

Agencies improve profile with contractors

Who would have thought it? The number of complaints about agencies by contractors has actually decreased.

Love-Hate Relationship

Contractors have a love-hate relationship with agencies. Certainly agencies find contractors almost all of their work. But contractors have had some bad experiences in how contracts are handled.

So it is a pleasure to discover that, according to a report released last week by the London-based agency trade organisation, the Recruitment and Employment Federation, that complaints from contractors have actually declined since last year.

Contractors Still Largest Group

According to the report, entitled "REC Professional Standards Complaints Report January-June," only 27% of all complaints received about employment agencies were from contractors. This is a much smaller majority than in the first half of previous years. One should, however, not say 'only: most of the complaints that the REC receives are from contractors, and not from permanent employees. It is true that complaints from permies are on the rise, a trend that the REC attributes to growing use of agencies by permanent job seekers.

"We believe that there is a real improvement in compliance and in best practice on the part of agencies who work with contractors," as Claire Walker, who has run the complaints service for the REC for the past five years told ContractorCalculator.

“ We believe that there is real improvement in agency compliance and best practice ”

Claire Walker -- REC

"Part of the improvement certainly comes from the REC's increased communication with agencies, and with our instituting inspections. But a good part of the effort comes from agencies perceiving a clear business benefit in doing the job right," Walker explains.

Contractors and Agencies Need Each Other

Why do contractors have more complaints? Walker points out that they work for the agencies, while permanent employees only use them to find jobs.

"It is not really surprising that contractors, who have to be paid by the agencies and who are in very regular contact with them, are more likely to experience problems with them than permanent employee candidates," Walker says. "Certainly payment problems are among the most frequent complaints, and we make formal investigations into them when we feel it is justified. But we see a great deal of complaints which arise from poor communication; often the agency is pressed for time and does not get its message across."

In these cases the REC works with the agencies to resolve the difficulties and to help them improve their channels of communication with contractors.

"Often it is the agency's own complaint-handling procedures which need to be changed, so that contractors do not need to come to us," Walker notes. The REC has also increased its share of informal mediation work to obviate the need for formal complaint investigations where possible.

London and ITC

Most of the complaints, a full 36% of them, come from London, which is not surprising as most of the REC members are based there. Next comes the Southeast, again where most of the IT contracting goes on outside of London.

It's also not surprising that most of the complaints are from the ITC sector; not because techies are greater at whinging, but because most of the contracting goes on in that sector.

Nonetheless, judging from the report, work with agents is improving for contractors. "We believe there is progress," says Walker.

Contractors should bear in mind that the REC will help them with complaints, in the form of an informal mediation or even with a formal investigation if the REC feels it is warranted.

“ Often it is the agency complaint procedures which need to be changed ”

Claire Walker -- REC

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