



Tune in to temps

How employers and recruiters can support agency worker voice in the workplace





About the IPA

The IPA exists to promote the involvement and participation of employees in their places of work, and through doing so improve the quality of working lives. The IPA is Britain's leading organisation delivering partnership, consultation and employee engagement in the workplace. Through our research and practice we develop new ways of working, based on trust and collaboration, that deliver better workplaces and better outcomes – employee well-being, increased productivity and improved services. The IPA is a not-for-profit organisation, funded by membership subscriptions and fee income from consultancy, training and research services. We are one of the few 'open spaces' in the UK where employers, trade unionists and other workplace representatives, academics, legal experts, human resource and employment specialists can come together with politicians and policy makers to discuss and debate employment issues and policy.

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raising performance
through workforce
engagement

About the REC

As the professional body for recruitment, the REC is determined to make businesses more successful by helping them secure the people they need. The REC is absolutely passionate and totally committed in this pursuit for recruiters, employers and the people they hire. The REC is a not-for-profit organisation governed by an elected council of recruitment industry representatives. Jobs transform lives, which is why we are building the best recruitment industry in the world. Find out more about the Recruitment & Employment Confederation at www.rec.uk.com



Jobs *transform* lives

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Foreword

Agency workers make up a significant proportion of our labour market, with 1.2 million workers placed into temporary/contract jobs every day. A quarter of British adults have been agency workers at some point in their careers, meaning it's something a good many of us have, or will, experience during our working lives. If our ambition in the UK is to have a productive, engaged workforce overall, ensuring temporary agency workers have as good an experience at work as permanent staff should be something to which all serious employers aspire.

With recruitment becoming increasingly difficult because of labour and skill shortages, employers may become even more reliant on their agency workers – to meet peaks in demand or to access key skills in the short term – meaning that valuing your temporary workforce and making them feel engaged isn't just a 'nice to do', it's a business imperative.

Our research with the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA) asks the vital question of how to engage agency workers in the workplace. Employers and recruiters both have important roles to play to create the best possible environment for temporary staff, and in doing so get the best out of their workers. It comes down to recognising the specific motivations of someone working on a shorter contract while ultimately treating them the same

way you would a permanent member of staff – they want to be a part of the same team, have the same opportunities to develop and feel valued by their managers.

People choose agency work because of the opportunities it brings, from having control over their working hours, to developing new skills with different employers, to finding a route into permanent work. The two scenarios that make up this report are set in very different environments that show a diverse spread of agency workers.

Flexible working is one of the great success stories of the UK economy – essential and beneficial to businesses, to our economy and to the individuals who choose to work that way. We're proud to partner with the IPA on this crucial research into engaging agency workers in the workplace and are

delighted that REC members continue to provide examples of good practice.



Kevin Green
*Chief Executive
 Recruitment & Employment
 Confederation*

Executive summary

From this research, we have produced the following set of recommendations for employment agencies and workplaces hosting agency workers. By adopting good practice in these areas, we believe that organisations can promote high engagement among agency workers and ensure that the associated benefits of productivity, innovation, commitment and well-being at work can be enjoyed by all.

Agencies should make every effort to ensure agency workers:

- **are placed according to their individual needs and aspirations**, requiring agencies to take the time to understand both the client and the worker, and their reason for undertaking agency work, to make sure that all placements will work to the mutual benefit of both parties
- **go to vetted clients** that match the agency's own values, to make sure the agency demonstrates integrity in its professed values. Agencies should check on the progress of their workers regularly to make sure they are being well treated by the host workplace
- **are able to raise concerns** about any aspect of a placement without fear of being penalised as a result. When workers are unhappy, agencies should work quickly to resolve any problems or find them a new placement that better suits their needs
- **are supported with their professional development** throughout their employment, both during and between placements, involving regular feedback and appraisals, access to training and opportunities to move between placements that offer the chance to learn a desired range of skills
- **understand and have easy access to their workplace rights**, above and beyond compliance with statutory requirements. The rights agency workers are entitled to should be clearly communicated. Wherever possible, the agency should use legal statutory minimums as a baseline to start from rather than a threshold to meet when

it comes to structuring benefits and services for agency workers, being as generous as possible.

Workplaces hosting agency workers should make every effort to ensure agency workers:

- **are given a proper induction**, on a par to that received by permanent staff, so that they feel properly welcomed from the beginning of their placement and have all the necessary training to ensure they can do their job safely and professionally
- **are treated as 'part of the team'**, both in terms of equal access to facilities and benefits, from day one of their placement, but also making sure on an informal level that permanent staff treat agency workers as equals and include them in activities and social events
- **develop a relationship with their line managers**, including regular feedback and, for those agency workers there for several months, receive proper appraisals, advice and an opportunity to develop their skills
- **have the organisation's values and narrative demonstrated** to them, in order to communicate how the work they are doing fits in to the wider organisation and give them a sense of purpose and meaning in their work
- **are listened to** at work, both when they give advice and suggestions about operational matters and when they raise concerns or grievances they might have. They should be given the same access to and support from any staff representatives in the workplace as permanent employees.

Above all, both agencies and host organisations should ensure that agency workers are treated at all times with **decency, compassion and respect**, which they are as entitled to as any other employee. An engaged workforce will repay good treatment many times over in terms of productivity, innovation, reduced sickness and absenteeism, and greater staff retention.

Background

There has been a wealth of research over recent years showing the benefits of employee voice and staff engagement for employers, leading to higher productivity, reduced sickness and absenteeism, more creativity and innovation, and significantly reduced levels of conflict in the workplace. Much of this work, however, has been focused on traditional, full-time permanent employees. There has, in contrast, been very little research on how voice and engagement can be boosted for those in more flexible employment, such as agency workers.

REC research shows that 24 per cent of the British population has worked as a temporary agency worker at some point in their working life. The REC's latest estimate (RITS 2014/15) is that on any given day, 1.2 million agency workers are out on assignment in the UK labour market, making agency work a mainstream part of the UK economy.

There are clear benefits for businesses that need to access the temporary workforce. It is an opportunity to trial candidates, reduce the cost of recruiting and to manage changes in business demand. Although not suitable for everyone, there are benefits for agency workers, who may choose to work this way for flexibility, to increase their income or as a route to a permanent role.

It is essential for employers and agencies to understand why people choose agency work so they can understand how to attract high-quality workers and keep them engaged and motivated while on assignment.

The aim of this paper is to answer: **How can engagement be promoted amongst agency workers?**

The paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 looks at who agency workers are, why they do agency work and what they get out of it. Chapter 2 looks at what the host organisation can do to promote agency worker engagement, highlighting best practice examples. Chapter 3 focuses on what agencies can do to promote engagement.

What is agency work?

An agency worker is someone who is employed by an agency and supplied to work under the supervision and direction of another business. Agency workers can either have an employee or worker status. Agency workers with worker status do not have exactly the same rights as permanent employees – they do not have the right to

protection from unfair dismissal, the right to request flexible working or the right to statutory redundancy pay, for instance – but they are protected by a wide range of rights, which is often not fully appreciated in the debate about different ways of working.

