



CYNGOR PARTNERIAETH Y GWEITHLU
WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) Report

Best Practice on the Acceptable
Use of Non-Guaranteed Hours
Arrangements





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Introduction

The document includes case studies from three organisations which highlight various aspects of implementing the Workforce Partnership Council's *Agreement on the Acceptable Use of Non-Guaranteed Hours Arrangements*¹. They have been drawn up in social partnership and they reflect each organisation's honest assessment of their approaches.

The best practice section highlights the principles and implementation requirements of the agreement and looks at how the three exemplar organisations are delivering these.

The best practice section also draws together common features from the three case studies to further assist other organisations implement the agreement. In particular, there is a focus on how to conduct regular reviews of people's hours and whether they should be offered a contract rather than a non-guaranteed hour arrangement (NGHA). It is hoped that each example will encourage public service managers and union branches to consider the best way to respond to the agreement in their organisation.

¹ Referred to in this document as 'the agreement' or the 'NGHA agreement'.
<https://gov.wales/workforce-partnership-council-acceptable-use-non-guaranteed-hours-arrangements>

Principles of the Workforce Partnership Council's *Agreement on the Acceptable Use of Non-Guaranteed Hours Arrangements* and how organisations are implementing them

Principle 1: Each organisation should "review the appropriateness of non-guaranteed hours arrangements with trade unions"

The agreement states that organisations will "build in regular reviews, both individually and collectively through the recognised trade unions on the appropriateness of the non-guaranteed hours arrangements in use in the organisation."

Our exemplars delivered on this principle by implementing a thorough review of their approach to engaging with their NHGA workforce.

For example, one local authority met with its unions to analyse how and where it used NGHAs. Together, the council and the trade unions agreed to reform their approach. Now, every person engaged on an NGHAs has their individual employment status reviewed at regular intervals. If they are working regular hours and predicted to continue to do so then they are offered the opportunity of a regular contract, in line with the agreement.

Principle 2: Organisations will make clear which non-guaranteed hours arrangements they use and for what purposes

The agreement states that each organisation will produce a statement about its approach to NGHAs. One example of how to meet this principle is provided by a Welsh Government sponsored body, which produced an implementation paper to deliver its actions in this area.

A related aspect of this principle is that any NGHAs work should be allocated fairly. We spoke to a health board which had recently introduced an automated system to allocate work to its bank of nurses who covered shifts at short notice. By being automated and centralised the system mitigated any risks that shifts might be unfairly allocated. Likewise, the health board's recruitment to the nursing bank itself was open and fair.

Career progression is another important related issue for people on NGHAs. The agreement states that people on these arrangements should have access to permanent opportunities at the organisation. One public body in Wales has taken a pro-active approach to this aspect of the agreement by positively encouraging this group of people to apply for permanent posts.

Principle 3: Access to appropriate induction, training and development support

Our three exemplars met this principle. In particular, one public body provided training to casual staff from vulnerable backgrounds with the express intention of supporting them in developing their careers.

Principle 4: Organisations will comply with employment law and collective bargaining agreements

Principle 5: Terms and conditions of service broadly similar to permanent staff

Taken together principles four and five of the agreement affirm that public bodies should comply with employment law and collective bargaining agreements when engaging people on NGHAs. Our case studies all confirmed that they operated in this way.

Common features and lessons learnt

Our three case studies all share a commitment to implementing the NGHAs agreement. Whilst each had their own approach, all had some common features to both their culture and practice. This section considers those common features and provides clear examples of how the NGHAs Agreement can be implemented.

Three organisations provided a description of their approach to the task in hand. Whilst each had their own approach, all had some common features to both their culture and practice.

Culture

In terms of culture, our three examples all demonstrated leadership and commitment in implementing the NGHAs agreement.

Leadership

In order to meet their aims, our three examples demonstrated leadership from the top of the organisation. Directors and HR teams were clear with managers about their responsibility to operate within the agreement. Managers became more accountable for the way they administered their NGHAs workers.

