax network' – and, regardless of what level, we have people who are only just starting off their tax career and then we also have people who are really senior, like, at partner level, director level, heads of tax. So, I would say there is something there for everyone.</p> <p>I didn't mention earlier, as well as our formal events, we also have informal 'coffee-mornings' and those really offer a great way for people to connect and, I think, there is many people who have come to those who ended up becoming friends with someone else from a place they would have never thought about - and also found ways that have inspired them. Advice has also been given to them from different people. So, that can come from committee members who give them advice, but also other attendees. So, I would say, it is open for everyone and regardless of gender.</p> <p>A common misconception that people make is that the network is only for women and I want to reiterate the message - all our events are open to men and I was really pleased to see a number of men attend our annual debate, that just took place in January this year. I always say, "without having all genders involved in this journey of gender equality we will never get there". Everyone needs to be in that conversation, so I want to emphasise all genders are always welcome to our networks so please do come along!</p>
Alice	<p>Great, and Alexis, Tasneem has just mentioned one of the events that is run by the Women in Tax network, the annual debate, what kinds of events are there?</p>

Alexis We have a whole host of things going on, but just to give you a recap, I suppose, of the last six months - just to give you an idea of the kinds of things we do: Tasneem has already mentioned in January we had the 'Women in Tax annual debate' and that was supposed to be in November but, due to the train strikes, we had to move it - but that was a really good in-person event, we had 100 people attend.

Every year we have an annual debate like this and this year the topic was "Taxing the wealthy, what is fair?" and we had a panel debate and we had Dr Ben Tippet who is a lecturer from the University of Greenwich. We had Catherine Grum, who is the head of family office services at BDO, we had Robert Waterson, a partner at RPC and we had Christina Johansson, a patriotic millionaire - it was a really good evening - and we overran on time because everybody was so interested - and it was a really lively debate and then we had drinks and canapes afterwards and so, there was a real networking opportunity there as well!

It was really nice just to have one of those in person events post-pandemic, it was really nice to get back to that, because I think, previously, our annual debate had had to be online because of the pandemic. So, it was really-nice to see so many people turn up for that - and there was a whole variety of people who turned up. Some people had never been to any of our events before, some people were regular attenders.

In February, we had a virtual event that was all about dealing with stress and pressure with executive coach Linda Spink. That was really well attended and, again, that was just dealing with, I say soft-skills, but obviously they are still really important and it was all about dealing with the juggle of home life, work life, stress and pressure in the workplace only, all of those issues.

Last year, in October, we did a whole series of virtual events for Menopause Awareness Week. We joined up with some of the regions of those events, really well-thought out and put together series of events and they were really well attended.

We also had a networking breakfast at Ernst & Young, again that was just a very informal breakfast where people could get together and exchange ideas and experiences.

In September last year we had our technical piece - we usually do one or two technical pieces a year - that one was run by us RPC, and that one was all about HMRC civil and criminal information gathering powers and I know, Alice, you were obviously heavily involved with that.

Alice I was, yes!

Alexis - and that was really well-attended. It is quite topical isn't it? What can HMRC get a hold of? Quite a few people found that interesting.

We also had a really good in-person event - that Tasneem was, obviously, heavily involved in - hosted by Rawlinson & Hunter and it was all about progressing your tax career and advice for new tax professionals, so again, as Tasneem was saying, passing that knowledge and insight down to the next generation of tax professionals and that was a really good event.

Last summer, we had the 'London Legal Walk' and we also had a session on life coaching, 20 or 30 people attended. Back in May we had a series of virtual events for 'mental health awareness week' that were very well attended and, obviously, very important for a lot of people.

As you can see that's the last six months.

Tasneem

I'm happy to announce that, coming up next in terms of the events we have for the rest of the year, we also in May will have our 'Mental Health Awareness Week' event. In June, we are planning a workshop around progression negotiations, public speaking confidence. We will also have our 'London Legal Walk' taking place on the 13th June - and that's always something really lovely to do because we are able to do that outdoors!

We also have something that's quite unusual and never been done before coming up in summer. Slightly controversial name, but it is "F-UP Night" and a fun activity. So, more details will follow but the idea around it is women talking about where they might have thought they have made a real, complete-blunder, but it wasn't actually a "blunder". It is okay to make a mistake - you can learn from it - it is talking about the growth mindset. "That is the idea of F-UP Night" - slightly controversial name, but I am really excited about that event because it is very different to what we have done before!

Then we will, of course, have our annual debate topic - yet to be confirmed - and we will also have a technical event coming up as well towards the end of the year and watch out, of course, for our coffee morning. So, hopefully that gives a flavour of what's coming up! We are obviously still firming up plans.

I am really excited about what the year is going to bring and there might be some new things in the pipeline as well. One other thing just to add is: I'm really pleased by the level of interest we are getting from different firms in the profession. They have come forward, they've said they want to collaborate and sponsor and host our events. So, very grateful for all those firms that have both helped us in the past and have also come forward about the future. With us being a non-profit organisation that is really-crucial for us, but we are very fortunate that we do have people coming to us to help in that respect.

Alice	Excellent! And keeping that future looking mindset, what would you hope for anyone who is looking to get involved in the Women in Tax Network. Alexis starting with you?
Alexis	I would hope that anybody who came to any of our events would feel like they can talk to any of us because my personal experience has been that that is absolutely the case. Basically, to feel like they can get involved with as many as events as they want, as few events as they want. If they would like to get involved with the committee, we are always looking for volunteers, helpers. As Tasneem said, we are a not-for-profit organisation, so we are all giving up our time, just to feel welcome, to feel supported by the network. To get the benefit of all the knowledge and the ideas that we can all share and the events that we are running and we look forward to seeing you at some of those events, hopefully.
Alice	Fantastic! And Tasneem?
Tasneem	What my hope for people getting involved in the network is come along, there is so many learnings you can take away from our event and our network, so many different topics we cover for women. Whether it be the mental load, whether it is about working mums, whether it is about caring for parents - there is just always so much mental load on women regardless of what their personal situation is. No matter what stage they are at in their career. I truly do believe there is something in it for everyone.
Alice	Come along to our event, come along to our coffee mornings, join the Women in Tax. People can't always come because they don't work in London but there is lots of virtual events as well. There is something there for everybody. You never know who you might meet, you might meet someone who ends up becoming your future mentor. I really do believe in the power of the Women in Tax Network and we have had some really great feedback from people who are part of the network.
Alice	Unfortunately, that is all we have got time for in this week's episode so thank you again to Tasneem and for Alexis for joining us. You can't find them both and in fact the Women in Tax Network on Linked In.
	The Women in Tax Network can also be found through the committee members on Linked In and through their website and you can find details of their events on Eventbrite all of which are linked in the show notes to this episode.
	If you have any questions for me or for the Women in Tax Network or any topics you would like us to cover in a future episode, please do email us on taxingmatters@rpc.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you.
	If you like this episode, please take a moment to rate, review and subscribe and remember to tell a colleague about us.
	RPC would like to thank Josh McDonald. Our original score is composed by <i>Inciter Productions</i> who also produce this podcast series. To hear a full, uninterrupted version of our podcast theme go to Instagram @inciterproductions and follow the link in bio.
	And, of course, a big thank you to all our listeners for joining us.
	If you like Taxing Matters, why not try RPC's other podcast offering "Insurance Covered" which looks at the inner workings of the insurance industry. Hosted by the brilliant Peter Mansfield and available on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Acast and our website.
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Thank you all for listening and talk to you again shortly!



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