Agency workers have the right to the following:

- National Living Wage or National Minimum Wage
- Protection from unlawful dismissal
- Statutory Sick Pay
- Statutory Maternity and Paternity Pay, Shared Parental Pay and Adoption Pay
- Statutory holiday entitlement – 5.6 weeks' paid holiday a year
- Minimum rest breaks
- Maximum working time – 48 average hours a week
- To be automatically enrolled in a pension if they meet the requirements
- Protection from unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act 2010
- Protection for whistleblowing
- Health and safety protections
- Right not to be charged direct or indirect fees for finding a job
- Protections from being restricted from working elsewhere

The recent Agency Worker Regulations (2010) entitle temporary agency workers, after a qualifying period, to the same basic conditions of employment as people working 'comparable jobs' on permanent contracts. In particular, agency workers are entitled to equal pay after 12 weeks of continuous employment at a client firm in the same role.

The REC's *Flex Appeal* report found that temporary work is viewed by workers themselves as particularly beneficial for people at four points in their working lives:

For entry-level workers

For young people entering the jobs market from school, college or university or people returning to work after a long break, work as a temporary agency worker, contractor or freelancer:

- helps them earn money and gain experience when they cannot access permanent jobs in the sector or location they ideally want. It is an opportunity to pick up soft skills and become accustomed to the world of work

- is a way to find a job quickly. The recruitment process is shorter than for a permanent role. It provides a route to target the permanent role they ultimately might want. A temporary placement provides experience and a foot in the door of a new sector and the opportunity to demonstrate skills to a new employer
- enables them to juggle different parts of a portfolio career that might include study, hobbies or entrepreneurship.

For people with specialist skills

For people with niche, in-demand skills and qualifications such as in IT or engineering, or for experienced people in professions such as teaching or nursing, work as a temporary agency worker, contractor or freelancer:

- allows them to work independently and not for one company
- gives them the power to pick and choose very specific types of work, contracts and employers that suit them best
- frees them from involvement in office politics, for those who find that stressful
- enables them to maximise their earning potential.

For adults with caring responsibilities

For people with caring responsibilities, especially women with children, work as a temporary agency worker, contractor or freelancer:

- makes them more able to arrange work around family commitments, not their family around their work commitments
- frees them to turn down work when family emergencies require it, without feeling they have let down colleagues or employers or jeopardised their future career or earnings
- allows them to change the hours and times they make themselves available for work at short notice as their family circumstances change each day, week, month or year.

For people approaching retirement

For people approaching the end of their working life who don't want to go directly from working full-time to retirement, or for those who have disabilities or illnesses or other interests that mean their old work patterns are no longer possible, work as a temporary agency worker, contractor or freelancer:

- allows them to ease into retirement
- creates an opportunity to negotiate the number of hours and the type of work they do
- allows people with disabilities or ill-health to avoid (or refuse) roles that are too physically challenging
- frees them to pick and choose the jobs they want to do.

What is employee engagement?

Employee engagement is a workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organisation to give of their best each day, committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, with an enhanced sense of their own well-being.

What does employee engagement mean for employees?

Employee engagement is getting up in the morning, thinking, 'Great, I'm going to work. I know what I'm going to do today. I've got some great ideas about how to do it really well. I'm looking forward to seeing the team and helping them work well today.'

Employee engagement is about understanding one's role in an organisation, and being sighted and energised on where it fits in with the organisation's purpose and objectives.

Employee engagement is about having a clear understanding of how an organisation is fulfilling its purpose and objectives, how it is changing to fulfil those better, and being given a voice in its journey to offer ideas and express views that are taken account of as decisions are made.

Employee engagement is about being included fully as a member of the team, focused on clear goals, trusted and empowered, receiving regular and constructive feedback, supported in developing new skills, thanked and recognised for achievement.

Engaged organisations have strong and authentic values, with clear evidence of trust and fairness based on mutual respect, where two-way promises and commitments – between employers and employees – are understood and fulfilled.

What does employee engagement mean for employers?

Employee engagement is about positive attitudes and behaviours leading to improved business outcomes, in a way that they trigger and reinforce one another.

Employee engagement is about our employees feeling pride and loyalty working for our organisation, being a great advocate of the organisation to our clients, users and customers, going the extra mile to finish a piece of work.

Employee engagement is about drawing on our employees' knowledge and ideas to improve our products and services, and being innovative about how we work.

Employee engagement is about drawing out a deeper commitment from employees so fewer leave, sickness absence reduces, accident rates decline, conflicts and grievances go down, and productivity increases.

Employee engagement is about organisation actions that are consistent with the organisation's values. It is about kept promises, or an explanation of why they cannot be kept.

There are four key enablers of employee engagement:

There is a clear **strategic narrative** drawn up by leaders that has ownership and commitment from both managers and employees. The narrative is a clearly expressed story about what the purpose of an organisation is, why it has the broad vision it has, and how an individual contributes to that purpose. Employees have a clear line of sight between their job and the narrative, and understand where their work fits in. These aims and values are reflected in a strong, transparent and explicit organisational culture and way of working.

Engaging managers are at the heart of this organisational culture – they facilitate and empower rather than control or restrict their staff; they treat their staff with appreciation and respect and show commitment to developing, increasing and rewarding the capabilities of those they manage.

There is an effective and empowered employee **voice** – employees' views are sought out; they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference. They speak out and challenge when appropriate. A strong sense of listening and of responsiveness permeates the organisation, enabled by effective communication.

Behaviour throughout the organisation is consistent with stated values, leading to trust and a sense of **integrity**.

(Macleod and Clarke 2009)

Employee engagement is based on trust, integrity, two-way commitment and communication between an organisation and its members. It is an approach

that increases the chances of business success, contributing to organisational and individual performance, productivity and well-being.

This research project explored the challenges that agencies and host workplaces face in raising and maintaining engagement levels with agency staff and identifies examples of best practice in overcoming them.

Why does agency working pose a challenge for employee engagement?

1. Many of the approaches to fostering employee engagement in the workforce are about building a relationship of trust, loyalty and commitment between the employees and the employer. With agency workers there are two main challenges in developing such a relationship: an agency worker's employee-employer relationship is divided between two separate organisations – the agency and the host workplace – meaning that two organisations must put in effort to build the quality of relationship, compared with just one for a permanent employee.
2. An agency worker typically might spend only limited time with each host workplace before moving on to the next, giving less opportunity to develop such relationships. Thirty-nine per cent of agency worker assignments last less than 12 weeks. The average length of assignment is 17 weeks for temporary agency workers (and 21 weeks for contractors) according to the REC's *Recruitment Industry Trends Survey 2015/16*.

Employee engagement will be lost if agency workers are not given the same attention and care as permanent employees in a host workplace, being denied a full voice at work, cut off from the strategic narrative, not having the opportunity to develop relationships with engaging managers and not treated with the same integrity as other workers. Thankfully, that need not be the case. This report demonstrates that engagement *is* possible for agency workers when organisations put the effort in to get it right. This report includes two case studies that demonstrate good practice in making sure to take the care and attention needed to cultivate an engaged agency workforce from both the agency and host workplace perspective.

