



Workforce Engagement
Quality Framework

Supplementary Stories

Six illustrative stories accompanying
Intentional and Collaborative Engagement
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Alex's Story

When a confirmed shift disappears

Alex is a qualified nurse and a parent. They want to keep practising and contribute to the household income while caring for their child. Daytime shifts are possible when childcare is available, but evening work is difficult to arrange. Before accepting a booking, Alex needs to know that the working hours and the childcare will fit together.

An agency supplying nurses to a healthcare provider advertises flexible work with cancellation protection. Alex would be able to choose suitable shifts and would become an Employee of an umbrella company, which would employ them and run their payroll, paying their wages through PAYE. The healthcare provider would decide which shifts it needed, and the agency would arrange the bookings.

The rate is £30 an hour before tax and other payroll deductions. An eight-hour shift would bring £240 in gross pay, making a useful contribution after the £60 cost of a day's childcare. Alex can secure a daytime childcare place that covers the shift and the journeys at either end. The advertised cancellation protection helps make the arrangement feel workable.

Childcare remains payable if Alex cancels it at short notice, and accepting one work booking can mean turning down another. During recruitment, Alex asks what happens if the healthcare provider changes its plans. The agency says cancelled bookings are covered by the provider's arrangements and that it will help Alex find replacement work. After Alex joins and selects a daytime shift, the assignment confirmation repeats that cancellation protection applies.

Alex understands that there is some protection for an accepted shift. The information does not give a clear payment amount, deadline or explanation of what happens when replacement work is unsuitable. Finding those details would mean following references between the agency's booking information, the provider's staffing arrangements and the umbrella's employment documents. With the shift confirmed, Alex completes the childcare booking and puts the working day in the calendar.

The agency calls the afternoon before the shift. The provider's requirement has changed and the booking is cancelled. There is an evening shift available instead, at the same rate, but it finishes after the childcare closes. Alex explains that the alternative is impossible and asks what payment the cancellation protection provides.

The coordinator says they will check. Their immediate task has been to notify Alex and find another booking. The provider's staffing team has closed the original shift on its system, and the agency's record shows that alternative work was offered. The umbrella receives the cancellation instruction and removes the planned hours from the assignment information awaiting payroll.

Alex now has a £60 childcare charge and uncertainty about the £240 gross earnings expected from the shift. The charge cannot be recovered by accepting work later in the day. Alex contacts the childcare provider anyway, hoping another family might take the place, but it is too late to change the booking.

The following morning, when Alex would have been travelling to work, the agency replies that its cancellation procedure was followed because it offered another shift. Alex asks whether declining work outside the availability already supplied means losing the protection. The coordinator cannot point to a clear answer and refers the payment question to the umbrella.

The umbrella's payroll team can explain which hours it has received and what ordinary work will be paid. For the cancelled shift, it needs to establish what payment was promised and when that promise applies. Alex's employment documents refer to the assignment arrangements, while the assignment confirmation names cancellation protection without explaining how much would be paid or under what conditions. The payroll team asks the agency for the terms and an authorised instruction.

Alex forwards the advert, booking confirmation and messages explaining the childcare restriction. The agency asks the provider to confirm what its protection policy was intended to cover. The provider refers to the agency's responsibility for communicating and administering bookings. Nobody disputes that the shift was confirmed or that the provider cancelled it; the uncertainty concerns what follows from those facts.

The next payslip contains pay for Alex's other completed shifts and nothing for the cancelled booking. Alex asks for a written explanation and receives an acknowledgement that the question is still being investigated. The childcare charge has already left the bank account.

The provider had wanted flexible arrangements to help it draw on experienced nurses who could

not work its usual full-time pattern. Alex had found that flexibility attractive. Yet the part of the arrangement Alex needed after choosing and accepting a shift remains unclear. The three organisations hold different pieces of the account, and Alex is spending time connecting them while waiting for an answer.

A week later the agency offers another suitable daytime shift. Alex would like to take it. The childcare place is available again, but confirming it would create another cost that could remain if the work disappeared.

