

Intentional and Collaborative Engagement Design

Understanding engagement packages and their
relationship with employment status, financial risk,
responsible procurement and disputes

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Introduction

The Workforce Engagement Quality Framework (WEQF) is founded on the proposition that a crucial layer of visibility is missing from the way engagements are understood and managed: a common, status-neutral method for examining what an arrangement offers, how it operates and what records support it. This gap affects more than the relationship between one individual and one engager. It runs through discussions about employment status and legislative reform, the management of financial responsibility across labour supply chains, the delivery of social value through procurement, and the examination of workplace disputes.

When someone accepts work, they enter an arrangement that will shape how they earn, organise their time, exercise choices and obtain support. The headline rate and description of the role may be prominent, but much of the arrangement's practical value lies in the terms surrounding them: how reliably work will be offered, what happens when plans change, which rights and benefits apply, who is responsible for providing them and how a problem will be resolved. Those terms matter to the individual making the decision. They also matter to the organisations purchasing the work, administering payments, carrying financial responsibilities or expecting the engagement to contribute to a wider objective.

Information about an engagement is often distributed across contracts, policies, recruitment material and onboarding information. Piecing those sources together can be difficult and can delay a clear understanding of the arrangement. Material terms and the arrangements for delivering them should be available before someone accepts a role, rather than emerging through policies, handbooks or onboarding information after work has begun. A standardised, universal method of making this substance visible would allow the parties to establish what is offered, which conditions apply

and how the arrangement is meant to operate. When so much of people's lives depends on the quality of their work, that quality should be made visible.

WEQF is being developed as an open standard to provide that missing layer. Its purpose is to make the substance and quality of engagements visible, measurable and comparable, giving individuals, engagers and wider supply chains a shared language and method for assessing an arrangement and agreeing what it should provide.¹ This paper examines why that visibility matters to the topics above, then argues that the current landscape requires parties to use it deliberately: designing engagements around the needs they must meet and collaborating where knowledge, resources or responsibilities are shared. Supply chains already coordinate other contractual matters across organisational boundaries; engagement terms and their delivery need the same coordinated attention. A common understanding of the engagement becomes the foundation for both the design and its delivery.

Discussions about employment status and reform raise questions about how work should be recognised, which rights attach to it and how those rights are delivered. Making the engagement package explicit connects those questions to the terms offered, the allocation of responsibility and the arrangements for putting commitments into effect. The paper is offered to researchers, buyers, suppliers, worker representatives, professional advisers and regulatory bodies concerned with how work is organised. Its purpose is to make the engagement itself a shared subject of assessment, agreement and purposeful design, connecting decisions about public policy, commercial responsibility and individual experience through a more transparent account of the work being offered.

WEQF's Six Point Blueprint

WEQF proposes a practical approach to building a marketplace in which engagement quality is visible, valued and purposefully designed. Its Six Point Blueprint encourages individuals and organisations to consider more deliberately what working arrangements provide, how they meet people's needs and how their commitments are delivered. These practices support a cultural shift towards a more supportive and mutually beneficial environment, connecting national policy and commercial objectives with workforce sustainability and wellbeing. This paper explains the reasoning behind the recommendations and how WEQF incorporates them into its framework and approach to engagement design.

1

Design engagement packages around wider needs and outcomes

to improve their suitability for individuals, projects and organisational goals.

2

Collaborate for consistent delivery across supply chains

to ensure agreed commitments reach individuals through coordinated responsibilities, resources and processes.

3

Make engagement quality visible alongside pay

to clarify the full offer made in exchange for an individual's time and work.

4

Provide material engagement information before acceptance

to help individuals choose suitable work and enter arrangements with clear expectations.

5

Commit to a minimum standard of processing and recordkeeping

to strengthen assurance, manage financial risk and help resolve errors and disputes.

6

Use a common, status-neutral language

to make engagement packages easier for individuals and organisations to understand, communicate and compare.

1. Understanding the engagement package

The arrangement surrounding a person's work can be understood as a package. Alongside pay, it brings together the terms, benefits, protections, practical choices and support that the person can expect, together with the conditions under which each becomes available.

Throughout this paper, **engagement package** means that combination as it applies to a particular engagement or to a group of people who genuinely share the same arrangements.

Thinking in terms of a package draws attention to the whole offer and to the relationships between its components, including details that can be difficult to see when spread across an advertisement, a contract, a handbook and the explanations given during recruitment.

WEQF approaches the engagement package through three connected parts:

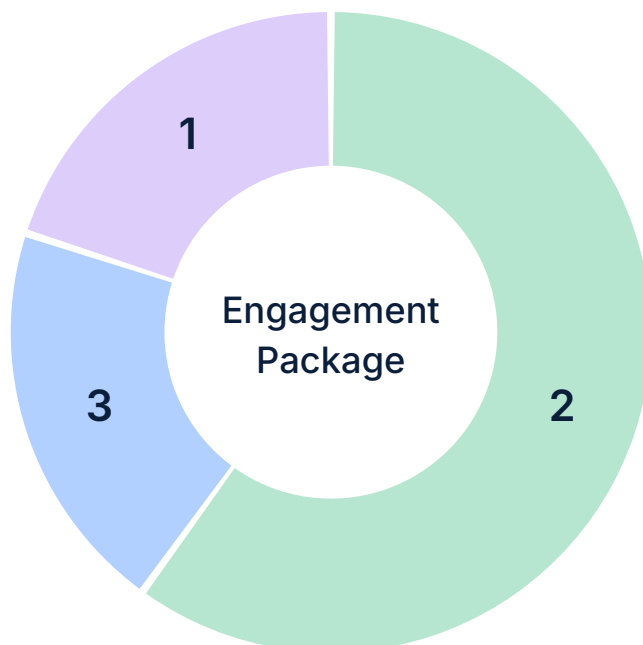
Part 1: Obligations

Part 2: Optional benefits and practical affordances

Part 3: Recordkeeping

The obligations establish the requirements that the arrangement must fulfil. The optional benefits and practical affordances describe the support and choices offered to the individual, whose extent and availability can vary considerably.

Recordkeeping connects those commitments with the data needed to administer the arrangement and examine its delivery.



● **Part 1: Obligations**

Confirm the common baseline considerations before Package design proceeds.

● **Part 2: Variable benefits**

Measure the extent, availability and conditions of the benefits and affordances offered.

● **Part 3: Recordkeeping**

Grade the quality of arrangements for engagement information, processing and records.

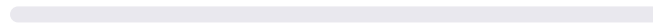
Part 1: Obligations

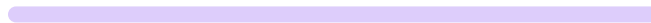
Employment status helps determine which rights and responsibilities attach to the relationship. Requirements concerning matters such as the right to work, health and safety, equality and the handling of personal information also need to be addressed according to their applicability. Some concern whether and on what basis the work can take place; others govern the terms or conduct of the continuing arrangement. Their content depends on the relationship and circumstances, so the legal floor is not identical across every engagement.²

These obligations are preconditions for an engagement. Every engagement must establish the basis on which the work can proceed, identify the parties responsible and put the required arrangements in place before work begins. Employment status does not remove this

common requirement. The baseline must be established and satisfied, then maintained throughout the engagement. It is the foundation on which the rest of the package is built.²

Each precondition is either satisfied or it is not. There is no spectrum of increasingly generous compliance: meeting an obligation establishes the required position. These matters do not describe the variable substance of the offer or demonstrate a higher level of engagement quality. That quality is found in the depth, degree and availability of the benefits, protections, practical choices and support built on the baseline. Making this distinction separates the conditions for an engagement to proceed from the substance that determines how well it supports the individual.


Precondition not met


Precondition met

Part 2: Variable benefits

The optional, variable benefits and practical affordances provided within that framework can exist in many forms and at substantially different levels. Support may be limited or extensive, available immediately or after a qualifying period, guaranteed when stated criteria are met or subject to a further decision. It may apply to everyone covered by the package or only to people in particular circumstances. It may continue for a short period, recur whenever a need arises or remain available throughout the engagement. "Optional" describes the scope to choose what additional support is offered when designing the package; where that support becomes a binding commitment, its delivery forms part of the agreed arrangement.

Each benefit can be understood as existing on a spectrum, with lower, intermediate and higher positions reflecting its extent, availability and

conditions. Additional learning support might occupy a lower position where only self-study materials are available, an intermediate position where a capped training allowance is offered subject to approval, and a higher position where a defined development programme is fully funded and supported by guaranteed paid learning time. Additional cancellation protection might occupy a lower position where a small payment remains discretionary, an intermediate position where a defined share of lost earnings is payable subject to a cap, and a higher position where the agreed earnings for confirmed work are protected by a guaranteed payment. The same benefit name can therefore describe substantially different levels of support. Its position depends on what is actually offered, how much the individual can rely on and which conditions govern access.


No benefit


Minimum legal only


Enhanced
(limited)


Enhanced
(conditional)


Enhanced
(unrestricted)

Part 2 contains the main substance WEQF seeks to make visible. The depth, degree and availability of these benefits determine much of the support an individual can draw from an engagement and how well it will suit their circumstances. Those details may be distributed across documents or become clear only when someone attempts to use the benefit. Making them explicit reveals the substance behind the title and provides a basis for understanding and comparing what different packages offer.

What a complete description contains

DIMENSION	PRACTICAL QUESTION
Quantity	How much is available?
Eligibility	Who can access it?
Availability	When is it available?
Conditions	What must happen before it can be used?
Certainty	What is guaranteed or discretionary?
Responsibility	Who must provide it?

A complete description makes those variables explicit. It identifies who can access the benefit, how much support it provides, when and for how long it is available, which conditions govern its use and which decisions remain discretionary. It also identifies the party responsible for providing it. These details establish the substance of the commitment for both the individual and the engager. Bringing them into a common account makes the difference between limited, conditional and extensive support open to examination before the benefit is needed.

Pay and the wider substance of the package need to be understood together. Pay compensates the individual for the time, effort and capability they invest in the work; the surrounding benefits and practical affordances shape the quality of the arrangement through which that investment is made. A high rate can accompany unpredictable work, restricted

choices and little support when something goes wrong. A lower-paid opportunity can offer dependable hours, useful flexibility and substantial help with development. The amount paid and the quality of the surrounding arrangement therefore answer connected questions about the value of an opportunity, and each needs to be visible when that opportunity is assessed.³

Engagement packages can range from arrangements confined to their legal floor to those offering extensive support, or concentrating additional resources on particular needs. Their quality depends on the combination of benefits and choices, the strength of each commitment and the conditions attached to it. Suitability depends on how that combination meets the circumstances of the people expected to use it. Both require an understanding of the variable substance beneath the headline description.

