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BEWARE THE BOGEYMAN

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Remodelling for Relevance**

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WELCOME



SIMON KENT
EDITOR

The new year is underway and despite lockdowns and restrictions there is a sense of optimism in the air. The expectation is that things will get better and that employers can look forward to a gradually improving work and business environment. It's an optimism the recruitment industry shares and recruiters are ready to help pave the way for companies as they continue to adapt to changing circumstances and new challenges.

The Global Recruiter is putting in place new initiatives to bring you the help and guidance you need over the next year and beyond. We're also preparing to recognise and reward recruitment companies and individuals who have demonstrated excellent work and dedication to the sector even in the face of such adversity.

Over the next few months look out for announcements concerning special publications dedicated to covering the information and issues you need to know about. Look out too for The Global Recruiter Industry Awards. Held back last year we're keen to make 2021 a rewarding one for the industry in as many ways as possible and we'll be announcing details for our unique awards very soon. Wherever you're working and whatever your challenges we will continue to be here for you. We wish you a successful and happy new year.



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incomparable

/ɪn 'kɒmp(ə)rəb(ə)l/

adjective

1. having no equal or rival for excellence or desirability.

IR35  **SHIELD**
THE IR35 COMPLIANCE STANDARD

IMPROVING PICTURE

The latest monthly Recruitment Trends Snapshot report from The Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) has shown professional vacancy numbers in the UK experiencing a seasonal dip month-on-month in December, although the year still ended on a high, with the annual discrepancy in job numbers closing. The data, provided by growth analytics platform, cube19, revealed a 27 per cent and 20 per cent month-on-month decline in permanent and contract vacancies respectively in December. This drop can be attributed to an expected seasonal dip as a result of the Christmas holidays. However, the statistics also revealed a positive development, with the annual percentage drop in jobs improving. Year-on-year,

permanent vacancies were down 22 per cent while contract dropped just one per cent for December 2020 when compared to 2019 figures. In comparison, the yearly discrepancy in vacancies for permanent stood at 32 per cent in November and 16.2 per cent for contract, signalling a 10 per cent and 15.2 per cent improvement respectively in December. The annual percentage drop in placements also showed signs of improvement, with permanent placements up 12 per cent when compared to November's year-on-year figures. The daily tracking data also indicates that both permanent and contract vacancies were on the up before the holiday period started. Contract jobs grew 20 per cent in the first two weeks of

December when compared to the end of November, with permanent vacancies also reporting an increase in the first half of the month, up 10 per cent from the end of November. Interview numbers in the first half of December also saw a two per cent growth in comparison to the end of November, indicating that the UK's hiring activity was on an upward trajectory before the holidays. "With the holiday period usually much quieter for hiring, it comes as no surprise that vacancies were down in December overall, however the data shows some incredibly promising signs," said Ann Swain, CEO of APSCo. "The year-on-year comparisons are the greatest indicator of the impact that the on-going pandemic is having on recruitment and these figures

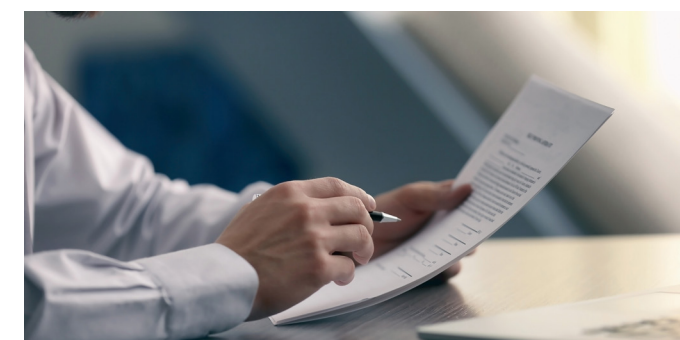
are rather promising for the end of 2020. The improvements we can see in the daily tracker data for the first half of December paint a positive picture for the beginning of 2021, suggesting that we are on the path to recovery – though it may be a long one with the UK once again moving into a national lockdown." Joe McGuire, Global Sales Director of cube19 added: "A reduction in volume over the holiday period is always expected but it is pleasing to see new contract placements/sales not following the usual Christmas dip. Additionally, perm year over year was at the same level seen in 2019 which is particularly encouraging. There is still some way to go but with the vaccine roll out there seems to be a bright light at the end of the tunnel."

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DISCRIMINATION FEARS

City law firm Bates Wells, has suggested employers may be reluctant to hire EU nationals as they cannot ask them whether they have status under the EU Settlement Scheme ('EUSS') until after June 30th. Guidance from the Home Office says that employers cannot yet not ask employees about their status under the EUSS, as EU nationals still have until June 30th to apply. The Home Office have told employers that if they ask about this before June 30th they will be exposed to claims of discrimination on the basis of country of origin. "Employers will need to tread extremely carefully," says Victoria Cook, senior associate in Bates Wells' Employment practice. "Probing questions during

recruitment could leave them vulnerable to claims that they have discriminated against candidates on the basis of their nationality. "Ironically, this could inadvertently lead to employers choosing to 'filter out' candidates from EU countries rather than run the risk of a claim," she says. EU nationals may present their European passport or national identity card as proof of their eligibility to work in the UK up until June 30th. From July 1st they will need to be able to prove that they have been granted settled status or that their application is being processed. It is expected that UK employers will be obliged to check the status of EU employees post



July 1st and may face prosecution if they fail to do so. Should any employees fail to apply for status under the EUSS or prove that they have lawful status to work in the UK via another form of visa, their employment must be terminated. Bates Wells says that employers who hire EU workers could incur significant recruitment costs and disruption if they are then forced to let them go just months later if it transpires that they don't have settled status.

Chetal Patel, Partner in Bates Wells' Immigration practice adds: "Right to Work obligations force businesses to operate as de facto immigration officers. Brexit has only added to the administrative burden." Patel adds: "Hiring and training employees only to be forced to fire them in a matter of mere months would incur significant costs, which businesses can ill afford in these difficult times."

PHAIDON'S ROLE

Recruiter plays key part in drive for vaccine

Phaidon International have been acknowledged as a key partner by BioNTech, the German-based biotechnology company who was the first to bring a successful vaccine against Covid-19 to market. Phaidon International's life sciences recruitment brand EPM Scientific has been working with BioNTech for a number of years and were pleased to be part of their journey in developing a vaccine. Harry Youtan, CEO of Phaidon International says: "Often we spend time focusing on the day to day tasks, but on this occasion more than perhaps

others, everyone in our team is extraordinarily proud that we are helping, in our own way, to overcome one of the greatest challenges in recent times." "Despite the damage caused by the virus, I have been inspired each day by the spirit of collaboration and scientific discovery," said Ugur Sahin, CEO and co-founder of BioNTech. "It is one of the greatest honours of my life to be involved in this effort and to play a role in helping the world regain a sense of normality. I would like to thank each and every person that helped make this a reality."



BREXIT AND COVID TALENT DRAIN

1 in 3 young people are considering leaving the UK for work



Research from Adecco has found one in three young people (16 to 35) are considering leaving the UK to work in another European country due to uncertainty around Brexit as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time the YouGov survey among some 1,000 UK workers found more than three-quarters (76 per cent) of those over 55 years old and about two-thirds (66 per cent) of those aged 45 to 54-years old said they would not consider leaving the UK to find work. The research further found that those working in the capital are the most likely to consider moving to another European country for work (40 per cent) when compared to

other regions in the UK with all citing Brexit uncertainty and the pandemic as deciding factors for them. "After a difficult year across the board these research findings reveal the true scale of the talent challenge UK companies face," commented Alex Fleming, region president of Northern Europe Adecco Workforce Solutions. "Even with a Brexit deal and the vaccine rollout underway, the high levels of uncertainty are leading young people in particular to look outside the UK and London for work. If businesses do not act now to turn this around, they will lose valuable talent and ultimately risk their chances of successfully bouncing

back in the long-run." The research uncovered some key industry differences. Nearly a third of those in IT and telecoms (31 per cent), real estate (37 per cent) and media, marketing and advertising (33 per cent) said the pandemic and uncertainty over the outcome of Brexit have made them seriously consider moving to the European Union to work. In contrast, those in manufacturing (70 per cent), transportation and distribution (68 per cent) and education (69 per cent) said they will be staying in the UK for work. This suggests that, despite fears Brexit would spark a mass migration of top talent away from critical industries, the UK will

unlikely see a widespread "brain drain" of talent over the coming months. Fleming added: "To combat this, it's more important than ever that companies continue to maintain a positive workplace culture. This means offering more flexible working and enhanced benefits such as mentorship programmes, as well as providing employees with the opportunity to upskill within a role. Companies must create compelling places for everyone to engage and learn. This will not only help to keep employees motivated and engaged but could be a deciding factor in whether they chose to remain working in the UK."

