



Friends Provident International

Professionalising financial services in the UAE

For 40 years, Friends Provident International (FPI) has been developing sophisticated savings, investment and protection products for customers around the world.

FPI – which can trace its heritage for more than 185 years – has had a presence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the last 14 years.

FPI has its head office in the Isle of Man and branches in Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and the UAE.

Crucially, FPI puts its customers' individual needs first, as opposed to promoting particular products. This sets it apart from other international financial services companies in the region, and is part of its focus to help customers achieve financial freedom and to protect the things they value most.

Specific training needs

In late 2015, FPI made the decision to create a formal training programme for its Middle East and Africa sales team. Ultimately, it wanted to offer a way for salespeople to gain a professional qualification that would be recognised by the sector and instil confidence in its distributors and customers.

FPI's sales director and sales trainer considered several different options, including offerings by the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII). Initially, it wanted to get a clear understanding of the timescales, logistics and costs associated with implementing a programme. It also highlighted two potential challenges from an internal point of view. Firstly, not everyone in the sales team speaks English as their first language, which could create barriers to structured learning, and possibly a discrepancy in terms of learning speed and 'success'. Secondly, not all salespeople were planning to work in the UK financial services sector at some future point in their career, so why would they invest time and effort studying for a UK-centric qualification?

Having reviewed the CII's suite of learning modules and examinations, FPI felt that offering the CII's Certificate in Insurance and Financial Services for candidates outside of the UK would be a key differentiator for them, both in the local market and internationally. The decision was made.

An empowering programme

The FPI sales team training programme officially launched in early 2016. As the first of its kind in the business, the technical, sales and training teams had to provide a compelling sell-in, to persuade them that it was worth investing their time, and that it would yield rewards. Team members were comprehensively briefed on the programme, its itinerary, benefits and subject matter. They were then given three examination options to choose from, based on perceived relevance to their job:

- Award in Financial Planning
- Award in Investment Planning
- Customer Service Qualification

Being able to make their own decision on training was empowering for those involved. Very few had completed any professional examinations previously. It was important to make them feel comfortable and ensure that all aspects were clearly understood. Example questions were highlighted and discussed, issues were debated and this illustrated to everyone in the sales team exactly what they should expect from the programme, and what would be expected of them.

Comprehensive collaboration

The FPI sales team chose the Award in Financial Planning as their first preference. To begin with they sat a 'mock' exam, using the CII exam guide as a reference. This proved extremely useful in building candidates' confidence by giving them a benchmark to see where they currently stood, prior to any training being completed. An impressive 12 out of 15 passed.

Following this mock exam the group completed a three-month training programme between January and March 2016. This was supported by CII's RevisionMate, its on-line exam support. Candidates were given a period of time to familiarise themselves with the subject matter, as small, hour-long, study groups were formed in which they could share any issues, at a time convenient to them. These sessions were collaborative in nature, and designed to gain technical input from experts in order to improve knowledge.

Following this, 14 out of 15 candidates went on to pass the Award in Financial Planning exam at their first attempt. This was a terrific achievement, and testament to the approach taken by FPI. As a result, its sales team became even more motivated, fuelled by a feeling of pride and a drive to perform. This confidence and momentum has made them keen to take on the next two award exams the Award in Investment Planning and Award in Customer Service that would lead the team to achieve Cert CII status (Level 3 qualified).

How the CII has helped

Attaining the CII's UK qualification sets FPI apart from its competitors in the UAE. No other sales force has this type of professional benchmark behind them. The CII has played a key role in getting them there.

From day one, when FPI was considering its training strategy, the CII was on hand to advise and support FPI in structuring a programme to deliver its objectives. Its online test centre provides a flexible and available resource to take exams. Plus, the CII's independence as a professional body committed to building public trust has helped build credibility with candidates, distributors and customers alike – something that is becoming increasingly important for businesses in the UAE.



“As the UAE's insurance industry evolves from being transaction-based to customer-focused, the CII's qualifications and training provide us with the perfect platform to ensure our people are up to the challenge. It's a great way to give them the confidence and professionalism they need to serve customers and distributors even more effectively.”

Neil Hay, Training Manager
Friends Provident International



“To be able to empower international insurance professionals is always hugely satisfying for us. The CII's recognised qualifications give FPI's UAE team even greater credibility in their local market, and enables them to serve consumers more effectively. We will continue to support its distance-based learning with innovative training.”

Steve Aspinall, Sales Director
Chartered Insurance Institute