

First PCG (QA) certifications

In March this year, PCG launched an accredited accountant scheme, to help members choose their accountant by identifying and promoting those who have been given additional and specialist training in freelance-specific issues. The scheme, called PCG (QA), for "Quality Accountant" is the third in PCG's portfolio of quality initiatives designed to help freelance businesses commercially.

Developed and delivered in association with Accountax Consulting Ltd, the PCG (QA) scheme involves strict entry criteria and a rigorous application process, a two-day training programme covering specialist topics such as IR35 and S660A, a marked assignment and an annual assessment which will take into account feedback from PCG members.

The introduction of the PCG (QA) initiative reflects the importance that PCG members and other freelance business owners place upon choosing an accountant.

"We consult our members regularly," said PCG chief executive John Thomas, "and respondents to two of our surveys in 2005 told us that their choice of accountant was influenced primarily by recommendations, followed by contractor experience and knowledge of IR35 and S660A, with price being only in third place. PCG (QA) was developed in response to a clear demand from members for help in identifying the best practices for freelancers."

So far, over 50 firms have applied to take part in the PCG (QA) scheme. Training courses started in May, and to date, seven accountancy practices from the first two cohorts have been certified under the PCG (QA) scheme:

- Marches ITC Solutions (Ludlow)
- SJD Accountancy (London)
- The Kinnaird Partnership (Cambridge)
- Vigar & Co (Peterborough)
- D J Colom & Co (London)
- Baker Watkin (Stevenage)
- JSA Services (Watford)

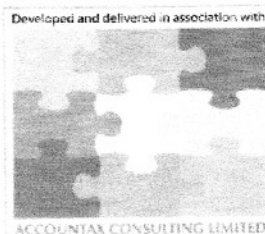
Peter Leach of Marches ITC Solutions said, "This is a highly worthwhile and welcome initiative by PCG and has our full support. The training was both demanding and stimulating, and I hope many other accountants who specialise in the freelancer sector will take advantage of the programme. PCG (QA) offers freelancers a choice of accredited accountants with specialist training and skills and we are delighted to be one of the first firms to be accredited."

SJD Accountancy's managing partner Simon Dolan said, "The PCG Quality Accountant certificate is very important to us and builds on our reputation as the tax advice experts with the most experience in providing specialist accountancy services to contractors and freelancers."



The first cohort in training – clockwise from top left: Peter Leach of Marches ITC Solutions, David Wilsdon of SJD Accountancy, Dave Smith of Accountax Consulting, Chris King and Glyn Newman of The Kinnaird Partnership and Amanda Vigar of Vigar & Co.

See www.pcg.org.uk – quick link PCG (QA) practices – for a list of certified practices



Chris King, a partner at The Kinnaird Partnership, attended the PCG (QA) course with colleague Glyn Newman. "We both found the discussions about technical issues relating to IR35 and Arctic Systems with personnel directly involved in such court cases extremely useful," he said.

Amanda Vigar of Vigar & Co LLP said, "With HMRC continuing to challenge contractors' status, I welcome PCG's move to set up an accredited accountant scheme. Contractors will know the advice they are getting is from a specialist in the area. Having been a contractor myself, I am fully aware of the pressures of contracting and know that the last thing needed is the additional worry of dealing with the taxman."

Accountax managing director Dave Smith, who ran the first PCG (QA) training course and assessed the candidates' assignments, said, "This scheme is not for everyone and there is no certainty that all candidates will be successful. Only those accountants that can demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues that affect freelance contractors and can meet the highest professional standards will get through."

Who can apply?

The scheme is open to qualified accountants only – chartered or certified accountants and chartered tax advisers.

Except where the firm comprises a sole practitioner, the minimum number of individuals completing the training must be two per office – usually the partner responsible for contractor clients and the person who looks after the day-to-day matters. At least one of them must be qualified. Furthermore, the practice must be a member either of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) or of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

These are the main prerequisites, and additional selection criteria apply.