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## **Responding to the policy challenges of the changing nature of freelancing in the UK**

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### **Abstract:**

Professional associations play an important role in democratic societies, especially where the interests of the parties being represented fall outside of the boundaries of traditional employment arrangements. This paper outlines the recent developments surrounding freelancing and self-employment in the UK and the deliberate strategies undertaken to evolve the Professional Contractors Group (PCG) formed in 1999 into the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) in 2014. The paper argues that freelancers are the smallest of small firms, and structured representation through a professional association provides the best way to ensure government regulation does not have a negative effect on the growth and management of freelance businesses. In particular, the paper champions a 'research hub' model for representative associations in this space, encouraging close collaboration with academics at a strategic level to drive the policy agenda.

**Keywords:** Self-Employment, Entrepreneurialism, Independent Professionals, Pluralism, Representation, Sole-traders

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## INTRODUCTION

The self-employed, and the professional subset of this group, independent professionals (also known as “ipros” or freelancers, defined below) have always seemed resistant to formal organisation or representation. This is problematic, as in functional plural democracies representation of specific interest groups typically takes place outside of a party political structure and instead often occurs via formalised organisations such as trade unions, charities, lobby groups, trade associations and chambers of commerce (Lijphart, 1977). Without an effective organisation for the self-employed and independent professionals, this group is left powerless and at the mercy of regulatory change.

We posit that the best way to ensure that public policy is advantageous to the self-employed is to ensure that they are well represented by a strong and broad-based interest group. We believe that such a group is essential to the success of the self-employed and independent professionals and in itself can only be successful by drawing on extensive research capabilities. This paper attempts to demonstrate this by looking at the lessons learnt from the evolution of the Professional Contractors Group (PCG) formed in 1999 into the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) in 2014. It will outline the purposeful actions taken to serve independent professionals and the self-employed. We present key learnings from IPSE’s development, including our main finding that implementing a structured “research hub” model is essential to ensuring effective representation. The aim of the paper of the paper is provide advice and guidance for organisations aiming to represent the self-employed in other jurisdictions.

## BACKGROUND

### *Who are independent professionals?*

There is no universally accepted definition of ‘independent professionals’, but they can loosely be defined as those self-employed workers working in specialist or highly qualified industries, excluding farmers, merchants, construction workers and craftsmen (Rapelli, 2012). Globally there are few organisations which solely and specifically represent either this group or the wider self-employed. Those that do exist, such as the Freelancers Union in the USA are either small, focus only on a single issue (such as taxation or healthcare provision), or are dominated by those working in certain industries or specific professions (such as construction workers or doctors).

### *The need for representation*

The self-employed are a unique and distinct group. Despite their diversity, they share common goals and interests and therefore structured representation through an organisation or pressure group is essential to ensure these goals and interests are met in pluralistic democracies (Cranford, Fudge, Tucker & Vosko, 2005). This is especially true for a unique subset of the self-employed labelled “independent professionals” or IPros in Australia (McKeown & Cochrane, 2012) and “freelancers” in the United Kingdom (Kitching & Smallbone, 2011). Research by Burke (2012) has shown that this group in particular fulfils a unique economic function and yet is often marginalised by policymakers. According to Burke (2012), freelancers create growth, innovation and jobs in innovation-based economies by allowing firms to de-risk innovation activities.

There is a long-held view that policymakers, or at least those in the UK, tend to focus on the traditional labels of employees, employers, entrepreneurs and business owners. (Bögenhold, Heinonen & Akola, 2012). As the self-employed fail to fit neatly within these categories (Cranford et al., 2005), they tend to be marginalised and their needs overlooked. They fall through the gaps in policy discussions of certain issues such as social welfare and pensions, and can even be seen as considered ‘atypical’ or ‘deviant’ workers in some economies (Leighton, Syrett, Hecker & Holland, 2006).

The lack of specific representation also emerges because the self-employed are typically a diverse group encompassing those working in a wide variety of industries who may feel they are better represented by other organisations, such as groups which are specific to the industry or sector in which they generally work. They may also feel part of an entrepreneurial or small business discourse if their intentions are to grow their small business and employ staff in the future, and thus might feel alienated by groups which seem to cater for an entity which does not intend to grow (Leighton & Wynn, 2011).