Ethos

Our examples adopted an ethos that they would limit the use of NGHAs to certain narrowly defined sets of circumstances. In general terms they decided that their use should be confined to cover absence for an existing post, especially whether there are statutory requirements for minimum numbers of staff.

Practice

In terms of practice, there were four common aspects to the way in which our case studies approached implementation. They all involved the unions in their work; they committed resource to the process; they initiated departmental-wide reviews of NGHAs usage and they communicated their plans clearly to managers.

Pro-active unions involved

In all three of our example the unions were closely involved. For their part, the unions in these bodies pro-actively recruited NGH workers to their membership and represented their views. They were regularly consulted by management on any changes to NGHAs and in areas where NGHAs use is an operational necessity, this is agreed by unions.

Committing centralised resource

In this document's three examples, the organisations committed effective resources to support implementation. They followed an action plan agreed by the senior management team. HR directors, their staff and the finance team worked with line managers.

Pro-active monthly department and organisation wide review of NGHAs status

A common factor across each public body was that they took a pro-active and energetic approach to regularly monitoring and reviewing the status of their staff engaged on NGHAs. They did not rely on the staff themselves or individual line managers to initiate this. Instead they established centralised systems. A strong element of accountability was built into to each of these system. Managers were supported in their duties to ensure their staff were offered substantive contracts if they were eligible.

Communication

In the examples included in this document, HR staff provided clear advice to line managers about their approach to NGHAs, taking particular care to explain technical aspects of contracts. They responded to misconceptions about the perceived benefits of NGHAs to managers. As a result, the managers in these organisations had a clear understanding of the practical contractual alternatives to NGHAs which were available.

CASE STUDIES

Local authority

Our first case study is a local authority which serves a population of over 150,000 residents.

Prompted by the introduction of the Welsh guidance on the use of NGHAs, the Council introduced a new approach, which aimed to limit the use of non-guaranteed hours to situations where they are truly essential.

N.B: The Council in this case study use the term 'casual contracts' when referring to non-guaranteed hours.

Overall approach

When the Welsh guidance was published it was sent by the chief executive to the corporate management team requesting that they complied with the principles. HR managers distributed the guidance to the relevant people, namely the individual managers who had control over contracts.

This was the start of the process. Managers were then advised that they must seriously consider their requirements when engaging workers in order to ensure that they do so on the correct contractual basis.

The authority decided it should avoid using NGHAs where practicable and that this approach should be embedded throughout the organisation.

Support from the trade unions was critical to the new approach, and they were involved from the start. According to a branch official "the unions are always in the loop" with regard to reforming the use of NGHAs.

Local authority – key points and lessons learnt

- Change was led from the top of the organisation with full involvement from the trade unions.
- The aim was that NGHAs were only used in a very small number of cases and only when absolutely necessary.
- The HR department collated monthly data on the use of NGHAs, using pay roll information.
- If a person was found to be working sufficient hours to make them eligible for an offer of a substantive contract then a vacancy was advertised which was open to those staff on an NGHA working in that area. In future, the authority will review this practice to bring it into line with the new agreement.
- The communication between the HR department and managers was consistent in reminding them to monitor the hours of their casual staff and to offer substantive contracts to those who were eligible.
- Oversight from the HR team led to managers being more accountable for their administration of NGHA workers.

This implementation approach continues throughout the organisation.

Reviews

HR monitored the working arrangements of casual contracts through the payroll and where it was evident that workers are working week after week, the position was challenged with managers to engage in a review.

With the support of the trade unions, reviews of the casual workforce in the council were undertaken with a view to embedding the Welsh guidance arrangements across the organisation. HR officers worked constructively with Heads of Service to reduce reliance on casual contracts in favour of substantive fixed term and/or permanent contracts over a period of time. Services were subject to regular reviews of their approach to ensure that compliance is ongoing.