HANOVER & CITY CV DEAL

Partnership created to build capabilities and market expansion

Hanover Search Group has entered into a new partnership with specialist career consultancy and outplacement services firm, City CV. The new partnership will see the global executive search organisation expand its capabilities to deliver a more comprehensive service to its client base, while also supporting the further expansion of central London-based City CV in both UK and international markets. Hanover currently offers executive search, leadership solutions and market intelligence services to its global client base. City CV was founded by Victoria McLean in 2009 and offers a range of outplacement programmes, professional

writing and coaching services to thousands of organisations and individuals around the world. Employing a team of specialist career consultants, writers and executive career coaches with experience in a cross section of industries, from finance and technology to project management and HR, City CV works with a client list ranging from mid-career-professionals to CEOs and non-executive directors. The partnership strengthens an existing relationship between the two organisations, where City CV provided outsourced support to Hanover Search Group clients. Hanover, which is headquartered in London and has offices in

Europe and North America, operates in a broad spectrum of sectors. It also has a presence in Asia markets through its partner company ALS International. Advising Hanover Search Group in the share purchase was head of corporate finance and partner at RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) Carl Swansbury and senior manager Alex Simpson. RG also undertook financial due diligence led by audit and assurance partner Grahame Maughan and director Andrew Cameron. James Emmett, CEO, Hanover, said: "Victoria and her team have built a successful and highly reputable business, which offers expertise and experience

that will benefit our global client base. We have seen first-hand how City CV adds real value to clients' career development and transition and through this new formal partnership we are keen to support their continued growth in key markets and territories." Victoria McLean, CEO of City CV, said: "We are excited to cement our relationship with the talented Hanover team. This partnership provides an important strategic opportunity for City CV to increase our growth trajectory in UK and international markets, provide added value services to Hanover, expand our digital platform 'Career Refinery', and broaden our client and candidate reach."

CLEANING UP

Chaseman Global shows commitment to ethical businesses with new hire

Chaseman Global has announced the appointment of Adam Small as head of clean technology, EMEA. Adam will be working alongside the global team to attract key talent to businesses with talent requirements within carbon capture, renewable energy, sustainable transportation and environmental services. With more than 13 years' experience working in senior search across the energy industry, Adam has helped deliver innovative talent acquisition and human capital solutions for a variety of multinational corporations, joint-ventures, SMEs and independent consultancies. Regional director EMEA at Chaseman Global, Philip Bills said: "I'm incredibly excited to have Adam join the team here

at Chaseman as we continue to expand our remit into the Clean Technology sector. We're passionate about working with ethical businesses, and with Adam onboard it further enables us to get the most talented individuals paired with the right businesses to help solve the global climate and food challenges." Adam joins an already established team to spearhead growth across the global portfolio: "Clean technology is key to the future of almost every industry globally, and as a company we want to work to support any business that's pushing forward within this sector." Says CEO, Richard Connolly. "We're delighted to be increasing our clean technology offering and have Adam at the centre of this service."



LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Denis Pennel, managing director, World Employment Confederation, discusses Why Platform Work needs to be fair.

Platform work has experienced rapid growth in recent years and been embraced by individuals and businesses alike. While working via an online platform does not constitute a new legal form of work as such, it does present a new way of organising and distributing work, which takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by advances in technology. Platform work can be carried out through a host of different contractual work arrangements – including fixed term, part-time, agency work, variable hours, self-employed etc. It also covers all sectors and occupations – from professional services through to domestic cleaning. As a consequence, online platforms offer significant potential to bring people into the labour market and support higher employment levels. Private employment services are also deploying online platform technology to enhance their added value to jobseekers, workers and businesses. From increased efficiencies to the promotion of new ways of working that can drive more dynamic, diverse and inclusive labour markets, we view online platform services as having the potential to bring a host of positive influences to labour markets. Indeed, technological advances allow our society to find a new balance between caring, learning, working and leisure.

As economies seek to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, this presents a particularly attractive prospect. The crisis has served to underline the importance of developing new ways of working and in many respects it has merely hastened the future of work. However, if online platforms are to live up to their potential, then it is vital that regulatory frameworks around the world are keeping pace. We need to set in place regulation that fosters and leverages new technologies and labour market innovations. Regrettably, many existing labour market institutions are unable to accommodate digital advances such as platform work, leading to workers and businesses opting out of these new employment pathways – something that can be detrimental to both them and society. What we need is to support digital technology in stimulating social innovation. This means taking a human-centred approach to labour markets and creating new solutions for working, learning and social protection to ensure that fundamental rights and benefits are appropriately balanced across diverse forms of work. Platform work is a form of work and as such, it rightly comes with expectations of decent work. To support national and international policymakers in defining and

applying such a regulatory framework, the World Employment Confederation has released a series of recommendations. (include link) They focus on HR-related on-line services and seek to create effective, appropriate regulatory conditions. The first recommendation is that in regulating platform work there is no one-size-fits-all. It encompasses a range of services, work statuses and ways of delivery. Trying to create an international standard would merely divert attention away from the urgent need to redesign national labour market institutions and safety nets to accommodate a more dynamic and digital economy and world of work. The second proposal is the need to create simple and clear regulation for worker classification. Workers and business need legal certainty and clear rules fit for the 21st century. Digital tools and technology mustn't be confused with a contractual relation or the provision of a service, and workers and business communities need to collaborate in shaping a national common understanding of variables such as accountability, economic independence and supervision – including for self-employed workers. Next comes the need for enforcement of worker status classification regulation in creating a level playing field. Resources

should be allocated by public authorities and be proportional and risk based. Before considering regulatory overhaul, policymakers should assess to what extent effective enforcement would solve any worker classification issues. Furthermore, policymakers need to ensure that similar services are governed by the same regulation, conditions and standards. Not all online platforms deliver the same output and many of them provide services that have existed for decades. In the case of recruitment services, if classification results in fees and costs being charged to jobseekers and workers illegally, then measures to halt the practice must be set in place. Finally, agency work must be promoted as a decent way to organise platform work. It is internationally recognised under ILO Convention 181 and, like all forms of work, can be provided through online platforms as well as other digital tools and channels. Private employment agencies have embraced these new developments and continue to ensure quality and adaptability for all parties. With these conditions in place I am confident that we can futureproof platform work and ensure that it is leveraged for the benefit of workers, business and our society as a whole. ■

MIND THE 'IR35 BOGEYMAN'

Dave Chaplin, CEO of IR35 compliance solution IR35 Shield and author of IR35 & Off-Payroll Explained says agencies have nothing to fear.

With only a few months until the Off-Payroll rules are extended to the private sector, many hiring firms are making knee-jerk recruitment decisions based on an inflated perception of the tax risk imposed by the new legislation. HMRC started the fire, the flames of which have since been fanned by firms with vested interests advocating an overly risk-averse approach to compliance. Some firms have been scared into adopting an “on-payroll only” stance and will find themselves at the back of the queue when the market hands out talent. However, the IR35 bogeyman really isn't that scary, and the supply chain can be well protected if it adopts a robust compliance-led process. In fact, evidence shows that the fallout from non-compliance can be far more real and damaging. For businesses that are unwilling to engage with the Off-Payroll rules, it will be the fear of IR35 that damages their competitiveness and their bottom line.

Off-Payroll risk, debunked

The chances of being subject to an HMRC investigation are already very small but further diminished by rigid compliance practices. Based on the IR35 status assessments that we have conducted to date, and recent survey statistics, we estimate roughly 250,000 UK contractors will be working under ‘outside IR35’ working conditions once the market returns to normal. Realistically, HMRC may struggle to enquire into more than 2,500 cases per year and has so far lost roughly half of the IR35 cases that have reached the tax tribunals. This suggests that an engagement stands a 0.5% chance of being subject to a successful challenge by the taxman.