The range of relevant features is considerably wider than a short list of employee benefits might suggest. A package can affect how someone enters an arrangement, earns and protects income, makes decisions, develops capability, raises concerns and obtains a remedy. Some features provide a direct financial benefit; others make work accessible, preserve independence or enable an existing entitlement to be used. The following eleven aspects give a practical view of that breadth. Across them, the package may express applicable obligations, additional commitments and choices about how support is made available.

ASPECT	WHAT IT COVERS
Engagement identity and clarity	Who the person is engaging with, what work is covered, when the arrangement applies and which party holds each responsibility.
Work and income security	How much work can be relied on, how changes or cancellations are handled and what support applies when work ends or is interrupted.
Pay treatment and financial exposure	When and how payment is made, how work-related time and expenses are treated, and which deductions, costs or financial risks the individual carries.
Time, rest and time away	How working time, breaks, leave and other absences are arranged, including the support available when the person needs time away.
Choice, autonomy and flexibility	The decisions the individual can make about accepting work, availability, working patterns and the way the work is carried out.
Benefits and longer-term protection	Additional financial or practical support, including arrangements that help protect the individual beyond their immediate earnings.
Safety, dignity, equality and accessibility	How safe and fair participation is supported, how individual access needs are addressed and how people are protected from harmful treatment.
Development and progression	The learning and progression opportunities available, who funds them and what time or practical support enables participation.
Voice, representation and participation	How the individual can influence decisions, be represented and take part in discussions affecting the engagement.
Information and comprehensibility	What the person is told, when they receive it and whether the terms, payment information and subsequent changes are understandable and accessible.
Challenge, correction and remedy	How a concern is raised, who can investigate or correct a problem and what happens when the arrangement has not been honoured.

A poorly designed package fails to consider or document all of these aspects, leaving gaps in the support offered or uncertainty about what has been promised. A purposefully designed engagement considers each aspect and documents the resulting benefits and arrangements through a complete description of their quantity, eligibility, availability, conditions, certainty and responsibility.

Part 3: Recordkeeping

Recordkeeping concerns the data that describe the agreed package and the data generated as the engagement is administered. These include the applicable terms, eligibility conditions, dates, hours, amounts, requests, authorisations, calculations and decisions. Taken together, the organised data documenting the arrangement and its operation form what this paper calls the **engagement record**. That record connects the original commitments with subsequent events, allowing the parties to establish which terms applied, how decisions were made and what was actually delivered.

The arrangements for preparing, processing and maintaining these data can also vary. Packages with similar stated benefits may differ in how requests are recorded, payments are calculated, decisions are authorised and supporting data are made available. A dependable process connects each relevant data point with the person, work, period and requirement to which it relates. It identifies where the data came from, who supplied or authorised them and how they were used. These connections help the parties understand how a stated commitment became a particular decision, payment or other outcome.

A useful engagement record gives the data continuity. The governing terms are recorded before they are needed, events are recorded at an appropriate time, and earlier data remain distinguishable from later changes or corrections.

Some data may be held by the engager, some by a contractor or payroll provider, and some by the individual. Their value depends on whether the relevant data can be connected, retrieved and understood when needed, as well as whether they were recorded in the first place. Storage, retention and protection against loss therefore form part of the initial consideration of the package.

A worker seeking an explanation, a buyer checking a commitment and an adviser

investigating a dispute may need different data from the same engagement record. Their enquiries may concern the terms that applied, the hours recorded, the conditions attached to a benefit, the calculation used or the authority behind a decision. Maintaining the relationships between those data points makes it possible to follow the arrangement from the original commitment through its administration and subsequent review.

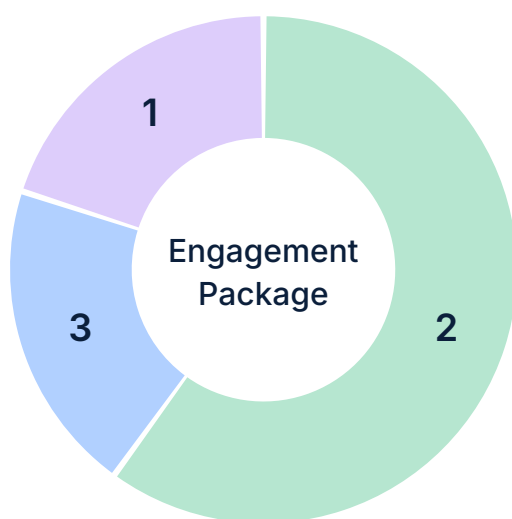
The three parts consequently address connected questions: which obligations apply, what support the individual can obtain, and what data support the administration and examination of those commitments. Substantial benefits supported by fragmented data can leave people uncertain about what they can obtain, while careful recordkeeping of a minimal package makes its limitations easier to see. The substance of the offer and the quality of its supporting record arrangements both matter.

WEQF's starting proposition is that these features can be made explicit and assessed against common criteria. In particular, the depth, degree, availability and conditions of benefits provide identifiable dimensions through which the variable substance of packages can be measured and compared. The supporting record data allow the relevant commitments, decisions and events to be traced. Considering these features alongside pay gives individuals and organisations a practical basis for understanding an engagement, judging its suitability and identifying where it could be improved.

What makes an engagement record dependable

ATTRIBUTE	PRACTICAL QUESTION
Completeness and access	Is the relevant information available when needed?
People and work	Is it linked to the correct people and work?
Purpose	Which project or organisational requirement does it support?
Responsibility	Who supplied, authorised and maintains the information?
Preparation	Are the governing terms recorded before work begins?
Processing	How are instructions, calculations and checks controlled?
Timeliness	When are events and decisions recorded?
Change history	Can earlier information and later corrections be traced?
Retention and protection	How are records kept and protected against loss?

What visibility makes possible



Part 1: Obligations

Without visibility: Hidden gaps leave individuals exposed and responsibilities unresolved.

With visibility: Parties can challenge gaps and settle responsibility before work begins.

Part 2: Variable benefits

Without visibility: People risk choosing work that leaves them unsupported when circumstances change.

With visibility: Individuals can judge whether work suits their needs, and parties can target improvements where support falls short.

Part 3: Recordkeeping

Without visibility: Unclear commitments and weak records leave errors unresolved and disputes harder to settle.

With visibility: Parties can identify weak arrangements, strengthen the record and resolve disagreements on a shared account.

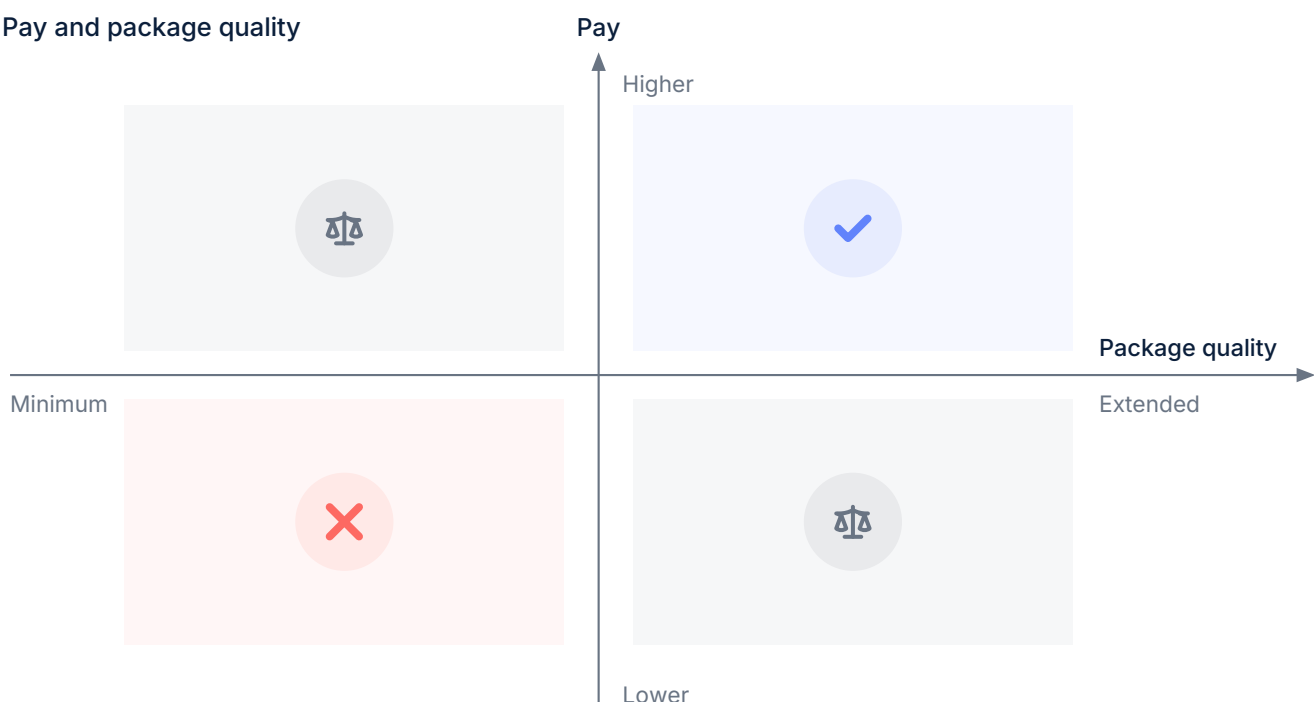
2. How the market shapes engagement packages

Engagement packages take shape within commercial choices about how to obtain the people and capability an organisation needs. Where sought-after skills are scarce and capable applicants have alternatives, an organisation has a reason to compete through pay, security, flexibility and development. Where many people are competing for available work, or a supplier is competing heavily on price, the organisation may face less pressure to improve the individual's offer and stronger pressure to minimise its own costs. The package that emerges reflects what the organisation is trying to achieve, whose preferences carry weight and which features the market rewards.

Legal minimums establish the obligations that arrangements must fulfil. When those obligations become the full extent of the offer (so called minimum-floor packages) the package provides no additional buffer beyond that floor when circumstances change or become difficult. Treating the minimum as the target makes cost containment the organising principle of the arrangement and leaves the individual to carry the consequences that the floor does not cover. Where that culture is expressed through repeated standard terms and purchasing decisions, that limiting approach can become a systemic feature of how work is bought and supplied.

