Arcavia Consulting

Embedded recruitment and direct sourcing.

What the model is, the situations it suits, and what it has delivered across construction, architecture and built environment technology.

INSIGHT PAPER · FOR TALENT ACQUISITION AND HR LEADERS · UNITED KINGDOM · SEPTEMBER 2026

CONTENTS

A third option between a recruiter and an agency.

Bought as a service, priced to flex, sitting outside headcount.

100+
HIRES DELIVERED SINCE FEBRUARY 2025

40–65%
TYPICAL COST SAVING VERSUS AGENCY

+73
NET PROMOTER SCORE

£4.8bn
CONSTRUCTION VALUE SUPPORTED

Two things have pulled recruitment capacity out of shape in the United Kingdom. Employment cost has stepped up, with employer National Insurance now at 15% and the unfair dismissal qualifying period falling to six months from January 2027. And demand in the built environment follows bid wins, framework awards and mobilisation dates rather than the financial year.

A permanent recruiter is a fixed cost carried through the quiet quarters. A contingent agency is a variable cost that rarely improves with volume. Embedded recruitment sits between the two, and this paper sets out what it does, the conditions where it works, and three example engagements with the numbers attached.

Client figures in the case studies are drawn from live delivery trackers. All three example engagements are anonymised.

The trigger is the shape of the demand, not its size.

Five conditions, and most businesses arrive with two of them.

01

A peak in hiring

A framework award, a bid win or a mobilisation date creates a block of requirements that the in-house team was never sized for. The peak is real but temporary, so permanent recruitment can be inflexible as an instrument, and agency fees at peak volume are expensive. Embedded capacity can be added for the peak and stepped back down afterwards without a redundancy conversation.

02

Specialist hires outside internal capability

Most in-house teams are built to fill the roles the business hires often. The difficult-to-fill, strategic hires and specialist roles that require headhunting and greater direct sourcing are a good opportunity for embedded recruiters to outperform agencies, free up capacity within internal teams, or both.

03

Agency spend has become the default

Where a preferred supplier list is the first call rather than the exception, cost per hire is fixed at the fee percentage however many people you hire. Embedded reduces list usage to genuinely hard roles and puts one point of contact over the agencies that remain, including their rates and performance.

04

Maternity, parental or part-time cover

An in-house recruiter going on leave, or moving to part-time or compressed hours, leaves a gap of a known length. Recruiting a fixed-term replacement takes ten to sixteen weeks and the good ones are reluctant to take a role with an end date on it. An embedded recruiter covers the desk from week one and hands it back.

05

An alternative to a fixed-term contract

A fixed-term hire needs headcount approval, a business case and a recruitment process of its own, and it carries employment risk and an end date that is awkward to move. Most in-house recruitment contracts also sit inside IR35, where the day rate has to rise by 20 to 25% to deliver the same take-home. Embedded sits in operating cost instead.

The common thread is a requirement with a shape to it — a start, a peak and a tail — against a resourcing model that only offers permanent capacity or per-hire fees. Where hiring is genuinely flat and low, a contingent agency is cheaper and this paper does not argue otherwise.

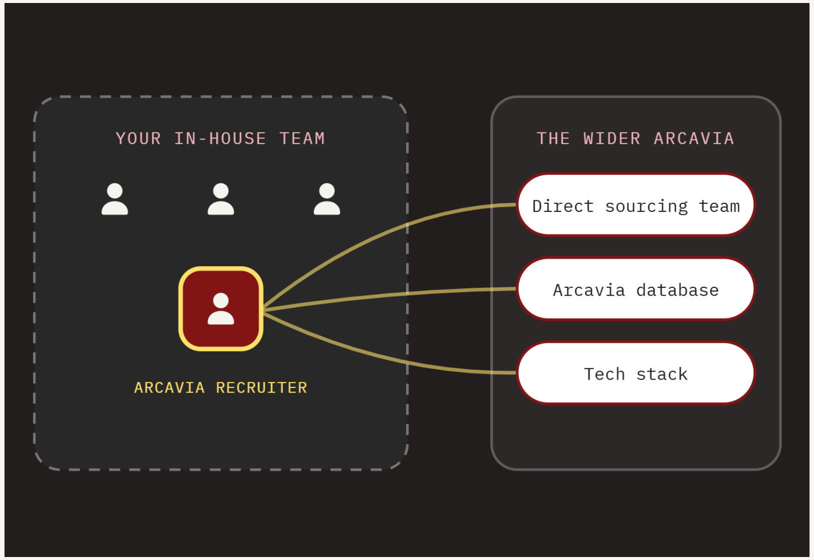
Headcount freezes are one of the more common reasons businesses start an embedded engagement. It is a service rather than a hire, so it sits in operating cost rather than headcount.