Case studies

This project used two case study examples to gain insight into how both agencies and host workplaces approach the question of engagement for agency

workers. For each case study, we conducted focus groups with the agency workers themselves and individual interviews with a selection of their managers in the agencies and in the host workplaces. One of the case studies, Tata Steel, was primarily focused around the role of the host workplace, while the other case study, Chef Jobs UK, was primarily focused around the role of the agency.

Tata Steel

Tata Steel UK is one of Europe's leading strip steel manufacturers, with steelmaking facilities located at Port Talbot in Wales, as well as steel rolling and processing facilities in the Midlands, the North East and Wales. There are currently 523 agency workers in the business, divided between Port Talbot and other sites around the country. These come from several different agencies – primarily Acorn, which provides around 50 per cent of the agency staff, and Hays, which provides a further 10 per cent or so of the total agency workers. Representatives of both agencies were interviewed as part of this research. Recent fluctuations in business demand at Tata Steel was one of the primary reasons why they were using agency workers at the Port Talbot site and others.

At Tata Steel they also used agency workers to support them with seasonal changes in workload. For example, when the HR team is running their recruitment drive for graduates, there would be an expected increase in the amount of admin support needed within the team. As graduate recruitment takes place between October and March, this demand was for a maximum of six months, therefore they would hire an agency worker to fill this temporary but scheduled demand.

Agency workers at Tata Steel were placed to meet changes in business demands as well as providing support while the business was going through a period of uncertainty:

"It's been a loss-making business for a number of years. That meant that we didn't recruit any talent [during this time]."

Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant, Tata Steel

Chefs Jobs UK (CJUK)

CJUK supplies interim chefs to hotels, pubs, restaurants and contract catering companies all over the UK. They employ 120–150 chefs at any one time and on average they make 43 new placements per week. CJUK are growing: in 2014/15 they processed a total of 29,915 placements. In 2015/16 that increased to 62,525, a 109 per cent increase; then last year they were up to 101,520 placements, meaning that over the past two years CJUK have increased their payroll by 240 per cent. Established in 1990, they're passionate about raising the standards in the industry and providing a better way of working for their chefs.

Stacie Domanski, a Senior Accounts Manager, explained that despite previous attempts to place chefs in permanent positions, the agency has realised that market conditions are more suited to temporary placements:

"The industry is so transient – chefs are moving around all the time ... I think that just goes to show that people might think a permanent job is a better way, but they always end up coming back to us. It happens so frequently."

Job satisfaction through problem-solving

At CJUK the chefs enjoyed the challenging nature of some of their assignments:

"I get a lot of satisfaction from it, in that a lot of the time, you turn up to places and they are in a mess. And it's like, 'Thank God you're here.' Because I won't lie to you, the owners of these restaurants are not going to close the doors because they couldn't get a chef. So you're making someone else's life a hell of a lot easier."

"You go in, you know that that person would have gone through hell if it wasn't for you, because they would have had to do their work and your work, and it would have been a hell of a lot more difficult. So, you know, those situations are nice." (Chef, CJUK)

Part of what they liked was the problem-solving element of it and being able to use their skills in a constructive way:

"If the job was too easy, you'd be like, 'Right then, so...'. And you're just waiting for service. When you go in, the challenge is, you get quite addicted to going in and sorting waiters out."

"Coming up, up, up, up, until exploding. And you do the best, and you try to be the best, not for somebody or some prizes or something like that, it's just because you have to be the best in that place." (Chefs, CJUK)

1. What do agency workers want from work?

Agency workers are a distinct and diverse group, widely dispersed throughout the country. They are found not only in high-volume industries such as manufacturing and logistics, but across the whole economy from healthcare to engineering, agriculture to IT. This diversity in experience is matched by a diversity in the reasons why people do agency work.

The REC's *Flex Appeal* (2014) report identified a variety of reasons why people do agency work (temporary, freelance or contract). In 2014 the most common reason people gave for why they had chosen agency work was because while job hunting they **could not find permanent work** (43 per cent of people surveyed). Agency work is also used as a method of **finding work and earning money quickly** (34 per cent). It can be used as a route to **earn more money than they would in a permanent role** (12 per cent). It can be used to **supplement workers' income** (13 per cent). It also offers workers **flexibility** (25 per cent). Finally, a significant minority opt to work temporarily in order **to work independently and not for one company**, with 14 per cent stating this preference.

Understanding the reasons that people do agency work has become increasingly important. High employment rates in the UK means that the demographic of the people looking for agency work has changed as there is more choice:

"We have not got high unemployment anymore so there are not that many candidates out of work that want work. Actually, candidates looking for work immediately are hard to come by so if you don't have a good story of the company and a sensible explanation of why it's a good job for them, they could take another temp job, and there's a lot of permanent employment around."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

The reduced pool of potential new workers makes it essential to understand what attracts people to agency work. For the workers we spoke to we found that getting their foot in the door, good employment practices and development opportunities were the key reasons they choose agency work.

Foot in the door at Tata Steel

Agency working can provide access to opportunities that are not on the open job market. Agency workers at Tata Steel saw their roles as a stepping stone to find permanent work with Tata Steel at some point in the future:

"I found that the bigger companies use an agency. I found it hard to find any decent-sized companies where I could get in the door myself for interview. It was more convenient to come through an agency because you're halfway there then."

Charlotte, agency worker at Tata Steel

The workers valued the speed of the process:

"[A positive of agency work] is getting you into a job quickly with a larger, well-renowned company."

Craig, agency worker at Tata Steel

As well as being a big company, Tata Steel has a good reputation as an employer, which means workers want to work there:

"I can't think of a better employer in this area, especially with a high volume in-house, I can't think of a place with better benefits and a better name for itself in this area than Tata."

Charlotte, agency worker at Tata Steel

The quality of Tata Steel as an employer means that agency work here gives workers access to their good employment practices. Agencies were keen to emphasise the value of being placed within an organisation where workers hope to gain permanent employment:

"Opportunities here that Tata provide are very good opportunities, so even though it is that people are starting as agency workers, they are eligible for good rates of pay, holiday entitlement is very good here – it's way above the statutory minimum. We do see people being taken on permanently as well, but then on the other hand agency work isn't going to work for everyone."

Megan Weaver, Key Contracts Consultant at Acorn

CV-building at Tata Steel

The agency roles that were available at Tata were seen as good-quality roles that give workers the opportunity to move around the business, develop skills and gain experience:

"Temporary work can increase a skills base; it often gives them the opportunity to apply for jobs in that organisation and, if not that organisation, that field."

Once you've got that experience, particularly at an organisation like Tata, that's a big door opener somewhere else. We call that CV-building – it helps to build experience, it gives them a reference – positive references help them so much to get a permanent job or for the temporary work."