It is also important to note that HMRC's inspectors typically target the low-hanging fruit, meaning firms that conduct comprehensive status assessments further diminish their chances of attracting the taxman's attention.

Even if HMRC comes calling, evidence gathered throughout the engagement reinforcing the status determination should prove enough to halt an investigation dead in its tracks or, at the very least, form the basis of a comprehensive tribunal victory. In the rare event that a compliant business succumbs to an HMRC challenge, the risk imposed upon the firm's other contracts is limited by the fact that the taxman is required to tackle each engagement on a case-by-case basis. This means a company does

not need to worry about a tax bill spanning its entire contingent workforce based on a single HMRC victory.

What will non-compliance mean for agencies and hirers?

Though Off-Payroll compliance renders tax risk minimal, this has not prevented some businesses from exaggerating the dangers of the legislation for their own gain. Some firms are using fearmongering tactics to encourage firms into risk-averse responses, typically resulting in the onboarding of entire contingent workforces onto a consultancy's associated payroll model.

But though such blanket measures negate the tax risk posed by Off-Payroll, they too pose significant threats. Indeed, according to our recent survey of more than 3,000 contractors:

- 65% of respondents said they will seek to avoid working ‘inside IR35’
- 72% of contractors said they would quote a separate rate for ‘inside IR35’ engagements

This means recruiters and hiring firms that fail to consider ‘outside IR35’ engagements will find themselves at the back of the queue when the most sought-after contractors decide on their next engagement while those that jump the queue will have to pay a premium.

Adopting a compliance-led approach to Off-Payroll

Contrary to popular belief, mitigating tax risk while remaining competitive via Off-Payroll compliance is not that hard to achieve.

However, agencies and hiring firms must work together to ensure that:

- Status assessments are accurate
- Ongoing working conditions continue to reflect the deemed status
- Evidence reinforcing the deemed status is documented throughout the engagement

Parties also need to take care to satisfy the Off-Payroll's ‘reasonable care’ requirement. Highlighted in section 61NA(1)(a) of the legislation, reasonable care must be demonstrated through the provision of a Status Determination Statement (SDS) detailing the reasons behind a status decision.

Though satisfying such requirements for each individual engagement may seem like a tall order, compliance solutions are available that tick the necessary boxes and reduce users' workloads.

IR35 Shield is a software solution that supplements fast, case law-backed status assessments providing hiring firms and agencies with the necessary tools to take a compliance-led approach. Furthermore, individual status assessments come accompanied by an SDS containing full reasons for the determination, satisfying the legislation's reasonable care requirement.

But though it will likely prove an effective deterrent, a compliance-led approach cannot completely prevent the taxman's advances. It therefore pays to be prepared in the event of an IR35 investigation. HMRC begins its Off-Payroll investigations by posing various questions about the engagement to the hiring firm. And provided the firm can provide ample evidence that its regime is robust, an expert tax advisor should be able to shut down a case before it has even got going.

However, if HMRC proceeds with its investigation, don't panic. Though HMRC has published a tool promoting its own view of IR35 in the form of Check Employment Status for Tax (CEST), the taxman cannot override the actual law.

Any successful challenge against the deemed status of a contractor would require HMRC to convince a tribunal judge that the engagement is within scope of IR35, which is an incredibly tall order when the defendant and all parties in the supply chain are armed with evidence provided by their compliance-led approach.

Securing added protection through insurance

One thing agencies and hirers shouldn't do is rely on insurance alone to protect them against HMRC. Insurance products are not a substitute for compliance and policies will not provide cover where the claimant has failed to fulfil their own obligations. Remember, if you do things properly, you shouldn't need insurance. However, IR35 can sometimes be subjective and, therefore, insurance could prove useful as an additional, inexpensive layer of protection underpinning your compliance efforts.

When selecting an insurance policy, make sure it includes at least six years to cover any claims for carelessness that would result in the enquiry window going back that far. It's also important to ensure your policy provides adequate cover throughout the courts. Even if you win at the First-Tier Tribunal, HMRC can, and often does, decide to appeal these cases to the Upper Tribunal (UT). UT cases require that the losing party funds the costs of the winning party, so it's imperative that your policy provides this cover.

Don't fear the IR35 bogeyman

Of course, a case even reaching any tribunal is an incredibly rare scenario where parties have adopted a compliance-led approach. IR35 Shield partners with specialist tax underwriters to help resolve any HMRC investigations into our clients' engagements, aiming to ensure they don't reach the tribunal. Despite some of the messages purported by HMRC and industry service providers, agencies and hiring firms have no reason to fear the IR35 bogeyman. In truth, any risks that businesses encounter will be of their own making, be it through refusal to engage contractors outside of IR35, inadequate compliance processes, or slow status assessments. From April 2021, many firms are set to let fear of the Off-Payroll rules cause untold damage to their business. The remedy, a compliance-led approach underpinned by a quality compliance solution, is easier to apply than most realise. ■

Handle IR35 with confidence

From April 2021, off-payroll working legislation will also apply to the private sector. Be confident about compliance with IR35 Comply from PayStream, one of the leading providers of umbrella and accountancy services.

Our specialist online IR35 review portal covers everything you need to manage and control IR35 from end-client to contractor. It's easy to use, and backed by experts.

Get IR35 confident at paystream.co.uk/sl/confidence



APPROACHING FAST

Tania Bowers, Legal Counsel and Head of Public Policy at APSCo outlines what you should have done by now.

The delay to the roll out of off-payroll rules into the private sector (and implementing the changes into the public sector) will have been a welcome relief for some last year, particularly amidst the struggles that many have faced since the pandemic struck back in March. However, it was only ever going to be an extension, rather than a cancellation of Off Payroll, and the new deadline is fast approaching. So, what should your staffing company have implemented by now and what should you prioritise before 6th April 2021?

A steering group needs to be in place

While, ideally this should have been in place for some time now, it is important that recruitment businesses have a steering group set up to agree the timeline, scope, task lists and define responsibilities for collecting status determinations from clients and passing them down the chain of supply, as well as co-ordinating client and contractor communication and the handling of any challenges to determination

results. For those that set up steering groups last year, there have been modifications to the rules since March 2020 and HMRC have issued updated guidance on both Off-Payroll and CEST, in addition to the detailed Employment Status Manual (ESM) so the end-to-end process must be reviewed.

Review of current business

Hopefully you have reviewed or are in the process of reviewing your supply chain and understand which parts of your business contract with Personal Service Company (PSC) contractors. Businesses need to have reviewed a) contracts and assignments with end dates beyond 6th April 2021, b) any contracts that are currently under negotiation that will expire beyond that date, and c) any contracts and assignments that a client is likely to extend beyond the deadline. You will also need to understand your exposure to the changes by considering the types of contractors you currently supply



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and the types of roles you fill across your sectors. Ideally this data should have been collated by now and recruiters should have begun to educate and consult with clients on their approach to assessing whether contractors fall inside or outside IR35. If you haven't already, as part of this review your steering group should also outline how queries regarding determinations will be dealt with both before and after the roll out of off-payroll rules. Many contractors with contracts straddling 6th April 2021 will prefer to terminate their current assignment and commence a new one in the new tax year, therefore you also need to consider notice provisions. Any new assignments from 6th April will require status determinations so you need to have an outline of how communication with clients and contractors across the supply chain will be handled in the long term and who is responsible for this.

Supply Chain review

It's recommended that staffing companies review their preferred supplier lists of umbrella companies and if they don't have one consider putting one in place. Some clients are insisting on contractors working via a PAYE model and for contractors assessed as inside IR35 working via a PAYE model is preferable to working inside IR35 via their PSC. Basically, an umbrella company employs the worker on a UK employment contract, and is therefore responsible for their PAYE, NICs and employment rights such as pension enrolment.

Non-compliant umbrella companies offering high levels of take-home pay by using "disguised remuneration" models are under HMRC scrutiny and are a tax and legal risk to the contractor, recruiter and client. Working with umbrella companies accredited by APSCo, the FCSA or Professional Passport reduces these risks significantly and recruiters can take comfort that the umbrella is run by "fit and proper" persons and is financially stable.