The combination of low pay and a package confined to the minimum is particularly damaging. The person receives little financial room to absorb uncertainty and little additional support from the arrangement itself. A lost shift, an interruption to earnings or an unexpected expense can then have consequences out of proportion to the event. A commercial model focused on reducing labour cost can press down on both pay and the benefits surrounding it, leaving the individual with a low-paid, low-quality arrangement. This is the point at which the connection between good work and fair pay becomes especially clear: the return for a person's time needs to be considered alongside the conditions and risks attached to earning it.

Pay and package quality



Different commercial objectives produce different priorities within that combination. An organisation's investment in support, security or development reflects the people it needs to attract, the outcomes it values and the costs it is prepared to meet. A model built principally around the lowest immediate price creates pressure to remove benefits that add cost without helping to win the work. The same pressure can reach administration, where accurate calculations, maintained records and accessible explanations require resources that may be difficult to recover through the price.

When that pressure reaches the funding or delivery of required rights, the consequences extend to underpayment, inadequate records and failures of accountability. Rebecca Seeley Harris's *PAYE Paid* examines how procurement and cost incentives can reward arrangements whose apparent savings depend on obscuring or removing rights-linked costs.⁴ Government analysis of the umbrella-company market also identifies non-compliance that deprives people of rights and allows non-compliant operators to undercut businesses meeting their obligations.⁵ These concerns make the contents and operation of the engagement commercially significant. Buyers need enough visibility to establish what a price is funding, how the individual's package will be delivered and whether the apparent saving transfers cost or risk elsewhere.

Even where support is offered, uncertainty about its conditions can leave the individual unable to establish what they can rely on. The accompanying illustrative account, Alex's Story inside the *Supplementary Stories* document gives a fuller account of how uncertainty about a benefit's conditions affects the person relying on it. Making this wider substance of packages visible alongside the associated pay rate allows those conditions to be examined and enables the individual to assess the whole opportunity and establish what has been promised in exchange for their work.

The consequences of package design extend well beyond the organisation that sets the terms. The individual's ability to participate and remain in work, the supplier's ability to recruit and retain people, and the buyer's ability to sustain delivery are all affected by the same engagement arrangements. Those terms also shape the contribution the work can make to wider social and skills objectives. Several parties therefore have an interest in their substance, even when they approach the engagement with different responsibilities and describe its value in different ways.

This understanding of quality gives substance to the current public policy direction towards good work, skills and fair pay. Those ambitions reach an individual through decisions about the work they can rely on, the support they can access, the time available for learning and the way their earnings are treated. Public procurement policy increasingly asks suppliers to demonstrate better working conditions, support progression and address barriers to participation.⁶ Transparency makes those expectations assessable: the package needs to show what has been committed, whom it covers and how it will operate. The completeness and accuracy of that account connect the ambition for better work with an arrangement capable of delivering it.

Yet the immediate engaging party usually holds the practical responsibility for selecting and issuing the individual's terms. Buyers establish objectives and commercial conditions; contractors organise delivery; the engager turns the proposed arrangement into commitments to the people doing the work. That point of agreement is especially significant because choices about support, responsibility and risk become the terms on which the engagement will operate. Parties with an interest in the resulting outcomes have a reason to contribute their knowledge before those commitments are settled, while the organisations responsible for engagement develop the detailed arrangements needed to deliver them.

The buyer's own practices are part of that substance. Short lead times, late payment and changes in demand can affect what suppliers can reliably offer to individuals further down the chain. Government guidance on modern-slavery risk expressly draws attention to the effects of purchasing practices, including pressure on price and demands for flexibility.⁷ Applied to engagement packages, the lesson is that the buyer's objectives need to be supported by suitable planning, funding and delivery conditions. Bringing these into the commercial discussion gives the engager a firmer basis for developing commitments it can price and fulfil.

An attractive commitment can remain ineffective where another part of the arrangement prevents access or leaves responsibility unresolved. *Helen's Story* explores this gap between a commitment valued by a buyer and the individual terms through which it would have to be delivered. The benefit depends on decisions made by several parties, whose responsibilities and operating arrangements need to support the same intended outcome.

Information also needs to reach that discussion from the people who understand the intended participants. Individuals, their representatives, education providers and employment-support organisations can explain the constraints an opportunity must accommodate and the support that would make it usable. Their contribution helps suppliers develop suitable terms and helps buyers understand the resources and conditions required. The resulting commitments can then be carried through the relevant agreements, working instructions and records, connecting the original objective with the arrangement received by the individual.

These influences create a need for purposeful decisions about engagement quality and for participation by the parties whose knowledge, resources and responsibilities affect it. WEQF's common basis for describing the package allows their different concerns to be brought into the same discussion and for deliberate

intention and collaboration to orient around a package's design. Without it, an individual may be considering an advertised benefit, an engager administering contractual terms and a buyer assessing a supplier's policy commitment without a clear account of how those descriptions connect. WEQF's concern is that opportunities to examine and improve the arrangement can be missed when each party sees only the part immediately relevant to its own role.

Once this is recognised, the engagement package becomes a useful point of reference for several wider concerns. It shows how a legal relationship is expressed in a person's terms, how financial responsibilities depend on the processing of those terms, how a procurement objective reaches the intended beneficiary and how the parties can establish what happened when an arrangement is challenged. The following sections examine those connections in turn, using the same question throughout: what difference does the completeness, accuracy and delivery of the package make to the issue being considered?

3. Engagement packages and employment status

Employment status is a functional and essential foundation of the UK labour market. It establishes the legal floor of a working relationship, determining which rights an individual can enforce and which baseline duties an engager must fulfil.²

As a statutory framework, it operates with clear intent. Employees receive the widest statutory protections in exchange for strict obligations concerning personal service and control. Limb (b) Workers receive a core baseline of rights, including paid annual leave and minimum wage, reflecting a dependent relationship where they personally perform services for an organisation but fall short of full employee integration. Genuinely Self-Employed individuals operate on their own account, taking on commercial risk in exchange for operating outside these statutory employment protections.^{8,9,10}

However, a fundamental disconnect occurs when the market attempts to use this legal classification system to understand, govern, or guarantee the actual quality and substance of an engagement.

Employment status was designed to establish legal liability; a status label alone does not expose the operational substance of an engagement. A statutory category establishes what baseline rights apply, but it cannot capture how those rights are funded, what conditions are placed upon them, or which entity in a multi-party supply chain is administratively responsible for delivering them. Expecting a legal label to serve as a comprehensive definition of a worker's experience asks the status framework to perform a function it simply does not have the capacity to fulfil.

Because employment status cannot describe the operational reality of the work, commercial labels have filled the void. Terms like "umbrella worker", "contractor", or "freelancer" are layered over the legal statuses. These commercial labels are simply shorthands for popular contractual arrangements.

Employment status

LEGAL CLASSIFICATION

The legal category of the working relationship.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The protections the individual can invoke and the obligations the engager must fulfil.

Engagement package

TERMS AND SUPPORT

Who is responsible and the particular benefits, protections and practical choices offered within the arrangement

CONDITIONS AND ADMINISTRATION

Who can access them, on what terms, and how the arrangement is administered and delivered.

Like employment status, they serve a specific, distinct purpose: categorising a commercial relationship rather than attempting to capture the detailed substance of the package. As a result, they do not provide an individual with clarity over the specific terms governing their work, nor do they clearly identify the party administratively and financially responsible for delivering those commitments, or expose the actual substantive quality of the engagement.^{2,11}

Two engagements sharing the exact same statutory status and commercial shorthand can provide materially different benefits and affordances to the individuals undertaking them. The CIPD's *Good Work Index 2026* reinforces this point. It finds much stronger associations between job satisfaction and management quality, leadership and meaningful work than with its broad distinction between permanent and atypical contracts. The data also links job dissatisfaction, a greater likelihood of quitting and negative mental health impacts to underlying realities such as excessive workloads, poor management and workplace conflict.³ One individual in a specific contractual category might experience transparent communication, reliable hours, and a highly supportive work environment, while another individual under the exact same legal status and commercial label suffers from extreme income insecurity, obscured deductions, and exploitative conditions. These categories alone simply do not provide enough visibility to understand what is actually being offered or occurring within the engagement.

This over-reliance on status labels and contractual shorthands to define work creates a structural fog. When the practical parameters of work are obscured beneath complex supply chains, organisational productivity and individual trust deteriorate. Furthermore, because the market lacks a way to evaluate the substance of an engagement, actors are able to actively blur or exploit the boundaries of the legal status. The Fabian Society's August 2026 *Status Critical* report emphasises that recent increases to baseline rights and National Insurance have strengthened the financial incentive to bypass employment relationships entirely. The report warns of widespread problems of "bogus self-employment" and "bogus limb (b)" categorisations, driven by engagers who use the boundaries between employment statuses to artificially shed costs and responsibilities.¹²

This exploitation of the gap between legal status and operational reality is well described within Rebecca Seeley Harris's *PAYE Paid* policy paper, which comprehensively examines the crisis of "taxation without rights".

PAYE Paid highlights that employment-style payroll deductions are frequently imposed on individuals while their corresponding legal protections are actively denied, diluted, or obscured. Statutory tax deeming, such as IR35 or section 44 of ITEPA, can force a designated party in a supply chain to operate PAYE, without simultaneously establishing employment-rights liabilities against that same party.^{4,13}

The paper also outlines the use of "Elective Deduction Models", which deliberately utilise employment payroll machinery while relying on a "contract for services" to legally distance the engager from baseline protections. Even for people who are legally entitled to Worker rights, the problem persists in how those rights are administered and who is held accountable for them. In complex, multi-party supply chains, the explicit identification of the party responsible for rights provision can be deeply difficult to ascertain. When core rights exist behind a veil of administrative opacity, or when it is impossible to attribute responsibility to a specific, named entity, those rights become practically inaccessible to the individual. As a result, individuals frequently suffer definite, non-negotiable tax deductions without any corresponding clarity over, or access to, the baseline protections they are legally owed.⁴

To address this compounding market failure, *PAYE Paid* proposes robust regulatory interventions, including a rebuttable presumption of Worker-level protection triggered by PAYE, and a binding status and rights statement issued before work begins.⁴

For the market to adapt to these proposed reforms and to answer the broader calls for clarity from bodies like the CIPD and the Fabian Society, the industry must stop relying on employment status to do the job of engagement design. The market requires a standardised method to separate the legal classification of a worker from the operational reality of their package.