Before accepting, Alex asks the agency to confirm what would be paid if that shift were cancelled and whether an alternative outside the recorded availability would affect the answer. The coordinator promises to come back after checking. By the time the reply arrives, another nurse has accepted the shift.

Alex's payment query remains open. The childcare provider needs a decision about the following week's place, and the agency is still asking for available dates. Alex would like to be choosing the next shift. Instead, they leave those dates unconfirmed and check again for an answer about the one that disappeared.

Priya's Story

Explaining the payment

Priya manages payroll and engagement administration for an umbrella company. The company employs people who work on assignments arranged by recruitment agencies, and it runs their payroll itself. Priya's team calculates and pays their wages and keeps the records of their terms, approved work, payments and any changes. Each week, the team needs reliable information from the agencies and the sites where the work takes place.

One of those employees is Daniel, who has recently worked on maintenance assignments at two sites for the same contractor. His recruitment agency supplies Priya's team with the assignment and funding information, while the site supervisors approve his working hours. His agreed gross rate is £18 an hour. To pay him correctly, the team must connect each return with the right assignment and week.

On Friday, Priya has opened the next payroll schedule when Daniel's query arrives. He has checked his payslip and found 35 hours where he expected 37. His supervisor approved the additional two hours, he says, and he wants to know when they will be paid.

The difference is £36 in gross pay. Priya expects an authorised hours correction to be straightforward, so she opens the payroll input used for the payment. It shows 35 hours. She then checks the agency's portal, which now shows 37.

The agency replaced its weekly spreadsheet after receiving an amendment. The replacement has the same filename as the original, and the portal displays the latest total. The umbrella's payroll run has preserved the 35-hour calculation, but the shared folder no longer contains the earlier source file as it was received. A message about "two additional

hours" sits in an email thread covering more than one assignment.

The additional hours belong to the assignment Daniel completed the previous week, but the message does not identify that assignment or the relevant dates. Priya can see that the current agency figure differs from the payroll input. Establishing who authorised the difference, when it arrived and whether someone has already started another correction takes more work.

She asks the agency for the approval history. Its coordinator believes the supervisor approved the amendment after the ordinary payroll input had been sent. The supervisor has moved to another project and is not immediately available. Another member of Priya's team remembers handling an hours adjustment for Daniel, but that entry relates to his other site.

Priya explains the discrepancy to Daniel and asks him to forward any messages that might help identify the amendment. He sends a photograph of his work notes and the message in which he raised the missing hours with the supervisor. The information helps locate the event, but Daniel is frustrated by the request. From his perspective, the work was done and the approval was obtained. He is being asked to prove the same two hours again.

The agency's finance team joins the inquiry because it needs to reconcile the hours approved by the contractor, the amount funded and the payment made by the umbrella. The contractor wants to know which version of its information reached payroll. Priya can explain the calculation for 35 hours, but she cannot yet give everyone a complete account of the amendment and its handling.

On Monday she checks the received-file log and the payroll import history. The log identifies when a file arrived, but it does not preserve the contents of the version that was later replaced. The payroll entry has an assignment reference; the email approving extra time uses only Daniel's name. Priya and the agency coordinator work through the messages to connect them.

Daniel calls again. The £36 gross difference is small enough for others to describe the matter as a minor adjustment, but it is payment for work he has already completed. He has set aside time for another call and another explanation, and still cannot tell when the money will reach him. Priya understands his impatience. She also needs to establish the correct period and prevent a duplicate adjustment while another colleague is looking at the same query.

The supervisor eventually confirms the two additional hours and supplies a dated message identifying the maintenance assignment. Priya links it with Daniel's work notes and the agency's revised return. The information establishes 37 hours for the affected period and confirms that only 35 have been paid. She can now authorise the supplementary calculation.

The additional payment reaches Daniel the following Thursday. The umbrella issues the corrected payroll information, and Priya confirms the adjustment to the agency for reconciliation. Daniel checks that the money has arrived before acknowledging that the payment problem is resolved.

Priya brings the calculations, messages and approvals together in the case record. The account is now sufficient to explain the agreed

hours, the shortfall and its correction. It took contributions from Daniel, the supervisor, agency staff and several people inside the umbrella to reconstruct it. The earlier source file itself is still unavailable, leaving part of the original processing history dependent on the surrounding messages and logs.