Status determinations

Status determinations should be well under way by now, but if not, it is important to push these forward as soon as possible without compromising on compliance. It's in the best interests of staffing firms to ensure rash decisions and potential blanket bans on PSC contractors aren't made by end-clients, so ensuring adequate time is being allocated to not only making determinations, but also handling any challenges to decisions or unclear determinations, is key. Many clients are choosing to use HMRC's CEST tools but commercial assessments and insurance are available to help clients use reasonable care in coming to the correct conclusion on status. Agree any new business models
Recruitment businesses should also have defined any changes to business models by now. Control is a key aspect of IR35 determinations, with the control over how a contractor performs the work a crucial consideration. In order to ensure this is appropriately managed, many staffing firms have chosen two potential models, but both require a number of compliance considerations that should be under review by now:

- Consultancy work: this is where a party delivers an "outsourced service" as an expert (not the supply of a person's services) to a client. In this case if the party delivering the outsourced service chooses to use a PSC contractor, then for the purposes of off payroll, it is the client and needs to do the SDS. Delivering an outsourced service carries more risk and the consultancy must expand insurance coverage to cover the area of expertise (it is not recruitment). If the service was incorrectly labelled as outsourced and in fact it was a service to which off payroll applies, then the client may be liable to HMRC for breaching off payroll. Hence, recruiters should not consider the consultancy model as a commercial advantage or a "quick win".
- Outside IR35 SoW: Many PSC contractors will be looking to deliver project style services to support their status as an independent professional, working outside IR35. However, for any recruitment firm choosing this option, there will need to be clear agreements in place with existing clients that are appropriate for a SoW model and avoid the recruiter taking on contractual risk – the PSC contractor should be responsible for the quality of the services, acts and omissions.

Prepare for challenges from HMRC

The legislation and guidance is now clearer on when an unpaid PAYE debt payable by a deemed employer (the fee payer) can be recovered from others (relevant persons). This means that if an HMRC officer considers there is "no realistic prospect of recovering these taxes from the deemed employer within a reasonable period" then HMRC can recover payment from the highest person in the chain or the second highest person in that chain, where that agency is also a resident in the UK.

Use your time wisely

The Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) has stressed for some time now that preparation ahead of 6th April is key. With only a short time left, it's crucial that agencies have:

- A steering group in place to drive SDS – where these have been in place for some time, they will need to review end-to-end processes in line with up-dated HMRC guidance
- Reviewed supply chains and developed a clear understanding of where PSC contracts are in place
- Reviewed umbrella PSLs or put one in place if the firm doesn't currently have one
- Begun the status determination process – but if not, don't compromise compliance for speed
- Agreed any new business models – whether that's a consultancy work or outside IR35 SoW model
- Prepared for any possible challenges to determinations from contractors or HMRC

Any staffing companies with future plans to engage the contract workforce in the UK post 6th April 2021 will need to have a process in place to enable them to work with end-clients to accurately and fairly identify a contractor's status to prevent any knock-on effect on placements in what is already looking to be a tough year for recruitment. ■

Microsoft Teams integrates with CTI champion CloudCall.



CloudCall, the intelligent phone system that integrates with your CRM, is now available for Microsoft Teams. The company has added an industry first integration with Microsoft Teams to its extensive list of leading recruitment and staffing CRM systems. This integration will bring an easier and more productive set-up for working within the app.

In the current climate, a lot of businesses are running remotely. Recruiters are meeting with candidates online, calling clients from their kitchens and communicating with colleagues through services such as Microsoft Teams.

Microsoft Teams has become not just a handy work tool, but a way to stay connected with your network. Microsoft Teams has become an essential part of day-to-day life for many people around the world, with Microsoft seeing a new daily record of 2.7 billion meeting minutes in one day, a 200% increase from 900 million, in mid-March.

CloudCall's Chief Technology Officer, Paul Clark, said "We've spoken to numerous customers and they've all told us their biggest pain, is switching between Microsoft Teams and their CRM system.

"We've integrated our powerful communications tools into Microsoft Teams so that users no longer have to switch between the communication platform and the CRM system."

The brand-new integration pulls information from your existing CRM system and makes details more accessible and useful within Microsoft Teams. Features such as click to call and opening candidate records, have been added to create smooth and simple processes for the user.

CloudCall for Microsoft Teams has many further features to offer their users too.

Search and share

The integration will allow you to search for contacts within your CRM, directly from Microsoft Teams. You can view the contact card and then share this with your colleagues across different channels and conversations, improving collaboration by being able to efficiently access and share the exact same information. If you had a candidate you think would suit a colleague's role, you can easily share these details.

Call and SMS

Once you've shared your contact, your teammate will then be able to place a call to the contact directly from the

card. The call will be initiated from Microsoft Teams, giving the user the ability to drive the call from the CRM instead of using multiple devices and interfaces. There is a new SMS feature for CloudCall for Microsoft Teams too. Recruiters will have the ability to easily send a quick text to confirm an interview or book in a call with contacts.

Call syncing

Any calls you make through the contact cards within Microsoft Teams, will be synced to your contact's activity history within your existing CRM system. Details such as calling times and call recordings will automatically be saved into the CRM. Colleagues will be able to efficiently access not just the details of a candidate within the CRM but listen back to any previous conversations via the call recordings.

Open a record

As well as initiating a call through Microsoft Teams, you can open a contact's CRM records directly from the contact card with a single click. Viewing details about a client or candidate has never been easier. The less time the user spends flicking between programmes and channels, the more time can be spent conducting business development and sourcing candidates.

CloudCall CTO, Clark, spoke about the positive impact the integration will have on remote workers. He said: Now more than ever, efficient communication within business is critical, as companies largely work remotely.

"Companies can use our solution to seamlessly recreate the office experience and empower their employees to communicate intuitively with their colleagues and clients."

Ultimately, the power of the CloudCall for Microsoft Teams integration allows recruiters to spend less time switching between platforms and more time doing what they're good at, recruiting candidates and keeping clients happy.



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READY OR NOT?

The FCSA ask Are you ready, or have you left it too late?

Last year, the Government postponed implementing the IR35 reforms in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a deferral, not a cancellation, and the Government is now committed to reintroducing these reforms from April 2021, ensuring people working like employees but through their own limited company pay the same tax as those employed directly. A further deferral is therefore highly unlikely.

In our article in the November 2020 issue of Global Recruiter, FCSA board members Matt Fryer of Brookson and Tim Hunt of Crest Plus (part of the JSA Group) provided agencies with a comprehensive six-month action plan to put you on the right track in readiness for the off-payroll reforms.

Now with less than three months to go, has your agency done everything it needs to be ready and in a good position to capitalise on the changes?

If the answer is no, in this article, FCSA will help you to understand what this will mean for your agency, explaining what the impact will be on your profitability and cash flow, the options you can offer contractors now considered inside IR35, and how best to attract candidates within IR35.

The best starting point is to refer to our previous article. If you have done all of this, you should be ready and be in a good position to capitalise on the impending changes.

To summarise at this stage, you should understand:

- How to assist your clients in assessing status using reasonable care
- What the impact will be on your profitability and cash flows
- What options you can offer contractors where they are considered inside IR35
- How best to attract candidates considered within IR35

Once the above have been understood and completed, you need to develop your processes and then embed them into your 'business as usual' ways of working.

Remember, you can still continue to help your end hirers to reduce the number of contractors and freelancers captured under the IR35 reforms by making changes to contractual documents and changes to working practices where they are unhelpful in maintaining genuine outside of IR35 working.

This needs to be continually considered with both ongoing and potential new clients. Continued client education is still key in managing this going forward and gives you a chance to get even closer to your potential new clients.

Remember, your clients will need to re-assess roles if and when those roles change, even if it is the same contractor continuing to work for them. You will need to ensure you have a process for capturing any such role changes and then re-assessing the new role or asking your client to re-assess the role.