Making these arrangements transparent requires a systemic approach that leaves employment status to do its legal job, while introducing a new mechanism to explicitly assess the substance of the work. The market needs a way to evaluate exactly which rights and benefits are provided, who is eligible, what the conditions of access are, and exactly which entity administers them.

WEQF's standardised engagement quality assessment directly supports the disclosure envisaged by *PAYE Paid's* proposed pre-work binding declaration. By requiring a structured, upfront account of the engagement's provisions and responsibilities, WEQF makes gaps between payroll treatment and rights provision visible for scrutiny before work begins.

An engager is forced to name the responsible party and state the substance of the offer, making any missing, limited, or conditional support immediately visible and giving all parties a defined basis for scrutiny.^{1,4}

At the same time, by establishing a standardised framework to assess engagement quality, the reality of the work becomes easily understood and directly comparable across the market. Individuals gain clarity on exactly what they are accepting, organisations gain the ability to govern and audit their multi-party supply chains, and regulators receive consistent information to support scrutiny of engagement quality, accountability and market health. Ultimately, this allows employment status to function exactly as intended, as a legal foundation, while introducing a transparent, accountable standard for the substance of the work itself.

The following section details how financial risk within supply chains is also impacted by the quality of the engagement package and the manner in which it is processed.

4. Engagement packages and multi-party financial risk

Financial risk takes shape in the way engagements are processed: how working time is captured, instructions are authorised, payments are calculated and the resulting obligations are accounted for. Each stage depends on the quality of the information received and the record left behind. A buyer may be several steps removed from the person whose work is being paid for, yet still have a financial interest in whether the right information reached the right processor and whether the resulting payment can be explained. Errors, omissions and gaps in that record can therefore have financial significance beyond the organisation administering the engagement.

The modern labour supply chain operates within an increasingly connected landscape of financial responsibilities. The umbrella-company PAYE rules introduced in April 2026, the Construction Industry Scheme fraud measures introduced at the same time and the established off-payroll recovery rules bring the conduct of other parties directly into the assessment of an organisation's exposure.^{14,15,16} These mechanisms connect the financial position of buyers, agencies and contractors with engagements administered elsewhere in the chain, making the quality of that administration a concern shared across organisations.

The **engagement record** introduced earlier is the recorded data connecting the engagement's terms with its processing and operation. It brings together the relevant work events, instructions, approvals, calculations, payments, reporting and corrections, preserving who supplied or authorised the information and when it applied. Through this record, a payment can be connected to the activity behind it and the responsibilities arising from it. The record is therefore central to establishing the facts on which financial exposure is assessed.¹

The immediate engager-the organisation holding the contractual relationship with the individual-is the point at which responsibility for administering the engagement and custody of

its record need to be brought together. Just as its contract solidifies the benefits and choices available to the individual, its processing and recordkeeping arrangements establish how that engagement will be operated and accounted for. Its decisions about data collection, processing providers, approvals and retention shape the risk position of the parties relying on the engagement. The immediate engager is consequently the focal point for the quality of that processing and the maintenance of a complete, accessible account.

Engagement quality therefore includes the reliability of the administration behind the agreed terms. Complete, accurate and retrievable records support a high-quality engagement by making its operation understandable, its payments traceable and its errors easier to identify and correct. Inaccurate, incomplete or fragmented records reduce that quality, leaving uncertainty about what occurred and how a result was produced. The same contractual terms can consequently be administered to substantially different standards. That difference matters both to the individual seeking what was agreed and to the organisations carrying financial responsibilities connected with the work.

Explaining a payment requires a connection between the terms applying during the relevant period, the work and expenses recorded, the instructions sent for processing and the calculation that produced the result. Changes and corrections need to retain their dates, authority and effect. When these elements are scattered across organisations or recorded against inconsistent identifiers, establishing the facts becomes a task of reconstruction. A complete and retrievable engagement record preserves their relationship as the engagement proceeds. *Priya's Story* follows the work required across an umbrella employer, a recruitment agency and a contractor to reconstruct an hours correction when that continuity is missing.

Minimum-wage compliance provides a direct example of how engagement terms and processing meet. A rate at the legal minimum leaves no margin for omitted working time or charges that reduce pay for minimum-wage purposes. Required spending on uniforms or equipment, the treatment of expenses and the hours entered into payroll all need to be captured and connected to the calculation for the relevant period. An apparently compliant rate can therefore produce an underpayment when the operational facts are missing or handled incorrectly. Designing the engagement includes establishing how those facts will reach the calculation and how the result will be checked and retained.¹⁷

The financial consequences are visible in the first minimum-wage naming round since the Fair Work Agency was established. On 3 September 2026, the government named 658 employers, reporting around £4 million repaid to over 27,000 workers and £7 million in penalties. Its accompanying message called on employers to review payroll, examine their processes and correct mistakes.¹⁸ A dependable processing record gives that review its practical foundation: the organisation needs to establish which people and periods were affected, trace the information used and preserve the corrections made. The same information also matters to parties seeking assurance about labour supplied to them.

A coherent processing record gives financial assessment a concrete basis. It allows relevant payments and obligations to be identified, figures to be reconciled, shortfalls to be quantified and affected engagements to be traced. It also exposes missing information and weak controls, giving the parties a clearer basis for deciding where improvements are needed. Assessing how reliably the immediate engager maintains that account connects engagement quality with the practical work of understanding and managing financial exposure.

This creates a direct need for collaboration between the immediate engager and the parties whose financial responsibilities depend on its activity. They need a shared understanding of what the engagement package commits to and how reliably its processing and records support that position.

658

Employers named in the minimum-wage round of 3 September 2026.

£4 million

Around this amount repaid to over 27,000 workers.

£7 million

Penalties reported in the same naming round.

HMRC's labour-supply-chain guidance reinforces this through continuing assurance, visibility beyond immediate suppliers, contractual information requirements and reporting through the chain.^{19,20} Collaboration makes those requirements relevant to the point where the engagement is administered, enabling the parties to assess the arrangements together and agree improvements.

Right-to-work requirements provide a further example of why this coordination matters. For relevant contractual arrangements entered into on or after 1 October 2026, civil-penalty liability for illegal working can extend beyond the direct employer to other parties in the contractual chain. The prescribed safeguards concern contractual terms, substitution controls and identity verification, supported by evidence that these arrangements operate in practice. This creates a practical need to connect the individual performing the work with the correct employer, contractual arrangements and checking responsibilities, and to retain the information needed to examine how those safeguards have been applied.

The quality of that record therefore matters both to the organisation administering the engagement and to other parties whose exposure depends on those arrangements.²¹

This aspect of engagement quality is addressed by the **Evidence** section of the WEQF questionnaire. Its questions ask the engager to describe how complete and accessible the engagement record is, how its contents are linked to the correct people, work and terms, and how processing, changes and retention are managed. An overall Evidence grade summarises that assessment in the **Package Profile**, with the questionnaire responses providing the detail needed to examine the declared arrangements.

This gives supply-chain parties a common basis for reviewing processing quality, requesting relevant supporting records and agreeing improvements where financial exposure depends on another party's administration.

5. Engagement packages, social value and responsible procurement

Engagement packages connect social value and responsible procurement with the arrangements people actually experience at work. A buyer may wish to widen participation, improve access to skills or support people facing particular barriers to employment. Those ambitions influence supplier proposals and purchasing decisions, but their practical effect depends on the terms through which the work is offered. The engagement package gives these objectives their practical form: access to paid learning, a predictable schedule, useful support during entry or a clearer route to progression must take shape in arrangements that the individual can understand and use.

That connection now carries substantial commercial weight. Under PPN 026, social value receives a minimum weighting of 10% for covered contracts from £1 million to below £5 million, and 20% for those worth £5 million or more, for procurements beginning on or after **1 January 2027**.

Its priorities include good jobs, skills, fair pay and working conditions, with supplier commitments measured through contractual arrangements.⁶ Buyers and suppliers therefore have a direct interest in engagement quality and in a transparent account of how the promised arrangements will support the people the procurement is intended to benefit.

Alongside these specific social-value requirements, the **Most Advantageous Tender (MAT)** approach under the Procurement Act 2023 allows buyers to consider relevant quality and wider benefits as well as price. Where working arrangements affect a contract's objectives, buyers can assess how a proposed engagement package supports reliable delivery, workforce stability and the intended social outcomes.

WEQF can support that assessment by making the benefits, conditions and responsibilities behind the proposal visible and comparable, connecting the commercial offer with the arrangements people will experience when delivering the work.²²

PPN 026 / Procurements beginning on or after 1 January 2027

10%

Minimum social-value weighting for covered contracts from £1 million to below £5 million.

20%

Minimum social-value weighting for covered contracts worth £5 million or more.

The aspects introduced in section 1 provide a practical basis for examining how an engagement package supports procurement objectives.

Safety, dignity, equality and accessibility can make work accessible to people facing physical barriers, support changing health needs and protect safe, respectful participation.

Choice, autonomy and flexibility determines how readily work can fit with caring, study and other responsibilities.

Time, rest and time away helps people sustain that participation by providing room for recovery and life beyond work. These features influence whether an opportunity is usable and whether a person can remain in it.

Work and income security helps people plan household finances and commit to regular costs.

Pay treatment and financial exposure shapes whether earnings arrive predictably and which work-related costs or deductions the person must absorb.

Benefits and longer-term protection can extend support beyond the immediate pay period, strengthening a person's ability to remain secure through disruption and plan ahead. Together, these subjects bring attention to the financial stability an engagement can support.

Development and progression can turn a period of work into an opportunity to gain skills and improve future choices.

Voice, representation and participation gives people a means to influence arrangements that affect them, bringing their knowledge of barriers and unmet needs into decisions about the work. Procurement can therefore support both greater capability and a meaningful say in how the engagement operates.

Engagement identity and clarity helps people know what they are agreeing to and who is responsible for fulfilling it.

Information and comprehensibility makes the terms and access conditions usable by the people who need them.

Challenge, correction and remedy gives them a route to question a refusal or seek correction when support is withheld or fails to arrive. These features help turn a public commitment into something the intended beneficiary can understand, use and defend.

