



Key Features on Structure and Organisation of the Accountancy Profession across 30 European countries

Status: 26 March 2012

This survey provides a collection of key features on structure and organisation of the accountancy profession across 30 European countries. Interested parties within and outside the accountancy profession can find general information per country on existing professions and titles, main activities, education and market access requirements.

Professional accountants provide a wide range of - sometimes mutually exclusive - services, including preparation of financial information, tax services, statutory audit, as well as many innovative services in the areas of non-financial reporting, assurance services other than statutory audit, sustainability and corporate social responsibility, strategy and management consultancy and corporate governance.

The rules regarding the pursuit of those activities generally vary across Europe:

- Depending on the country, all or only parts of the accountancy profession are regulated.
- Where regulatory approaches for market access of accountants exist, which can for example cover education and qualification, the use of professional titles as well as membership in professional institutes and supervision, the rules vary from country to country.
- Only for statutory audit services, harmonisation at EU level ensures a certain level playing field.¹

The country presentations (see links below) provide condensed general information about large parts of the accountancy profession across 30 European countries.

The information per country does not cover (i) the whole possible range of accountancy services (e.g. some countries focus on information about audit and assurance services), (ii) all existing titles of professionals who provide accountancy services (e.g. bookkeepers are generally not included) or (iii) information about other professions that may be allowed to provide certain accountancy services (e.g. lawyers providing tax advice).

The data is based on information provided by the FEE member bodies from each country. FEE's membership consists of 45 professional institutes of accountants and auditors from 33 European countries. Their activities and their involvement in qualification and market access are also briefly addressed in the country presentations.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/auditing/directives/index_en.htm



Companies of all sizes are more and more operating across the EU and globally, which creates challenges and opportunities for their advisors from the accountancy profession. Establishing in another Member State or providing services cross-border will be a key element for the future of the profession. The relevant legal framework on services² and recognition of professional qualifications³ derives from the fundamental freedoms of the EU Single Market.

The country presentations provide some basic general information on how market access of professionals from other EU Member States and from Third countries would work in the cases of temporary provision of non-audit services⁴ and of permanent establishment of auditors and accountants.

The FEE Qualification and Market Access Working Party, the FEE secretariat and the FEE member bodies have worked together on these key features, that can be helpful to anyone who seeks information about the accountancy profession: practitioners (professionals and trainees), national professional institutes of accountants and auditors, accountancy oversight bodies, other professional organisations, business and business associations, politicians, regulators, journalists ...

FEE cannot guaranty the completeness and accuracy of the information contained in the country presentations, which have been completed by the FEE member bodies between July 2011 and March 2012. The status of information (month and year) is mentioned on each slide of the presentations.

FEE does not monitor whether the information remains up to date. Updates, if any, will need to be provided from the FEE member bodies upon their initiative.

Further and more detailed information can be obtained via the national professional institutes of accountants and auditors.

² http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/services/services-dir/index_en.htm

³ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/index_en.htm

⁴ Under the current legal framework (which is under review, http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/auditing/directives/index_en.htm), FEE believes that temporary cross-border provision of statutory audit services is not possible, because auditors need to be approved and registered in the Member State where they want to provide statutory audit services.



Legend and acronyms

Protected title: title protected by law.

Reserved activities: activity or group of activities, access to which, the pursuit of which, or one of the modes of pursuit of which are subject to the possession of specific professional qualifications.

Included authorisations: 'Professions' may also cover the authorisation to perform additional activities other than the reserved ones.

Supervision: is intended as supervision of the profession and not of the institute.

Competent authority: any authority or body empowered by an EU Member State to issue or receive training diplomas and other documents or information and to receive the applications for the profession. For additional information please refer to article 3 of the Directive 2005/36/EC (RPQ Directive).⁵

General initial education steps: educational conditions for admission to the profession.

Pro-forma declaration: written declaration to be made in advance when services are provided on EU Member State. It includes the details of any insurance cover or other means of personal or collective protection with regard to professional liability. Such declaration shall be renewed once a year if the service provider intends to provide temporary or occasional services in that Member State during that year. The service provider may supply the declaration by any means. For additional information please refer to article 7 of the RPQ Directive.

Establishment: provision of services on a stable and continuous basis, as opposed to temporary provision of services.

Infrastructure: the physical set up or office of an establishment.

Aptitude test: a test of the professional knowledge of the applicant, made by the competent authorities of the host Member State with the aim of assessing the ability of the applicant to pursue a regulated profession in that Member State.

Form: the way the aptitude test can be taken (e.g. written, oral, combination of the two, etc.)

Frequency: number of times sessions of the aptitude test are organised per year.

Compensation measures: host Member States may require the applicant to complete an adaptation period or an aptitude test to compensate for substantial differences in for example national law, tax on company law, trainings, etc. For additional information please refer to article 14 of the RPQ Directive and article 14 of the Statutory Audit Directive 2006/43/EC.⁶

EU: European Union

MS: Member State

⁵ Available at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:2005L0036:20110324:EN:PDF>

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:2006L0043:20080321:EN:PDF>