Reviews were undertaken consistently by mapping workers' pay across the payroll. This process firstly identified the workers that had been defined as 'casual' by their managers. Thereafter, through the mapping of people's pay, it was found that:

- Some workers who are termed 'casual' actually had guaranteed hours and worked to a rota. In these circumstances, the contracts were deemed fixed term in nature.

- There were workers who truly were covering ad-hoc absences and had no guaranteed hours for this specific purpose.

Over a period of more than two years, the HR department and managers worked together to review hours of work and to offer a guaranteed number of hours to workers wherever appropriate. This work is ongoing.

The new arrangements were supported by the trade unions. Unions were invited to assess the impact of these reviews and consider the robustness of the arrangements in place as the focus in this area intensified.

Where there is a change to the contract, the head of service was required to authorise the change via the appropriate business case process. HR then wrote to the worker concerned to confirm their move to a fixed term or permanent contract as appropriate.

The reviews have shown that in some instances, there was a drift from casual hours to more substantive and consistent hours and whilst the additional hours in themselves were often welcomed by the worker, it was important to remind managers that this meant the worker was entitled to a review of their contractual status.

In 24/7 services, where there is a potential for a higher number of casual workers to be working a similar pattern of hours and it is evident that the Service could guarantee a specific number of hours on a fixed term or permanent basis, these job opportunities were ring-fenced to the casual workforce in this area, thus enabling fixed term or permanent substantive hours contracts to be awarded to this workforce accordingly.

The review and engagement with workers in these ring-fenced opportunities sometimes highlighted that a number of workers welcome the 'no-obligation' expectation of their casual contract. Implementation of the guidance provided individuals with the choice as to what working arrangement best suit them when the opportunity to change their contractual status arises.

Workers on non-guaranteed hours can request a review of their hours. Managers however were asked to carry out the reviews regardless of an individual request. Wherever possible a review of working arrangements will lead to changes to contracts, thus stabilising the workforce.

Definition

HR managers and unions agreed on when NGHA or casual contracts are appropriate.

A true casual contract is when there is no obligation to work and hours are ad hoc. There is no mutuality of obligation.

The Union clarified their expectation that the following should also feature in the review:

“If managers rely on a worker regularly, then they should be moved to a substantive hours’ contract where appropriate.”

“A true casual contract is when a worker needs to come in to fill gaps, in a sporadic, ad hoc manner. And every organisation will have some of these.”

One of the main determinants of whether an appointment is casual, is that there is “no mutuality of obligation” that is, the employer is not obliged to offer the employee any work and the employee is not obliged to accept any offer of work that may be made”.

Example – Social Services

The social services department has worked particularly well with the HR department and trade unions to review their use of NGHAs.

Social Services were supported in moving some workers from casual to substantive contracts. This was in a range of roles such as care assistants, domestic assistants and cooks where since 2016 the Council made 42 casual workers permanent. This included one example of a casual worker securing a 35 hour a week post at one of the Council’s residential care homes through a ring-fence exercise.

The approach in social services is embedded and HR will continue to work with the Department in this capacity.

How it works in practice: The data review highlighted to the Heads of Service and Managers where workers on casual contracts were working consistently. Workers had rotas issued in advance and these rolled forward. The hours of work may have changed but the hours of work were consistently offered week after week. HR then worked closely with the relevant manager to identify how many job opportunities on fixed term or permanent substantive hour contracts could be ring-fenced to this group of workers.

The number of posts identified from the above exercise was communicated to the relevant group of casual workers. Everyone in the group identified had a chance to apply at the exclusion of all others. The authority is committed to review this particular element of their practice in line with the strengthened agreement, that “when regular hours have been worked over the preceding 12 weeks and it is predicted that there is a continuing need for the hours to be worked on an ongoing basis, the individual will be automatically offered employment on a permanent or temporary contract to meet that predicted

need.” For them this would require a slight change to their current procedure in as much that there would no longer be a need to advertise the contract as a new post, rather it would be offered directly to the person concerned.