Defining that contribution begins before the buying requirement or tender is written. Buyers and the contractors shaping delivery need to connect national policy objectives with the needs of the communities in which the work will take place. Early discussion with local people, their representatives, education providers and employment-support organisations helps establish which barriers an opportunity must address, while engagement with the supply chain helps establish how it could be delivered. Procurement guidance already connects national priorities, local needs and early stakeholder and market engagement with the development of specifications.²³ Applying that approach to engagement packages gives those conversations a concrete purpose: identifying the benefits, support and working arrangements needed to produce the intended result.

Related approaches in Scotland and Wales reinforce this connection. Scotland's Fair Work First brings workforce practices such as voice, development and flexibility into relevant procurement decisions, while the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act provides for social public works and workforce clauses and their implementation through subcontracting.^{24,25} Across these approaches, the practical task is to connect a purchasing objective with arrangements that remain effective where the work is actually performed.

The decisive point is where these intentions are translated into the terms agreed with the individual.

The engagement package and its contractual commitments establish what support is offered, who can access it and under which conditions. The immediate engager usually settles and administers those terms, while the buyer's objectives may sit several contracts further up the chain. A promise made during tendering can lose its substance through subcontracting unless the intended support reaches the terms offered to the people it was designed to benefit. In *Helen's Story*, a procurement commitment to development fails to become an accessible offer within the short assignments used to deliver the programme.

The conditions attached to a benefit help determine whether it can fulfil the purpose for which it was commissioned. Eligibility, timing, capacity and the process for obtaining support must fit the needs identified and the duration of the opportunity. Those features need to be understood across the supplier's proposal, the delivery plan and the individual's engagement terms. Visibility at that level allows the parties to assess whether the proposed arrangement addresses the intended barrier and whether the commitment will remain usable throughout the relevant period.

Carrying that substance through a supply chain requires agreement about the support promised, its cost and the responsibilities for delivery. Suppliers need to develop the detailed package while budgets, staffing and operating plans can still accommodate it. Buyers and contractors need to establish how their own arrangements will support the proposal. Collaboration connects the purchasing objective with the point where engagement terms are formed, allowing the parties to agree commitments that can be priced, communicated and operated consistently. Community partners can then examine whether the proposed terms address the needs they helped identify.

The engagement record provides a means of following those choices into delivery. It connects the agreed support with the people covered,

records requests and decisions, and shows how the arrangement operated over the relevant period. A useful account distinguishes what was promised, what became available, who could access it and what was taken up and delivered. Agreed measures of progression or sustained participation allow the wider results to be examined alongside that account. The procurement commitment, the individual's terms and the reported activity can then be considered together.

A shared method of describing engagement packages, supported by consistent measures and reporting definitions, makes that connection usable across organisational boundaries. The parties can agree what will be counted, which people and period the figures cover, and which records will support the report. Where results fall short, they can examine the design of the offer, its accessibility and its delivery as distinct parts of the inquiry. Findings from that work, together with the experience of participants and local partners, can inform the next engagement package.

Responsible procurement consequently calls for deliberate collaboration over engagement design and quality. The quality of the arrangement depends on the substance and accessibility of its benefits, the accuracy of the terms describing them and the reliability of their delivery and records. Bringing these matters into the purchasing and contracting process allows national objectives and local needs to influence the opportunities people actually receive.

WEQF's **Provisions** section records standardised answers about the availability, extent and conditions of benefits and practical affordances across eleven categories. The **Package Profile** presents results by category, helping suppliers and buyers assess alignment with their objectives and identify necessary changes. Linking these results to supporting terms and records gives collaboration a practical subject: what will be offered, to whom and how it will be delivered.

6. Engagement packages, disputes and the resolution of disagreement

A clear and workable agreement depends on the completeness and accuracy of the engagement terms and on how readily both the individual and the engager can understand them. The individual needs to know what they are accepting and what they can rely on; the engager needs an equally clear account of the commitments it must explain, administer and fulfil. Gaps, inconsistencies and poorly explained conditions leave room for different expectations to form around the same arrangement. The substance of the engagement package, and the way it is conveyed, therefore matter from the outset to preventing misunderstanding and providing a shared basis for resolving disagreement.

At the end of June 2026, the Ministry of Justice reported approximately **70,000 open single Employment Tribunal cases**, 51% more than at the corresponding point in 2025. During the April-June quarter, the system received around 14,000 single claims and disposed of 6,100 single claim cases.²⁶ The national user group minutes of March 2026 also show how far ahead some hearings were being listed: hearings of around five days were generally reaching 2027 in most regions, with London South listing into the first half of 2029.²⁷ For the individuals and organisations involved, the prospect of an extended dispute makes early clarity, timely correction and the preservation of relevant information especially important.

Acas guidance places the collection and consideration of relevant evidence within a fair investigation, including a written record of how

and why evidence was obtained.²⁸ Employment Tribunal preparation in England and Wales requires disclosure of relevant documents and the assembly of hearing material.²⁹ These requirements bring attention back to the engagement package and the record of its operation: what terms applied, what the individual was told, which decisions were made and what was delivered. An organised account gives the individual a basis for substantiating an entitlement or challenging a decision, while enabling the engager, advisers and tribunal to examine the events against the arrangement said to govern them.

Examining a disagreement requires a connected account of the commitment, its conditions, the events in question and the decisions or instructions that followed.

70,000

Approximately this many open single Employment Tribunal cases at the end of June 2026.

+51%

Increase in open single Employment Tribunal cases compared with the same point in 2025.

Where that information is fragmented or contradictory, the parties must reconstruct the arrangement before they can address the disputed issue. *Sam's Story* illustrates what happens when weekday hours in a signed contract conflict with later handbook and onboarding requirements for evening and weekend work. His internal grievance and appeal fail to resolve the disagreement, leaving him unable to share his father's care as planned and seeking another job while obtaining advice about tribunal action.

The same perspective helps distinguish a failure to recognise an applicable right from a failure to communicate or deliver an additional commitment. It can reveal whether the engagement package was incomplete when issued, whether its description was misleading, whether the person was unable to obtain an agreed benefit or whether the administrative process produced the wrong result. A clearer account gives the individual a better basis for raising the problem and gives the responsible organisation a better basis for responding. It also makes departures from the agreement easier to identify, including failures that may require a formal remedy.

This is why recordkeeping belongs within the discussion of engagement design. The relevant information includes the terms applying at the time, the material communicated to the individual, requests and decisions, changes in circumstances and the processing that followed. Preserving those connections gives a later reader an account that can be followed, questioned and compared with the person's own evidence. It also helps the organisation identify who can explain or correct the issue, which becomes particularly important when several parties have contributed to the engagement and no single participant holds every document.

By the time a matter is examined, managers may have changed, assignments may have ended and information may be spread across

organisations that no longer work together. A dependable engagement record preserves the connection between the agreed terms and what occurred while those details are still available. It gives later inquiry a firmer starting point and allows the parties to spend more attention on the disputed questions themselves. For that reason, the value of recording an engagement accurately begins well before anyone knows whether a complaint or claim will arise.

Clearer arrangements also create an opportunity to address avoidable confusion nearer its source. Where payment responsibilities, eligibility conditions and routes for correction are understood, an individual can direct a question to someone able to act, and the organisation can establish whether an error has occurred. If the disagreement continues, the same information can help identify its scope and support a fair examination. Improving the engagement package and its record therefore contributes to both prevention and resolution: explaining the arrangement before it is relied upon, enabling timely correction and making the relevant history available when a claim needs to be considered.

This gives the deliberate design of engagement packages and contracts a practical purpose: establishing consistent coverage of the matters that shape the working arrangement before the terms are offered. The relevant obligations, benefits, conditions and responsibilities need to be considered together, documented accurately and expressed in language that the individual and those administering the engagement can understand. Design must also address how changes will be communicated and how the engagement record will preserve what applied at the time. Completeness, accuracy and clarity become features of the engagement as it is formed, giving the parties terms they can understand and work to, and a documented basis for examining whether the arrangement was honoured.

WEQF addresses this through questions about Engagement identity and clarity, Information and comprehensibility, and Challenge, correction and remedy. They examine what the individual is told before accepting work, how terms and changes are explained, and the support available for complaints, reviews and resolving disagreements. The Evidence questions then examine when information is provided, how decisions and changes are recorded, and whether the account can be retrieved later. Standardised answers and the corresponding **Package Profile** make these arrangements visible for assessment and improvement. The result gives the parties a structured basis for improving clarity, access to remedy and the records on which a later inquiry would depend.

7. The Blueprint in detail

The preceding sections have examined employment status, financial risk, responsible procurement and disputes through the lens of engagement package substance and quality. Each perspective reveals a need to understand more than a category, a headline promise or a description of the work. Employment status leaves significant differences in benefits and experience unexplained. Financial responsibility makes the quality of records and associated processing consequential beyond the immediate engager. Procurement objectives depend on commitments reaching the people they are intended to support, while disputes expose gaps and discrepancies within the engagement terms and related documentation.

Across these matters, the missing connection is a common way to inspect and compare the engagement package and the arrangements supporting its engagement-record. Much of the relevant information already exists, but it is distributed across contracts, policies, recruitment material, onboarding information and administrative processes. At the point those documents are formed and agreed, decisions about benefits, conditions, responsibilities and administration become solidified. Their completeness and clarity therefore shape how the concerns discussed above translate into subsequent activity and outcomes.

A shared standardised language brings those decisions into view consistently, making the formation of an engagement an accessible point of assessment, agreement and improvement.

With a clear, shared account of an engagement, parties can examine its suitability, cost and delivery before work begins. Without that visibility, the same questions remain, but answering them depends on piecing together information distributed across contracts, policies and separate records. Decisions that could have shaped the arrangement beforehand become questions that must be resolved after commitments have already been made.

Improving engagement quality therefore involves both the terms offered and the way those terms are designed, communicated and administered. WEQF's Six Point Blueprint sets out a direction for the market, bringing the substance of working arrangements into decisions about individual needs, commercial objectives and the delivery of work.

- 1 Design engagement packages around wider needs and outcomes
- 2 Collaborate for consistent delivery across supply chains
- 3 Make engagement quality visible alongside pay
- 4 Provide material engagement information before acceptance
- 5 Commit to a minimum standard of processing and recordkeeping
- 6 Use a common, status-neutral language

01

Design engagement packages around wider needs and outcomes

A culture of relying on minimum-floor, legacy or static packages can leave the wider needs of the work and the people performing it insufficiently considered. WEQF therefore recommends making engagement design a more active, recurring consideration, with packages formed and reviewed around their purpose, intended outcomes and the people involved. A shift towards purposeful design and regular review creates scope to tailor support and conditions to particular projects and individual needs, while contributing to wider organisational goals.

