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INSIGHT

The Interim FM & Estates Guide

Introduction

Interim appointments are often briefed quickly and assessed lightly, yet they are regularly handed the most exposed work in an FM or estates function: a compliance gap, a relocation, a failing contract or a leadership vacancy that cannot wait.

Interim work is a steady part of our market. About one in nine (11%) of the FM vacancies Maxwell Stephens advertised from 2023 to 2026 were interim or contract roles. Across all sectors, the Institute of Interim Management's 2026 survey found that change or transformation management is the most common primary purpose of interim assignments, at 37%.

The quality of an interim appointment is decided by the same thing as any senior hire: judgement. Most interim assignments that go wrong were not sourcing failures. The organisation did not define what finished looked like, or it assessed the person on their CV rather than on evidence that they deliver quickly in unfamiliar settings.

This guide is written in two parts. The first and longer part is for organisations deciding whether to use an interim, then briefing, assessing and governing the assignment through to handover. The second is for FM and estates professionals considering or already doing interim work.

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Experience is not the same as judgement

When an Interim Is the Right Call

An interim is a response to a specific problem with a defined time frame. When the problem is vague or permanent, a permanent hire is usually the better answer. Five situations justify interim leadership.

Vacancy Cover

A Head of FM or Estates leaves or moves role, and the estate cannot run without a decision-maker while the permanent search runs. The interim holds compliance, suppliers and the team steady until the successor arrives.

Change and Transformation

Moving from self-delivery to an outsourced model or back again, retendering a total FM contract, consolidating a portfolio or restructuring a team. These need someone who has led the same change before and has no stake in the old structure.

Mobilisation and Relocation

A new headquarters, a fit-out, a contract mobilisation or a move into occupation. The work has a clear start and finish, and the mix of project and operational skills it needs is rarely required once the building is live.

Crisis and Compliance Recovery

An audit finding, a regulator's concern, a serious incident or a backlog of overdue statutory inspections. The organisation needs someone with the authority and experience to take control, restore assurance and leave a system the permanent team can run.

Bridging to a Permanent Hire

Sometimes the organisation is not ready to recruit. The structure is changing, the role is unclear or the budget is not agreed. An interim can stabilise the function and help define the permanent role, so the eventual hire is briefed on reality rather than on an old job description.

If none of these apply, ask whether the need is really interim. A permanent gap filled by a series of interims is usually a decision that has been deferred, not solved.

Interim, Contractor or Consultant

The three terms are used loosely, and the confusion produces poorly framed briefs. The distinction that matters is who owns the outcome and who holds authority inside the organisation.

- **Interim manager.** A senior professional who steps into a line role with delegated authority over people, budgets and decisions for a defined period.
- **Contractor.** A professional engaged for capacity or a specific skill, working under someone else's direction.
- **Consultant.** An adviser who diagnoses, recommends or designs, and usually leaves the running of the operation and its implementation to others.

Each has its place. A consultant may be the right choice to review an FM operating model, while an interim is the right choice to implement the chosen model and carry the team through it. A contractor may clear a backlog of maintenance records, but if the backlog reflects a leadership gap, a contractor will not close it.

Two mistakes are common: engaging a consultant when the organisation needs someone to make decisions and live with them, and engaging an interim but withholding the authority the role needs, which turns an experienced leader into an expensive adviser.

A Quick Test

- Will this person manage staff or suppliers directly? If so, you need an interim.
- Will they sign off spend, contracts or compliance decisions? If so, you need an interim.
- Is the main output a report or a recommendation? A consultant may be enough.
- Is the need extra capacity under an existing leader? A contractor may be the answer.

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Quietly building exceptional teams

Writing an Interim Brief

A permanent job description describes a role. An interim brief should describe a result. If your brief could be reused unchanged for a permanent hire, it is not specific enough.

