

Employer in focus

Accountants with empathy

QP is crucial in moulding the sort of graduates PwC wants to employ: those who can see things from the client's point of view.

Diversity is encouraged

A big accountancy firm's clients come from all walks of life. So it makes sense that the people employed by that firm come from all sorts of backgrounds too. But that, of course, means training a lot of people in the accounting profession – and this, according to Douglas Holyoak, director of learning and education for PricewaterhouseCoopers in China and Hong Kong, is why QP is so crucial.

Holyoak heads a department of about 115, working closely alongside people in Taiwan and Singapore. PwC as a whole employs 14,000 people across Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Singapore, 3,000 of them are in Hong Kong. And it takes on about 2,000 new graduates a year, 400 of them are in the city.

Holyoak has worked in the training field since 1986, initially for various financial services companies and consulting firms, then briefly for the software industry, and then at PwC. Based initially in his native United States, for the past three and a half years he has been in Hong Kong. The fact that the majority of the people he trains are in China makes the job markedly different here.

"The emerging market status of China means that it presents different pressures and different problems from the U.S. – we have to support people in a different way. Here, there is more focus on programmes like QP – how can we help people become a certified public accountant?" It is a direct result, he says, of the surplus of graduate accountants in the U.S., compared with the relative shortage here. That forces PwC to recruit a lot more non-accounting graduates – about half of its new joiners in Hong Kong come from other backgrounds, and a far higher percentage in China – but far from being a problem, that dovetails nicely with the firm's own recruitment priorities. "We want to recruit people from all backgrounds, not just accounting, because we have a range of clients and they need people with different skills and strengths," he says. The QP provides our prospective CPAs in both mainland China and Hong Kong with quality training in technical knowledge and diversified skill-sets that are essential in today's business environment.

Tammy Yip, associate director of human resources for PwC in China and Hong Kong, adds that "the firm wants diversity. We want the brightest and best, not necessarily just people from an accounting background."



About the AE

Authorized employer	: PricewaterhouseCoopers
Member-in-charge	: Douglas Holyoak, director of learning and education
Registered as AE	: 6.5 years
No. of QP students under supervision	: 872

Communication is key

That means a lot of people need to be turned into accountants. Graduates joining PwC are appointed a career coach, always from within their own department, who takes overall responsibility for the graduates' professional development, as well as a buddy – someone with just a couple of years more experience who can show graduates the ropes. They are also given support when it comes to qualifying as accountants.

"As soon as we recruit those who are pursuing the part of the business where qualification is required, we start working with them to ensure they understand the qualification process," says Holyoak. More than 80 per cent of the firm's graduates choose to do QP – a qualification he believes is uniquely useful because of its focus on providing practical, workplace-style experience.

"We are very pleased to be in partnership with QP," he says. The firm has been registered with QP as an authorized employer since November 2004. "It is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills in the classroom; it is about applying that knowledge and those skills. It allows an individual to come to work and have experience with real-life situations."

"It is not just about debits and credits. It is about what you know and how you communicate it. Communication is vital – people who have the ability to establish a relationship with another person. When you have that relationship and you can really put yourself in another person's shoes and start to think about the problem from their perspective, only then can you deliver real value to your clients."

The reason Holyoak enjoys his job at a Big Four firm so much, he says, is the same reason why QP is such a must for the firm's graduates – the demanding nature of the work, and the sort of people it attracts. "The type of people who work for these firms are bright, motivated, energetic individuals with a thirst for learning that I find exhilarating. The only reason the client hires us is for our point of view. Why would we hire a person who does not put effort into developing that point of view? That is why we are so keen on QP."

What are big accountancy firms looking for when they recruit graduates?

- Aim to develop your communication skills: it is essential in the business world. When accompanied by a capacity for teamwork, a passion for the industry and business acumen, the sky is the limit.
- Be a team player - someone who builds meaningful relationships by sharing and collaborating to achieve goals, to see other people's perspectives by putting themselves in the shoes of others and being passionate about creating value.
- Students from disciplines other than accounting, such as business, engineering and science, can be very successful in the accounting profession and many of our recruits come from these disciplines, so recognize your own distinctiveness and sell your unique personal traits. Diversity is encouraged.



Tammy Yip, associate director,
human resources, PwC China and
Hong Kong

Interview and reporting by Richard Lord