The Journal is now in its 110th year of publication. We feel very honoured to be its guardian. We’re equally honoured to have you as the patron of the ITP. How does it feel?

It’s good to be associated with something so critical to everyday life and history. Telecommunications and communications have been critically important through the annals of history during good times, bad times and emergency crises. And you see what telecoms has done through the World Wars, through the period of BT, the improvement in productivity – it’s at the heart of many things that happen.

Times have also changed over the decades for the ITP and we’ve had to move onwards. Do you think institutes have a value, a place to play in business today?

I think there are multiple different ways of people keeping up to date with technology and with telecoms, through the Internet and through the things we actually facilitate. However, I think there’s room for institutes. The key is to be independent, trusted, balanced and factual, because there’s a lot of hype out there and a lot of new development and marketing. So, I think the core of having a professional Journal that really reflects professional views is valuable in today’s world. However it is going to have to develop in order to be attractive, particularly to younger professionals and younger people, I would have thought.

Totally. About 600 of our 4,000 members are apprentices and we’ve been building up Telecoms Professional to engage them. What’s your view on telecoms apprentices and apprenticeships in general?

One of the core problems we’ve had was the downgrading of apprenticeships. Apprenticeships operate in every form of life. In the best of training you have apprentices; Lawyers, Accountants, Ship Building and of course Telecoms. But the whole question is around practical application of those skills, and learning how to do things in practice – not just in theory.

I think some of the problems that we’ve seen in the banking sector have been because it has moved away from the profession of banking to banking rather as a trading activity. When they lost the concept of people taking the banking exams and traineeships, you can see that coinciding with what appears to be a significant downturn in aspects of that business. So, I think apprenticeships are really critical in the true sense to all walks of life.

Apprenticeships are a big part of what we do at ITP – we put over 50 young people into apprenticeships in the telecoms SME sector. Do you see institutes as having an important role here?

Institutes have to facilitate the quality of apprenticeships; they have to be good in order to be valid. Now we have the Apprenticeship Levy this is the best way to get the funds. The government policy is obviously to move very hard on apprenticeships, but I do think that having some standards around what an apprenticeship means is very important. That’s where a professional institute should be trying to help establish some of those standards, so that SMEs – particularly where they don’t know what it is that is expected of them – have an apprenticeship that really works.

As well as apprenticeships ITP encourages professional registration – from ICTTech to CEng. Do you think we’re going to see a bigger push on the professionalisation of our people, formally recognising their skills?

I think it goes hand in hand with apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are about professionalisation and practical skills, based on the right theoretical knowledge, and that applies to every single walk of life. In Germany there’s a code of apprenticeship for all trades, and they need to be there. They need to be regulated preferably by a professional institute rather than by government because, otherwise, the quality and the standards fall, as we’ve seen in a number of areas in this country. People rely much more on plumbers and builders coming from continental Europe than they do on our own people, because they’re often better trained and better skilled.
Back to the telecoms industry; obviously, it's a very exciting time for BT with the acquisition of EE. Where do you see the main issues and opportunities for the industry?

As we said, telecoms is the heart of everything that happens. Communication is the heart of everything that happens. High speed, reliable, data and voice, and video communications have an enormous impact on our life. You can’t operate today without that kind of access. In high cost environments in Europe particularly, competition depends on being productive; productive depends on the use of technology, and requires speed to do it. Whether it’s medicine, traffic management, energy efficient management, whether it’s the creative industries and planning and design, whether it’s research in universities – every single aspect of life depends on high speed, effective and reliable communications, voice data and video. We see that, and the demands to do that are exponential. People have to get with that plan, have the skills to use them and have the infrastructure that supports them. What BT does is support that infrastructure.

With ITP’s long history in mind we led a guided tour of the new Communications Gallery at the Science Museum recently. As patron of the Museum you must be delighted to see the exhibition come to light?

The Science Museum is great. It’s really important in terms of encouraging young people to understand the importance of mathematics and science. People must be brought up in a broader way, where mathematics, science, languages are maintained; they’re all parts of developing the brain, developing ways of thinking and keeping the mind open to opportunities.

And finally – what wise words would you like to share with our members?

Only that I think life is about working in a certain way and doing things you enjoy with people you like working with in a very professional manner. And the better job you do for clients and customers, the better you feel yourself, and the better rewarded you’re going to get. I think it’s making sure you have the right skills and attitude and that you develop the leadership skills that are so important to the success of an individual or a company or a group of people.