Start With Outcomes

List a small number of outcomes the assignment must deliver, and make each one observable. Stabilising compliance is an intention. All statutory inspections current, with evidence held centrally and a named owner for each asset class, is an outcome that can be checked.

Set a Duration and a Defined End State

Give an expected duration and describe what the function should look like on the day the interim leaves. The Institute of Interim Management's 2026 survey found that the average interim assignment now lasts 10.0 months, up from 9.6 months in 2025. That is a cross-sector figure, but it is a useful prompt: assignments drift when nobody has written down what done looks like.

What a Good Brief Contains

- The problem, stated plainly, and why it needs an interim now
- The outcomes, and how each will be evidenced
- Expected duration, with formal review points
- Authority over budget, people, suppliers and sign-off limits
- The reporting line and a named sponsor
- Known constraints, such as contract dates, funding, occupancy or staff consultation
- The end state, and who will own the work afterwards
- Location and on-site expectations

Test the brief with HR, Finance and Operations before it goes to market. Disagreement about the end state is far cheaper to resolve before the interim starts than halfway through the assignment, when it becomes a dispute about scope.

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Strong facilities management is invisible when done well, critical when missing

Speed, Day Rates and Engagement Status

How Quickly Interims Can Start

Speed is the main reason organisations use interims, and the advantage is real. Experienced interims plan for availability, are often finishing one assignment as they look for the next, and are rarely held back by the long notice periods that slow permanent senior hires. A well-briefed interim search can move from brief to start far faster than a permanent appointment.

Time is more often lost inside the organisation than in the market. Slow rate approval, an undecided engagement route, late system access or unaligned interview diaries can use up the time the interim was meant to save. Settle these before the search begins.

Day Rates and Cost Thinking

According to the Institute of Interim Management's 2026 survey, the average interim management day rate in the UK rose to £907 in 2026. That is a cross-sector average across all interim assignments, not an FM or estates figure, and actual rates vary with seniority, scope, location and urgency.

Judge the rate against the cost of the problem, not against a permanent salary divided by working days. Set it beside the cost of an unmanaged compliance exposure, a delayed occupation or a failed contract mobilisation. Our day rate calculator, on the Maxwell Stephens website, is a simple tool for relating an annual salary to a suggested interim day rate when you are setting a budget.

Engagement Status

Organisations must assess the employment status of an interim for tax purposes, often discussed under the heading of IR35, and should take professional advice on how each engagement is structured. Build that assessment into the timeline so that it does not delay the start date.

Assessing Interim Candidates

Interim assessment is often lighter than permanent assessment, on the grounds that the appointment is temporary. The logic is backwards. An interim has less time to recover from a poor start and usually inherits a harder problem, so the evidence bar should be higher, not lower.

We assess interims on the same spine as permanent leaders: capability, context and motivation, plus evidence. For interims, the weight shifts towards evidence of delivery in short windows and credibility from the first day.

Evidence of Delivery in Short Windows

- Ask for previous assignments comparable to yours, with the state they found and the state they left
- Ask what they had achieved after the first month, not only by the end
- Check whether the change held after they left, and who owned it
- Take references from the sponsor who engaged them, not only from peers

Credibility on Day One

A fixed-term assignment leaves no room for a settling-in period. The interim must be credible to the team, the suppliers and senior stakeholders from the first week.

- Can they explain your problem back to you more clearly than your brief did?
- Do they know the regulatory and contractual terrain of your sector?
- How would they spend their first fortnight, and whom would they see first?
- Why this assignment, and what would make them leave it early?

Warning Signs

- Long lists of assignments with no clear outcome for any of them
- Outcomes described as activity: reviewed, supported, assisted
- No clear explanation of why assignments ended when they did
- A fully formed plan offered before they have seen the site or the data

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Onboarding and Governing an Interim

Interims are often left to find their own way in, on the basis that they are experienced. Experience shortens onboarding, but it does not remove the need for it. The organisation controls access, authority and information, and the interim cannot deliver without all three.