A recruiter inside your team, with a sourcing team behind them.

The second part is what makes the first part fast.

An embedded recruiter works in your business rather than alongside it. Your brand, your email address, your applicant tracking system if you prefer it to ours, your hiring manager meetings and your interview process. To a candidate they are part of your business, which is the point — the conversion rate on a direct approach from the hiring company is materially better than the same approach made by an agency.

What separates the model from renting a recruiter is what sits behind them. A single recruiter can hold perhaps eight to twelve live roles before coordination crowds out sourcing, and the first thing to go is the proactive work. Behind an embedded recruiter sits a direct sourcing team that carries the research and outreach, so a spike in requirements becomes more capacity rather than a queue.



The embedded recruiter

Intake, sourcing, screening, coordination, offer management and onboarding support, owned end to end.

The direct sourcing team

Research, market mapping and outreach capacity behind the recruiter, scaled to the requirement rather than the person.

The stack

Applicant tracking, LinkedIn Recruiter seats, salary intelligence and AI-assisted screening and matching, included in the fee.

Where the data sits

Market maps, salary intelligence and talent pools built during an engagement are shared. You have full working access throughout and a complete export at the end, into your own systems. We retain the market intelligence, which is why an embedded recruiter is productive in week two rather than month three — they start from a mapped market rather than a blank system.

What it is not. It is not an agency with a retainer attached — the fee is paid for the work rather than the placement, so the incentive is a working pipeline rather than a fast CV. It is not a contractor on a day rate either; the recruiter is managed, supported and covered by us, and a change of person is a conversation rather than a process.

Pipeline built ahead of the requirement.

Direct sourcing changes who applies, not only how many.

Recruitment performance in this market is mostly a function of when the sourcing happens. A vacancy advertised on the day it opens draws from the people who are looking that week. A mapped market approached three months earlier draws from the people who are doing the job well somewhere else, which is a different and much larger population.

That is the whole mechanism, and it is why an embedded model is measured on the pipeline rather than on placements alone. Three things follow from it.

Shortlists are shorter

Screening against an agreed scorecard rather than a job description means fewer candidates reach a hiring manager, and more of them are appointable. Four CVs to a hire is a realistic working ratio on a mapped role.

Time to hire falls at the front

Most of the elapsed time in a slow hire sits before the first CV, not after it. Pipelining ahead of the requirement removes that period rather than compressing the interview stage.

Offers hold

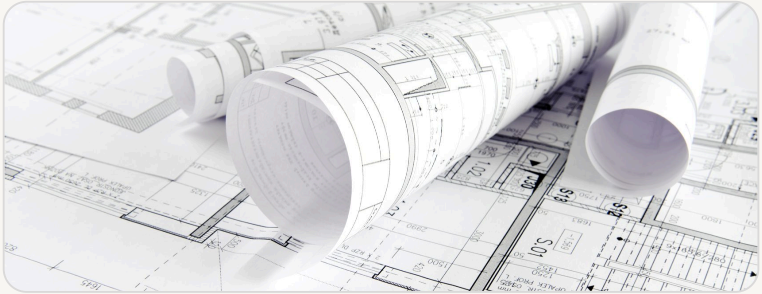
A candidate approached directly by the hiring business, with the pay position benchmarked before the conversation starts, is less likely to be in three processes and less likely to be counter-offered.

The trade-off worth stating. Building a pipeline ahead of demand means paying for capacity before there is a hire to show for it. That is precisely the cost an agency avoids, and it is why contingent recruitment is cheaper at low volume. The gain appears once the volume is there, and it compounds — the second and third role on a mapped market are much faster than the first.

The first thirty days

Week one	Role intake, hiring manager alignment, systems and access, employer messaging, process mapping. Agreed role briefs and scorecards.
Week two	Market maps for priority roles, salary benchmarking, outreach live.
Week three	Screening calls, longlists, interview process agreed with hiring managers.
Week four	Shortlists with hiring managers, and the management information baseline set for time to hire and cost per hire.

For comparison, at week four of a permanent recruitment hire you are typically still shortlisting the recruiter.



Nine hires across five projects at 33.5% below agency benchmark.