As there will be financial risks associated with wrong assessments, be prepared to challenge any determinations you feel may not be robust. For example, if you feel that reasonable care has not been used when arriving at the status decision. Consider an audit process where internal determination decisions and those provided to you by your clients can be re-looked at objectively with a fresh pair of eyes. Keep an eye out for any new legislation or case law as this may result in changes being required to determination tools, and consequentially re-assessments could be needed for your existing previously assessed workers, both those inside and those outside IR35. Also, keep an eye out for what your key competitors are doing. Having something to compare your own processes to can be very helpful in times of change. If you or your clients haven't used the extra time to prepare since the postponement in 2020, you still have time to do this properly, but you will need to start now. Before April 2020, HMRC indicated the potential of a "soft landing" where fines and penalties may be waived in certain circumstances. HMRC has indicated that they would still be making good on their previous intention of a grace period from 6th April 2021. But what does this mean? Firstly HMRC has indicated to workers that their intermediary entity will not be subject to new compliance checks for tax years prior to April 2021 on the back of new information unless HMRC has reason to suspect fraud or criminal behaviour. HMRC also intends to take a light-touch approach in the first twelve months following 5th April 2021, meaning businesses may not have to pay penalties for inaccuracies relating to the new IR35 rules unless there is evidence of deliberate non-compliance. This may help give businesses the confidence to take a little extra time to get things right if needed rather than cut corners late in the day to meet the deadline. Of course, the best scenario we strongly advise is preparing well now and being ready on time. When similar IR35 reform legislation was introduced in the public sector in 2017, many organisations "blanket banned" outside IR35 contracting options so as not to have to make what was perceived to be risky outside IR35 determination assessments. This was widely challenged at the time and so is expected to be much less common as we approach 2021 reforms in the private sector. Some end hirers have since become more subtle in protecting themselves from the perceived tax risk by offering only PAYE roles instead of blanket banning outside IR35 roles; however, the commercial implications have yet to be borne out. To comply with their obligations, administration time and costs for hirers will also increase. Therefore, many hirers will understandably seek ways not to make any determination at all and are already being seen to take cautious approaches to hiring by offering roles as fixed-term employment or "inside IR35". The downside of any form of blanket ban approach from the hirer or agency is that they may not be competitive when looking to hire contractors, or the cost of the contractor may become much higher and prohibitive, especially where the worker can find other roles outside IR35 for the same or better rates of pay. Blanket bans will, for many, be "false employment." However, in practice in the current climate, as we exit COVID-19 and nationwide lockdowns economic consequences, many contractors may be happier to accept less than ideal terms and of pay when work could be hard to come by. The laws of supply and demand will, in the end, determine which roles will attract higher pay rates and which will result in contractors taking a hit on their usual take-home payments. Hirers are taking more of an interest in the supply chain due to the increased risks to them, so it is advisable to undertake your own credit checks on your suppliers to ensure you have a robust, financially sound supply chain behind your own business and a credible picture to present to your hirers. Be very wary indeed about the rise of opportunists in the market, whether that be inexperienced IR35 reviewers, umbrella companies with inadequate experience or lack of financial robustness, new models designed merely to enhance take-home pay, Statement of Works models that don't accurately reflect genuine working practices, or other models already being investigated by HMRC e.g., loan schemes. Remember, FCSA Accredited Members have been independently audited against a strict code of compliance on an annual basis, and our members are prepared, ready, and willing to help your agency. ■

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IR35 SHIELD

The Professionals' choice for implementing Off-Payroll with confidence

With just a matter of weeks to go before the Off-Payroll legislation takes effect in the private sector, 52% of contractors recently told us that they are yet to be assessed by their client. It is going to be a busy few weeks for all parties to implement compliance.

As all sectors try and recover from COVID-19 and the economic downturn, retaining and securing the best talent will be essential for clients. Unfortunately, firms who have taken a cautious approach and adopted an "inside IR35 only" stance will find themselves at the back of the queue when contractors are deciding on their next contract.

Fortunately though, any IR35 fears the supply chain has can be allayed if it adopts a robust compliance-led process.

IR35 Shield is an insurance-backed solution available that can help assess the status of contractors quickly, compliantly and consistently, and provide hirers with peace of mind.

The challenges

Off-Payroll compliance is multifaceted, and firms have new compliance responsibilities, with the primary one being to conduct comprehensive assessments to accurately determine the correct status of their workers.

Parties are also advised to document and store ongoing proof of engagements being outside IR35 to protect against future HMRC's advances.

This real-time monitoring and evidence gathering during the contract is especially important under Off-Payroll, because

HMRC may knock on the door many years later, when the original hiring manager and contractor will be long gone.

Remaining compliant in the new era is complex - a single assessment is not enough. IR35 Shield's comprehensive compliance-led approach will help businesses quickly close down future HMRC investigations and avoid being dragged through a tax tribunal. As the old saying goes, prevention is much better than cure.

Firms must be careful to ensure that they enlist the help of experts and solutions with demonstrable experience in this arena and beware of the 'pop-up IR35 experts' entering the market that are really trying to sell something else.

What firms need to do

Firms need to audit their contingent workforce quickly and accurately, to help inform immediate hiring policy decisions and ensure they have in place an ongoing robust IR35 compliance process.

Advisors need to work closely with the key stakeholders (HR, legal, project managers) to ensure the assessment data undergoes the necessary level of human oversight, which will help lead to highly accurate and consistent status determinations.

What IR35 Shield does

Accurately aligned to current case law

Current employment case law is applied to each assessment undertaken, using the same approach as a tribunal judge. Our independent assessments eliminate human error or bias.

Business Intelligence & Reporting

IR35 Shield's reporting and forecasting features can help firms drill down into the detail and make evidence-based policy decisions, highlighting any immediate risk.

Diligently combines human expertise and automation

Our unique Collaborative Assessments technology means that we are far more than just an automated tool. By giving oversight and ownership of the assessment to the whole supply chain, we ensure that all parties provide the information most relevant to them.

Fast and Efficient

IR35 Shield can be used to invite and track all of your workers to be assessed, delivering the status determinations in real-time as they are completed whilst minimizing the administrative burden of the new legislation.

Commenting on IR35 Shield and its capabilities, Dave Chaplin, CEO and founder of IR35 Shield said: "IR35 case law has moved on considerably in the last decade. Barristers and armies of lawyers are now involved, and my experience of co-defending cases, including at tribunal, means IR35 Shield has been designed to pre-emptively shore up a future defence."

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aren't always **quite**
what they
seem




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THE RISE OF DEVOPS

High demand for experts
as world switches to
remote working

A report published by CodinGame has shown how demand for DevOps experts has skyrocketed in the past year as Covid has pushed employees to remote working. The developer recruitment platform interviewed more than 15,000 developers and HR professionals from around the world for its 4th annual developer report. It found that while most companies allowed staff to work remotely some of the time, almost half (48 per cent) of those surveyed said their developers worked away from the office full-time in 2020, compared to just 4 per cent of those companies surveyed during 2019. However, figures suggest any trend towards tech telecommuting may be short-lived, once the virus has been beaten, as less than a quarter

(23 per cent) of developers questioned said they would prefer to work remotely full-time. The switch to remote working also saw a sudden rise in demand for DevOps experts, as businesses have experienced increased needs in managing their cloud infrastructures or migrating their operations to the cloud during the pandemic. This trend is likely to continue in 2021 putting pressure on tech recruiters. More than four-out-of-ten (43 per cent) HR professionals surveyed admitted they will struggle to find qualified DevOps for their tech teams this year. DevOps has jumped ahead of Back-End and Full-Stack developers as the hardest positions to fill. When it came to hiring, tech recruiters turned to virtual interviews during the pandemic.

More than half (52 per cent) of the developers recruited in 2020 were interviewed and hired remotely. However once again this trend could be short-lived as only 15 per cent of developers and 1-in-4 recruiters had a preference for this kind of contact. The tech sector has been one of the success stories of the pandemic, and that's reflected by the confidence levels within the developer community about their job prospects in 2021. Programmers were asked how easy they thought it would be to change jobs in 2021, on a scale from 1-10. Confidence was reasonably high, with respondents scoring seven on average, the same as in 2020. "Our latest report on the developer profession highlights the rise of telecommuting and

virtual hiring in 2020 and the strong demand for DevOps experts as businesses adapted to working in the cloud," commented Aude Barral, co-founder of CodinGame. "Although Covid has largely been behind this shift, it will be interesting to see if these trends continue in 2021. "We've also seen more tech recruiters hiring developers who haven't followed the traditional academic route," Barral added. "A computer science degree is no longer a must-have if you want a career as a programmer. "With the wealth of online and offline resources available to everyone, coders of all levels of technical competence can improve their programming skills, opening up job opportunities in the booming tech sector."

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APTITUDE JOINS PLATFORM

Thomas test takes place as applications rolled out.