"We're seeing many temps over the years be gradually given extra responsibilities and further exposure to different skills and the opportunity to move up a grade. We see lots of things going on here that encourage temps to come here and want to stay."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

At all different levels, people want to add to their CV – whether that's at management level, or a student looking for a summer job:

"I could have an industrial cleaner or manufacturing worker or I could be recruiting for a procurement manager or finance analyst, so in those situations I guess everyone has a level of ambition that they want to develop. I would say that we do see people who start here with the view of developing a career, rather than some agency positions [that] would be viewed as maybe a summer job whilst at university, for example, so it's mixed."

Megan Weaver, Key Contracts Consultant at Acorn

Employers who use agency workers should work to create good workplaces that will attract them and ensure they are giving their best during their time there. Practical steps can be taken to increase engagement for those looking for permanent work that will provide them with opportunities to gain experience or access to permanent opportunities.

'Good work' on offer at CJUK

Chefs employed by CJUK choose to do agency work as it provides opportunities for flexibility, variety and having access to good workplace environments. Chefs place a major emphasis on the way in which CJUK responds to their needs around flexibility:

"You can make requests here that you couldn't really when you were full-time; like, 'I just want three, four days this week, only four days next week.'"

Chef at CJUK

This flexibility also includes the ability of chefs to take time off work for holidays whenever they want, in contrast to many permanent catering jobs where weekends, Christmas and other busy times of year would often be difficult to secure leave.

This responsiveness of CJUK to employee needs and wants extends beyond hours worked to the quality

of the working environment itself. Chefs reported feeling confident and comfortable in calling up CJUK to request a transfer to a different workplace for any reason if they feel they aren't enjoying their current placement:

"You pick where you want to work, you pick the hours you want to work, you can pick the people that you're working with – because if you don't like them, you just ring the agency and they just pull you out, don't they? Where, if you've got a full-time job, you're stuck with those people forever. And sometimes you just don't want that. And it's being able to move around, as well. One place you're working in, you might like it for the first six, seven weeks, if you're on a long-term contract. And then you might think, 'That's not what I wanted, this.' Ring the agency, and by the end of the week they've pulled you out and put you somewhere different. It's fantastic."

Chef at CJUK

Another benefit of their work status that the chefs appreciated is being paid weekly rather than monthly, which makes a big difference to their personal financial circumstances, and that CJUK ensures they are paid for every hour worked, rather than pressuring chefs to do unpaid overtime – something reported to be a common problem for many people working permanent jobs in catering. As one of the CJUK managers put it:

"When they're working on a temporary basis, they're getting paid for every single minute that they work, so if they end up doing two hours' overtime on a Saturday night, they'll get paid for it, whereas as soon as they go permanent, they don't, and that is one of the biggest reasons, I think, that they come back to us."

Stacie Domanski, Senior Account Manager at CJUK

These good employment practices help build and maintain trust for workers as well as attracting them to agency work in the first place. The approach that CJUK takes creates a good level of commitment from their workers, which translates into how they are perceived by the employers they are placed with – as highly engaged, productive workers:

"The agency staff that we've got from this particular agency have been fantastic, really good-quality standard of work, punctual. If anything, they've made my chefs raise their game a little bit because they've come along from outside, they're very conscientious, great standard, so they've made my normal chefs up their game and work a little bit harder to keep up."

Peter Gardner, Catering Manager at Mersey Care NHS Trust

Improving working life through agency work

"You're happier, because you know there's a safety net. If you're in a full-time job and you're not happy, you've got to go through the process of finding a job, a job that you think you're going to want. Then you've got to apply for it, then they've got to have you for interview – it's a long process. If you're not happy in your job here, you ring up, and a lot of the time the maximum they're going to ask you to do is, 'Can you get to the end of the week?' If you can't get to the end of the week, then there's something wrong, let's be honest. Because you've got that safety net, you've got a better attitude, you feel better, you know that there's a way out. Whereas sometimes, if they've given you a full-time job, you can almost feel like there's not a way out, because it's such a long process to go through." (Chef at CJUK)

Development opportunities at CJUK

For the chefs, agency work gave them the opportunity to work in different locations and develop skills that chefs preferred in comparison with permanent employment:

"You learn a lot, because you're at so many different places. If you're full-time, you stay for a length of time, it becomes like a robot, same thing day in and day out. Here you've got the opportunity to move about to different places, different methods. I've probably learned more in this space of time that I've been on the agency, than I have not been on the agency, just because there's so much, so many different techniques."

Chef, CJUK

CJUK provide their workers with the opportunity to choose and request work that they feel would provide meaningful experiences and increased employability. They are also very responsive to requests or expressions of interest from their chefs when trying to decide on their placements, proactively asking the chefs, "Is there anywhere you want to work?" or "Is there any food that you like, or anywhere you've eaten that you like?", and making an effort to approach such places to secure them as a new client in order to find somewhere that the chefs actively want to work. CJUK focuses on variety of experience in order to provide professional development opportunities for the chefs:

"If you've never done Three Rosette food, or Michelin Star food, you can turn around and, in your appraisal, if they say, 'What are you looking for?' You think, yes I'd like to have a go at that, I'd like to refine myself and do that – they will literally try and get it for you. Which is something I didn't really expect, and I've not really seen from any other agency. Which I thought was just fantastic, because it is a career option, and it is an opportunity to develop yourself, which I think there's a stigma that a lot of people think it's not a development option – well it is here, because you can choose what you do."

Chef, CJUK

Working through an agency can be used as a route to permanent employment, as a way of enhancing and developing new skills, and, as we found for chefs, as a way to give them the opportunity to work more flexibly and earn more money. We found that good organisations, good practices and development opportunities attract agency workers to their assignments. The agencies should make sure that workers are aware of the benefits of agency work and ensuring they have realistic expectations. Having a strategic view about agency work and what it can provide for the worker in their career will encourage ownership and commitment amongst agency workers.

2. What can the host organisation do to promote agency worker engagement?

Access to a flexible workforce is hugely valuable to employers. The benefits include: providing the opportunity to trial a candidate, reduced recruitment time and costs, and managing changes in business demand. We found that host organisations can use methods of promoting employee engagement as a way to ensure commitment, productivity and innovation amongst agency workers. In our case studies this was done through a good induction process, engaging managers, organisational values and a good working environment.

Induction process

Induction is an essential part of on-boarding your new recruits and familiarising them with your organisation. Induction gives you the chance to welcome new employees and build on their positive attitude and enthusiasm for their new job. It's an opportunity to familiarise new members of staff with your organisation and to introduce them to their immediate colleagues and other members of the wider workforce. It's also an ideal opportunity to familiarise new recruits with your organisation's policies on areas such as health and safety, equality and discrimination. Having a comprehensive, structured induction process has been shown to play a big part in improving long-term staff retention (CAS 2017).

The length of assignment impacts the level of induction. To promote employee engagement amongst agency workers, organisations first need to provide information that will help them perform their tasks. Second, they need to ensure that managers properly understand the level of induction that will adequately prepare agency workers to be engaged with their work.

