

## REC statement on social workers in Northern Ireland

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) has been made aware of messaging that some members have been receiving from their workers and clients, regarding "a ban" on agency social workers in Northern Ireland. This is completely absurd - and will only worsen the already acute shortage of social workers in Northern Ireland. Most importantly, it will put end-service users - vulnerable people - at risk.

We have asked the procurement team at the Business Services Organisation (BSO), the framework operator for health and social care in Northern Ireland, for urgent clarification. We're now just five weeks' away from 30 June, which we understand to be the proposed date of implementation.

We are especially disappointed at the missed opportunity to engage with recruitment professionals and the REC to find a sensible route forward, one that takes into account the needs of service-users, the reasons why people choose to work via an agency in the first place, and how transparent and effective pre-market engagement can develop a fit-for-purpose procurement process that delivers value for money.

In our last communication with the BSO on 18 April, it was stated that the requirements for the next iteration of the framework and tender process had "not been confirmed" but the tender would begin in late June. We are incredulous that clients are now talking about a ban of agency social workers in these circumstances. In fact, in our last meeting with BSO, we found ourselves vigorously agreeing about the importance of open and ongoing dialogue between ourselves, agencies and the BSO, as a foundation for successful public procurement.

The likelihood of agency social workers leaving the profession, rather than taking up a permanent contract, has been well-evidenced by the REC. For example, [a recent REC survey](#) revealed that four in ten temporary social workers (42.18% of the respondents) would leave the workforce completely if further restrictions were made to their current pattern of employment.

The REC will continue to support affected members in Northern Ireland while we seek urgent clarification from the BSO.