The union played an active role in these reforms. Their members often spoke to their local branch official when they felt their hours were sufficient to claim a permanent post. The union would then speak to a member of HR to explore and review the post, which led to relevant contract changes being made.

Challenges

A senior HR official acknowledged that they had sometimes faced challenges in implementing and effecting change in these reviews across the casual workforce but was happy to report that the Council “is making good progress”.

They said that “a consistent message is important when it comes to NGHAs and the Council’s workforce and that relevant in-roads have been made to address this. As the review of the casual workforce intensifies, these in-roads and the work undertaken with the Social Services Department will be invaluable in taking these reviews further forward”.

The union referred to casual workers ‘drifting in’ to regular hours whilst remaining on a casual contract. They also talked about such workers getting ‘mixed in’ with workers on substantive contracts, without the union or HR realising the extent to which this was happening. This showed the importance of introducing a regular review of every casual workers hours and contractual status.

Misconceptions

A senior HR official said: “Local authorities may generally supplement the workforce with casual workers but there can sometimes be an over reliance on casual workers and where this is the case, we are looking to break down any misconceptions that managers may hold.” For example:

- When it comes to a service review that could result in a reduction in workers, it does not automatically follow that it is the person on the casual contract that will be let go/no further work offered. It could well be the case that the casual worker has worked consistently and without gaps over a period of years, (albeit their hours may have changed upwards or downwards during that time). These are the workers termed casual that would need to be included in the pool of workers at risk of redundancy, which will also include staff on permanent contracts.
- There are no corners to cut in the administration of casual contracts. Casual workers are subject to the same pay, recruitment checks and induction processes on appointment and so on.

- The management of casual contracts can be administratively time consuming in terms of there being no contractual hours set against these pay records to automatically generate pay. Timesheets must be completed, submitted and paid.
- The drift in casual contracts requires consistent and continuous review.
- NGHAs may offer the manager contractual flexibility to deploy workers to meet the needs of the service but this is not the only contractual status that affords this. Guaranteed hours to be worked flexibly and/or peripatetically also present viable contract opportunities.

Necessity to use NGHAs

The authority and the union acknowledged that there are a defined number of areas of the business where casual workers are a necessity.

Examples where NGHAs may legitimately exist in the longer term include where someone holds a post and cover for their ad-hoc absence is essential such as covering the pool side in a leisure centre. The poolside of a leisure centre cannot be left unattended and a suitably qualified worker must provide the cover.

Ad-hoc cover in the above example could include annual leave; ad-hoc sickness and attendance at training of staff, all of which also need to be covered by suitably qualified workers in other front line services of the Council.

Next steps

The council has ambitious plans for the future. A senior HR official said:

“we will want to work closely with the unions to maintain momentum, to remove casual contracts wherever we can”.

The Council is due to appoint to a number of posts that will have a specific interest in the Council’s workforce planning agenda and this will enable it to move forward to achieve its aspiration and concentrate on the issue of moving workers from casual to substantive contracts wherever possible.

The Council’s HR department have an action plan to make this area a priority. HR will continue to work with managers to limit the use of NGHAs. Data will be reviewed every quarter in order to identify how many workers in each department truly are casual and/or require a contract review.

To assist managers in scrutinising their existing arrangements, HR will continue to provide heads of service with employment data relating to workers that they have identified as casual so that they can review how that person has been deployed and then determine if the contract status is a true reflection or not of

the pattern of work that is evident. Where it is evident that the working pattern is not indicative of a casual contract, HR will continue to support heads of service to review those contracts.

The Council is reviewing its paperwork relevant to casual contracts and on the launch of this contract, it will be shared with managers along with relevant guidance to intensify the focus and reviews of casual worker contract status. The definition of a casual worker is very clear in this context and managers will be able to easily identify which of their workers fit that contractual status specifically.

Against the above position, it will be very clear where the terms of the contract does not naturally fit the position of a casual worker and where a contract review is required.