Tata Steel have centralised the process of hiring and inducting agency workers so that *"every temp will have a consistent on-boarding experience"* (Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant at Tata Steel).

"It's vital that when they arrive they are properly inducted rather than being shoved in a corner on a desk that's a mess that they obviously haven't prepared for them arriving, and not this horrible feeling of wasting the first day because no one was expecting you and it's chaos."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

This would likely make workers feel that they are starting on the back foot and not feeling that their presence is valued. An induction that provides a good outline of what the organisation does and the role the worker will play provides context to the work they are doing, which promotes commitment to that role. The level of induction required will be dependent on how long the assignment is:

"The type of induction they'd have in the HR sharing centre would be completely different if they were working on the blast furnace. It's the hiring manager's responsibility and again it depends how long they're here for. If they're here for a week and they'll be filling in a corner is different if someone is here for maternity leave for 6-9 months."

Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant at Tata Steel

The office workers at Tata Steel see inductions as a good way to help them understand that their role is important to workers. There was a sense from the agency workers interviewed that they want to get the same level of induction as the permanent staff so that they are on a level playing field:

"Some of the stuff that has been done for permanent staff could be included for agency staff. Because when I started here I didn't have a clue about steelmaking, I didn't have a clue about various areas of the business, even the locations of the business, and in my particular job recruiting for the different sites."

Gemma, agency worker at Tata Steel

Workers formed opinions about the brand and reputation of the employer they are assigned to based on the quality – or even the existence of – the induction they receive:

"It depends on the professionalism of the company that you're working for. Sometimes you can walk in and get a full induction, and they'll say, 'There's changing rooms, toilets, tea and coffee' and all that. And they'll take you round the kitchen and show you everything. Other places, you'll walk in and they'll go, 'You're working over there.' And that is it."

Chef, CJUK

"There are places that will just say, 'Look, right, I don't have the time, I'm that busy to give you an induction onto a section. I'm just going to give you a list of jobs, I need to stand there and prep it.'"

Chef, CJUK

A lack of proper induction like this could lead to a sense of alienation among workers – that their managers aren't interested in them, thus allowing disengagement to set in from the very beginning.

Feeling welcomed at an employer organisation is very much something agency workers value:

"The general culture of places, when they're inclusive and bring you in as one of their own. Even just things like a staff meal, a drink, can make the world of difference when you're in there for 12 hours a day."

Chef, CJUK

"It depends how they speak to you, how they treat you, it's whether or not they're inclusive. You can have the same literal tasks, but have two very different experiences depending on the culture and how they view you as a chef, I think."

Chef, CJUK

To achieve an engaged agency workforce, it is important for host workplaces to treat agency staff well throughout their placement, communicating clearly with them and making them feel like part of the team. This process, however, has to start at the very beginning, with the staff induction – getting off to a poor start with a perfunctory or lacking induction will make it difficult to rebuild staff trust and enthusiasm at a later stage. In contrast, a positive induction, on par with that given to permanent employees, will make agency staff feel welcome, included and positively engaged with the placement they are about to begin.

Managers

An engaging manager is one of the most important ways that employee engagement is promoted amongst the workforce. A manager will support workers to understand how to carry out their role, convey the importance of it and an understanding of how the work needs to be done (Macleod and Clarke 2009).

At Tata Steel the agency workers were very positive about their line managers. This makes the staff feel part of the team and that their manager cares about their development. For example, some agency workers received annual appraisals at the same time as the permanent staff they worked alongside, to reinforce a sense of equal treatment:

"She put in some one-to-ones for us and set out some objectives. To make sure that we felt we weren't missing out on what the rest of the team were getting."

Charlotte, agency worker at Tata Steel

Managers also ensured when possible that agency workers' tasks were individually engaging, varied

and contributing to their professional development:

"We spend a lot of time not just doing our own jobs but also being given extra activities to improve the way that we're working and the way that we are working together. That's helpful."

Charlotte, agency worker at Tata Steel

That the quality of their work is valued by managers helps to make them feel part of the organisation. Managers also pay clear attention to the views of agency workers on operational matters, which is extremely valuable in ensuring that agency staff feel that their voice is being heard – one of the key enablers of engagement.

"You've got an opinion on how to do process improvements and your opinion is just as valid as anyone else's."

Gemma, agency worker, Tata Steel

This treatment again contributes to the high level of commitment that agency workers at Tata Steel demonstrate in their roles:

"Agency workers are very reliable; they are very willing and they're excellent workers. Generally with temps it's the motivation of getting a permanent job that keeps them going."

Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant at Tata Steel

Managers also are the first point of contact to resolve any issues at work with workers, generally approaching on-site line managers ahead of staff at the recruitment agency for most issues:

"There's a sliding scale of problems, where when you get to a certain point you involve the agency, but other than that you just go to your [on-site] line manager."

Chef, CJUK

"You raise the issue with the client first. And if you get no satisfaction with the client, then you go through to the agency, and the agency will resolve it for you."

Chef, CJUK

At Tata Steel, the managers recognise the importance of their role in making sure they speak to agency workers directly to resolve day-to-day issues, rather than simply referring everything to the agency, or simply asking for agency staff to be removed:

"If I had an issue with them I would let the agency know but I would also have a face-to-face conversation to deal with that. It depends on the relationship you have with the agency worker and the kind of work they're doing. If you've got someone who is coming to work drunk everyday who is an agency worker, you expect the manager to call and say 'don't bring that person back in

because of the health and safety risk, but if you had someone who is late by five minutes every day you'd have a conversation with the agency and say I'm going to have a conversation with this person, if it doesn't improve then I will come back to you for someone else."

Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant, Tata Steel

In this way, the managers take responsibility for engaging with agency workers face-to-face and developing the kind of relationship necessary for an engaged workforce. As the main point of contact between the host organisation and the agency worker, line managers have a vital role to play in ensuring that agency workers are properly engaged during their placement.

Organisational values

A strong strategic narrative that provides a clear, shared vision for the organisation is at the heart of employee engagement. Employees need to understand not only the purpose of the organisation they work for but also how their individual role contributes to that purpose:

"Sometimes you go in and you don't really know much about the organisation; they'll just have you doing a list of jobs. Sometimes it's different, they do see the bigger picture, they'll talk to you about what they're trying to do with the company, where they're trying to go."

Chef, CJUK

Having this clear sense of purpose is a great motivator for employees and helps bring out the best of their abilities. A clear set of values also helps to build the reputation of the organisation such that agency workers actively look forward to working there. The reputation of Tata Steel as a good local employer means most of the agency workers see working there as an opportunity:

"It's good to work for a company that has a good name and it [makes you feel like] 'Yeah, I work for Tata.'"

Gemma, agency worker, Tata Steel

"It's very ethical, I am aware they do a lot to help communities so I do feel quite happy to work for the company."

