



THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

AS **DAVID FURST** PREPARES TO HAND OVER THE PRESIDENTIAL BADGE OF OFFICE, HE REFLECTS ON HIS TIME AS AMBASSADOR FOR THE ICAEW AND THE PROFESSION

A little over a year ago, I was walking up from Bank station in the City of London when I bumped into one of our past presidents, Peter Wyman. In the course of our conversation, he asked me if I was looking forward to my year in office. 'You know, David,' he added, 'what you have to hope for is a crisis. It makes it really much more interesting.'

Well, I had three months' grace to get my feet under the table and then I got my crisis. Thank you, Peter. And you were right: while we all wish it hadn't happened, the credit crunch and its impact on the real economy has been one of the defining issues of my presidential year.

It's always dangerous to tempt providence but I do believe that the institute and the profession have so far been able to steer a course through the crisis. Looking back over the year, there are so many things that the institute has achieved and it has been a privilege for me to play a very small part in those achievements. In particular, I would like to mention our defence of 'mark-to-market' in the face of hostile calls for change. The current method may not be perfect, and indeed may need to be revised, but accountants have got to tell it as it is and that's what we do, whether it's good news or bad.

If the profession could be faulted at all, it is that during the good times we failed to explain what mark-to-market actually meant. As a result, when the bad times arrived, there was a huge gap in understanding. However, we did a good job of filling that gap and our autumn campaign to publicise potential going concern issues has meant that – again, so far – there has not been an overreaction from investors, stakeholders and the media. We also played a very positive part in the debate about the role of auditors.

On a personal note, in years to come when I look back on my three years as an officeholder, there are two areas I've been involved in of which I am particularly proud.

The first is the establishment of the five advisory boards, designed to keep us informed of developments within their sectors. They've been a real success story. Not only did we secure very high profile people as chairmen and board members, but they have been consulted on a huge range of issues and have initiated institute thinking. In addition, they have provided a first class independent source of sector-based thought leadership.

Second, as a champion of our international strategy, I was also keen not to let the agenda slip on the international regional offices. This could have been an easy cut, given the current economic climate, but the reality is that we have to become international or die. The firms are all going global and, if the institute is to stay relevant to their needs, it has to do the same. In the long term, I believe there will only be a small number of global institutes and if we fail to join them, our influence will wane and we will end up as the UK district society of some international regulatory body.

I was delighted that last month we launched our first international regional office for South East Asia, based in Singapore. Plans are also well underway for a second in the autumn, this time in Dubai.

I will also remember with pleasure the most important aspect of my role as president – meeting members in the UK and overseas. I will never forget the two receptions we hosted last summer for Bangladesh International Financial Reporting Standards students – where I discovered what it feels like to be a Hollywood star! Everyone wanted to talk to me and have their photo taken. The warmth and enthusiasm they showed towards the institute was phenomenal.

From my travels overseas as president, I've found that the institute is held in high regard almost everywhere. Yes, I've met the occasional 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' but that is only to be expected and welcomed in a membership as intelligent, motivated and diverse as ours.



David Furst: Championing the ICAEW's international strategy

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The views expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the ICAEW