A direct sourcing solution for ‘difficult to fill’ hires.

Situation. A Tier 1 contractor delivering a major station redevelopment, a hospital programme site, a port and rail terminal, a city centre station and a data centre fit-out, with resourcing demand arriving project by project rather than through a central plan. Several of the roles were in locations that are difficult to recruit into, and part of the programme could not be announced publicly while hiring was under way.

Approach. An embedded resourcing function across all five projects, working to a retained monthly fee with no fee on hire. All sourcing direct, with a single delivery tracker giving the client a live view of every role and every candidate stage.

PIPELINE STAGE	REACHED	CONVERSION
Sourced	1,191	–
Recruitment screening	419	35.2%
Submitted to client	115	27.4%
Client interview	46	40.0%
Offer	14	30.4%
Hired	9	64.3%

Live delivery tracker, position at 16 September 2026. 46 roles tracked across the account, 22 currently open. Conversion is stage on stage.

FIVE MONTHS TO 16 SEPTEMBER 2026	AMOUNT
Placements	9
Total placed salaries	£902,000
Average placed salary	£100,222
Agency benchmark at 15% of salary	£135,300

33.5%
BELOW AGENCY BENCHMARK

£45,300
SAVED OVER FIVE MONTHS

16 days
SUBMISSION TO CLIENT FEEDBACK

Saving is measured against a contingency agency fee of 15% on the same placed salaries, net of every Arcavia cost across the five months and of agency cost carried into the period from before the engagement began. No placement fee was charged on any of the nine hires. Feedback time is the mean across the nine submissions where both dates are recorded.

Positions recruited

- Delivery Lead
- Commercial Lead
- Senior Project Manager, Structures
- Temporary Works Lead
- Information Lead
- Project Manager
- Senior Planner
- Handover Lead
- Sub Agent

Placed salaries ranged from £63,000 to £143,000. Roles live at the date of this paper include MEP Lead, Planning Lead, Senior Commercial Manager, Health and Safety leadership, Bid Writers, Estimators and Procurement Manager.

A regional studio from fifty to eighty people in twelve months.

Two studios scaled, with attrition covered inside the same engagement.

Situation. A global practice growing two studios in a United Kingdom regional office at the same time, in a city where the practice was not yet the obvious destination for senior design and technical staff. Hiring had to cover growth and replacement together, and the local pay position needed testing against the market before offers went out.

Approach. Recruitment coordination run end to end from inside the office — application screening, direct sourcing, interview scheduling, feedback and offer management — alongside a pay structure benchmarked to the local market. Agencies were used only where a role could not be filled directly.

Result. The office grew from fifty to eighty people over the twelve-month engagement, with more than thirty hires delivered across design, technical, interiors and project support, averaging a 60% saving against agency cost over the engagement.

50→80
HEADCOUNT IN 12 MONTHS

30+
HIRES DELIVERED

60%
AVERAGE SAVING VS AGENCY

Positions recruited

- Design Manager
- Project Director
- Retail Lead
- Design Technology Lead
- Architects
- Project Architect
- Technical Coordinators
- Technologists
- Interior Designers
- Part 2 Assistants
- Document Controllers

One quarter, in detail

Hires	11
CVs submitted	37
Agency fees displaced, at 15%	£63,150

50.6%
NET SAVING VS AGENCY

3.4
CVS TO A HIRE

Nine of the eleven hires displaced an agency fee; two came through direct application and are excluded from the benchmark. The saving is net of every Arcavia cost for the quarter, bought as a monthly fee plus a share of the saving delivered above an agreed threshold.

> "Deep knowledge of our industry and a strong ability to connect with our company culture — thoughtful insights, consistent delivery, and a data-driven approach that was invaluable throughout."

FORMER HR DIRECTOR, EUROPE

Strategic hiring and confidential hires.

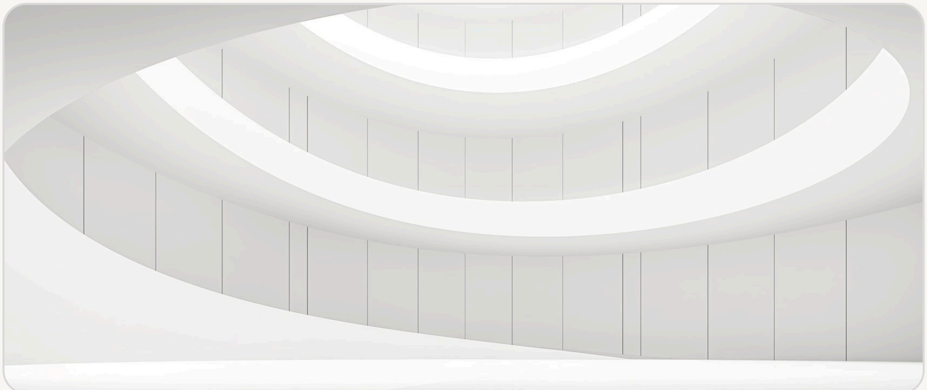
Senior, confidential and mapped rather than advertised.