Health Board

We spoke to a health board in Wales about their use of a bank of nurses who are employed using non-guaranteed hours arrangements.

Bank system – background

Hospital wards use rotas to manage the hours worked by nurses. Staff absences in a rota must be covered by appropriately qualified staff to support patient care. There is new legislation in Wales regarding minimum staffing numbers and skill mix too is defined.

Because of the new legislation, minimum staffing levels have increased, which means a requirement for more nurses per ward. That increase has fed through in to an increased demand on nurse numbers now, without the supply having yet increased. There are more training places now, so supply will increase over coming years but that is unlikely to meet demand in full. Managing the resource efficiently is essential to ensure the health board manages gaps in cover.

The health board has a system to find cover when there are gaps in the rota. It is approached in this order: if permanent part time staff aren't available for overtime, then they turn to nurses on the 'bank' – who are engaged on a type of zero hour contract. There is no obligation on bank staff to work if they don't want to. Bank workers can be the health board's own permanent employees, permanent employees of another health board or they may only work through the bank. Only having exhausted the options for overtime and bank does the health board turn to staff employed by an agency.

Research has shown that there is greater clinical risk when clusters of agency staff develop in wards or hospitals. Therefore, there is a strong preference for employing bank staff who are employed by a health board.

However, on this point, a senior HR manager said:

“Employing agency workers is not always a matter of choice. We do have to fill gaps in shifts and if all other options have been exhausted then the use of agency staff has to be considered.”

Some areas of nursing are very specialist, where the problem can be more acute and then agency nurses are needed more often by the board.

The health board is mindful that there is a finite number of hours a nurse can work under the European working time directive (EWTD).

The bank is also used to employ student nurses in unqualified nurse roles whilst they are completing their studies. This gives them invaluable experience within the health board before they start work as a newly qualified nurse on completion of their degree.

Improvement to the bank system

Health board – key points and lessons learnt

- The board has a long established practice of using NGHAs under the system of a 'bank' of reserve nurses brought in to cover gaps in shifts. However, the system of allocating work through the bank had the potential to improve.
- The board brought the system for rostering nursing shifts together with the system for allocating work to nurses on the bank.
- The new automated system for rostering and the bank brought the following benefits:
 - Reach: bank nurses got to hear about opportunities to work on shifts with gaps across all wards and departments.
 - Immediacy: bank nurses and shift manager were able to receive instant confirmation that gaps in the roster had been filled.
 - Convenience: nurses were able to hear about opportunities to work on their phone, no matter their location.
- The automated system allowed the board to monitor hours worked by bank nurses to better protect staff and patient safety and eliminate poor practice.

Responsibility for the roster support team and nurse bank department was recently brought together under direction of the workforce director. Significant technical changes were introduced alongside rostering changes which meant there were clear synergies in how these system worked and could be supported.

An online system with improved automation was introduced which recorded and advertised available shifts to staff interested in working in the bank. The software allowed nurses to book their shifts via an app on their smartphones and allowed them to manage their bookings effectively. The processes for rostering and bank booking nurses have to work closely together. The new system integrated support for both. This was a major step forward as previously rosters were drawn up separately to the process of booking bank workers to cover absences.

A senior director explained the benefits in this way:

“A manager needs to know what shifts need to be filled and then be able to offer those shifts to the pool of qualified staff who may wish to take up the offer of a shift. The app is linked to both the roster and the bank system so it can easily assess which shifts need to go to bank and make interested staff aware of the offer.”

Under the new system staff could state their preference for when and where they wanted to work. Then, only shifts which met their preferences would appear on their app. Then they could book their availability immediately.

The new system has now been in place for 18 months.

Benefits of an automated system

Many benefits were realised from the introduction of the new automated system. These included:

Increased reach. The new system allowed ward managers to reach all the people who wanted to work a bank shift in one go. Previously they would rely on manual distribution lists, which were often limited to a ward or department, or personal contacts, which was a much more haphazard approach. Shifts are now offered to all staff registered on the bank allowing equal access to what is available.