The agency asks whether similar late amendments have been handled correctly on other assignments. Priya cannot answer from the totals in the payroll system alone. She would need to compare the relevant inputs, approvals and subsequent adjustments. That review needs staff time during a week already committed to another payment run.

Daniel's query is marked as resolved. The missing wages have been paid, but the work of explaining the shortfall has involved people across several organisations. When Priya returns to the next payroll schedule, she pauses over the list of late amendments. Each has a current figure. She now needs to know how readily her team could explain the history behind it.

Helen's Story

The promise that did not reach the engagement

Helen leads procurement for a public-sector organisation commissioning building refurbishments across the region. She needs to appoint a contractor that can complete the work within the budget and schedule. Her organisation also wants the programme to create supported opportunities for local people returning to work. Helen will have to show the programme board what those opportunities delivered as well as how the building work progressed.

Before the tender is prepared, Helen's team meets local employment advisers. They describe people who want to return to paid work after time spent caring for family or managing other responsibilities. Wages matter, but so do predictable hours and a chance to gain skills useful beyond a short assignment. The refurbishment programme could provide that combination through work that already needs to be done.

The tender asks suppliers to explain how they will support people returning to work. The successful contractor commits to a series of placements and describes flexible working, training and support. Its proposal includes a development policy and a plan to use subcontractors and staffing suppliers across the sites.

The commitments are incorporated into the programme documents. The contractor will organise delivery, while its staffing suppliers will recruit people and issue their individual terms. Helen expects those terms to carry the promised support. The delivery plan identifies the suppliers and numbers of opportunities, but the details of who can access training, when and on what conditions remain within each supplier's existing arrangements.

The first report shows people starting work, paid hours delivered and training completed. The sites are progressing, and Helen arranges a visit to hear directly from some of the participants. She wants to understand whether the opportunities are helping people regain confidence and build something they can take into their next role.

At one site she meets Leila, who has returned to paid work after several years caring for family. Leila is helping with project administration on a twelve-week assignment. The daytime hours have made starting possible, and the wages are welcome. During recruitment she was told there would be opportunities to develop her office skills, including experience of the software used to manage project records.

Leila asks Helen whether the training is likely to happen before the assignment ends. She has completed the site induction, but has spent the following weeks on routine filing and data entry. When she asked about further learning, the supervisor referred her to the staffing organisation. Its adviser said development support normally became available after six months' service.

Helen checks the dates. Leila's assignment is due to finish after twelve weeks.

The report on Helen's tablet records her as a participant who has received training. Leila explains that this means the induction she attended on arrival.

Back at the office, Helen asks the contractor how the promised development applies to these short assignments. The contractor points to the policy supplied with its proposal. That policy offers a range of learning opportunities to its own workforce, with participation arranged through managers. It does not establish what the staffing supplier must provide to Leila.

The staffing supplier sends its standard terms and development policy. The six-month qualifying period is there. The assignment information mentions opportunities at the site but does not allocate paid learning time, identify activities or explain who will release Leila from her ordinary duties. No individual document gives her the commitment Helen had expected the programme to provide.

The site manager says there are colleagues who could demonstrate the project software. To do that during the working day, somebody would need to cover the routine tasks and provide the instruction. The staffing arrangement has been priced for the hours of project support. Neither the site plan nor the supplier price contains a defined allowance for the additional supervision and cover.

Helen lays the contractor's proposal beside the staffing supplier's terms. The proposal promises development; the terms make Leila wait six months before she can access it. Her assignment lasts twelve weeks. The contractor has relied on its own policy, the supplier has used its usual terms, and neither document tells Leila how she will receive the learning described when she applied.

Helen asks for a clearer account of the learning delivered across the placements. The reporting template records the number of people trained, but does not distinguish site induction from additional development. Suppliers have used the category differently. Some report attendance at

induction; others include informal instruction that supervisors remember providing during ordinary work.