The above serves to show that there is an acute need for structured organised representation for both the self-employed and their highly skilled subset, independent professionals. Without effective representation based on sound research, this group is subject to a hostile policy environment which fails to recognise or understand them.

### ***Who are IPSE?***

IPSE is a UK-based organisation which aims to represent the 4.5 million self-employed workers located across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. IPSE has a particular focus on high skilled freelancers or iPros of which there are 1.9 million residing in the UK (Kitching, 2014). The association is not-for-profit and funded by members’ annual subscription fees. In return, members receive representation, advice, events, training resources, a selection of specialist insurances and advocacy services. Members also receive discounts on relevant commercial services. The organisation is overseen by members as the Board of Directors is elected from a consultative committee which is itself directly elected from the membership. IPSE has 22,000 members working across a variety of industries, primarily in IT, engineering, project management and the creative sectors. Following the rapid growth in self-employment in the UK to 15% of the workforce in 2014, with an increase of 732,000 between 2008-2014, (ONS, 2014), it became apparent that IPSE’s role in representing the self-employed would become more important into the future.

## **LESSONS LEARNT**

The following sections explain the nature of the changes and challenges evident in freelancing in the UK and what lessons the IPSE learnt in response to these changes. IPSE’s history is presented in chronological order, with a recommendation proposed based on the issues experienced by the organisation at each stage of its evolution.

### ***Recommendation 1: Identify a ‘focal point’ or unifying issue when you start out.***

Like many trade bodies and representative organisations, IPSE was initially formed in response to a single issue (Browne, 1990). In 1999, a proposed change in taxation law, known as “IR35”, prompted

a group of 100 IT contractors to come together and form a group to lobby the Government to abandon the proposal. (Hughes, 1999; Ross, 2012). This group called themselves the 'Professional Contractors Group' (PCG) and quickly grew to have several thousand members, employing a small number of professional staff. PCG established a range of membership service offerings which included various insurances specifically aimed at protecting members should they be subjected to an investigation by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC, 1999), the UK's tax collection authority (Ross, 2012).

IR35 was announced by the Government in 1999 as a way to address the issue of "false self-employment" (Busby, 2002; HMRC, 1999). It emerged as a result of a rapid rise in the number of IT contractors using limited company structures and a suspicion that this was motivated by tax-avoidance. The association of the issue of tax avoidance with self-employment has a long history and is a key challenge for the organisation to overcome.

Internationally, a multitude of issues have been identified in relation to false, bogus or disguised employment relationships (Cranford et al., 2005; Leighton et al., 2006). In general terms, false self-employment occurs when individuals who would ordinarily be employees either set-up or are forced to use their own one-person limited company which is then engaged by their employer, thus disguising an employment relationship as a commercial one. This arrangement allows the employer to make significant taxation savings and escape liabilities for employee rights such as notice periods, redundancy rights, sick pay, holiday pay and maternity pay. The individual worker, although exposed to a significant amount of risk, may also benefit from a modest tax saving. IR35 applies only in cases where the relationship between the worker using the company and the employer choosing to engage the company is deemed as employment. It does not apply where there is genuine self-employment and an individual has legitimately decided to benefit from the limited liability that applies from supplying their services to a client via their own limited company.

However, establishing that an employment relationship exists is notoriously difficult and legally complex (OTS, 2015). In the UK, definitions of employment and self-employment are based on many years of case law and thus it is impossible for an individual legitimately supplying their services through their own limited company to be certain of their status. This lack of confidence in work status inspired the original founders of IPSE (then PCG) to establish the organisation. A further motivation was the reputational damage IR35 created to self-employed workers using their own company. This was particularly acute in the IT industry where working via a company is an ingrained and common practice and often a requirement when sourcing work via an employment agency (House of Lords, 2013).

For PCG, the 'focal point' of IR35 gave the organisation a sense of purpose. This attracted members by demonstrating that the organisation was willing to stand up for the interests of the group it claimed to represent (freelancers). Without a focal point for members to rally around, it would have been difficult for the organisation to gain traction. IR35 is typical of the issues that affect the self-employed in that it stems from a lack of understanding or recognition of this group. To protect members and encourage membership growth, PCG introduced an insurance package which included tax investigation insurance (Ross, 2012). This decision served two key purposes: it protected members from IR35 and ensured that when case law was formed, PCG would have an influential role by ensuring its own advocates were defending individuals involved in high profile or contentious

IR35 cases. In addition, this action generated interest from a diverse group of workers in industries other than IT and resulted in a larger and broader membership base.

