

Profile: ICB Advisory Council Member

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Currently, I am a self-employed agricultural administrator, and have been involved with ICB Council since its inauguration in 2010. My practice is rural based and spans Cumbria and into Northumberland. Like many businesses, my practice has evolved over the years and is now predominantly financially based. Whilst qualifying in agricultural business studies and accounts a number of years ago, (too many to confess to!) I feel it is important to ensure skills are regularly updated so, as a consequence, I am studying for my ICB Level 3, although in the usual manner of procrastination as I am busy with clients – I am not getting through it as quickly as I should!

As a council member, I feel it is very important that we understand our members' needs and requirements in order that we can communicate on your behalf to the Institute who do a great job in supporting our profession and ensuring that we are seen as professionals in our own right. However, I also believe that as a profession it is important that we work with others. Many of us are passed work via accountants, so it is important to get over to them the skills we can offer. In Cumbria we have set up a bookkeepers quarterly meeting with a firm of accountants. These meetings are open to any bookkeepers and they cover topics such as qualifications, initial meetings with clients, safety when working alone, RTI. The next meeting will update skills in Excel, discuss various bookkeeping packages and also discuss MLR and compliance. It is gratifying to see that a number of attendees are members of ICB, and we hope to encourage others to join us. The members I have spoken to who have attended have appreciated the support - being self-employed can sometimes be a lonely existence! Hopefully from these meetings, we may even develop a strong Cumbria branch of ICB – and if anyone would like to attend these meetings, please contact me.

As we all are only too aware every time we switch on the news we are in a double dip, or perhaps even a treble dip recession. Well, out of every cloud there has to be a silver lining! Personally speaking, I think we as bookkeepers have great opportunities here to deliver to our clients useful management information. Accounts traditionally are historic – many clients now wish to know where they are at a given point in time, and are beginning to see the logic of having the bookkeeping done in a timely manner, with files where they can find things!

Now a little about me! I have been involved in agriculture since I left college, working in the grain trade and in livestock auctions until finally I became a farm secretary. Whilst admitting to being fairly outspoken, I try to look at other people's opinions without bias. Post foot and mouth, I became involved with Farm Crisis Network, a national charity that I still volunteer for, giving support to farming families in time of need. Through helping set up the Cumbria branch I was very lucky to be invited to Highgrove where we toured the farm and had lunch with HRH Prince Charles. I am also a Rotarian – which serves to remind me that there is a life outside of farming!

Finally I am lucky enough to have a supportive family of two teenage daughters, a long suffering husband and the office mascot, Maisie the Jack Russell!