

Contractors' cause to climb up political and economic agenda in 2010, promises PCG

PCG, the professional association supporting freelancers, contractors and consultants, has ambitious plans for 2010, and members can look forward to seeing their cause climb up the political and economic agenda during the year to come.

Managing Director John Brazier explains: "We will build on the successes of 2009 and work towards greater recognition for the freelance business model and lifestyle, ensuring freelancers begin to play an increasing role in shaping the UK's economy as it emerges from recession. Our objective is to position PCG further up the value chain of political and economic engagement and influence, so that we are invited to provide expert opinions and participate in high-level debates about key economic and labour force issues."

The legacy of 2009 leaves PCG with a tough act to follow, having launched the first-ever [National Freelancers Day](#), its first Manifesto for Freelancing, recruited new blood to complete its heavyweight senior management and policy team, and even undergone a name change and brand make-over. But in an interview with ContractorCalculator, PCG Managing Director John Brazier promises 2010 will be equally busy.

Contractors' voice at the CBI

PCG has taken a significant step forward with its re-positioning by becoming a member of the Confederation of British Industry's (CBI) Trade Association Council, where its voice will be heard alongside those of the UK's key trade and industry bodies.

"The Trade Association Council is the most senior body influencing CBI policy," says Brazier, "which itself is one of the most effective lobbying bodies representing the needs of UK industry. It is very significant that through PCG freelance issues will now be heard in this important forum, especially as all the organisations represented will have freelance client organisations in their membership."

He continues: "PCG has also contributed key data and a case study to the CBI's recent report designed to stimulate debate about the future development of business. The report, [The shape of business: the next 10 years](#), describes a flexible workforce which takes centre stage and is cited as one of UK PLC's major economic strengths."

Supporting the contractor 'nanobusiness'

According to Brazier, PCG plans to lobby for greater recognition of the 'nanobusiness', a limited company with a maximum of only one or two knowledge workers at its core. Representing the typical contractor limited company, he says that nanobusinesses are different from and have different needs to existing microbusinesses, currently defined as those businesses with 0-9 employees.

"We will continue our campaign for the right of knowledge-based workers to work the way they want to and not be forced into the rigid compartments of 'employee' and 'employer'," he says. "PCG will continue to influence the policy debate in this area at senior government levels."

Manifesto for Freelancing gathers pace, and recognition

Educating the political establishment about the benefits of a flexible workforce was only one of the objectives of distributing the Manifesto for Freelancing to all MPs and prospective parliamentary candidates on National Freelancers Day last November.

Brazier says the response has been enthusiastic: "We've received requests for meetings and further details from representatives of all parties. At a recent dinner at Westminster, Labour MPs showed a deep understanding of the role freelancers play in the economy; the level of support for our activities was considerable."

Brazier admits that engaging with the current government has at times been challenging, but by widening PCG's policy platform and following the work of members of the policy team who joined PCG in 2009, headway is being made.

Wider PCG policy platform pre- and post-election

"Repealing [IR35](#) remains firmly on our policy agenda, we are also focussed on tackling Inter-Company Transfer (ICT) abuse with the [UK Border Agency](#)," he explains, "and we're forming a working party to review government policy about security clearance, which we shall feed back to the [Cabinet Office](#)."

Brazier continues: "We want to see a review of small business regulation and a commitment to test the impact of all new rules before they are adopted, and we've been reassured by the positive attitude of all political parties to reduce red tape on small firms."

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John Brazier, PCG

"In addition, we've indicated our willingness to take part in a review of business taxation, which is desperately needed, and we've not forgotten that the [income shifting proposals](#) have merely been put on hold and will remain alert for any attempt at resurrection."

Greater access to public procurement features in the Manifesto and is a key initiative. Brazier says: "Government must give recognition to small businesses that can provide the public sector with solutions that are currently achieved by much more expensive means."

But Brazier concedes that a great deal depends on the result of the forthcoming general election, and whether it leads to a change in government, a hung parliament and resulting coalition or the [Labour Party](#) maintaining its tenure.

Growing PCG membership groups, recognising contractor quality

Despite the negative impact of the recession on the contracting community, Brazier confirms that PCG membership increased in 2009. He also says that new membership campaigns will focus on under-represented sectors that will benefit from PCG's lobbying and support, such as engineering and media.

"So, recruitment activities in 2010 will focus on knowledge workers in the engineering and media sectors and to this end our membership offering will be further strengthened" he says. "The rise of the 'green collar' worker in energy and environment is an opportunity we also recognise."

He told ContractorCalculator that PCG should resist calls to offer a freelancer quality 'kitemark', such as chartered status, at least in the short term: "Of course quality is hugely important, but we already have a code of conduct, and guidelines for clients seeking freelancers. These services are well positioned to be evolved as we focus on supporting better working relationships up and down the freelance supply chain."

Brazier concludes: "This year promises to be an exciting time. PCG is at a critical stage of evolution, poised to make the transformation up the policy-making value chain into being a major player on the UK's economic stage, influencing the policy agenda at the highest levels on behalf of its membership."

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