Global talent assessment platform provider, Thomas International has added its Aptitude assessment to the new Thomas platform. The new platform, consisting of Thomas Perform and Thomas Profile applications, will begin to be rolled out across Thomas' global markets after the completion of this initial launch phase in the UK.

The addition of the Aptitude assessment expands the capabilities offered to customers using Thomas' new platform. The new platform combines 40 years' experience of recruitment and development assessments, merging psychometric science and benchmark data with the latest technology to help businesses unlock improved business performance through predictive hiring.

The new addition is part of Thomas' ongoing mission to help businesses identify

best-fit candidates, and avoid making costly hiring mistakes. Psychological factors, such as aptitude, are a well-established determinate factor in the long-term success of a candidate in a role. This is of particular importance as organisations look to bounce back after a difficult 2020.

"This is just one of the many enhancements we will see roll out across the new platform in 2021 that will help us deliver against the opportunity of predictive hiring for our customers," said Sabby Gill, Thomas' CEO. "Through the use of benchmark data, combined with our knowledge and know-how honed over the last forty years, businesses can use Thomas Perform to predict the level of impact candidates will have on business performance and team culture, not just their CV strengths."

TECH RISES TO CHALLENGE

Survey finds uptick in tech integration for early careers talent acquisition

Research from global talent acquisition and management firm, Alexander Mann Solutions has found more employers integrating technology into the entire talent acquisition remit including early years recruitment and assessment.

The company's report – in partnership with Aptitude Research – analysed a mix of quantitative and qualitative research across North America, EMEA and APAC during the pandemic to ascertain the impact of Covid-19 on talent acquisition. The data revealed that 38% of those surveyed had a separate budget for campus and early years recruitment during the outbreak. This included an allocation for technology investment, with financial services the top industry with a separate budget for campus engagement activity. These companies indicated intentions to focus on using digital solutions to engage

candidates throughout the year and beyond. Almost a third (30%) of companies also highlighted that they are now considering implementing game-based or digital assessments in order to provide validity to assessments while also delivering a positive experience to candidates through shorter, more candidate-friendly assessments. "There's no doubt that Covid-19 has led to an increased use of technology in the talent acquisition arena," says Jane Clark, global head of emerging talent consulting, AMS, "but while we saw more firms utilising video interviewing, tech has clearly proven valuable in many other ways this year. It's highly encouraging that so many employers reported they had a separate budget for campus and early years recruitment as it can be all too easy to overlook this critical segment of talent pools in difficult times.

"What has certainly been interesting is the greater investment in virtual tools to engage with emerging talent from attraction through to onboarding," she adds. "Utilising digital platforms for virtual career fairs, virtual company presentations and redesigning social media campaigns was a real game changer in 2020. We also saw creative virtual campus ambassador programmes used to attract the best graduate talent. Some organisations were quick to switch their internships to digital platforms and we predict this trend will continue in 2021. It seems that many clients are embracing this digital world and all the many benefits it brings. We don't see this appetite for innovation and differentiation going away any time soon – in fact we think this will form part of a post-Covid future."

DEMOCRATISING TECH

Ignas Rubežius, CEO of The Remote Company believes no-code solutions will be the way forward

With the growing demand for software development professionals already producing a talent shortage of 40 million workers worldwide and projected to reach more than double that by 2030, Ignas Rubežius, CEO of The Remote Company believe no-code solutions will be the way forward. According to Rubežius no-code allows anyone in an organisation to code cheaper, faster, and without any prior knowledge in programming.

"We see that no-code solutions are becoming commonplace," says Rubežius, CEO. "The tools using the no-code approach get everyone on the team involved in the creative process. Until now, web development required the involvement of IT professionals who oversaw every step of the process. With the help of no-code tools, teams can do most of the work themselves and the IT department can jump onboard later, if needed."

Experts predict that by the end of next year, 75 per cent of development shops will use similar solutions, while 85 per cent of engineer leads believe that the implementation of low-code or no-code solutions will become a standard within their companies in the next few years.

No-code is an alternative to a traditional approach to software development. Instead of having professionals spend hours writing code, non-technical staff can join the process by assembling the website or an app using pre-made elements via a user-friendly interface. No-code products work by providing a visual layer on top of the code – if changes are made in the visual editor, they are reflected in the respective lines of code in the background.

Pfizer, General Electric, and Zurich Financial are among the fast-growing number of companies that have adopted various no-code solutions in creating custom software. For example, no-code

platforms can aid in migrating legacy apps that are costly to maintain. It can also be used in creating new tools that can access all company data in real-time and turn it into insightful statistics.

No-code solutions are utilized in marketing communications, too. For example, MailerLite is a tool that allows businesses to launch and manage marketing campaigns without any coding. The user-friendly product can be used by marketing teams to easily create, track, and optimize company newsletters. Every part of the process is done without the involvement of the IT department.

"After the success of MailerLite, we set out to find a way to let users build their dream web project themselves, without putting a lot of effort into learning programming or hiring developers," says Rubežius. "It offers people the ability to build quickly and efficiently, without technical barriers."

Ycode, which will go into public beta in early 2021, reimagines the traditional way of designing and developing websites and web applications. It empowers anyone to build faster, without needing to know how to code. Users have full freedom – not only can they change the look of the basic visual elements, but they can customize interactivity, functionality, and user experience of the website or the web app too. It uses the most progressive and fastest-growing Tailwind CSS framework in the frontend and writes clean Laravel PHP code in the background. Ycode avoids vendor lock-in and offers easily understandable code, which means any developer can jump in and extend on the project.

Such solutions democratise development and bring the power of building websites and web apps to anyone interested. The ease of use, efficiency, and the involvement of a wider workforce makes no-code the future of development that might soon become an industry standard. ■

SKILLS FOR LIFE

Phil Howard at Intequal examines how you can ensure your apprentice makes the most of the time spent learning their profession.

Whether you're upskilling your existing team or bringing in fresh talent, apprenticeships can be an excellent way of driving innovation and providing your teams with the latest skills and fresh ideas.

Entry-level recruitment is difficult in any sector – you're often hiring on potential rather than industry-proven skills, and in the hope that the education that has been completed before the new hire starts will provide the necessary soft skills to hit the ground running when they enter the workplace.

But in fast-moving digital roles this is even more of a challenge. What is new and cutting-edge today will be old news very quickly, and for this reason increasing numbers of employers are choosing to invest time in training a digital apprentice. By taking this approach individuals learn the company and the sector by working alongside colleagues but also absorb knowledge and skills in short sprints which they can instantly apply in the workplace as they go.

But employers too have a responsibility to help young apprentices make the most of their time learning their chosen profession – ensuring that they are effectively set on the path to success from an early age.

Here we look at a few factors that can help to ensure an apprentice hits the ground running:

Online learning

Online learning has become increasingly prevalent over the last 12 months. Some of this is down to changes in the workplace that have taken place on the back of the coronavirus pandemic and made remote working the norm. But make no mistake – much of this would have happened regardless.

In many ways, the young people we're working with today are hard-wired to thrive in this new world of work. They're digital natives comfortable with using tech like Microsoft Teams to collaborate with others and manage projects and workflows. However, online learning on its own is not a like-for-like replacement for in-person sessions – rather it is a different approach that needs to be thought through carefully in order to be successful. It certainly shouldn't be a case of simply converting existing materials so that they can be accessed online – the learner deserves and expects a richer more interactive experience. Ofsted said similar in its annual report when it stated: "Online education needs to be well integrated into the provider's curriculum offer in order to work effectively."

For this to be the case there needs to be a real focus on quality teaching and tutor-led interactive online training models with individualised programmes which are employer-led and specifically designed to support the occupation in which the apprentice is being trained.

Structured learning

Apprenticeship positions should offer a structured and transparent learning plan which allows them to have a full understanding of their development and clear goals to work towards. They can then use this as they build their skills incrementally while simultaneously implementing their learnings in real-world practice.



The best apprenticeships are built on continued communication and constant feedback, something that younger workers often crave from a new role, giving them the best possible opportunity to meet the high standards of their employer and deliver ROI at a faster rate.

This professional development alongside continued learning of new and relevant skills is an investment which both the apprentice and the employer benefit from. Apprentice retention rates often exceed the average with apprentices far more likely to stay with the business in the long-term.