### ***Recommendation 2: Ensure you appeal to a broad audience***

With the addition of new and diverse members, issues other than IR35 came to the fore such as software patents, security clearances, Government procurement and labour law. Thus from a single issue pressure group, PCG grew into a specialist organisation representing 22,000 professional contractor members in 2014.

In the 15 years since its inception, PCG was able to gradually gain parity of esteem with organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, Confederation of British Industry and British Chambers of Commerce. PCG achieved a number of policy successes in this time, for instance prompting a review of IR35 via the Office of Tax Simplification, funding a successful challenge of the 'income shifting' legislation, and setting up a 'Security Clearance Forum. However, with the growth of the organisation it became clear that PCG was limited in its ability to achieve its mission of adequately representing the wider self-employed population. To this end, PCG commissioned research examining freelancing and self-employment to gain further knowledge about its members and their issues. This research found that the typical PCG member (a professional contractor) faced similar issues to most other freelancers and indeed the wider self-employed population, such as a lack of income security, late payment by clients and a blurring of boundaries between work and home life (ComRes, 2014). Therefore it made good sense to work towards representing the wider self-employed population. Further, many policy issues largely stemmed from a lack of understanding or recognition by policymakers of the self-employed as well as the need for freelancers to "mimic" businesses (Burke, 2012).

### ***Recommendation 3: Target campaigning appropriately***

PCG quickly acquired an image as an aggressive campaigning organisation. Most memorably, a one-day protest at the House of Commons caused significant disruption to Parliamentary business (The Register, 1999). Such tactics were seen as necessary to attract media attention and increase awareness of the issues faced by contractors. This action helped PCG to increase membership numbers significantly but at the cost of access and respect from politicians, civil servants and other stakeholders who were less likely to take the organisation seriously. It was successful in raising awareness and gaining interest from press but it held back the organisation politically. The authors suggest that similar organisations should consider such actions only as a last resort and only when careful consideration has been made of the effects of such action.

To increase influence, PCG's Board appointed a full time, professional public affairs and policy team. This team created and implemented a long term strategy to professionalise the organisation and increase its influence. In particular, this strategy identified the need to relocate its headquarters; rebrand the organisation; become the authoritative voice for the self-employed; provide a responsive range of value-adding services to members and build alliances to establish credible research capability. In doing so it radically changed the messaging and campaigning style of the organisation, further improving its ability to influence on behalf of its members.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Ensure good access to decision-makers***

PCG's increasing political influence was facilitated by the relocation of the organisation from the outskirts of London to higher profile office space in Westminster, close to the UK's Parliament and key government ministries. The relocation to Westminster was considered important for an organisation seeking to access and build relationships with policy makers. This location was within close proximity of the offices of busy members of parliament and political editors thus making on-site meetings and briefings very convenient.

The organisation therefore also had to consider other ways of increasing its political influence. For example, a supportive group of MPs was encouraged to form the 'All Party Parliamentary Group for the Freelance Sector', as another means of maintaining influence. In Scotland, which has a distinct political culture from the rest of the UK, PCG ensured that a good relationship was maintained with members of the Scottish Parliament by ensuring they were kept up to date with key policy issues affecting the self-employed. This was done by sending regular updates to key figures, and holding events with PCG members in Scotland.

#### ***Recommendation 5: Branding must be well-targeted***

PCG's more professional lobbying approach was effective in improving access to politicians and therefore improving representation of the self-employed. However, it became clear through discussions with journalists, politicians and stakeholders that the PCG brand was limiting its public profile and ability to advocate on behalf of its members. It was no longer obvious whom PCG was representing – 'contractor' being an ambiguous term in normal usage, often used to refer to those working in the construction industry. Given that many of the issues independent contractors were facing were similar to that of the wider self-employed population it became apparent that there were several potential benefits to rebranding the organisation so it had a broader appeal.

The rapid growth of the self-employed sector in the UK was becoming a topical issue that was not only of interest to the media, business journalists and economic editors but also to politicians and the Bank of England. The self-employed sector comprises many nuanced sub-groups such as freelancers, contractors and consultants (Cranford et al., 2005).