Leadership appointments are where the gap between coordination capacity and research capacity shows most clearly. A confidential replacement cannot be advertised, a succession hire has to be assessed against a set of criteria that nobody has written down yet, and the population worth approaching is rarely more than a few dozen people. That is a research project rather than a vacancy, and it is the work most in-house teams have no spare capacity to carry.

Both engagements below ran under NDA, alongside embedded delivery for other clients. The process is the same in each: a full market map with compensation data, eight to ten longlist interviews, a shortlist of three to five, then offer negotiation, referencing and onboarding support.

97%
COMPLETION RATE SINCE 2024

18
WORKING DAYS TO SHORTLIST, AVERAGE



ENGAGEMENT ONE

Four leadership hires into a global ground engineering business

A geopolymer specialist holding the intellectual property for its own solution and leading its global market. Four leadership appointments were needed in early 2026 with market sensitivities that required a confidential process throughout.

Shortlists were delivered within four weeks and all four hires were made within 43 working days of the project starting.

- Operations Director
- Technical Director
- Confidential VP position
- Head of Regional Sales

ENGAGEMENT TWO

Operations Director succession, family-owned regional contractor

A second-generation, family-held contractor with a strong record of profitable delivery in a Tier 1 public sector environment. The owners wanted an Operations Director aligned to the family's values who could lead a third wave of succession — senior enough to run the business, with fifteen to twenty years left in their career for a long handover.

Around 68 people were approached across commercial and operational backgrounds, plus developer backgrounds who could open a new growth area.

c.68
APPROACHED

8 → 4
INTERVIEWED → SHORTLISTED

1
APPOINTED

You should be able to see what you are buying.

Six measures, generated from the system rather than assembled.

Embedded models are easy to buy and harder to hold to account, because the fee is not attached to a hire. The answer is a baseline set in the first month and the same six measures reported every month afterwards. Any provider should be able to produce these from their applicant tracking system rather than building them in a spreadsheet for the review.

MEASURE	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Time to shortlist and time to hire	By role and by discipline, against the baseline set in week four. Time to shortlist moves first and is the better early signal.
Cost per hire	All in, including the monthly fee, against your own prior agency cost per hire rather than a published benchmark.
Agency spend displaced	The number that pays for the engagement. Fees you would have paid at your own rates, on the hires that were actually made directly.
Fill rate and pipeline health	Open roles, live pipeline by stage and roles at risk. A healthy pipeline looks wrong at the top and right at the bottom.
Source mix	Direct sourcing against applications, referrals and agency exceptions. If the direct share is not rising, the model is not working.
Offer decline and early attrition	Where the process or the pay position is losing people. Both are usually a benchmarking problem rather than a sourcing one.

Set the baseline before you start

The most common failure in an embedded engagement is that nobody records what the position was beforehand, so the saving is argued about at the end. Three numbers, agreed in the first month, settle it: your agency fee percentage, your current cost per hire, and your current time to hire on the roles in scope.

Flex rather than terminate

Mobilisations slip, bids are lost and awards move. When they do, the sensible response is to step the engagement down rather than stop it — the pipeline stays warm and the market knowledge stays with the account, so returning demand does not start from nothing. Most engagements begin narrow, on one office, one project or one discipline, for an initial three months.

08 — ABOUT ARCAVIA

Building trusted partnerships through precision recruitment.

Specialist talent partner to the built environment.

Arcavia Consulting works with architecture and design practices, contractors and built environment technology businesses across the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. We partner in three ways: embedded solutions for ongoing or variable hiring, strategic hiring for confidential and senior appointments, and project recruitment for mobilisations with a defined scope.

If any of the five situations on page three describes where you are, the useful next step is usually a short conversation about the baseline — what you are currently spending, how long your roles are taking, and which of them your team has no capacity to source. It takes about half an hour and it does not commit you to anything.

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