WEQF calls this **Intentional Engagement Design**.

02

Collaborate for consistent delivery across supply chains

In a labour supply chain, the organisations setting objectives, agreeing commercial terms and administering work each benefit from the engagement and assume risks connected to its operation. Their decisions need to work together for the intended support to reach the individual consistently. WEQF therefore recommends that those parties collaborate on a shared approach, intended outcomes and clear responsibilities, carrying the agreed arrangements through contracts, funding and operating processes at each stage of the chain.

WEQF calls this **Collaborative Engagement Design**.

03

Make engagement quality visible alongside pay

When so much of the economy, people's lives and wellbeing depends on the quality of work, that quality should be visible and measurable. Pay describes the financial return, while Provisions describe the benefits, protections, practical choices and support surrounding it. WEQF recommends that both should receive equal visibility and consideration, giving individuals and organisations a clear account of the whole offer. Assessing them together makes clear what the individual receives in exchange for their time and work, allowing both the individual and the engager to judge the value and suitability of that exchange.

WEQF calls this combined view **Pay + Provisions**.

04

Provide material engagement information before acceptance

Discovering material conditions only after accepting work can leave an individual facing unexpected restrictions, unable to access support they expected or committed to an arrangement that does not meet their needs. WEQF therefore recommends that pay and anything affecting the availability, value or use of a benefit, protection or practical choice be made clear before acceptance. Providing that account while the individual can still decide supports informed choice and reduces the scope for misunderstandings after work begins.

WEQF's **Package Profile** provides a shared account for review before acceptance.

05

Commit to a minimum standard of processing and recordkeeping

Errors in processing and gaps in records can create financial exposure, contribute to disputes and make it difficult to establish whether an engagement has been administered correctly. WEQF therefore recommends that parties commit to a common minimum standard for creating, processing, storing and retrieving engagement information. Keeping the applicable terms, decisions, changes and calculations connected supports checks of payments, investigation of discrepancies and assurance about the processes on which the parties rely.

WEQF assesses declared engagement-record arrangements through its **Evidence** questions and separate grade.

06

Use a common, status-neutral language

Scattered information makes engagements harder for individuals and collaborating organisations to understand and compare. WEQF therefore recommends using a common language and consistent coverage to bring the relevant substance into a clear, accurate account that can be understood across employment statuses and engagement routes. Such an account can communicate the meaning of the underlying terms without routinely requiring disclosure of every legal or confidential commercial document.

WEQF provides this common language through its **standardised questionnaire**.

8. WEQF: making engagement quality visible

Edition 1.0

The Workforce Engagement Quality Framework (WEQF) provides a shared method for making the substance and quality of engagement packages visible, measurable and comparable. Edition 1.0 brings that method into a published questionnaire, a supporting documentation pack and a working Beta application. Together, these give individuals, engagers and supply-chain partners a practical basis for understanding what an engagement offers and agreeing how it could improve. The initial standard is available for free use, review and testing.

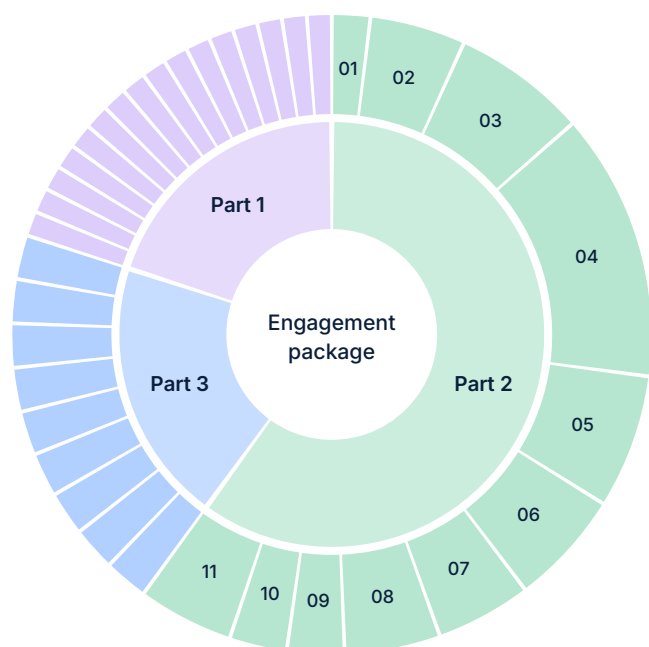
Development journey

Development began by examining a broad body of legislation, regulatory guidance, public policy and related research. Material matters affecting an engagement were identified as individual propositions, organised by subject and developed into questions with defined answer criteria.

The resulting model brings together the package's common foundations, its variable benefits and the quality of its supporting record arrangements. The formation records connect the questions to their source meaning and explain their inclusion and treatment, keeping the reasoning behind the questionnaire open to examination.³⁰

The full development journey, Edition 1.0 documentation pack and Beta application are available at weqf.co.uk.

THE ASSESSMENT MODEL



Full questionnaire diagram available at weqf.co.uk

Documentation pack

Assess and present: Questionnaire, Scoring Sheet and Package Profile.

Understand and apply: System Overview, Question Companion and User Guide.

Examine the method: Technical and Release Reference, with supporting rationale.

Beta application

The Beta application puts the same Edition 1.0 model into practice. Users can build packages, complete questionnaires, produce and share profiles. Free early access supports practical review, testing and early adoption.

1 Questionnaire. 3 parts. 87 questions.

The Questionnaire is at the heart of WEQF, bringing benefits, protections, practical choices and record arrangements into one structured account. Its three Parts address the foundations of an engagement, what the individual receives and the quality of the arrangements supporting it. Together with the Package Profile, which presents the results in a clear, shareable form, it provides a simple, usable system for both engagement design and assessment.¹

PART 1

Prerequisites

16 questions

Confirm the common foundations before assessing or designing a package.

PART 2

Provisions

62 questions

Describe the benefits, protections and practical choices offered, across 11 Areas of Concern.

PART 3

Evidence

9 questions

Examine how engagement information is prepared, processed, recorded and made available.

SHAPE A PROPOSED PACKAGE

Engagement design

Before terms are settled, the Questionnaire helps parties turn the needs of the people, the work and the wider project into a deliberate package. Benefits, protections, practical choices and supporting record arrangements become explicit decisions that can be considered together.

Parties can compare alternative offers, adjust the extent and conditions of support, and consider the resources and responsibilities needed to deliver it. Using a common structure makes each contribution visible and helps an engager develop a coherent offer whose quality can be understood before work begins.

EXAMINE AN EXISTING PACKAGE

Engagement assessment

For an existing or ongoing engagement, the same Questionnaire records what the individual can receive or rely on, the conditions governing access and the arrangements for administering and recording it. The answers give parties a clear, consistent account of the package.

Parties can identify strengths and gaps, compare arrangements and agree where improvement is needed. The assessment gives that discussion a clear starting point: which benefits are available, how dependable they are and which supporting arrangements need attention. Improvements can then be considered against the same questions and criteria.

Both uses can be communicated through a **Package Profile**, presenting the package's Provision results and separate Evidence grade. The following pages explain the three Parts and show an illustrative Profile.

Prerequisites are what WEQF calls the obligations of the engagement package: a minimum universal set of considerations that every engagement must address. The questionnaire records these as mandatory, non-scoring confirmations, all of which must be satisfied before Package design proceeds to the variable choices about benefits and administration. Each confirmation records that the named matter has been considered and that the arrangements required for the engagement are, or will be, in place.

The sixteen matters are:¹

Prerequisite	
01	Right to work
02	Terms and information before work
03	Labour-supply information
04	Labour-provider licensing
05	Required qualifications and approvals
06	Children and young people at work
07	Safeguarding and DBS/PVG checks
08	Health and safety before work
09	Employers' liability insurance
10	Equality and fair treatment
11	Forced labour and human trafficking
12	Handling personal information
13	Access to engagement documents and updates
14	Correcting engagement records
15	Business or service transfers
16	Protection against unfair dismissal

CONFIRMATION

Yes	No
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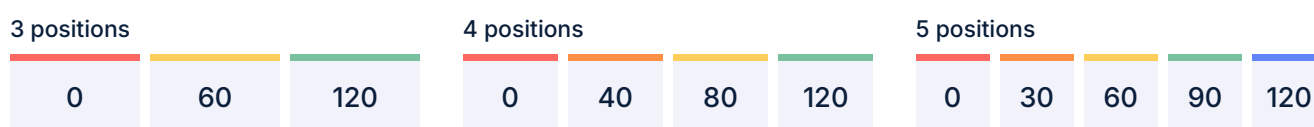
These indicators show how the starting conditions determine whether assessment can proceed. All sixteen confirmations must be Yes; they contribute no Provision points.

Provisions are WEQF's collective name for the benefits, protections, choices, opportunities and other affordances available to the individual. The practical value of each Provision depends on its quantity, availability, eligibility, certainty and/or the conditions governing access and delivery. The assessment therefore goes beyond confirming that a benefit exists: it records the extent of what is offered and what the individual can rely on. The 62 Provision questions are grouped under the eleven Areas of Concern, or AOCs, mentioned in Section 1:

Area of Concern		Provision questions
01	Engagement identity and clarity	2
02	Work and income security	5
03	Pay treatment and financial exposure	7
04	Time, rest and time away	14
05	Choice, autonomy and flexibility	7
06	Benefits and longer-term protection	6
07	Safety, dignity, equality and accessibility	5
08	Development and progression	5
09	Voice, representation and participation	3
10	Information and comprehensibility	3
11	Challenge, correction and remedy	5
Total		62

Each Provision question offers a spectrum of three, four or five answer positions, describing progressively greater enablement in the matter being assessed. The respondent selects the highest position whose complete criteria are supported by the package. Each question contributes up to 120 points, producing a total Provision score out of 7,440, with results also available by Area of Concern. The scores show the assessed quality of individual Provisions and their contribution to the wider offer, including the conditions that strengthen or limit their practical value.¹

These scales also support design. An engager can increase or reduce the extent of support in a particular Area of Concern or an individual Provision, adjust the conditions attached to it and examine how those choices change the overall package result. Commercial constraints, workforce needs and wider objectives can then be considered through specific decisions about the package, with the resulting level of support tailor-made and made explicit.



Provision points / colour follows each question's defined spectrum.