The records establish that people entered paid assignments and received the information needed to start at the sites. They do not give Helen a consistent account of the extra learning available, who qualified, how much paid time was provided or what participants completed. She cannot connect the broad training commitment with a defined offer and delivery record for each person it was meant to support.

The contractor asks the site teams to identify remaining opportunities for learning. Leila's supervisor tries to arrange a session, but the project is approaching handover and the colleague who could provide it is occupied elsewhere. Leila continues doing the work for which she was booked. Her assignment ends on its scheduled date before the proposed session takes place.

Helen speaks to her again during the programme review. Leila is pleased to have recent work experience and a reference. She had also hoped to leave able to describe a new skill on her next application. The development offer had helped persuade her that this particular assignment would provide it.

In the report Helen takes to the programme board, the starts and paid weeks can be substantiated. The additional development outcome remains unconfirmed. She explains the difference between the support described in the proposal, the conditions in the individual terms and the evidence available from delivery.

The buildings are moving towards completion, but that explanation cannot put learning time back into Leila's twelve weeks. Helen had a commitment she could read at the start of the procurement. At its end, she cannot show that the same commitment reached the person who was expected to benefit from it.

Sam's Story

The hours he could no longer rely on

Sam works as a technical support adviser for a company that runs helpdesks for other businesses. He helps people recover access to their accounts, resolve equipment problems and get back to work. He has several years of experience and enjoys the job. When he applied for his current role, the working hours mattered as much as the salary.

His father needs daily help at home. Sam shares that responsibility with his sister, Anna, who works evenings and Saturdays. She covers the weekday care, and he takes over after work and at weekends. Between them, they manage meals, shopping, appointments and the help their father needs around the house. Their jobs make that arrangement possible and pay the bills in their own households.

The vacancy Sam applied for was advertised as a weekday position, eight until four. At interview, he explained his caring responsibilities and why those hours suited him. He had already turned down another opportunity with rotating shifts. Before accepting this one, he wanted to be sure he could do the work and keep his commitment to Anna.

His offer letter confirmed a place on the weekday team. The contract stated: "Normal working hours: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm." It did not explain when those hours could change or identify any requirement to work evenings or weekends. Sam checked the written hours against the arrangements he and Anna had made, signed the contract and gave notice to his previous employer.

During his first week, Sam received access to the staff handbook and completed the company's online onboarding forms. The handbook said support advisers could be

required to work evenings and weekends to meet client demand. The onboarding information also referred to flexibility across the company's service hours. Neither explained how those requirements related to the weekday hours in his contract or distinguished his team from the rotating-shift teams. He acknowledged receipt of the handbook, but no change to his agreed hours was discussed. His first schedule showed eight until four, as expected.

For six months, Sam works those hours. He finishes at four and reaches his father's house before Anna leaves for her evening shift. Occasionally, the team is asked for weekend volunteers. He declines when he cannot help, and the extra work goes to colleagues who want it. His work and his share of the care fit together as he had planned.

Then the company agrees extended support hours with a client. Its operations team draws staff from several helpdesks into a new rota. Sam is scheduled for two late shifts a week and one Saturday in three. A weekday off replaces the Saturday, keeping his total working hours the same. It gives him time when Anna is already available and takes away time when she needs him to cover.

Sam speaks to his manager as soon as the schedule appears. He brings his signed contract and points to the hours.

She refers him to the handbook and the onboarding information, explaining that the company expects advisers to cover the service hours its clients require. Sam asks where his contract says that Monday to Friday can include Saturday. His manager cannot point to anything beyond the documents he received after joining, but tells him the rota must still be staffed.

He sends the people team his offer letter, signed contract and copies of the later documents. The disagreement is there on the pages: the contract specifies weekday hours, while the handbook introduces a wider obligation without explaining how the two fit together. Sam asks the company to confirm that he can continue working the hours in his contract. The people adviser says "normal" describes the usual pattern rather than a fixed commitment, and that the handbook sets out the flexibility expected of staff.

The company treats his request to remain on weekdays as an exception to the new rota and refers it to operations. Sam explains that he is asking it to honour the written arrangement on which he accepted the job. Operations declines the exception because it needs the staff assigned to the extended service. The new rota starts while they are still exchanging messages.