From a journalist's perspective, when investigating a story relating to self-employment, independent professionals, freelancing or other types of microbusiness, journalists would prefer to consult with one organisation which genuinely represents the sector and provides informed, expert opinions. The name "Professional Contractors Group" was simply not convincing in stories which report on issues and campaigns relevant to the self-employed.

The external perception of PCG being a niche organisation representing only a very small group of independent professionals would not permit the organisation to achieve its mission and large-scale aspirations. This was especially limiting for PCG's political influence. PCG needed to adapt to the changing working landscape for independent professionals and adopt a multi-dimensional approach to branding that would clearly communicate to external audiences who it represented and what it wanted (Lomax, Madorb & Fitzhenry 2002). On September 1, 2014, the 'PCG' name was shelved and the new brand of IPSE was launched. The acronym IPSE is also Latin for "self" and is well suited to the change PCG was intending to achieve.

The new brand is intended to be viewed as being inclusive and welcoming and thus is envisaged to strengthen membership numbers. IPSE's new brand helps it to achieve its ambition to "Become the voice of the 4.5 million self-employed individuals across the UK and make self-employment central to the economic debate in Government, ensuring policies are in place that make it easier to become self-employed and to be self-employed".

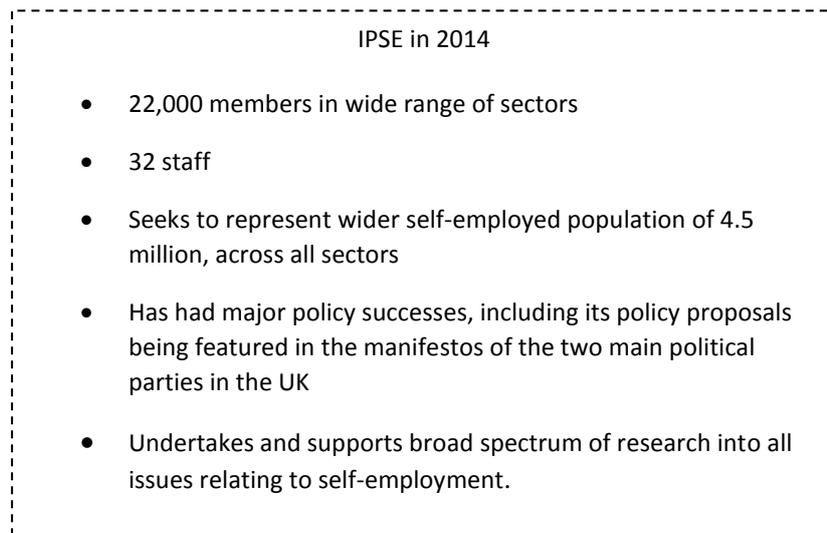
### ***Recommendation 6: Use the press to raise awareness***

IPSE's goal is to become more relevant to the self-employment narrative rather than the more niche independent professional or contractor narrative. Thus when investigating issues relating to self-employment, many journalists are approaching IPSE for comment or views on the topic. For example, a good relationship has been established with the *Daily Mail*, the second most widely circulated national newspaper in the UK, and IPSE has regular coverage in the business section. The shift to IPSE has made it easier to engage with journalists as there is no longer the need to explain what the organisation is and who it represents. For instance, in the month of September 2014, IPSE received 74 individual instances of media coverage with a total media circulation of 17,489,260 (IPSE/Gorkana. 2014). This is the largest total for September since inception in 1999 and three times the total circulation for the same month in 2013. Following a successful launch, IPSE immediately used the new brand to make connections with media outlets from the new target sectors and achieved significant results. Coverage in media titles such as 'Tech City News', 'Design Week' and 'Comms Business' was particularly useful as all these titles are well read by the creative, media and digital sectors which are sectors in which IPSE is seeking new members. This increased press attention is a direct result of the rebranding exercise. Figure 1, overleaf, summarises the factors leading up to the rebrand.