Jo, agency worker at Tata Steel

Charlotte's description below about how she felt about working for Tata shows how she bought in to Tata's vision and how her own role fit into the wider work of the company, as well as the important role this played in giving her a sense of purpose at work:

"It makes you feel like you have a more important job when you come in, especially the way it's been over the last year or two for workers who had the uncertainty over jobs. When you see everybody leaving when you

go home and you see all the cars you just think if things didn't go well or you didn't work very hard you realised how quickly so many people could be out of work. That's quite a massive responsibility. Everyone needs to do their jobs properly in order to sustain it or Port Talbot would be out of work quickly."

Charlotte, agency worker, Tata Steel

CJUK look for good organisational values in their clients before sending workers on assignment:

"We're picky about our clients, because we want our chefs to work in the best places. Our vision is a better workplace, a safer society, and that is what we're striving for, so we will often turn business down and turn clients and bookings down because we don't feel like they meet our standards and they don't meet what we're looking for, for our chefs."

"[The kind of things we look for are] a positive workplace, making sure that chefs don't work crazy hours – they don't want chefs to be working 100 hours and only getting paid for 40, it is not fair. So they make sure that that doesn't happen with their permanent staff. And I think we try to work with people that are similar to us and have the same kind of values and ethos as we do, because it just seems to work much better."

Stacie Domanski, Senior Account Manager at CJUK

This selective approach to choosing clients helps to make sure that the agency workers themselves are both engaged and productive. Employers who source chefs from CJUK value this and feel it gives them the opportunity to ensure that the agency workers provided are the right fit:

"I've had Katie from CJUK and one of the regional reps in first to tell them what we expect of agency staff, what we'd be looking for, give them a bit of a tour so they know our site as well and the process we've got so they can go to prospective agency chefs and say, this is the place, this is what they do, everything like that, so we're not just getting anybody. [As a result] the people that they've given us we've never had a problem with, they've been really conscientious, really good workers, they've been really good quality."

Peter Gardner, Catering Manager, Mersey Care NHS Trust

Working for an organisation with a clear set of values and having an understanding of how your role fits in to a wider purpose are important factors for the engagement of all employees. For agency workers particularly, however, it is vital that organisations make the effort to try to communicate this wider

narrative so that even if they are only working there for a short assignment, they are still engaged with their work and see it as having meaning, not just as a list of tasks to perform in exchange for money.

Working environment

The working environment in an organisation has a large impact on how workers feel about their role. Tata provides a good working environment for temporary workers by including them in activities laid on for permanent staff:

"Our temps go to the Christmas do, they go to outings, they aren't treated as second-class citizens. One of our temps, his little one was ill with a hole in the heart and they had a whip round and raised money. They would have done it for a permanent person but they would have done it for someone who is a temp too."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

A sense of belonging makes workers enjoy their work, fit in and feel like part of a team, which helps them feel included in what is, for them, a temporary working environment:

"The people you work with make a massive difference; if you're having a bad day, it's easier if you enjoy the people you work with."

Ashleigh, agency worker, Tata Steel

"It's nice to come to work when I worked for agency work; I come in smiling and I go home smiling, it's great."

Charlotte, agency worker, Tata Steel

For the chefs it could be as simple as staff being welcomed into the workplace:

"The staff [at current placement] are just unbelievable; it's so, so nice. All the chefs, nobody's stressing, everyone's welcome with open arms. Front of house said, 'Don't forget your drink, 'What drink?' 'You're a member of staff now, so you get a free drink on a Sunday night.' It's a pint, it costs £3.75. But it's how they've said, 'You're a member of staff now,' they're not treating me like an outsider. General culture of places, when they're inclusive and bring you in as one of their own. Even just things like a staff meal, a drink, can make the world of difference when you're in there for 12 hours a day."

Chef, CJUK

Treating agency workers as part of the same team as permanent workers includes both how they are treated while working and how they are treated during mealtimes, recreation or other activities. This is something they do at Mersey Care NHS Trust, a CJUK client, as a way to include workers:

"We all eat together, we're all part of the same team, we all move round to the same locations together. So yes, it is what we try and achieve here; it's not just agency staff coming in to fill a gap – they become part of the team."
Peter Gardner, Catering Manager, Mersey Care NHS Trust

When an agency worker joins a team, it is important that they are treated the same as other members of staff. Equal treatment in certain areas is required by law:

"Because of Agency Worker Regulations they have to get most of the same rights and soft benefits, use of the canteen, intranet, free tea and coffee, all those sorts of things. Just thinking about how we police that, we won't put a temp anywhere unless we've been there and checked the job description and checked that with the temp."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director, Hays

Compliance with the legal requirements on equal treatment is a responsibility of managers in ensuring agency staff are properly integrated with permanent staff. Permanent staff colleagues also have an important role to play in making agency staff feel integrated in practice, and this is often a reflection of the wider staff culture. As one agency manager pointed out, sometimes a simple oversight from their permanent colleagues can have serious consequences in making agency staff feel excluded:

"We sometimes have temps say they've felt very left out because there's been an outing and they haven't been invited. And they say, 'we didn't think to invite her because she's just a temp,' and that's just common courtesy but sometimes common courtesy isn't obvious."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

Ensuring agency staff are well integrated, included in events and generally treated as part of the team contributes to engagement in several ways. First, it appeals to the general sense of fairness that all workers have – that people who work alongside each other deserve the same treatment. A sense of injustice will soon cause disengagement with work to set in. Second, it fosters a sense of camaraderie and belonging, which is important in boosting agency workers' commitment to their placement – they are more likely to put in discretionary effort to help out colleagues who they care about. Finally, it reduces the risk of isolation from being in a temporary position, where agency workers might not have had much time to get to know their co-workers – as a result it can improve happiness and well-being at work.

3. What is the role of the agency in promoting agency worker engagement?

Placement process

Agencies need to have a relationship with their workers and be able to understand the right roles to put them in. This is important from the perspective of the employer, agency worker and agency. A bad fit will mean employers and workers are unhappy and it may require the agency to find someone new to take that role. Also, the agency can facilitate better relationships with host organisations and workers by keeping an eye on the progress of the agency workers through aftercare and scheduled check-ins. It is the role of the agency to understand this to ensure they have productive assignments. This could be through, for example, knowing that someone is interested in finding a permanent job or looking to gain particular types of experience and skills via temporary assignments; this is vital information that will ensure that the worker is placed into the right role:

“You need to put someone in who is happy to give their all for nine months, and if someone is happier to do three weeks give them that. In an ideal world you’re going to put the ones that want a nine-month assignment into the nine-month assignment, not someone who has just been made redundant and someone who has 46 interviews because they’re not going to want to stay. With recruitment it’s all about fit.”

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

The process of understanding what someone wants from a role empowers them to make decisions about what they want from work.

Agency workers feel like they have a *“choice, so you can choose that you don’t go back to a place where you didn’t enjoy it, and then giving a range of different experiences and seeing different workplaces”* (Chef, CJUK).