Sam arranges a shift swap for the first late finish. Anna uses leave to cover the next one. Neither can keep doing this regularly. Their relatives cannot provide dependable cover, and the paid help they enquire about would take more from their household budgets than they can sustain. Each new week's schedule brings another conversation about who can be with their father and whose work will have to give way.

Sam raises a formal grievance. He takes the documents to the meeting in the order he received them, with a colleague accompanying him. He asks why a requirement that materially changes his availability appears only in information supplied after he accepted the role. He also asks why acknowledging receipt of a handbook is being treated as acceptance of

hours that his signed contract does not describe. He wants to keep the job, but needs the company to restore the weekday arrangement.

The grievance response maintains that the contract's reference to normal hours must be read alongside the handbook's scheduling requirements. Sam appeals, pointing again to the written hours and the absence of any explanation that evenings and weekends could become compulsory. The appeal manager upholds the decision. The final letter confirms that the internal process is complete and that Sam is expected to work the assigned rota. His contract still says Monday to Friday, eight until four.

By then, Anna has asked her employer to reduce her regular shifts. She has exhausted the leave and swaps she can use, and their father still needs someone there. Her next month's earnings will be lower. Sam continues helping when he can, but he can no longer provide the share of evening and Saturday care they planned around his job.

Sam sends the documents and grievance correspondence to an employment adviser and asks about taking the dispute to a tribunal. He also starts applying for other weekday jobs. The company's final response has left him with no internal route to recover the arrangement his family depends on. He needs his wages, so he continues working the rota while he looks for a way out.

The following Saturday, Sam finishes his shift and opens an application for another support role. Anna is at their father's house, having given up a paid shift to cover the care he was meant to provide. He is applying to leave a job he enjoys because he can no longer rely on its written hours. Any further challenge will have to happen outside the company; his family cannot wait for that dispute to be resolved.

Jordan's Story

Making the first weeks of work possible

Jordan is twenty and has been looking for work since finishing college. He lives with his family in a village outside the nearest town, has little money of his own and depends on buses to get around. He wants a regular income and some experience to put on an application. When an advert looks promising, he checks the journey before spending time on the form. A six o'clock start can rule out a job that is only a few miles away.

He has recently started meeting Ruth, an adviser at the local employment service. She helps young people across the surrounding towns and villages, and knows the bus routes almost as well as the vacancies. As she works through Jordan's CV and asks about the roles he has considered, she recognises familiar difficulties: getting to work at the required time, paying for the first journeys and finding an opportunity where somebody has time to help him learn.

Ruth has an opportunity in mind. Recruitment is about to open for a paid entry programme at three public buildings in the district. She knows the travel arrangements and the support available because she helped the contractor and its employment agency understand what local young people needed when they were preparing their bid, nine months earlier.

The council had released a tender for a buildings-maintenance contract. It included a requirement to help local young people who were not in education, employment or training, often described as NEET, gain work experience and develop skills useful beyond the contract. A contractor interested in bidding approached an employment agency that could recruit, employ and pay the new starters. Before deciding what to offer, the two organisations arranged to meet

Ruth and discuss possible ways of delivering that part of the brief.

Ruth brought her knowledge of the young people her service supported across the surrounding towns and villages. Transport and access to practical training were the two largest barriers they faced. Some could not reach early shifts on the available buses. Others could manage the journey but struggled to pay for it before their first wages. Many needed a chance to learn useful tasks with somebody who had time to teach them.

The contractor talked through the work available at the buildings and the duties that needed to happen at fixed times. Ruth checked the locations against the bus routes. As the discussion turned to the cost of travel, the agency's account manager explained that its usual support involved refunding eligible expenses with the first wages, after receipts had been submitted.

"What pays for the first Monday?" Ruth asked.

The account manager looked again at the payment timetable. She could see a way to put together an offer that addressed those difficulties, provided the contractor could organise suitable working hours and make staff available for training.

She proposed supplying an initial bus pass before work began and building paid coaching into the working week. The contractor agreed to examine the duties and supervision it could provide while the agency developed and costed the package.