Embedded into the company culture from the get-go, these apprentices are trained in established ways of working within the business – meaning that they'll work in the right way to make an impact within the company.

Cross-generational learning

Young apprentices can become an important part of a cross-generational group that can provide a toolkit of workers with different strengths – helping to create a dynamic and diverse team.

In this way knowledge transfer, through both traditional learning and development and alternative methods such as reverse mentoring schemes, can add real value to an apprentice's time with a business. Not only does it provide them with knowledge gained through years of experience, but it allows them to give something back to the business and share knowledge gained through their course.

Apprentices often bring new ways of approaching tasks to the table – and as digital natives they are already well equipped to adapt to new technologies and ways of working. By allowing them to reverse mentor more senior colleagues, they are able to share theories learned on their course and equip other members of the team with newfound skills and knowledge that they can use to increase business productivity.

In return this provides apprentices with the opportunity to gain confidence and develop soft skills such as communication which will serve them well throughout their future career.

It is worth remembering that it is not just practical skills, but also variances in the attitudes and motivations of these different age groups that can make reverse mentoring schemes successful. When recognised and harnessed, these differences can create a stronger united force for approaching tasks. ■

Young apprentices can become an important part of a cross-generational group that can provide a toolkit of workers with different strengths – helping to create a dynamic and diverse team.



STORMING BACK

We speak with entrepreneur and ex-founder of Phaidon, Adam Buck about his return.

Entrepreneur and ex-founder of Phaidon, Adam Buck, recently announced that he had joined FinTech recruitment startup Storm2 as Chairman. Buck has been quiet since exiting as Chairman of Phaidon during its 2018 acquisition having founded the global recruitment firm in 2004. We sat down with him to discuss what he's been up to in the 2 years he's been away, and why he chose now to make a comeback.

What have you been doing since Phaidon went through acquisition?

It sounds a little bit Swiss Family Robinson, but I've been spending time with my family. In the early years of Phaidon I focused a lot of my time on ensuring its success, but as my four children started to grow I realised I was in danger of missing family moments and so I have fully embraced this opportunity. With recent events there has certainly been a little more home-schooling that I had planned, and I am pretty sure a new career as a teacher doesn't beckon for me, but aside from that it's been fun. Outside of family time I have been looking at many and varied business ideas inside and outside of recruitment. I am wary of "Drinking the Kool-Aid" and believing that just because you are successful once before you can repeat that good fortune, especially in a new sector, but it has been enjoyable to explore and look at new business ideas. It took me years to understand but I now realise that as an entrepreneur the 'fun' for me isn't mechanically logging quarterly numbers each successive

year and managing the politics of a business, but in thinking through and advising on new ideas where a replicable scalable business model has yet to be determined.

Why did you feel now was the right time to get back into the Recruitment industry?

In truth, despite all the terrible events COVID-19 has caused, I think it's a fascinating time in recruitment and in fact in most business sectors. I was approached by a number of private equity firms and staffing companies to act as chairman, build groups, create funds etc and initially I had no interest as I felt I had enjoyed my time in recruitment and was content to walk away. With COVID-19 and all the disruption it entailed a lot of these parties started to reach out again asking for advice. One thing led to another and before I knew it, I was back! I have been truly amazed by the resilience of the staffing industry over the last year and the innovation that has been used to adapt. I actually feel we're in a fairly good and very exciting place right now.

What made Storm2 such an attractive opportunity?

At Phaidon I used to talk about the "rocket ship". As with most of my good ideas they were borrowed from others and this one was in fact from Sherly Sandberg, the COO of Facebook. She says that if you were

offered a seat on a rocket ship you wouldn't ask what seat, you just get on so there is no time for politics etc. That is what a good business should be. I have always believed recruitment is a momentum play with people being the main asset and unless you keep growing and creating opportunity, as Sthree and indeed Phaidon did, that you ended up slowing down and losing your best talent.

I found the opportunity at Storm2 intriguing as the business had ambitious growth plans which ticked the "rocket ship" box and this would, in turn, mean opportunities would be created for others. Outside of that James Brown, the founder, had a belief he could do it bigger, faster, and better than before and that was the same belief I left Sthree with. That, together with the interesting niche end markets he had focused the business towards, the quality and character of the management team he had assembled and the equity scheme he had designed to reward them, as well as the strong financial backing he had received from Puffin Point made the opportunity compelling.

How do you think Coronavirus will change the face of recruitment?

As with any financial downturn weaker businesses have been exposed where the right standards of delivery have not been maintained in the front office, and the correct control and procedures in the back office have not been adhered to. Of course, the downturn is different this time in so much as it is health-led which is incredibly sad, but because of that people are questioning whether business and indeed recruitment will be changed forever.

In my opinion it will create changes and some fundamental ones, but only accelerating changes that good staffing businesses have already been adapting to over recent years with the use of technology and flexible working. I think recruitment will always be led by people as it always has been, but there are certainly opportunities to create and scale faster and more adaptable businesses on the back of recent events.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity for the industry at the moment?

The obvious answer would be rec-tech, but there are a lot of people talking up the next big "thing" with a lot of money pushed into fund these businesses and I am not sure I am smart enough to work out who or which ones will win. There is certainly some amazing innovation and some really cool ideas being developed, but I actually think the opportunity still sits with a blend of people and technology over the next decade or so. I think it will be the business or businesses that truly understand this and use technology to enhance, not replace the human offering that good traditional recruitment has been built on.

What's next for Storm2?

Taking over the world, one placement at a time... Jokes aside, Storm2 has very ambitious plans as I said before and that includes several new brands and global offices. At the end of the day, it will be a team effort and individually if everyone does their jobs the team will create something pretty amazing. It is all about creating opportunity for clients, candidates and in turn most importantly those who work within the business. Work with smart people, make some money and ultimately have some fun. Not sure what is faster than a rocketship, but think that...

Any advice for recruitment leaders in the current climate?

Use this opportunity to look within your business at the things you can, and should, be doing better and changing as a business. I was never interested with what was working within my business, but in what wasn't working. That is far more valuable. Also use the current climate to reset your business and redefine what is now possible as the next few years offer some very exciting opportunities.

Launched in 2019, Storm2 are an award-winning global FinTech recruitment business backed by Puffin Point. Having already scaled to 50 people across London and Singapore, their ambitious plans for 2021 include the opening of offices in Europe and the USA, alongside further specialist brands in HealthTech and GreenTech. If you are interested in learning more about the company please visit their website. ■

WORKFORCE DEXTERITY

AMS chief executive officer, David Leigh looks at the future of total workforce solutions.



There's no doubt that the last year has been tough for everyone, but while Covid-19 has disrupted businesses, it hasn't stopped the evolution of talent acquisition and management that we were experiencing before the pandemic. For global total workforce solutions firm, AMS (formerly Alexander Mann Solutions), the workplace evolution that we're all experiencing now has long been anticipated.

Evolving brand

AMS has been a pioneer in the world of total workforce solutions since it was first established by Rosaleen Blair under its original name in 1996. Since then, the firm has evolved and adapted to support the needs of businesses on a global scale. From the integration of technology, AI and automation into talent strategies, increasing globalisation and the rise of the contingent workforce, AMS has flexed and shifted in line with the changing talent needs of its clients while also driving innovation to get them ahead of the curve.

While the pandemic has certainly been a catalyst for a lot of change in the talent acquisition and management arena, Leigh explained that the company's refocus and new image was already in the pipeline as businesses talent needs were already evolving and flexing at a significant rate:

"Our decision to re-brand wasn't directly led by the global pandemic – in fact it has been in the making for some time – but there's no doubt that Covid-19 created a need for further tweaks and refinement of our total workforce solutions.

"Before the pandemic struck, the 'normal' workforce was moving and flexing at such a pace that traditional talent strategies were, in many instances, too rigid to serve the needs of businesses. On top of this change that was already emerging, in the last year employers have had to strike a difficult balance between the need to create safe, supportive

and, for many, remote working environments, while also adapting to the wide-spread restrictions to ensure continuity for customers, no matter what is happening in the macro economy."

"It very quickly became clear that workforces need to be built for change – and we all need to adapt to this." Leigh continued, "We are proud of our heritage, having pioneered the Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) industry 25 years ago, evolving to add contingent and advisory services, and today offering a total workforce solutions partner that integrates all these pieces. Now, though, we are pioneering workforce dexterity. It's what the recruitment and talent market demand and what companies need."