### ***Recommendation 7: Develop a clear policy platform or manifesto***

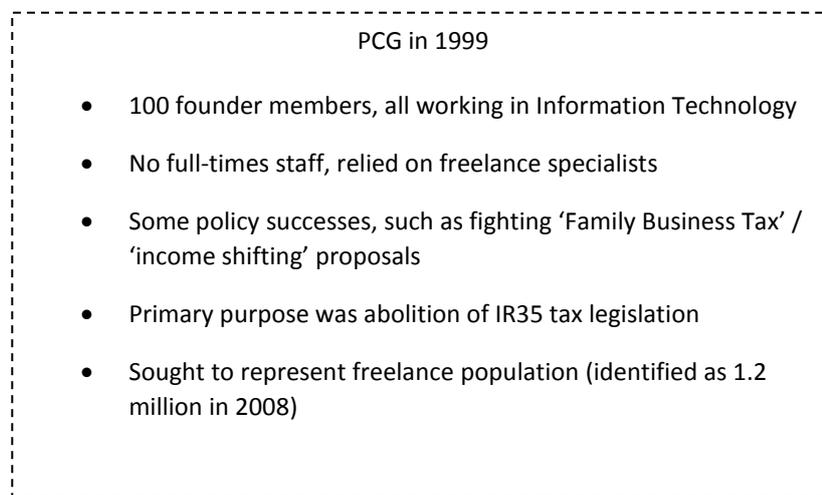
The above recommendations show how to campaign for a better policy environment when representing the self-employed. However, an organisation then needs to articulate what exactly it wants from decision makers. To this end, IPSE launched a manifesto outlining its key policy positions. The IPSE manifesto presents solutions to the issues that are being faced by a growing number of self-employed workers such as difficulties starting out in self-employment, compliance and administrative processes, infrastructure and taxation. This is a broader policy platform than the organisation had traditionally embraced, appealing to the wider self-employed community rather than the original core IT contractor membership base. This emerged as a result of the changing nature of freelancing in the UK, in the form of the rapid growth in self-employment.

**Figure 1: Summary of evolution of freelancing in the UK and establishment of IPSE**



Factors:

- Rapid growth in self-employment of 732,000 between 2008 – 2014
- IR35 tax law unchanged
- Further tax legislation implemented which affects the self-employed
- Increasingly unstable political-environment
- Period of economic recovery
- Increasing diversity in membership from previously IT/Engineering dominated



Factors

- IR35 tax legislation introduced
- Rapid growth in the numbers of information technology contractors
- Hostile government



The manifesto was the process of many months of development and policy analysis. In order to ensure its newly broad policy platform was as robust and appealing as possible, the think tank DEMOS was engaged to analyse the policy needs of the wider self-employed, hosting a series of roundtables with key stakeholders to identify the wider policy needs of the self-employed (O’Leary, 2014). Each roundtable focussed on a particular theme (e.g. supporting new entrants to self-employment, barriers to business), and invited relevant stakeholders such as representatives from

other professional organisations, think tanks, academics and politicians. The results of these roundtables were then complemented with further research and were synthesised into a document which made a number of broad policy recommendations. IPSE then used this document to inspire its own manifesto, which shared many of the same recommendations. The policies put forward in DEMOS's document were refined following research by the polling agency ComRes and consultation with IPSE's own members. International comparisons were also undertaken and the lessons learned applied to the manifesto. IPSE's manifesto identified policy under the following themes:

- **Recognition:** Increasing recognition of the self-employed and independent professionals by encouraging better representation in Government, better collection of statistics and the appointment of a Minister for Self Employment.
- **Starting Out and Support:** Identifying the support needs for the more vulnerable self-employed and improving support structures. Policies in this section included improving maternity pay and pensions for the self-employed.
- **Infrastructure:** Ensuring that the self-employed have access to high quality infrastructure including broadband internet and access to co-working spaces.
- **Regulation and Barriers to Business:** This section dealt with traditional issues of 'red-tape' that have a disproportionate impact on the self-employed, such as late payment, and access to Government contracts.
- **Taxation:** Identifying innovative solutions to the difficulty in taxing the self-employed proportionately, clearly and fairly.

The areas outlined overleaf affect a significant proportion of the 4.5 million individuals working independently in the UK. It appears that the manifesto has contributed to successfully positioning IPSE as a credible voice to policymakers and the media.

Recent actions taken by the UK Government regarding self-employment and issues such as late payment and moving towards a fairer maternity pay for this group are arguably directly linked to IPSE's manifesto publication. For example the Government has announced plans to create a small business conciliation service to resolve disputes experienced by the self-employed- a proposal first put forward by IPSE. We speculate that politicians and policy makers did not want to be seen engaging with an organisation such as PCG that represents IT contractors which have been associated with tax avoidance in the past. However, as the self-employed are generally regarded as playing a positive role in society, this reluctance has been overcome by the change to IPSE.