Before Day One

- System access, including CAFM, finance, document control and email
- Site access, permits and any required inductions
- Written confirmation of authority and sign-off limits
- Introductions to the team, key suppliers and senior stakeholders
- Current compliance registers, contracts and open risks

Governance During the Assignment

Name one sponsor who owns the assignment and meets the interim regularly. Agree a short plan early in the assignment, then review progress against the outcomes in the brief rather than against activity.

- Hold regular reviews against the agreed outcomes
- Record the significant decisions the interim takes, and the authority used
- Review scope formally if the problem changes, rather than letting it drift
- Keep the permanent team involved, so knowledge does not leave with the interim

Scope creep is a common way for interim assignments to fail. A capable interim is asked to pick up one more problem, then another, until the original outcomes are late and the end date has moved twice. Extending an assignment can be the right call, but it should be a decision taken against the brief, not a default.

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Fit matters more than speed

Exit and Handover

The end of an interim assignment is where much of its value is kept or lost. If the handover is rushed, the organisation pays for the improvement and keeps only part of it.

Plan the exit at the start. The brief should say who will own the work afterwards, and the interim should build towards that owner from the early weeks, not in the last few days.

A Handover Checklist

- A written position statement against each outcome in the brief
- Updated compliance registers, risk logs and asset information
- The supplier position: performance, open disputes and contract dates
- Decisions taken, decisions still open and the reasoning behind each
- Processes and reporting that the permanent team now runs
- An overlap with the permanent hire or new owner, where it can be arranged

When the Interim Bridges to a Permanent Hire

If the interim is covering a vacancy, align the two timelines. An interim who has shaped the permanent role is a valuable source of insight for the search. Decide early whether the interim may apply for the permanent role, and be open about it with the interim and with other candidates.

Finally, ask the interim for a candid close-out: what they would do next, what the organisation should stop doing and which risks remain. It is often the most useful document the assignment produces, and it costs nothing to request.

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Every search starts with the brief

For Interims: Positioning and Evidencing Impact

This part of the guide is for FM and estates professionals considering interim work or already doing it. Experience alone does not make an interim career. Organisations engage interims to solve problems, so you are chosen for the problems you have solved, not the titles you have held.

Position Around Problems

Decide which situations you handle best and say so plainly. A clear position is easier to remember and easier to recommend. Examples include:

- Compliance recovery across a multi-site estate
- Mobilising a new FM contract or relocating a headquarters
- Moving from outsourced to in-house delivery, or the reverse
- Holding a Head of FM or Estates role through a restructure

Evidence Impact, Not Activity

For each assignment, record the state you found, what you did and the state you left. Use the organisation's own measures where you can, such as compliance completion, backlog position, supplier performance or occupation dates, and claim only what you can support.

- Write a short outcome record as each assignment ends
- Ask each sponsor to act as a referee while the work is fresh
- Explain in one line why each assignment ended
- Keep recent, relevant assignments in detail and summarise older work

The strongest interim CVs read as a set of short case studies. A hiring manager should be able to see quickly which of their problems you have solved before, and what happened as a result.

If you are setting a rate for the first time, our day rate calculator is a useful starting point, but your rate should reflect the problems you solve.

For Interims: Gaps and Career Moves

Managing Gaps Between Assignments

Gaps are part of interim work. Plan for them financially and professionally rather than treating each one as a setback.

- Start conversations about the next assignment well before the current one ends
- Stay in touch with past sponsors and specialist recruiters who know your work
- Use gaps to keep qualifications and sector and compliance knowledge current
- Be clear about availability, location and rate when you are approached
- Avoid assignments that dilute your position simply to fill time

Moving Between Interim and Permanent Work

Many FM and estates professionals move between interim and permanent roles more than once. Both moves are credible if you can explain them.

Moving from interim to permanent, expect hiring managers to test your motivation. They will want to know that you intend to stay, build a team and live with the consequences of your decisions over years, not months. Show examples where you have done that, and be honest about why permanent work suits you now.

