

## PCG wins contractor access for government contracts

For most of the last decade, contractors have had serious difficulties in competing for government contracts that required security clearance. A small group of security-cleared companies were able to win most of the bids because contractors who weren't security-cleared weren't given due consideration.

Now the London-based [Professional Contractors Group](#) has successfully negotiated for new guidance on these contracts with the Recruitment and Employment Federation ([REC](#)) and the government departments involved. [See [PCG Guidance on Security Clearance](#)]

### An Old Issue Resolved

PCG policy spokesman John Kell explains:

"We were very happy to bring this old issue to a successful resolution. The last guidance dated from 2002, and before that, agencies openly advertised for contractors who had security clearance. The 2002 guidelines were supposed to prevent preferential treatment, but in fact, agencies simply dealt with a small group and dropped the advertising. The practice simply shifted to a different stage of the procurement process."

### Many Contractors Were Effectively Shut Out

Technically, contractors who didn't have security clearance could compete for these offers, but in fact, when they came forward, they were not given real consideration, Kell explains.

PCG has now changed all that. Working with comments from that PCG members made on the organisation's forums, PCG has succeeded in obtaining the cooperation of the Cabinet Office in this matter. The Cabinet Office has issued the new guidance to all departmental security officers and HR directors in government, and put all the relevant guidelines in the same place for the first time – previously they had been spread out over various letters and within the Manual of Protective Security.

### Cabinet Office Decision

"The Cabinet Office has made it quite clear that contractors do not need security clearance before bidding for most government contracts," commented PCG's chairman David Ramsden. "We have been pressing for this clarification for some time and are delighted that this new guidance creates a level playing-field for small businesses, and allows government departments to source contractors from a much bigger pool of talent."

There are also some amendments: pre-existing clearance may now only be required if work must be completed in less time than it takes to obtain clearance; previously it could be required if work simply had to be started in less time than it took to obtain clearance, which could include almost every contract.

"This is a major breakthrough for freelancers who for too long have been frozen out of government contracts which require security clearance, particularly in the defence sector," Ramsden points out.

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John Kell-PCG

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David RamsdenI-PCG

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