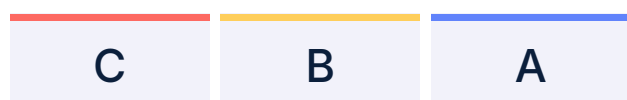
Evidence is WEQF's term for assessing the quality of the arrangements through which engagement information is prepared, processed, recorded, connected and made available. Its nine questions also use spectra, each with three answer positions describing progressively stronger arrangements within that dimension.

They cover:

Evidence dimension	
01	Record completeness and availability
02	Links to people and work
03	Links to project or business needs
04	Sources and responsibility
05	Preparation before work
06	Control of record processing
07	Timing of event records
08	Change history and explanations
09	Retention and protection against loss

The three Evidence positions map to C, B and A, with A representing the strongest position. The overall Evidence grade follows the lowest of the nine dimension grades, keeping a weakness in any one part of the declared arrangements visible in the headline result. Together, the Provision scores and separate Evidence grades make the level of quality visible in both the substance of the engagement package and the organisation of its processing and recordkeeping. Parties can identify the areas they need to strengthen and describe the arrangements required to reach a different position.¹

EVIDENCE GRADES



Overall grade: lowest of nine dimensions.

The Package Profile

The **Package Profile** is the readable output of the questionnaire: a concise, standardised account of a proposed or existing engagement package. It brings the substance of the offer and the quality of its supporting record arrangements together in a form that individuals, engagers and other relevant parties can understand and share.

Its headline Provision score and separate Evidence grade provide an immediate overview. Results for the eleven Areas of Concern and nine Evidence dimensions show where support or record arrangements are stronger and where they are more limited. Readers can move from that overview to the features relevant to their needs and see what shapes the overall result.

The Profile also identifies the package being described and the people, work and period it covers. That context helps readers judge whether the account is relevant to them and compare arrangements on an informed basis. Read alongside pay and the proposed terms, it makes the offer easier to understand and discuss.

Within the Beta application, users can create a package, revise its answers as a design develops and generate the resulting Profile. Sharing that account gives other parties a common basis for collaborative design or assessment: comparing options, discussing the support offered and agreeing improvements with the organisations responsible.

The example on the following page shows how these results are brought together. Its headline figures provide a quick orientation, while the breakdowns reveal the pattern behind them.

PROVISIONS

4,090

of 7,440 available points

EVIDENCE

B

Lowest of nine grades
8 A / 1 B / 0 C

Prerequisites

16 / 16 Yes

All sixteen prerequisites are satisfied. Assessment can proceed.

Provisions

Illustrative Beta Profile: eleven Areas of Concern and nine Evidence dimensions.

PROVISIONS	POINTS	AREA POSITION
01 Engagement identity and clarity	180 / 240	Green 75.0%
02 Work and income security	150 / 600	Orange 25.0%
03 Pay treatment and financial exposure	740 / 840	Blue 88.1%
04 Time, rest and time away	880 / 1,680	Yellow 52.4%
05 Choice, autonomy and flexibility	360 / 840	Yellow 42.9%
06 Benefits and longer-term protection	100 / 720	Red 13.9%
07 Safety, dignity, equality and accessibility	280 / 600	Yellow 46.7%
08 Development and progression	380 / 600	Green 63.3%
09 Voice, representation and participation	240 / 360	Green 66.7%
10 Information and comprehensibility	360 / 360	Blue 100.0%
11 Challenge, correction and remedy	420 / 600	Green 70.0%

Evidence

Overall grade 8 A / 1 B / 0 C

B

Q79 A Completeness and availability of the engagement record	Q80 A Linking the engagement-record to the correct people and work	Q81 A Linking the engagement-record to the project or business requirement
Q82 A Sources and responsibility for the engagement-record	Q83 A Preparation of the engagement-record before work	Q84 A Control of engagement-record processing
Q85 A When engagement events are recorded	Q86 B Keeping earlier information and explaining changes	Q87 A Keeping records and protecting against loss

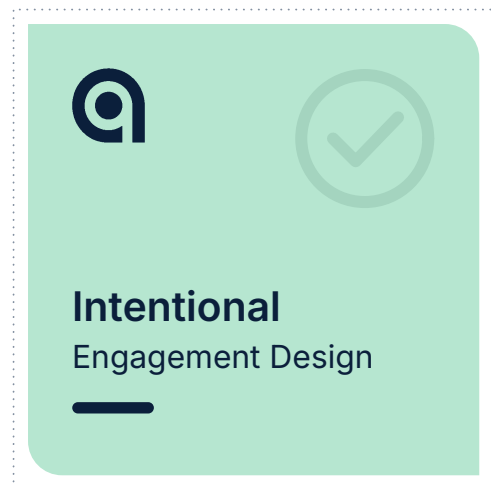
Area bands summarise points. Question colours follow their own response spectra. Evidence uses C / B / A. Its overall grade is the lowest of the nine selected grades.

9. Intentional and Collaborative Engagement Design

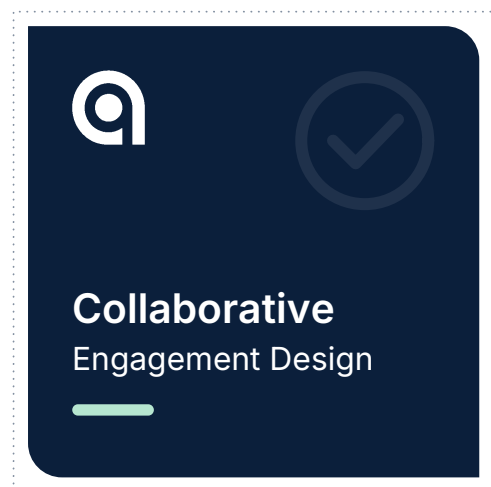
WEQF introduces Intentional Engagement Design and Collaborative Engagement Design as the foundations of a cultural shift in how the market forms and manages engagements. The aim is to make the quality of people's working arrangements a deliberate part of commercial and project planning, with organisations examining what they offer, what it costs and how it will operate before engagements begin. The terms governing working lives become a shared concern for the parties whose decisions shape them.

Organisational Users of WEQF can display the badges below in printed and digital media to show their commitment to these engagement design practices.

WEQF defines **Intentional Engagement Design** as the purposeful formation or review of an engagement package against identified needs and objectives. It brings decisions about support, eligibility, timing, certainty, access and responsibility together with the systems and processes needed to deliver and record them. The quality of the individual's working arrangements, the financial responsibilities connected to their engagement, relevant national policy objectives and the prevention of avoidable disputes become matters to address while the package is being formed.



Collaborative Engagement Design is WEQF's term for the joint formation and review of a package where knowledge, resources or responsibilities sit with several parties. The immediate engager contributes its understanding of the workforce, the applicable relationships and the arrangements it can administer. Other parties contribute knowledge of the work, the people, the purchasing conditions or the systems on which delivery depends. The common assessment gives these contributions a shared subject and makes their consequences for the engagement visible.



For that shift to take hold, engagement design needs a place in project planning. Reusing packages formed primarily around price or a general response to legislation, without reassessing them for the work in hand, leaves project needs and wider responsibilities unexamined. Waiting for regulation to change leaves little room for the needs of a new Cohort or experience from delivery to shape what is offered. WEQF proposes a more responsive approach, in which the scope for different support, conditions and administrative arrangements is considered whenever the work or the people it serves require it.

Agencies, umbrella employers and other engagement providers can use the method to develop and cost a wider choice of Packages, showing what support is available, to what degree and under which conditions. Buyers and contractors gain a clearer basis for discussing what each price includes and the resources needed to sustain it. The commercial ambition is to move competition beyond minimum floor packages chosen for price alone, giving workforce sustainability, satisfaction and wellbeing equal consideration in the judgement of value. Providers can make the value of better support visible, while the parties commissioning the work can recognise and fund it.

Buyers have an important role in establishing the objectives a project should serve. Engagement with communities, colleges, employment-support organisations, worker representatives and prospective participants can identify the needs a project should address. Buyers can translate those needs into broad objectives and consider how their own funding, schedules, service expectations and commercial decisions support delivery. This creates an informed brief against which suppliers can develop proposals, with the intended beneficiaries and desired outcomes understood before detailed package choices are made.

Bidders and the organisations operating engagements then develop the feasible, costed

arrangements. Contractors, subcontractors, agencies and employers can work together around the actual staffing requirements, the Cohorts involved and the contributions each organisation is able to make. During tender preparation, this allows the costs of additional support, supervision, administration and cover to enter the bid before commitments are settled. The buyer can examine the proposed package against its objectives, while detailed terms are developed by the parties with the knowledge and responsibility to put them into effect.

The optional companion account, *Jordan's Story*, follows this process through a contractor and agency preparing a bid with knowledge supplied by a local employment adviser. The agency develops and costs a package for a group of new starters, and the contractor incorporates the agreed responsibilities into its proposal. Jordan later experiences the practical value of decisions made months before he joins the work.

Collaborative design also gives existing supply chains a way to address shared financial and operational concerns before they expand or make new commitments. In the companion account, *Maya's Story*, an agency seeking work from a larger contractor brings together its own assessment and Declarations from its umbrella suppliers. The common presentation helps the parties examine how their processes connect and agree improvements before the expanded relationship begins. It also gives the contractor a clearer basis for understanding the packages that would apply to the people supplied.

Professor David Mosey's *Constructing the Gold Standard*, endorsed in the government's *Construction Playbook*, offers a similar approach to supply-chain collaboration from which WEQF can learn. It gives construction clients and suppliers a common framework for examining their arrangements, agreeing actions and carrying commitments into the contracts used throughout a supply chain.

The shared purpose is to connect wider objectives with consistent, understandable commitments and clear responsibility for delivery, making collaboration part of how those objectives are put into practice.³¹

WEQF applies the same principle to labour engagements. The agreed design needs to be carried into the individual's terms and the relevant supply agreements, so that the support promised is matched by the funding, information and activity required to provide it. The parties establish who delivers each commitment and how its availability and use will be recorded. This connects the quality of the individual's arrangement with the responsibilities of the organisations whose decisions determine whether it can be delivered.

Design also creates a basis for learning. The parties can examine delivery information and participant experience against the declared arrangements, then use that understanding to agree improvements or inform later Packages. New projects, changing Cohorts and experience of what support is used give reasons to revisit the design. Engagement quality becomes a continuing part of managing work, with a clear account of what applied during each period.

