Template letter: The role of supply agencies in the education sector

**30.11.2020**

Following on from the REC’s initial response to the campaign by the NEU and NASUWT regarding the use of agencies in the education sector, we have produced this template letter for agencies to send to their clients directly.

We urge members to send this letter to your clients, to reiterate the important role that agencies play in the education sector, and to highlight the issues with the proposed changes in the unions’ campaign.

**Dear [NAME]**

**Supply agencies – supporting schools through the pandemic**

All of us know how important effective staffing is to schools functioning effectively at this difficult time. As Chief Executive of the [Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC)](https://www.rec.uk.com/) – the professional body for agencies – I wanted to write to reassure you that supply agencies are here to support you in supporting the pupils in your school.

By helping you to manage staffing needs, including extensive compliance and safeguarding checks for candidates, maintaining an accurate and reliable list of available supply teachers and reacting when you need them, agencies are crucial to effective school staffing. I know many schools have long-lasting and trusting relationships with their agencies. That’s no wonder, as the services provided by agencies mean they can be on call from as early as 5.30am until late in the evening to ensure the schools they work with remain fully staffed. This flexibility and specialised knowledge would be impossible to replicate through another model.

The same trust is at the heart of agencies’ relationships with supply teachers. Over the course of the last 9 months, 90% of REC members in the education sector have furloughed temporary workers to support their income. This shows how the sector supports teachers through the pandemic, and demonstrates how much agencies care about protecting supply teachers as well as providing an effective solution for schools.

A big part of agencies’ work is maintaining ethical and fair practice in recruitment. At the REC and we will always work with the unions and Department for Education to ensure this remains the case. Agencies in REC membership have to comply with our Code of Professional Practice and our Complaints and Disciplinary Procedure. The Code ensures that REC members operate to a higher standard, which in turn leads to high-quality candidates. The Complaints and Disciplinary Procedure allows us to investigate complaints against members by workers and clients. The complaints team’s investigation process can result in cases being escalated where necessary to our industry-led Professional Standards Committee (PSC). The committee has the power to sanction or in extreme cases expel members. This process means that you can trust REC members to deliver the highest standard of recruitment for your school and gives you a clear route to raise any concerns.

**Misleading teaching union claims about agencies miss the mark**

You may have seen some campaigning aimed at creating a new system of directly-engaged supply teachers that would bypass agency standard and require schools to manage all the activities that an agency currently handles. This would include required compliance and registration checks before engaging with supply teachers directly Obviously, this is not ideal for schools, and removing agencies from the supply chain will create more work and cost for your already overstretched staff.

Historically, local authorities and schools did manage their own supply teachers. However, the move to outsourced supply happened many years ago due to the growing burden it posed and the lack of specialist staff. Going back to this would be taking a step backwards that would save neither money nor time. Agencies were introduced as they are specialists with the resources and expertise to handle this work safely and effectively. Schools can instead focus on quality teaching.

Some trade unions also draw focus to the amounts that agencies charge schools. It is highly misleading to present the pay of a supply teacher, the taxes they and the agency pay (like National Insurance), the costs of safeguarding and of agency staff as “profit”, as many of these claims do. By comparison with many sectors, profit margins in supply teaching are small, and not out of line with Government expectations – we have worked with Government on a framework (CCS Supply Teacher Framework RM3826) to ensure that costs are effectively and fairly controlled. In addition, schools are able to shop around and can choose what agencies to work with based on fees.

Now more than ever, we should be working together with schools, agencies and unions to protect schools. That's the best way to ensure your school stays open and delivers the best possible service to your pupils and their families.

Yours sincerely

A picture containing arrow

Description automatically generated

Neil Carberry

Chief Executive

Recruitment & Employment Confederation