One director explained it in this way:

“When I’m looking for someone to fill a nursing shift I’m basically taking a megaphone and asking ‘who wants to work these hours?’ to everyone in earshot. The new system magnifies the volume of that megaphone, so that it extends beyond my ward or department across the whole health board and beyond.”

Immediate confirmation. Thanks to the new system managers knew instantly that a shift had been filled, allowing them to move on to see whether there were any other gaps in their schedules. Similarly there was a benefit to staff. They too knew instantly that their offer to work the bank shift had been accepted and so could then make firm arrangements around that.

A director said:

“Having more info and certainty is a positive as previously you needed to confirm with emails and phone calls. Now confirmation is instant.”

Convenience. The new system allowed everyone to move away from a fragmented system based on emails and paper to an efficient pooled service.

For staff, this was a big improvement. From juggling dozens of incoming emails about potential shifts, they could now rely on one message service providing consistent clear information on potential shifts.

As a result of the new technology, the health board has much improved capacity to fill requests for bank staff increasing the efficient use of bank staff and minimising reliance on agency staff.

A director said:

“The staff love the new software, especially as it’s on their phone. As a member of staff, you don’t have to check your computer when you come home. You can be out and about – in Tesco’s for example – and arrange a shift there and then.”

In the director’s view this system could be used anywhere in real time where an organisation has a roster gap which needs to be filled.

The new tool also helped accurately monitor staff’s working hours supporting EWTD compliance. From the health board’s perspective, it is vital to comply with these regulations – for both staff and patient safety. This is why substantive staff have to disclose their extra hours to managers and why there is additional benefit to controlling the bank through a supportive system.

Eliminating poor practice

The new technology has helped the health board address those areas where arrangements for bank workers were not optimised.

In some instances, there was a risk that bank was being used where the staff would have more appropriately been on fixed term contracts. The technology allows the board to identify this and ensure informed decisions are taken regarding how best to fill a vacancy both in the short and longer term.

A director explained that there was also a risk that a small number of managers might have preferred to offer continuous bank work rather than offer substantive contracts because it was more convenient to them. He said:

“Because bank staff can be accessed quickly to support short and medium term needs, potentially it could be attractive for some managers to use the bank rather than recruit to a substantive role where available. The systems monitor bank use and are able to provide detailed information to inform how and when it is best to use bank support and when managers need to take action to recruit to a substantive vacancy.”

According to a director, linking better bank management with improved roster management should mean there is less reliance on bank and agency shifts. “For example,” he said “managing annual leave efficiently means the reliance on bank reduces.”

“Governance, efficiency and rigor in decision making is actively supported by the software, allowing for better predictive strategic allocation of key resources,” he said.

“Getting the governance right is key. It has to be policed and good governance is needed. It has to be safe. Lorry drivers have tachograph to ensure they don’t work unsafe hours. It has to be the same for health care staff too.”

The new software has brought greater accountability to the way managers arrange their rotas and allocate shifts.

A director said:

“From an organisational point of view: “what you know you have to deal with”. That is, if you have good systems in place to record how staff are being used then the information you have and insight that brings means you are better placed to deal with any issues and make the right decisions. If you don’t have the right information; you aren’t able to do this.”

Next steps

Other staff groups outside of nursing are adopting bank working and the advantages the new software brings. An arrangement very similar to bank for doctors is being brought in to reduce agency usage and improve patient care.

Sponsored body

Casual staff 'pool' – background

This organisation is one of a number of Welsh Government sponsored bodies and departments which operates facilities and visitor attractions which are open to the public.

The organisation has used a 'pool' of casual workers for many years. Their sites provide a highly seasonal service. Therefore additional staff are needed at peak times, especially during school holidays as this is when their sites are busiest. Casual staff are also used to cover on-site events and short-term staff absence.