CJUK are committed to having a strong relationship with their workers:

“They’re obviously working and representing Chefs Jobs UK, and whether they are on our payroll or the client’s payroll, I still see them as our employee. And I think they still see themselves as being our employee, we try to make them, as opposed to just being an agency worker, an extension of our business. We hope that they live and breathe the same values that we do, and I think that we’re fully responsible for them when they’re on a job and I hope that they feel if they’ve got any issue they’ll call and talk to us about it, whether it be a personal issue or an issue in the workplace.”

Stacie Domanski, Senior Account Manager at CJUK

The ability to place agency workers into the right organisation comes from the agency understanding of the client and the worker, something that can only be obtained by paying close attention to the views and needs of both:

“It’s a real people business. Your clients are people and the products are people – it’s all about relationships. It is understanding the clients, understanding their needs, understanding the culture. You can only get a positive experience for workers if you put the right temp into the organisation. You have to have the business relationship with the client, understand their need and culture, and as a result put the right people in. Anyone could complain that they are unhappy if they are the wrong fit.”

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

This can be done by using a consultative process to gain an insight into agency workers’ own interests, aspirations, skills and needs:

“[My agency] did the consultancy thing. They see your CV, look at it, break it down and what kind of things you don’t like. They get to know what you want from your next employer and a little bit about you. I suppose personality fits are important when the line manager requests certain types of people – it’s important that they get to know you first.”

Charlotte, agency worker at Tata Steel

The relationship between the agency and the client is an important part of the agency working experience. If properly briefed by the agency, the organisation and workers should have a good understanding of the role being offered. The agency also plays a role in preparing workers for their new role:

“Agencies need to be clear about the type of business we are. What you tend to find with agencies, they call and say, ‘You’ve got an interview with Tata tomorrow. Do you want to go?’ I expect them to be more consultative: ‘We’ve got a vacancy at Tata. What do you know about Tata? Have you worked there before?’ You do your research so you know what environment they’ll come into, prepping them before the interview. The Tata Group own Jaguar Land Rover, Tata Steel Consultancy Services, massive organisation, global, used by lots of organisations. We expect them to sell that to the individual.”

Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant at Tata Steel

This knowledge allows candidates to prepare for their role and adjust any expectations of what they will get. At Tata Steel they have experienced attrition from agency workers who were not fully briefed on the role and were not a good fit for the roles on offer:

“The hiring managers, they wanted people from small SMEs, manufacturing who understand profit and loss. In reality you’re taking people who are accountants or data analysts who come from working on their own having lots of accountability, being almost a finance business partner, and you’re putting them in a call centre and telling them I need a spreadsheet on this or that. That didn’t work and we had to go back to the agency and say, even though managers want people from this environment, can you just make sure that candidates are aware that they’re not going to have accountability? They are going to be sitting in a call centre.”

Ruth, Lead Recruitment Consultant, Tata Steel

At CJUK they do this by being honest and managing workers’ expectations:

“If a chef said, ‘Yes, I only want to do rosette places,’ we would have to be really honest in saying, ‘Okay, we can definitely get you some of that work some of the time, but would you be open to taking on sort of nice, fresh food, gastropubs that do operate at a nice standard in the meantime, if there is a gap, in between a rosette site and a rosette site?’ If they said, ‘No, I don’t want to do that,’ well, we’d have to again be honest and say, ‘Okay, it might be difficult for us to keep you busy.’ Or they might say, ‘Absolutely, yes, that is fine.’ And at least we’ve understood, that yes, they’re capable of a rosette-type place, but it doesn’t mean it is important, it doesn’t mean they always have to be in those kinds of places. And everything that they tell us, we log on to our system, so all the notes are there. So I might put the notes on, and even though I’ll have briefed the account managers, it is good that they’ve got access to all the notes.”

Stacie Domanski, Senior Account Manager at CJUK

From the point of view of the employer, clear communication about what the role is will allow agencies to prepare workers to ensure they are ready for the role, reducing attrition and turnover. From the view of the worker, clear communication from their agency and employer will enhance the experience of the agency worker. If properly briefed by the agency and the organisation, workers should have a good understanding of the role they are about to undertake.

Management

It is important that the agency communicates with the agency worker throughout their time with the agency, in order to maintain levels of engagement. CJUK keep their agency workers engaged by providing feedback and career advice, something that is strongly praised by their chefs:

“We get annual appraisals. In January you sit with one of the girls [recruitment agency staff] upstairs, in one of the interview rooms. And we’ll go through your last year’s work, with everywhere that you’ve worked – some of which you’ve forgotten about – and they’ll give you all the feedback, positive – and sometimes negative, I believe, I’ve never had any! And then they’ll say, ‘What do you want for this year? What do you want to do going forward? Did you want to stay to do continuing professional development (CPD), do you want to go into this or that? Is there anywhere else you want to work that I can find for you? What can we do for you?’ And it’s absolutely outstanding.”

Kevin, chef, CJUK

Open communication is a big part of providing a good work environment for agency workers. Agencies said it means they are able to mitigate any potential issues:

“We have regular phone calls, regular emails, the communication between the two, I feel that they would never let anything get to a point, we talk every few days, how is such a person getting on, how did they find it, how are you finding them, and that’s really good because there is no issue that would get to an issue because I feel we’ve got an open relationship with them as an agency and us as a customer to be able to talk about things quickly and openly.”

Peter Gardner, Catering Manager, Mersey Care NHS Trust

From the agency’s perspective, it is important to check on agency workers after they have arrived at a placement, to make sure that they are being treated well and that disengagement is not setting in; otherwise they risk losing staff after a few weeks:

“If you don’t do that aftercare, you don’t find out and you think don’t worry and subtly talked to them and ask them if anyone has made a cup of tea, you can do it nicely, but if you don’t do proper aftercare you miss out and they leave after three weeks.”

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

Chefs UK

Discussions and feedback

"Feedback is so important, and it is something that we take really, really, really seriously.

"Every single job that a chef goes on, I'll get feedback. If they've gone on a job and, for example, they've done something wrong – they've been prepping really slow or there has been an issue with one of their dishes – the client will come to us and tell us about it, and then either myself or Jen will have a really, really honest and frank discussion with them. 'Is there anything that is bothering you? Why has that happened? Could it be because of this?'"

"Like for example this morning, I was speaking to somebody we'd received some poor feedback about last week, but he has been under a lot of strain at home, and he has been under a lot of stress, and that has perhaps impacted on his work, and prior to that he could have been doing a great job, and it is just this one kind of little hiccup.

"We've had a chat with him, and he has decided just to take a week out, and take some time to himself. We've signposted him to Hospitality Action now, so he can try and get some help and support from them, and hopefully in a couple of weeks' time he'll be back with us, working again and doing a great job." (Jen Duckworth, Talent Specialist at CJUK)

It is important that agencies ensure that there are clear processes for basic employment rights such as holiday and sickness pay. This helps to ensure that there is a good relationship between the agency and the worker:

"I think Acorn are pretty good; they've always been very accommodating in the event of an emergency. For instance, I had a bereavement and I couldn't contact anybody but emailed Megan. She got back to me straight away and I took it as a holiday rather than unpaid."