The future of total workforce solutions: dexterity

If we take a deeper dive into the definition of dexterity, in a business environment it can often be linked to 'digital', with Craig Roth, vice president of Gartner research describing it as "the ability and ambition to use technology for better business outcomes". But workforce dexterity encompasses so much more than just digital.

Leigh explains, "It involves reframing talent management to talent liberation and adopting a new mindset across the entire remit of total workforce solutions that allows companies to harness the holistic power of their people in new ways. Our workforces are now in constant motion and a static approach to managing this simply won't be fit for purpose."

According to AMS, the concept of workforce dexterity is built on four pillars:

- **Fluidity:** bringing together a fluid mix of people, skills, and technology, with the flexibility to power a business through tomorrow's demands in real time
- **Diversity:** a unique approach to combining a diversity of perspectives, skills, experiences, and roles to accelerate innovation and success

- **Resilience:** working to create a boundless organisation, with a resilient workforce of people and skills that can take on challenges, then evolve and thrive in the face of uncertainty
 - **Differentiation:** beyond acquiring great people, extending capabilities with the right programs and technology to reach beyond competitors
- Leigh continued, "Dexterity encompasses mindsets, beliefs and behaviours that employers and strategic talent partners need to adapt to in order to deliver workforce strategies that are relevant for today's world. We're already seeing elements of this emerge as a natural reaction to the pandemic.

"For example, organisations who a year ago were reluctant to implement widespread remote working practices have now accepted and embraced it. Diversity, inclusion and supporting mental health in the workplace has also never been so widely accepted. Crucially, this approach to dexterity is not about 'keeping up with change' – the pace of developments makes this an impossible target in some instances. Instead, it's about cultivating a workforce with fluid, resilient, diverse and differentiated capabilities to enable true workforce dexterity to be achieved. When this level is reached, then businesses will be equipped to almost seamlessly adapt to change, no matter what form it takes."

Workforces that are built for change

This ability to prepare for disruption in any shape is more important as the impact of Covid-19 continues to emerge. As Leigh explained further, "there's certainly been a wealth of assumptions made since the pandemic began as to how the workforce and talent solutions have changed. However, in reality, we don't really know. We're still facing on-going volatility and uncertainty as the virus grips the world. As a result, workforces have to evolve not to a specific 'point-in-time' environment, but rather continually evolve for business needs.

"We can't, however, ignore the fact that the workforce has evolved almost beyond recognition; how businesses manage this change now will be the difference between success and stagnation. Our clients are building for the future, and this means being boundless and global. We are helping them create workforces that are built faster, flex easily, and are quantified by skills, not heads."

Harnessing a crisis

While AMS is now pioneering the concept of workforce dexterity in the long term, as Leigh explains, in the short term there is an immediate need for people strategies that have sufficient flexibility to allow businesses to scale their workforces up or down where needed. While this will require constant fluidity from those that support the talent acquisition and management processes, it also presents a great opportunity.

"As disruptive and damaging as the pandemic has been, and indeed, continues to be, it does also present the chance to reimagine and reinvent the workplace and talent strategies. For experts in people acquisition and all suppliers involved in workforce solutions, now really is the time to guide what the future will look like. As Barack Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, has become famous for saying: "You never let a serious crisis go to waste," and the same is true when it comes to the future of recruitment, contingent workforce solutions and talent management."

Whatever lies in store in a post-Covid world, one thing is for certain; employers need to create fluid, resilient, diverse and differentiated workforces in order to thrive. Businesses are striving for a strategy that empowers their firm to anticipate and capitalise on the constant shifts in people, processes and technology. And, as AMS has clearly recognised, dexterity – or rather, true workforce dexterity – is the means to achieving this goal. ■

REMODELLING FOR RELEVANCE

Gordon Stoddart, co founder and strategic advisor at The Recruitment Network discusses priorities for 2021.

The pandemic wreaked havoc on 'normal' practice in 2020 and continues to do so. As well as the tragic loss of life, the impact of Covid 19 – the restrictions and lockdowns in particular – resulted in many businesses being devastated. Many have not and will not survive and whole industries have been brought to their knees. 2 of my brothers run successful and market leading businesses – one is the very best gastropub group in the UK (yes I am biased but they've won every award you can win) and 1 in leisure (the biggest European inland surf centre called the Wave) and I've seen first-hand the challenge of navigating their way through shut downs. They'll survive, many won't. So much of our focus in the last 10 months has been on reacting to Covid influenced changes and the subsequent economic impact which have been outside our control or influence. The best businesses and recruiters who have been negatively affected by Covid 19 have reacted with agility firstly to ensure they survive and secondly to remodel themselves to be fit for purpose – rightsizing, focusing on efficiencies, refocusing the resources on business development, identifying new markets and building new products to take to market. Across The Recruitment Network, it's been inspiring to see how our members have reacted to prepare themselves for markets coming back and the latest jobs outlook shared recently by the REC should give us all reason for optimism. Talking of optimism, on the Optimism Index which we run every week, members are on average hugely optimistic about 2021 – current levels of optimism are at 9 out of 10. So we're seeing agencies now fit for purpose, on the front foot again and looking forward to a really positive 2021 (accepting Q1 and the restrictions will frustrate although let's face it, we're getting good at lockdowns). However over and above the recent Covid influenced

changes that have forced many recruiters to remodel for survival, there is also a need to remodel for relevance. We have to recognise that beyond the Covid 19 chaos and the short term economic and market conditions, there are some significant and long term changes and trends happening in the world of work taking place, which present some real opportunities to evolve what we do and offer as recruiters to be as relevant and valuable to our clients as we can be. These changes, some of which are being accelerated by Covid are affecting how our clients evolve as employers and how they look at the resource they need to deliver their strategic ambition. The question every recruiter and every business should be asking themselves continuously is 'how are we different from the competition in a way that customers value?'

Tom Hadley, (formerly Director of Campaigns and Policy from the REC) from Hadley's Comments has been doing some fascinating research with both the International Labour Organisation and the World Employment Confederation. Both Tom and Kevin Green, who has as good a view as anyone when it comes to the world of work and what's happening, shared their view to TRN members recently of what they were seeing and predicting in 2021 and therefore what we should be aware of

As we head into 2021 I have concluded that there are 8 significant areas of focus for employers which have becoming strategic priorities for many (NB the consequence of Brexit would be number 9 however I have excluded it on the basis that it doesn't/isn't affecting every employer right here and now – we'll see the medium term impact in due course). >

1. Continued short term restructuring (to deal with the impact of Covid and the economy)
2. Changing workforce design, including flexible working and automation
3. Strategic workforce planning
4. Diversity and Inclusion
5. Talent shortages in critical skillsets
6. Employer branding
7. Wellbeing of employees
8. IR35

All of the above offer a recruitment agency the opportunity to evolve the offering, add significant value and stand out from the competition. We've seen many recruiters evolve their products and services – building innovative talent solutions, getting involved in developing talent as well as sourcing it and developing their capability and expertise in stakeholder management and workforce planning and design. The transaction opportunities are still there, but focusing on additional value and a different type of relationship, partnership and strategic collaboration creates a real long term opportunity.

to turn it into an online solution for all our members to take to market in recognition of the rising number of organisations being forced to make redundancies. The success of this – the Scottish government, FTSE 100 businesses and global conglomerates are among those now using the TRN Outplacement Cycle via the members – has been a great example of how recruiters can evolve the value of their offering by becoming more relevant. Redundancies are a reality for many, so how can we help them get through it? Innovative solutions open doors we couldn't otherwise open, leads to conversations we might not otherwise have and creates new opportunities (one of our members was given exclusivity on contract opportunities worth £154k in exchange for offering the Outplacement Platform for free). We've recently released an IR35 platform in partnership with Brookson for members to offer out (a member rang me last week sharing that the free IR35 Cycle he offered to a new client had opened up an exclusive contract opportunity worth £45k), and a D & I online solution is being built as we speak.

The shift from transactional recruiter to trusted partner and expert in talent related solutions is there for the taking. Bring it on. For further information on The Recruitment Network or to access your very own Outplacement, IR35, Diversity and Inclusion or Wellbeing Cycle to offer to your clients drop me a line at gordon@therecruitmentnetwork.com. ■

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