



...Strength in Numbers

**A PROPOSED ICAEW
GENERAL PRACTICE FACULTY
SURVEY AND REPORT
AUGUST 2000**

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INDEX

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. BACKGROUND AND COMMENTARY

3. APPENDICES:

- A Survey Questionnaire and Methodology
- B Levels of Response
- C Other Services Suggested
- D Comments Received
- E Services Provided by SPA

SPA SURVEY AND REPORT ON AN ICAEW GENERAL PRACTICE FACULTY

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- 1.1 Whilst, given the perceived significance of the topic, the level of response by SPA standards was low, over 80% were statedly willing to join a GPF (Appendix B).
- 1.2 The services suggested to be provided by a GPF were all well supported with one exception. (Appendix B).
- 1.3 Other services were suggested which are reported in Appendix C.
- 1.4 The most frequently repeated comment was one of concern with the ICAEW's ability to 'deliver the goods'. These and other comments are listed at Appendix D.
- 1.5 SPA is expected to retain its rôle providing 'checks and balances' on a GPF, also continue to act as commentator to those bodies beyond the ICAEW that impact on our practising environment.

Recommendations

- 1.6 The objective of a GPF should be to provide services and support to the smaller practice, defined as the 16,828 specifically registered firms of up to 5 partners as per the 'List of Members and Firms 2000'.
- 1.7 The ICAEW should consider automatic membership of a GPF for all those with practising certificates in firms of up to 5 partners.
- 1.8 The ICAEW should be prepared to commit existing members' funds to provide free membership of a GPF.
- 1.9 A GPF should be given a high degree of autonomy of action within stated objectives and an annual budget, enabling swift proactive response to given situations.
- 1.10 The ICAEW should liaise with SPA on those SPA services (Appendix E) the ICAEW propose be provided by a GPF.
 - Certain 'member pays' services managed by SPA might be extended to GPF members.
 - Other services 'organised' by SPA might be passed to a GPF.

SPA SURVEY AND REPORT ON AN ICAEW GENERAL PRACTICE FACULTY

2. BACKGROUND AND COMMENTARY

- 2.1 Within its objectives set in 1996, SPA sought to encourage the ICAEW to provide services and support tailored to the many thousand small practices of between 1 and 3 partners. Hitherto, it was held by SPA that appropriate services or support did not exist or that these tended to be structured for larger firms.
- 2.2 SPA's objectives sought to identify, develop and introduce services and support until similar ICAEW activities were developed.
- 2.3 In 1996 there appeared no single effective body within the ICAEW to whom SPA could take its findings or proposals; early submissions via the General Practitioner Board were not channelled through to potentially interested parties, nor did that body appear to have a particular representative rôle at Council; what SPA sought was a proactive body capable and willing to take decisions.
- 2.4 SPA considered whether splitting the GPB between smaller and larger practices would provide a solution but, after its experience with this body in 1997, SPA's thinking turned towards the formation of a bespoke Faculty.
- 2.5 When SPA was set up, it was against a background of concern with various Institute policies and actions, and a wide credibility gap had developed. Although some areas of this communications breakdown have been improved, it appears that for many members this gulf remains to be bridged.
- 2.6 To overcome this divide, and for a General Practice Faculty to be successful in the medium to long term, respondents suggest it may be a sensible strategy to give something back to the members. By this, it is suggested that an investment in such a faculty may be required from the Institute's existing funds and current subscriptions.

SPA SURVEY AND REPORT ON AN ICAEW GENERAL PRACTICE FACULTY

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND METHODOLOGY

PROPOSED GENERAL PRACTICE FACULTY

SPA supports the proposal to form a new Faculty addressing the needs of Smaller General Practitioners.

Undoubtedly a subscription will be charged, as other Faculties cost between £50 - £60 per annum. It is envisaged that some services provided may be sources from existing Faculties, and might include the following - please tick whether you are interest *(I) or not interest *(N/I).

	* I	* N/I
1. Technical Accounts Support (to FRSSE Level)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Small Audit Technical Support (below large company level)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Practice Management Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Alternate / Locum Arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Member to Member Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Regulatory & Disciplinary Guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Student Training Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	YES	NO
8. Would you be prepared to join such a Faculty at the cost outlined above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