IPSE is now well-positioned to be the first point of contact for policymakers and the media as supporting the self-employed becomes a more pressing issue thanks to its expansive and well developed policy agenda.

### ***Recommendation 8: Take a strategic approach to research***

The above recommendations provide an overview of the lessons IPSE learned during its history to increase representation for its members and improve the policy environment for them. However, we believe the most important factor in IPSE's success has been the implementation of a detailed

research strategy. We believe that good research, above all the other recommendation outlined above, is the key factor in ensuring that the self-employed are well represented by their interest group. Good research has been instrumental in the shift from PCG to IPSE, and much of the manifesto programme relied on high quality research projects. For the last decade, PCG has had an active interest in research but it had been approached in a largely piecemeal, ad-hoc way and without an overall strategic direction. The organisation generally aimed to conduct three major research projects per annum. These projects included polling and surveying the membership to track trends in the way they work and explore key issues and challenges they face working as freelancers. The findings of these surveys assisted PCG in developing both commercial products and position statements in new policy areas for members. The research findings also provided PCG with an improved understanding of its members which was essential as an organisation championing this way of working to businesses, the public and policymakers.

PCG also commissioned academic research and embarked on one qualitative project each year. These projects demonstrated the value of freelancers and independent professionals to businesses and the economy at a national and European level (Rapelli, 2012, Leighton 2013). The findings from these projects were used to support PCG's key messages that freelancers, who are a vital part of the economy, required support from the government and that policies should be designed to help them flourish rather than creating barriers to this way of working (Burke, 2012). Statistical research tracking the growth in freelance and independent working also aided PCG's lobbying efforts. In 2008, in partnership with Kingston University, PCG developed a definition of freelancers using data from the Labour Force Survey (Kitching, 2011). This definition is based on Standard Occupational Classifications 1-3. For the first time, PCG and other organisations could track the growth in the number of freelancers in the UK as well as their contribution to the economy. Prior to this research being conducted, there was no systematic approach to estimate the number of people working as freelancers or describe their demographic characteristics.

If IPSE was to expand its membership into new sectors, it was essential that the needs of the self-employed outside of the core membership were understood. Prior to the rebrand, a representative survey with over 1,000 freelancers and self-employed workers in the UK outside of PCG's membership was commissioned. The findings of this survey were used to identify and articulate position statements for new policy areas. For example, maternity/paternity pay was identified as an employment right that the self-employed sought and late payment was viewed as one of the biggest challenges facing freelancers. IPSE developed detailed policies to address these issues and these were compiled in the IPSE manifesto and broadened our suite of policy solutions.

The use of robust statistics and building strong relationships with business schools at respected universities was a successful approach to gaining credibility from both the media and policymakers. What also became apparent was the need for more regular and in depth research on a wider range of issues. As an organisation that was increasingly being contacted by journalists and politicians for comment, we could no longer rely on a few pieces of research to inform our key messages and policies. Journalists sought the latest statistic. Once research findings are available in the public domain, they are no longer of interest to the media. Consequently, it was essential that research data was gathered regularly and updated periodically, and this is the approach that PCG began to take. We believe the above research projects were above all other factors the most important in

ensuring IPSE's continued success as a representative body for the self-employed and independent professionals. We recommend that comparable bodies in other jurisdictions take a similar approach.

### ***Recommendation 9: Establish a research hub***

The more strategic approach to research led IPSE to identify that an academic underpinning to its research was essential. It was envisaged that the creation of a research hub on freelancing and self-employment would formalise this process. A research hub is a network of influential academics working in a particular area of interest across multiple disciplines and countries that meet on a regular basis to discuss their work and identify new areas for research.

The overall aim of the research hub is in line with IPSE's mission statement which aims to improve the landscape for freelancers and ensure that self-employment is both considered and supported in all areas of regulation and policy. This objective is achieved by conducting robust research which will influence policy development. Research data on this group is difficult to gather and locate and the research hub allows IPSE to address these challenges. It was envisaged that the hub would eventually form part of an advisory committee for a think tank.

The think tank would be a leading source for information on freelancing and self-employment for other organisations, the media and politicians, providing a complete library for interdisciplinary research into the area. It would publish and commission new research through the committee members and identify the research gaps and set the agenda for future research. This would enable IPSE to further gain a more in-depth understanding of all types of self-employed workers, which would assist to drive the organisation's strategy to expand the membership into new sectors.

