

Can you confirm your bona fides?

Employment agencies and employment businesses are increasingly requesting copies of passports or other forms of identification before putting freelance contractors and consultants forward for projects. Whilst there is no onus on them to do so where a proper contract for services exists, many agencies and end clients are adopting identity checks as a standard procedure.

It is the Government's clear intention that such organisations should check workers' identities, and although contractors are not required to provide such evidence, there is no reason not to comply with such requests. Declining to cooperate might rule one out of a contract, although this is of course a decision for the individual.

The threat of terrorism is one of several reasons why client organisations are taking more care about establishing the bona fides of potential employees and contractors. Whilst this can raise difficult and sensitive issues for all parties concerned, it is increasingly being seen as good practice to reduce risk and ensure peace of mind.

A recent analysis of 3,000 screens of potential financial services employees demonstrated that 25 per cent of the CVs contained material irregularities, according to The Risk Advisory Group. This was borne out by a 2002 Mori poll, which found that one third of respondents admitted to fabricating elements of their CVs. A survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development last year found that 25 per cent of employers in the UK had withdrawn job offers in 2003 after discovering CV fabrication.

It's no wonder then that agencies are keen to find a way of ensuring that information on a CV is accurate. Deploying contractors with integrity, who have the necessary skills

and competence to do the job, is crucial for the success of a project. Engaging contractors who do not have the appropriate skills can demotivate other team members, damage relationships, prejudice the satisfactory completion of a project and even attract litigation.

So, just how do we as freelance consultants and contractors prove that we have the qualifications, character and experience to do the job?

RwC plc is a leading supplier of checking services for the verification of qualifications, work experience and references of contractors and job candidates for companies in every industry sector. It markets its services under the "backgroundchecking.com" banner.

Chief executive Steve Bailey, says, "We're in the business of background checking and nothing else. Our clients are looking for three basic safeguards. They want to protect their business from fraudsters, they want to protect their existing employees from unknown elements entering the workplace and they want to protect their customers from any kind of threat."

PCG is working with RwC plc to develop a scheme for its members, to be launched within the next three months. Chief executive John Thomas confirms that this is a valuable and timely service. "This is being driven globally by statutory and regulatory pressures and corporate best practice," he says. "And frankly, it makes good sense and will complement our other quality initiatives."

The scheme will provide PCG members with certification that they have been checked to BS7858 level, which includes:

- Basic personal and financial check (electoral roll, CCJs, bankruptcy check)
- Highest educational qualification
- Further technical or professional qualification or membership
- Full 10-year continuous history to include date of leaving continuous education, verification of employment dates, employment gaps and basic criminal records check (unspent convictions)



RwC chief executive, Steve Bailey

Preferential rates will also be offered for a three-year scheme providing the full check in the first year and an annual renewal check in subsequent years.

Bailey explains that they are usually required to destroy all records and findings after six weeks. "Clearly, this is inappropriate for contractors, who by definition move from job to job. We can, however, with their permission, hold base level information that requires checking only once. This could be histories of all qualifications, job references and financial records up to the point when they last took a contract. When they move job we would only have to check the period of their last employment and just refresh our records for that time. This is far cheaper than rechecking from scratch."

Derek Wreay, managing director of the Wreay Group and a member of the ATSCo executive committee says, "People deliberately misleading on their CVs is one of the biggest bugbears for our recruiters, and we welcome PCG's proposed initiative. Large corporates typically spend millions of pounds on physical security, like manned guarding and biometric access to buildings and computer systems. They are now waking up to the fact that they rarely check out new contractors and employees with the same rigour, and yet IDC research shows that 80 per cent of threats come from within the workplace."

For further information, see www.backgroundchecking.com