For individuals, seeing the Package Profile alongside pay creates a clearer basis for assessing and choosing work. Some may prioritise higher earnings and accept fewer Provisions; others may prefer slightly lower pay where stronger support, predictability or flexibility offers a better fit with their circumstances and work-life balance. **Pay + Provisions** brings those considerations into a more complete account of the opportunity's suitability. Making the extent of support and the conditions governing its use visible before acceptance helps people understand what they can rely on, compare the choices available to them and enter an engagement with clearer expectations and less room for misunderstanding.

The market WEQF seeks to encourage is one in which individuals can understand and rely on what they are offered, engagers can show the value of the arrangements they provide, and supply-chain partners can coordinate the support and administration needed to deliver them. Intentional Engagement Design and Collaborative Engagement Design give that ambition a practical form: quality is considered before work begins, commitments are agreed by the parties able to fulfil them, and experience informs the next design.

10. WEQF: current position and application



Augscape Research & Development has produced **WEQF Edition 1.0**, prepared for use from **1 October 2026**. It brings together the source analysis, questionnaire, assessment method and supporting materials described in this paper. The Package Module provides the method for assessing and designing engagements, with the review pack explaining how it was formed and how to use it.

A supporting application is available in **Beta**, meaning an early software version is available for practical use and feedback. It allows users to create Packages, declare their assessments, request Declarations and respond to requests.

WEQF is a free and open standard that all parts of the market can use in its published, unmodified form at zero cost. It provides a status-neutral basis for examining packages across different employment statuses, engagement durations and contract types.

Using the same questions, definitions and assessment rules allows organisations to describe different packages in a way that others can understand and compare. The method stays consistent while the packages can reflect the needs of different projects, regions and Cohorts.

Agencies, umbrella employers and other engagement providers can test the current Edition against Packages they already operate or propose to offer. Sharing the resulting Profiles with contractors, buyers and other partners provides a practical basis for examining the method's clarity, coverage and usefulness in commercial decisions.



The Edition 1.0 pack and Beta application are both available at app.weqf.co.uk.

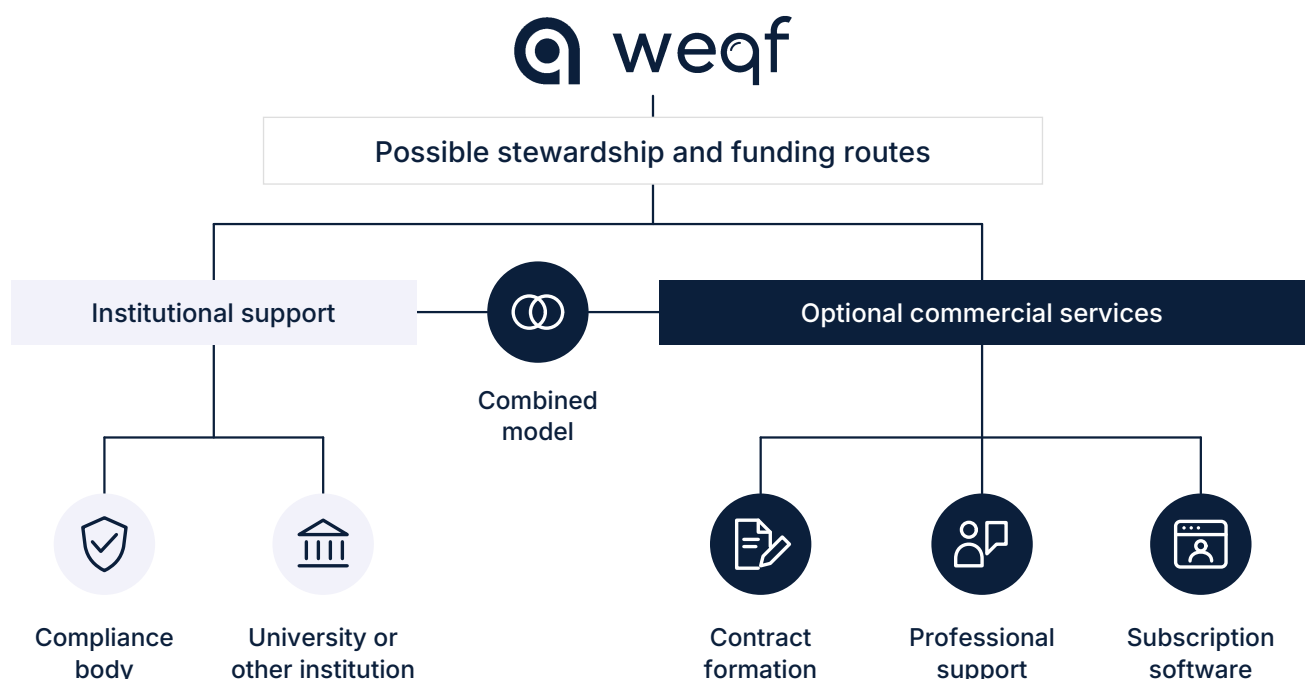
11. Stewardship, development and an invitation to contribute

For WEQF to become established as a reliable market-wide standard for improving engagement visibility, managing supply chain risk, carrying national policy into working arrangements and reducing workplace disputes, its source materials and assessment method must be kept current.

Augscope proposes **quarterly reviews** of relevant regulatory and policy changes, with new Editions released where those changes materially affect the method's inputs or assessment requirements. Each review would consider what has changed, which parts of the framework are affected and what action is needed. Earlier Declarations would remain connected to the Edition used, while later releases explain the changes made. That continuity allows the standard to develop while preserving an understandable basis for previous assessments.³²

This work requires continuing administrative oversight, specialist input and funding. Augscope's preferred direction is for the WEQF model to be adopted and maintained as an open standard by a suitable third party, through intellectual property transfer or another suitable stewardship arrangement. It may become part of an existing compliance body's portfolio, an academic undertaking with a university partner, a commercial offering or a combination of these routes.

The objective is for WEQF to find an organisational home with the capacity to review the method, support its use and carry its development forward, while preserving free access to the initial Package Module's published standard.



There are three broad ways to fund that responsibility. An adopting body or institution could operate WEQF through existing budgets or new funding secured for its research, maintenance and development. A commercial model could generate income from optional products and services built around the free standard. A combined model could use institutional support to maintain the method alongside income from services that help organisations apply it. These routes give prospective partners a choice about how the standard could fit their remit, resources and capacity.

Constructing the Gold Standard provides a useful comparison here. Its free, publicly available recommendations sit alongside associated optional commercial contract forms, including FAC-1 and TAC-1, published by Thomas Telford with supporting guidance and training.³³ *Constructing Excellence* also operates a separate paid verification scheme.³⁴ This shows how a publicly accessible body of practice can coexist with paid services supporting its use or outputs. Should commercial funding be required, WEQF could adopt a similar arrangement, with income from optional services contributing to the upkeep of the free standard.

Three possible commercial routes have been identified. The first is a contract formation service developed with legal specialists. In this model, Packages designed using the free WEQF standard are inputs to a contract formation system. Legal specialists use the agreed design, its exact terms and the relevant employment and tax inputs to prepare contracts that give legal effect to the Package's commitments. Additional contract services support multi-party supply chains, connecting the terms offered to individuals with the funding, information, processing and delivery responsibilities of commercial partners. The service also provides for agreed changes as projects and engagement requirements develop.

The second is professional support, providing paid consultation, training, guidance and implementation advice alongside the open standard. Businesses obtain help with assessing existing Packages and designing arrangements to meet defined commercial and workforce objectives. Support focuses on understanding and managing labour-related financial risk, translating social value and responsible procurement commitments into deliverable arrangements, and improving clarity and recordkeeping to reduce misunderstandings and disputes. It also helps organisations coordinate their responsibilities across a supply chain, so that the intended outcomes are supported by the terms, resources and processes needed to achieve them. Fees support both the service and the continuing development of the framework.

The third is membership or subscription software. Under this model, engagers and their partners pay to access online tools for designing, sharing and administering Packages across projects and supply relationships. The documentation-based published standard remains available for independent use at zero cost. Subscription income supports the operation of the software and contributes to maintaining the method on which it relies.

Augscape has deliberately kept these routes open for discussion before selecting an approach. The aim is to establish a suitable combination of stewardship, funding and practical support with prospective partners.

A further development opportunity is a feedback and outcomes module gathering information from live, operational engagements. Such a module would connect declared Packages with delivery records, participant feedback and agreed key performance indicators (KPIs), allowing organisations to examine whether commitments were delivered, who accessed the support and what outcomes were recorded. That evidence would support reporting against project objectives and give later package design a clearer basis in experience.

Pilot use and sustained adoption also offer a route to anonymised information about the engagement Packages being assessed and used. Aggregated by region, trade, project, age group and other relevant characteristics, that information would support demographic statistics on workforce engagement quality and the use of different arrangements. Linking those patterns with delivery and outcome information would help organisations and researchers examine how designs operate across different groups and identify where further development is required.

Initial conversations are being opened with universities and academic institutions concerning the current Package Module and Beta application, including the credibility of the framework and its technical approach. WEQF is also seeking a wider base of review, comment and contribution. The purpose is to examine the present model in enough detail to identify where it is useful, where it requires development and which organisations could help establish its future.

Buyers, contractors, agencies, umbrella employers and procurement framework operators are asked to examine how the method fits commercial decisions and the operation of supply chains. Legal professionals, regulators and official bodies are asked to contribute to its treatment of relevant requirements and its supporting explanations. Unions, colleges, employment-support organisations, prisons and probation services, and the Department for Work and Pensions are asked to bring knowledge of the needs and barriers experienced by the people an engagement is intended to support. Other government departments concerned with business, education and justice are asked to explore the connection between policy objectives and the arrangements through which those objectives could be delivered.

The objective is to obtain feedback on the current framework model, the relevance and

value of Collaborative Engagement Design as a functional concept, and the wider maintenance and commercialisation routes available to WEQF. Review of the questionnaire and application can help establish how well the model works in practice, while discussion of possible uses and partnerships can inform the choice of an organisational home and a sustainable approach to its development.

This offers a way to connect discussion of employment status and reform with a clearer account of what engagements actually provide. For the wider market, it offers a common subject through which financial responsibility, responsible procurement and individual experience can be considered together. WEQF invites those interests into the same conversation: making the terms people depend on visible, giving the parties responsible a shared basis for designing them, and connecting the resulting commitments with their delivery. The next step is to bring the relevant expertise and practical experience together to examine that proposition and help determine how it should develop and be maintained.

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