



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

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Dear all,

I want to start this letter by thanking you again for your invaluable efforts in supporting our healthcare system during what has been an unprecedented and challenging time. I am grateful to our agency staff, in health and social care, for all their hard work and for stepping up when their country needed them the most. I am writing today to remind you of some important responsibilities you have as a supplier of agency staff to the NHS.

Our flexible staff, including bank and agency, will play an integral part in reducing the backlog of elective care and operations and we anticipate a great need for additional healthcare staff over the coming months. Therefore, I want to remind you that our NHS will only use agencies that are operating on approved frameworks. We will not tolerate a lack of compliance with framework rules or price caps. This is to ensure effective use of taxpayers' money and to protect the quality of care received by our patients.

You may recall the letter I sent in December 2020, where I set out the NHS priority of eliminating off-framework spend. I am delighted to see significant progress with several Trusts removing off-framework agencies from their supplier list in the past few months. I would like to thank those of you who have played your part in supporting the NHS in a responsible way.

However, NHS providers continue to report that a minority of recruitment agencies have not proactively adapted their business model to partner with approved frameworks and operators. We also know that some on-framework agencies or recruitment groups offer shifts off-framework. The off-framework approach is having a negative impact on the healthcare system, fair competition and price cap compliance. I have also written to Trusts informing them of the support available to them should they feel pressured by unreasonable negotiation tactics from agencies or exposed to increasing hourly rates. We know that this type of behaviour is not only detrimental to our healthcare system, but also to the rest of the agency sector. To those of you operating in this manner, now is the time to bring shifts on framework including partnering with approved frameworks, or else your services will no longer be required.

The NHS would welcome your support to help them improve their workforce planning, by encouraging those of you regularly providing staff to the same Trusts, or for the same shifts, to

consider block booking arrangements. Block bookings help Trusts with their workforce planning and create a more predictable employment offer for staff.

Finally, the department will continue to work closely with NHS England and Improvement and framework operators to support the NHS, and our workforce during the recovery phase, and we hope you want to be part of this journey. More information about our approved frameworks can be found at [NHS England » Agency rules: list of approved framework agreements for all staff](#), and please contact the framework operators with any queries.

Thank you for your continued cooperation.

HELEN WHATELY