Jo, agency worker, Tata Steel

Clear communication around all these issues is very valuable in providing reassurance for agency workers, so that they know what to expect and can find resolutions quickly if, as in the case above, unexpected events occur that need to be dealt with. If an agency does not follow best practice, it has a clear and direct impact on the experience of the workers, as well as undermining the relationship between the worker and agency, which can reduce engagement for workers going forward:

"I had an issue a couple of weeks ago where I hadn't taken much holiday and I didn't have any communication to say our holiday runs out on this day. You've got X amount of holiday, you need to take them. Then it wasn't until after the holiday had run out I found out through another colleague."

Gemma, agency worker, Tata Steel

Even among highly professional agencies who exercise good practice, different agencies' processes may suit some candidates better than others. From

the two focus groups we conducted, we found that the agency workers seem to prefer systems that give them more control and autonomy over their own working arrangements:

"Hays are quite good because every time I phone them I speak to the same person, or they have the portal where you can find information. Everything is online, so we have access to booking our own holidays, holiday entitlement, etc."

Charlotte, agency worker, Tata Steel

Organisational values

At CJUK, their approach and relationship with the workers is a big bonus for them:

"You can tell straight away, it's more of a community. They've got a good HR approach, and they look after you."

Chef, CJUK

"They wanted to know where I worked, what I was doing. And they did such an in-depth Q&A for me, and they got so much information out of me, that I've never had that before. And I've said this loads of times, especially to all the chefs out there, if there's one word that I could say about this company, it's definitely professionalism."

Chef, CJUK

During the focus group it was clear that the chefs take a vast amount of pride from working with CJUK. (All focus group participants came in their uniforms on a non-work day to take part in our discussion.) They are strongly committed to doing a good job for CJUK. Building loyalty with the CJUK brand made the chefs proud of working with CJUK and feel like they

are representing the brand. This led to a level of engagement with the chefs by building loyalty and productivity:

"You never, ever go down to their level – because you are Chefs Jobs UK. So their name is on you. So you go away and you do your best."

Chef, CJUK

If an agency builds a reputation for quality service, it is reflected in how both their candidates and clients talk about them:

"We use them because of the service; they also sent us their best quality chefs that are available."

Conor McPeake, General Manager of the Supreme Group – Green Welly Inns

A good relationship will mean workers are comfortable to provide feedback to the agency of their experience on site, which can be used to help the agency make decisions about where to send their workers in future. By demonstrating that they are listening to employee voice, agencies will also help to improve the engagement of their workers. One of the CJUK workers expressed this view clearly: sometimes they simply want to feel that their voice is being heard, rather than for the agency to take any concrete action as a result:

"If I've had a bad experience somewhere, I'll ring up [CJUK] and I'll say, 'Are you ready?' ... and she'll go, 'Go on,' and then I'll start, and I'll not take a breath for 15 minutes. She'll go, 'Feel better now?' I'll go, 'Yes, I'll get back on with it now.' And sometimes I think that's what some of us need; we just need to rant on and get somebody who just listens to you."

Chef, CJUK

At other times, however, agency workers want to know that agencies will take quick action to move them on when they are unhappy with a placement:

"I like it when I hear on the phone, 'Alright Nick, if you are not happy there, you can stay until the end of the week, and next week we'll change you.' And that's taken the stress out of me."

Nick, Chef, CJUK

"If there weren't suitable opportunities that we could accommodate in Tata Steel, we would work with other branches to consider what clients are. It could be that other clients could be an option for this candidate to place into a different position. If there was a specific requirement, we would try to accommodate that. Because it's got to be right for both parties."

Megan Weaver, Key Contracts Consultant at Acorn

Rather than allow a worker to become disengaged by remaining too long in a position where things are not working out, responding to their concerns and helping them find a new placement quickly helps to build a relationship of trust between the agency and the worker. In the case of CJUK, it also helps to demonstrate their stated commitment to only placing workers with clients who match their values. This consistency with their stated values maintains a sense of integrity, which is a key enabler of employee engagement.

Career development and other support

The agencies we spoke with told us about supporting workers with career development:

"What we do is give careers advice to everybody who comes in. It isn't just 'give me a job', it's career advice we give them – cradle to grave. I personally have got people who I've known since they were at junior level right to director. We aren't just a job shop; we are careers advisors."

Jackie Taylor, Senior Business Director at Hays

Workers in our focus groups also talked positively about the careers advice they had received from their agencies:

"It was really good they did the sort of consultancy thing; they see your CV, look at it, break it down, and what kind of things you don't like."

Charlotte, agency worker at Tata Steel

The opportunity to talk about what they want from their work empowers workers to make choices about the kind of jobs they want to do. CJUK take an active role in providing development opportunities for chefs by putting on training days:

"We've got some really good chefs that are really, really good on pastry, and other chefs might perhaps not be as confident or comfortable doing pastry, because they've never experienced it, so we're going to hold some masterclasses. At Accrington and Rossendale College, they've got some amazing catering facilities there, and pastry is going to be one of them, so we've got a chef who is brilliant at pastry and he is going to come and kind of share his pastry knowledge and do a masterclass, and similarly we looked into doing butchery ones, because not all chefs have done kind of full-blown butchery."

This illustrates a commitment to developing and rewarding the capabilities of those they manage. Similarly, agencies can take the initiative in supporting their workers at work in a variety of

other ways – to benefit their skills, professional development, mental or physical health, or other aspects of their well-being at work.

In summary, while the employment agency might not directly control most aspects of the daily working environment for agency workers, they still play a key role in ensuring that agency workers remain engaged over the longer term. This comprises several important elements.

First, the agency is the provider of many of the key employment rights that agency workers enjoy – access to holiday and sick pay, for example. The quality and ease of access to these rights will make a big difference to how agency workers perceive their employment relationship.

Second, agencies have an important part to play in the professional development of their agency workers. While a good host workplace will provide appraisals for agency workers alongside permanent staff, this does not mean that agencies should not also be providing these. Many of the staff interviewed in this research greatly valued the feedback sessions with their agencies and the way that the agencies took an interest in developing their skills and helping them achieve their career goals, as for example CJUK did with helping their

chefs gain a wider range of experience.

Third, agency workers depend on the agency as an organisation to fall back on in case of a dispute with their host workplace – the way that agencies conduct themselves when disputes occur will make a big difference to how they are perceived by workers. Agency workers will be more engaged when they are able to give honest feedback about problems they are having with the client without fear of negative repercussions from the agency. Instead, they will appreciate it when they feel that their voice is being heard.

Finally, the agency is responsible for making smart decisions about which assignments they offer to workers and which workers they supply to different employers. Those who exercise this responsibility well – by choosing carefully only those clients who share their values, by listening and taking account of worker interests and desires, understanding their workers' skills and needs and matching those well to the client – will find a much more engaged workforce as a result. Similarly, those who act quickly to respond to worker concerns and desires to move on will thereby demonstrate their integrity, retain the trust of their staff and be rewarded by loyalty in return.

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