The first step taken to create the research hub was to contact key academics with whom IPSE already had good relationships. Academics were initially identified as those who had previously worked with PCG and had a background in research on self-employment or small business issues. These links proved invaluable in referring IPSE to influential and respected professors and researchers who had an interest in, and published on, various aspects of freelancing and self-employment. These academics spanned a variety of disciplines, organisations and countries across the globe.

Once these contacts were made it became clear that a strategy to build relationships and create this initial network of experts was required. The strategy taken was to host a series of research seminars, where the academics could present their research findings and join coordinated opportunities to publish new research in academic journals. This encouraged participation and kept the network engaged in the project and its ultimate goal of establishing a think tank. The research hub was later expanded to include other key academics from Spain, France, Germany and Austria following referrals from the initial group. It is envisaged that the think tank will be multidisciplinary, global and influential. Table 1 summarises the development process of the hub/think tank.

This strategy has been very successful in formalising the approach to research at IPSE and using research to drive IPSE's organisational strategy, as well as building relationships with key stakeholders and influential academics. Throughout the process, we have embarked on projects with academics on areas of interest to IPSE and areas where IPSE are seeking to be involved in issues in the future. For example, research on the wellbeing and welfare of the self-employed, which is currently high on the political agenda, is now under way. This work will inform and assist IPSE to

develop further policies and commercial products to support the self-employed. In addition, the publication of research in journals will further increase IPSE's visibility in the academic context and provide a body of literature to underpin IPSE's work which can be drawn upon to support key messages and campaigning efforts.

The hub has increased IPSE's profile and credibility amongst key stakeholders as IPSE representatives are now invited to join steering committees of research projects and present at conferences by academics. It has also been possible to strengthen relationships between the organisation and government departments. IPSE's policies and proposals are supported by robust academic research and this is being noticed. Being involved in the identification of research gaps and setting the research agenda amongst the network has allowed IPSE to become involved in new issues and has shown that we are at the forefront of research and an authoritative voice of the self-employed in the UK. Research from other countries allows IPSE to have an international perspective on the issues that affect its members and learn lessons from the experiences of the self-employed in these countries. It allows the organisation to point to the successes and failures of various public policy initiatives in other countries where similar issues may have emerged. Equally, encouraging international perspectives and funding relevant research allows IPSE to gain considerable respect from other stakeholder groups, national Governments and organisations such as the EU as it is demonstrating itself as a respectable organisation willing to back up its positions with robust research and analysis.

The "research hub" model allows IPSE to maintain some distance between the research to ensure it is seen as independent and not unduly influenced by IPSE's agenda. It also creates a forum within which academics can debate and discuss amongst themselves what research is needed. This type of collaborative action research is more effective in improving practice and organisational learning than other research models. (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002).

IPSE of course maintains a presence on the forum and retains control of the agenda and in doing so ensures that the research conducted via the hub has a practical application to the development of public policy. By giving the research hub a personality distinct from IPSE the hub can identify other research priorities and remain a focussed, long-term programme.

**Table 1: Identifying academics and establishing the ‘research hub’: Who was identified and how?**

<b>Step 1: Existing Academics</b>	
<p><b>Who?</b> Academics PCG had previously worked with on an ad-hoc basis who had previously undertaken work on self-employment</p>	<p><b>How:</b> PCG / IPSE chose to directly sponsor academics to do research in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify size of self-employed / freelance population in UK and Europe,</li> <li>• Identify economic value of freelancers and the key issues they face.</li> </ul> <p>This allowed IPSE to quantify the scale of the issues its members faced and also have a basis on which to make an argument to policymakers about why independent professionals should be helped by the Government. Academics were identified through a record of previous research on UK self-employment.</p>
<b>Step 2: Broadening Horizons</b>	
<p><b>Who?</b> Academics from a broader range of disciplines i.e. beyond economics and business studies, beyond UK environment.</p>	<p><b>How:</b> IPSE undertook a research and engagement programme, identifying academics who had specialised in this area in the past in the UK and abroad. Academics identified in step 1 were called upon to assist with this process and suggest others with an interest in this area who worked in disciplines such as law, human resource management, and psychology.</p> <p>These academics were then invited to present papers at a summit in London.</p>
<b>Step 3: Establishing the hub</b>	
<p><b>Who?</b> Any other academics prepared to contribute to fostering greater understanding of self-employment from any country</p>	<p><b>How:</b> Following the summit those identified in step 2 were asked to supply details of other academics who had a research interest and these were invited to a second summit, which was then formalised as IPSE’s ‘research hub’. More papers were submitted with each member of this new group constructively reviewing and supporting other members</p>
<b>Step 4: Formalising the process</b>	
<p><b>Who?</b> Academics willing to work in areas targeted by the hub according to its strategy.</p>	<p><b>How:</b> Formalising the research hub structure established in Step 3 by creating an advisory committee of academics and IPSE staff to direct research priorities and organise regular meetings. Issuing calls for papers on topics identified according to long term-strategy of the hub. Moving towards acting as a ‘think tank’ on self-employment.</p>

## CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Through outlining the development of IPSE from its beginnings as PCG, this paper aims to show:

- The need for the self-employed and independent professionals to be represented by a formal association or organisation
- The lessons learnt in practice through the formation of such an organisation in the UK, namely IPSE (formerly PCG). In particular, the various messaging and campaigning strategies that we learnt were successful over IPSE's development.
- Most importantly, the need for high quality research to act as an underpinning for the work of a representative association. We believe this is best achieved through the successful implementation of a research hub model.

IPSE's mistakes and successes since its formation as PCG in 1999 have led us to make the following recommendations for similar associations seeking to improve recognition in this space.

1. **Ensure a focal point exists for campaigning.** In the case of PCG, this was IR35. This issue stemmed from a lack of recognition of self-employment and in seeking to address this issue, PCG and later IPSE broadened the appeal of the organisation
2. **Ensure the organisation appeals to a broad audience.** PCG had a narrow appeal to a particular type of self-employed worker. Research identified that this appeal had the potential to be much wider, and PCG could speak to the broader self-employed population.
3. **Target campaigning appropriately.** By professionalising campaigning, policy and public affairs functions campaigning can be targeted to ensure the right messaging is used. PCG learnt to avoid using aggressive campaigning tactics and language which limited its appeal.
4. **Ensure good access to decision makers.** PCG moved its headquarters to Westminster and implemented a number of public affairs strategies to ensure influence decision makers.
5. **Branding and messaging must be well targeted:** PCG rebranded to IPSE to ensure that it did not exclude the wider self-employed population from its ranks and to ensure that the organisation itself was not overlooked in discussions surrounding self-employment.
6. **Use the press to raise awareness:** The rebrand made IPSE's campaigns more interesting to the press. This was exploited to maximum advantage by the organisation.
7. **Develop a clear policy platform:** IPSE engaged a think-tank to help it write a manifesto.
8. **Take a strategic approach to research:** IPSE recognised that strategic research is essential for furthering an organisation's agenda. In IPSE's case, it allowed the organisation to better target its messaging and expand its membership.
9. **Establish a 'research hub':** This is our key finding. We believe this presents the following benefits:

- Establishing a network of academics provides a platform for organic growth of research into the issues that are faced by the members of an organisation. IPSE was able to use the contacts of academics it engaged to identify other interested academics, who in turn identified even more academics to work with the organisation.
- A research hub ensures that relevant research is independent of IPSE, thus ensuring that public and stakeholder trust is maintained in any research findings.
- A research hub allows international comparisons to be made. IPSE's policy of a small business conciliation service was inspired by similar services in Germany and Australia.
- A hub structure also eases the funding burden for IPSE. Previously, ad-hoc research had to be funded entirely by IPSE whereas a research hub allows independently funded research to be discussed and instigated.
- Because the research hub meets regularly, research is identified in a proactive, as opposed to a reactive way.
- Formalising this process into a research hub/think tank ensures that the process of identifying multidisciplinary research opportunities and possible interested academics is done so in a structured way, commensurate with the priorities of IPSE.

This paper provides valuable lessons for organisations looking to represent the self-employed in other countries. Some of the hurdles encountered by IPSE include ensuring that your brand is targeted appropriately to ensure maximum membership numbers and impact. In IPSE's case, its brand as PCG was holding growth of the organisation back and this was only identified as a result of considerable research. Secondly, although ad-hoc research is useful, it was only with the creation of a hub that IPSE was in a position to identify further research in a rigorous and structured way. The authors therefore strongly recommend the use of formalised grouping of academics to further the needs of interest groups in plural democracies.

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