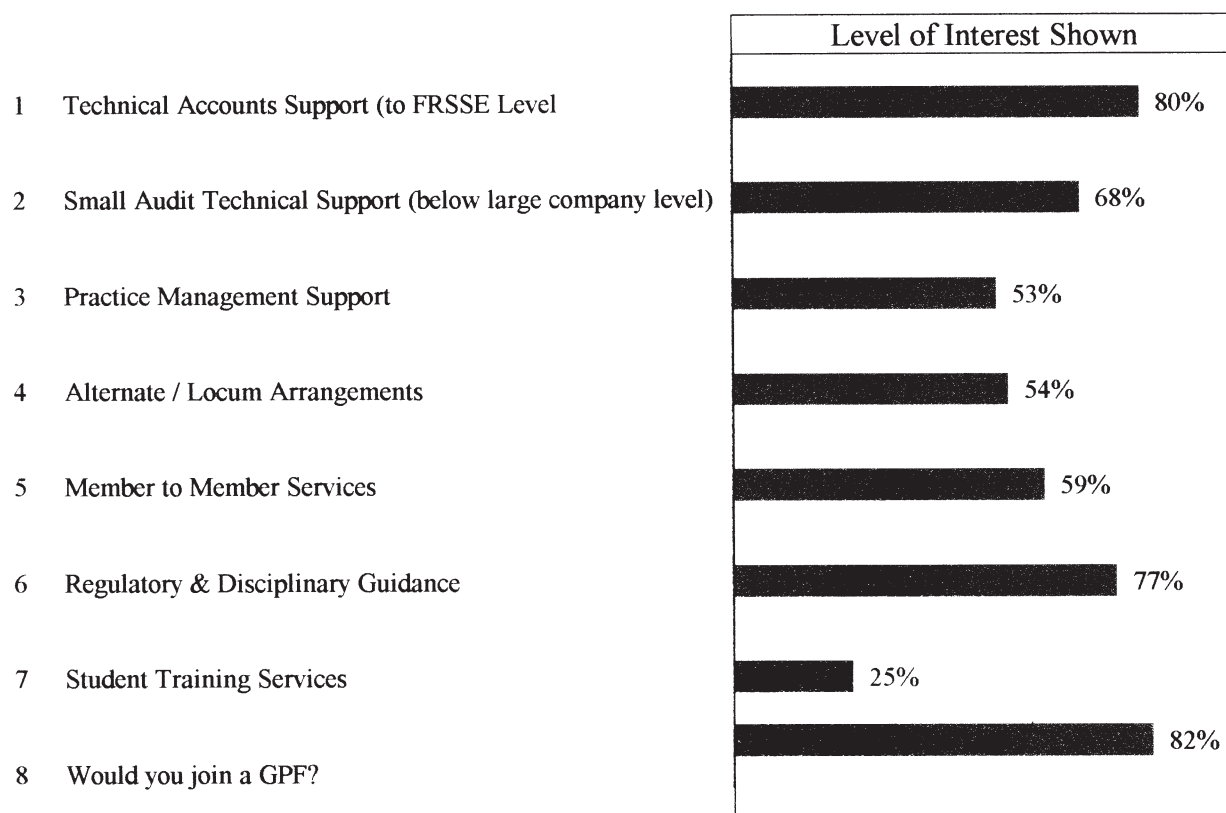
METHODOLOGY

- The survey was circulated to SPA’s membership of (then) just over 1,000 firms. There were 212 respondents in all.
- Analysis was undertaken by SPA staff.
- Commentary was provided by the Steering Committee.

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LEVELS OF RESPONSE

- The questionnaire sought levels of interest to various suggested services.
- Interest percentages were calculated from numbers of positive responses to each question from the 214 respondents.



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OTHER SERVICES SUGGESTED

Suggested services are listed in descending order of frequency:

1. Provide information/guidance on technology developments/linking with IT Faculty.
2. Provide helpline/support on general legal or taxation matters.
3. Provide 'clearing house' facilities for practice disposal/acquisition, mergers etc.
4. Provide staff recruitment facilities.
5. Provide support for small insolvency practices.
6. Provide CPE courses designed for small practices including development of business advisers.
7. Provide technical helpline on investment matters.
8. Provide central purchasing facilities.
9. Provide inter-firm comparison facilities for small practices.

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COMMENTS RECEIVED

Comments are listed in descending order of frequency:

1. Concern that ICAEW / GPF may not be able to provide services sought efficiently or economically.
2. A GPF should focus on small practices.
3. GPF membership should be 'free' (part of annual subscription).
4. SPA should remain alongside a GPF to monitor and provide a balance to larger firms.
5. Some joining a GPF would expect to leave other faculties.

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SERVICES PROVIDED BY SPA

1. Member Pays Services

- i. Professional Indemnity Insurance
Bespoke insurance pool, competitive premiums plus free technical helpline on tax and legal matters and defence costs at disciplinary hearings.
- ii CPE Training Programmes
Discounted rate available from national training organisation.
- iii Company Formation Services
Competitively priced services at discounted rates plus free technical helpline on corporate matters.
- iv Legal Service
Support on ICAEW disciplinary and regulatory matters plus free helpline.
- v Private Medical Insurance
Bespoke insurance pool, competitively priced scheme with national organisation, with fixed premium for two years for practitioners, staff and family members.
- vi Regulatory Services
Assistance pre, during and post JMU monitoring visits, plus independent regulatory reviews.
- vii Tax Information Service
Subscription to weekly information service offered by national organisation at discounted rates.
- viii Taxation Services
Ex-Revenue Inspector providing support at affordable rates on individual matters or investigations.
- ix Accountancy Software
Discounted prices available from national organisations.
- x Securities Information Service
Preferential rates available from national organisation on securities and investments, prices, data etc.

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SERVICES PROVIDED BY SPA

2. Financial Services

Suitably sized brokers have been identified to provide:

- Finance for small businesses
- Financial Planning Services
- Mortgages or loans for Self-Employed or Directors

3. Member to Member Services

Individual members working in niche areas offer expert knowledge and assistance to their colleagues on:

- Arbitration
- Authors and Journalists
- Company Doctor
- Contractors
- Insolvency
- Ministers and Clergy
- Taxi Trade
- Trade Associations and Charities

4. General Enquiries

The SPA office receives several enquiries each week on a wide range of practice matters where either a second opinion is sought or access to a specialist service is requested and located.

5. Website, SPA.ORG.UK

- The existing site provides search facilities to the public to locate a member in the chosen town or county. Additionally, benefits and details of membership are provided.
- Future enhancements will provide descriptions of each practice's specialism, SPA services and links, together with a history of issued reports.

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SERVICES PROVIDED BY SPA

6. Publications

i. Newsletters

On average, nine issues each year incorporating news, events, new services, letters and 'answerback' surveys.

ii. Members Yearbook

Issued each summer/autumn showing member contact details, SPA services and SPA's constitution.



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