The types of staff in the pool include front-of-house staff and educational facilitators.

The organisation is bound by safety and security rules governing the minimum number of staff that must be on duty. If understaffed their sites have to close to the public, which harm the organisation's reputation. Therefore if members of staff on substantive contracts are not available, other cover must be found.

Some casual staff enjoy the flexibility. For example, the pool includes artists and actors, who when they are not working in their main occupation supplement their hours with the organisation.

Reforming approach to the 'pool'

Sponsored body – Key points and lessons learnt

- The organisation reviewed its use of NGHAs under the lead of a director with the full involvement of the trade unions.
- They took an approach designed to pro-actively limit the use of NGHAs to a limited set of circumstances.
- Use of NGHAs by managers was monitored monthly by the finance department at each run of the pay roll. If they saw that a person on an NGHAs was working sufficient hours to make them eligible for an offer of a substantive contract then one was offered.
- Managers were regularly briefed by the HR team on any complex areas, with the aim of streamlining the process of offering substantive contracts to eligible people.

The establishment conducted a review of their use of pool staff. The HR team compiled data which they shared and discussed with the trade unions and line managers.

A paper was produced which addressed areas where the use of pool staff risked falling outside the terms of the guidance. In particular they looked at the regularity of pool staff's hours and whether they should have been on permanent or fixed term contracts instead.

Following the review, the organisation now takes a pro-active approach to limiting the use of pool staff. A HR manager gave an example of how the new approach works in practice. "If every Tuesday a manager is bringing in the same member of staff, then this should be addressed and a substantive contract should be offered." They added: "if a member of staff is regularly needed we put a rota in place to reflect this."

The organisation offers annualised hour contracts to staff as an alternative to being in the casual pool. This gives managers plenty of flexibility and staff have guaranteed hours which are spread across the year. The organisation offers annualised contracts already, especially on sites where they have shorter hours in winter. This means that staff get regular pay packets.

In order to support the wider use of annualised hour contracts, briefings are planned for managers to help them understand and remember the difference between pool and annualised staff. In particular the briefing will emphasise that both sets of staff must be treated fairly and that pool staff's situation must be regularly monitored so that they can move to a substantive contract if their hours become regular.

The finance department monitors the usage of pool staff, when pay rolls are prepared. They look at whether anyone in the pool is receiving the requisite number or regularity of hours should be offered a substantive contract. Both the frequency and pattern of hours is considered.

One challenge is that pool staff are sometimes very keen for extra hours. However, the process is that part time workers should be offered extra hours first, then full time staff and only then pool staff as a last resort. There's a perception challenge. The HR managers acknowledge that they need to be clear to pool staff so that they understand which staff group get priority for extra hours.

Pool usage is now significantly reduced. The relevant staff are now being placed on contracts, either fixed term or permanent. What's more, agency staff are not used at all.

Supporting vulnerable people into work

The pool will be retained for a small number of instances. There are some wider societal benefits to this approach, especially as the organisation uses the pool to help introduce vulnerable people back into work.

They work with community groups who represent disadvantaged groups, such as refugees, people with disabilities, people recovering from drug and alcohol misuse and people on probation from custodial sentences.

They are able to provide valuable skills and experience vulnerable to people who wish to enter or re-enter the workplace. A number of the organisation's pool workers have gone on to permanent employment either with them or elsewhere.

This approach also helps to promote equality. For example, a person with a long term degenerative illness used the pool to get back into work and now employed on a permanent contract with the organisation. Currently people with disabilities are under represented on the organisation's staff team, so this is an important step forward.

Training

All pool workers receive induction training in their area of work. Furthermore, any training which is standard to that group is offered to the pool, for example: health and safety; equality. Pool workers are paid to attend such training. It is an opportunity to obtain transferrable skills, such as customer care.

Union representation

The union is pro-active in recruiting pool staff. They produce a poster to highlight this. Pool staff are represented by the union in consultations.