Back at the agency, the account manager used the Workforce Engagement Quality Framework, or WEQF, to design and assess the proposed arrangements for a first intake of twelve people across three buildings. Each placement would last six weeks. The assessment brought the working terms, support, conditions of access and record-keeping into one account that she could share with the contractor and Ruth.

The agency developed the offer around thirty paid hours a week, Monday to Friday, beginning at nine and finishing in time for the return buses. The contractor confirmed that experienced staff could cover the earlier duties. Each new starter would receive a four-week bus pass before the first working day, with a named agency contact responsible for issuing it and dealing with any problems. Ruth checked that these arrangements would work for the clients she was likely to refer.

The learning offer included an hour of planned coaching within paid working time every week, beginning in the first week. Ruth wanted participants to leave able to describe skills they could use in another job. The contractor identified stock records, ordering supplies and daily checks as suitable areas, and allowed for supervisors' time and deputy cover. The agency agreed how learning hours and the activities completed would be recorded alongside ordinary work, so that paid time could reach payroll and the programme could account for the training delivered.

The agency priced the wages, travel support and administration it would provide. The contractor confirmed the cost of supervision and cover within its own staffing plan. With those responsibilities agreed, the agency completed and declared its assessment and

supplied the resulting Package Profile, a summary of the arrangements, alongside supporting terms and a quotation. The contractor used that material in its bid to explain how the proposed intake would meet the council's objectives, with the delivery costs included in its price.

Several months later, the contractor won the contract and notified the agency. The agency's account manager then called Ruth to confirm that the programme would go ahead and agree when referrals could begin. During the following two months of preparation, the agency carried the commitments into its employment terms and the contractor confirmed the site schedules, supervisors and deputies. Ruth's team checked the current bus timetables against the agreed hours and prepared to refer suitable applicants.

Now, at her appointment with Jordan, Ruth has the confirmed recruitment dates and the offer in front of her. It sets out the hours, pay, first payday, initial travel support and weekly coaching. Jordan studies the start and finish times first. Both fit his bus timetable.

"Do I have to buy the pass and claim it back?" he asks.

Ruth points to the offer. The agency will supply it before the start date. She helps him work through the travel cost after the first four weeks, when he will be paying from wages. Jordan applies, attends an interview and is offered one of the places. The agency confirms his building, supervisor and contact details with the employment agreement.

The pass arrives before the weekend. On Monday, Jordan takes the bus with the route already checked and the supervisor's name saved on his phone. Two other new starters are waiting at the building. The three of them compare journeys while the supervisor gets the induction materials ready.

During the first week, Jordan learns the daily checks, where supplies are kept and how to record items that need replacing.

In the coaching session, the supervisor works through the ordering system slowly enough for him to take notes. At the end of the week, the approved time record includes the learning hour within the thirty paid hours sent to the agency.

In the third week, the supervisor is called to another building on the morning of a coaching session. The site is busy, and Jordan assumes the session will disappear into the rest of the day's work. There is a task on the ordering system he still wants to ask about, but he hesitates to interrupt somebody dealing with a problem elsewhere.

Later that morning, the deputy checks the schedule and tells Jordan the session will move to Thursday. Cover for the routine duties is already allowed for. Jordan brings his question to the rearranged session and works through the task with the deputy. The site records who provided the coaching and when, and the paid time reaches the agency with that week's approved hours.

At the programme review, the contractor brings together the learning records from the three buildings. The council can see the sessions delivered across the intake and ask about any that needed rearranging. The agency supplies the corresponding work and payment information. Ruth's organisation asks the participants whether the support was useful. Jordan mentions the Thursday session and the question he had almost left unasked.

By then, Jordan has bought the next bus pass from his wages. The journey is familiar, and his notebook contains tasks he can now carry out without someone beside him. At the end of the six weeks, Ruth helps him update his work history and records the supervisor's offer of a reference.

Jordan finds another vacancy asking for experience of stock records and ordering. He opens the application. This time, there is something specific to write in the box.

