



Feature Interview

By Caroline Biebuyck

Practical Experience: Views from the Ground

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu: Authorised Employer

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, one of the Big Four firms, is also one of the largest professional service firms in the world. In Hong Kong, the firm employs approximately 250 new graduates each year as trainee professional staff. Around 90 per cent of the 2005 graduates are now registered QP students, who are gaining practical experience under the Institute's authorised employer system.



Human resources partner Philip Tsai feels that practical experience works well in large and medium-sized accounting firms as it ensures consistent staff development. "This helps us monitor staff to make sure they are meeting both their training requirements while simultaneously meeting our firm's own needs," he explains. Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu has chosen to compliment the Institute's training with its own staff learning and evaluation approach. "These work hand in hand," says Tsai. "As a result we've seen students working with their counsellors and getting more out of the combined system. As a firm we think this works very well."

The firm has around 170 counsellors registered under the AE/AS scheme. Why so many? "We want to share the workload so that our counsellors can put in the time and effort needed to help develop these future young accountants," Tsai explains. "This way we can ensure that each counsellor looks after an optimal number of students."

May Cheng is an audit manager within the firm, and has been a counsellor there for several years. She sees her role as being multi-faceted. "As counsellors we have to share our insights on career development. We have to be able to discuss the student's expectations of the scheme and of their training. And after discussing their performance we have to be able to find ways for them to improve or suggest what we can do as a firm to provide them with the opportunities they need to extend their practical experience."

All of the students who Cheng counsels work on one or two of her audit assignments. "This helps me put comments I receive from them and their supervisors in the context of my own knowledge of their work," she explains.



“Generally, however, it’s important that the students see their counsellors as independent parties – as a channel between their other managers and themselves. This makes it easier for them to discuss any problems they may have.”

She thinks that the main benefit of the PEF scheme is its focus on the development of specific technical competencies. “Under the PEF we have to be more precise about the work that the students have performed. We have comment on the skills they have attained. The PEF also ensures we assess students continually throughout the period. This means we can work with them to give suggestions on how to improve their performance or to make sure they get the right experience they need on a regular basis.”

Tsai likes the fact the PEF spells out to all parties what is expected of the students. “There is a clear benchmark that helps employers monitor staff development and performance. At the same time staff are better motivated as they are more focused and understand where they stand in their career development. The end result is well-balanced professionals who are competent in various different areas.”

Cheng also thinks students gain from the requirement to keep regular records. “This helps them to keep track of what they’ve done and to think about the areas that they have just worked on. They can use these records as an important tool in developing their overall career plan.”

Tsai believes that the PEF offers students a good opportunity to take greater initiative in directing the progress of their work experience. He advises all students to take ownership of their own career from the start. “After understanding the PEF process, they should discuss their experience and preferences with their counsellors. Only then can they start to map a more personal progress which best suits them while meeting the PEF requirements.” He also recommends they engage in open dialogue with their counsellors. “Then you can get the full benefit of the opportunities that the counselling sessions give you.”