Moving from permanent to interim, test your own readiness. Interim work suits people who are comfortable arriving without relationships, making decisions early and leaving when the job is done. It suits people less well if they value continuity and a long-term team of their own.

If an interim assignment turns into a permanent offer, treat it as a new decision. The role you are offered may not be the role you have been doing, and the authority you held as an interim may not come with it.

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Final Thoughts

Interim appointments are among the most consequential hires an FM or estates function makes, because they are usually made when something is already under pressure. The organisations that get most from them treat the appointment as a judgement call, not a stopgap.

For hiring organisations, that means being clear about the problem, writing a brief with outcomes and a defined end state, assessing for evidence of delivery in short windows and governing the assignment through to handover. For interim professionals, it means positioning around the problems you solve, recording your impact as you go and being deliberate about the work you accept.

Maxwell Stephens has specialised in FM, estates and workplace recruitment since 2006, with offices in London and Darlington and an active network of more than 50,000 FM professionals. We recruit both interim and permanent FM and estates leaders, and we assess both against the same standard of evidence.

To discuss an interim appointment, or your next assignment, call 0207 118 4848 or email info@maxwellstephens.com.

What the Data Says

What UK data shows about interim management, assignment length and flexible work.

- The average interim management day rate in the UK rose to £907 in 2026, according to the Institute of Interim Management.
  Source: Institute of Interim Management (IIM), Interim Management Survey 2026, 17th Edition
- The average interim assignment now lasts 10.0 months, up from 9.6 months in 2025.
  Source: Institute of Interim Management (IIM), Interim Management Survey 2026, 17th Edition
- Change or transformation management is the most common primary purpose of interim assignments, at 37%.
  Source: Institute of Interim Management (IIM), Interim Management Survey 2026, 17th Edition
- On any given day in 2024, 872,000 temporary or contract workers were on assignment through UK recruiters.
  Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC), Recruitment sector contributes more than £40 billion a year to the UK economy despite tough job market, 2025
- About one in nine (11%) of the FM vacancies Maxwell Stephens advertised from 2023 to 2026 were interim or contract roles.
  Source: Maxwell Stephens analysis of 497 advertised vacancies, May 2023 – September 2026

Sources were checked in September 2026. Select a source to open the original research. Maxwell Stephens figures are drawn from our own published vacancies and placement records.

See It in Practice

SailGP Interim Facilities Project Manager Recruitment

SailGP, the international sailing competition, decided to move its headquarters from New Zealand to London and needed specialist facilities and project-management expertise to mobilise the new UK operation. Maxwell Stephens was appointed to recruit an Interim Facilities Project Manager on an initial six-month contract, to take the new property from project stage through to live operation. We ran a tailored headhunting campaign, directly approaching 57 candidates and presenting a shortlist of three, all of whom SailGP interviewed. SailGP appointed its preferred candidate to oversee the transition from fit-out and implementation into live workplace operations.

It shows a mobilisation and relocation brief with a defined end state, where the interim had to be credible from day one because a fixed-term assignment left no room for a settling-in period.

Read the full case study at maxwellstephens.com/case-studies/interim-project-manager-to-ensure-plain-sailing-for-sailgps-hq-relocation-project

Related Reading

- Interim or Permanent? Choosing the Right FM Appointment
  maxwellstephens.com/blog/interim-or-permanent-choosing-the-right-fm-appointment
- The First 100 Days in a Senior FM or Estates Role
  maxwellstephens.com/blog/first-100-days-in-a-senior-fm-or-estates-role
- How to Succeed as an Interim Manager
  maxwellstephens.com/blog/marketing-yourself-as-an-interim-manager

Talk to Maxwell Stephens

Planning an FM, estates or workplace appointment? Contact us for a confidential conversation, or browse more case studies. Looking for your next interim assignment? Upload your CV.

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