Maya's Story

A place on the list

Maya runs a regional recruitment agency supplying site operatives and project-support staff to construction businesses. She has built it through repeat orders from a small group of clients and wants to expand. Larger contractors have programmes stretching across regions and several years. A place on their preferred supplier lists, usually called PSLs, would open the door to work from the teams delivering those programmes.

She has been preparing for that step for months. Her senior recruiter is ready to manage another region, and the agency has strengthened its recruitment and finance teams. Maya wants to build the next stage of the business around a larger, lasting client relationship. She needs to convince a contractor that her agency can deliver it.

One national contractor invites applications to its PSL for two regions. Alongside questions about capacity, prices and references, Maya receives a Declaration Request through the Workforce Engagement Quality Framework, or WEQF. The contractor wants to understand what people placed by her agency would receive and how their work and pay would be managed.

Maya gathers her operations and finance colleagues. The agency employs and pays some people directly. Others are employed by one of two umbrella companies, which run their own payrolls. The agency finds the work, confirms the assignments and sends approved hours and funding to the relevant employer. A complete response will need contributions from all three businesses.

Her team assesses the agency's arrangements, from the information given before someone accepts work to the support available during an assignment. Maya also sends a Declaration

Request to each umbrella supplier, asking about the packages it provides for the people her agency places. Both return their Declarations and Package Profiles, summaries of the terms, support and record-keeping they offer. Maya checks which groups of workers each applies to.

Her operations manager lays the responses beside the agency's assessment. The same headings make it possible to follow a person's experience across the organisations: accepting an assignment, receiving pay, getting help and finding out what happened when something changed. Maya can see where her team's work connects with the services provided by each employer.

One difference catches her attention. Recruiters often remain the first person a worker calls about pay. One umbrella supplier gives each query a reference that the agency can follow. The other usually exchanges messages with whichever recruiter raised the question. Maya thinks about the additional staff she hopes to recruit and the number of projects they might soon be handling.

"Could somebody else pick this up if the recruiter was away?" she asks.

Her operations manager can find the messages, but following the history takes time.

Maya arranges calls with the payroll managers. They agree a routine her whole team can follow: a clear contact at each employer, enough information to identify the affected work and a record of the answer that another colleague can find. A worker who calls back should be able to speak to whoever is available and continue from where the conversation stopped.

Over the following weeks, the teams put the changes into practice. Maya's operations manager checks several queries with the payroll teams and asks another colleague to pick up the history. The agency and suppliers update their assessments, and Maya's recruiters begin using the agreed process across their accounts.

She then submits the agency's response alongside the umbrella suppliers' Declarations. The contractor can see who would employ each group, what those people would be offered and how the organisations would work together. At the review meeting, its procurement manager asks how they would explain a payment if a site changed someone's approved hours after sending the original return.

Maya brings the relevant umbrella payroll manager into the discussion. They walk through the steps with the reviewer, using examples from their records. The conversation also establishes what they need from the contractor's sites. Its commercial team agrees how approved hours and later changes will reach the agency, and who the recruiters should contact when something needs clarification.

The meetings, references and commercial discussions continue over several months. Then Maya receives the letter confirming that her agency has been accepted onto the PSL for both regions. She calls her senior recruiter into the office to read it. The national account they have spent months preparing for is now within reach.

The first substantial request follows a few weeks later: forty operatives and project-support staff across six sites, starting over the following month. Maya's team works through the requirements and confirms the

arrangements with its umbrella suppliers. The quotation sets out the proposed staffing, the packages that would apply and the price. The contractor accepts it and issues the first orders.

Recruitment becomes the focus of the office. Each person receives the details of the assignment, the employer who will pay them and where to go for help. The contractor's site teams know how to send hours and changes, and the umbrella employers have the information they need to pay their employees. Maya's senior recruiter takes charge of the new regional account as the first groups begin work.

At the end of the first month, all forty people have started and the contractor confirms further orders for the next phase. Maya brings the team together to review the account and welcome the coordinator joining them the following Monday. There is enough confirmed work to make that appointment and give her senior recruiter responsibility for the growing relationship.

Maya had set out to earn a place on the list. Her agency now has a national contractor account, forty people working across six sites and further work booked. The expansion she had spent months preparing is under way, with a team in place to deliver it.