

Essential Trading Co-operative Ltd

Refreshingly different HR

Essential Trading is one of the largest worker co-operatives in the UK. The organisation is as passionate about equality as it is about providing healthy, organically-sourced, Fairtrade food.

When 120 workers have an equal voice, this can present certain challenges for the organisation. We've ensured that the co-operative meets its practical and legal obligations, whilst remaining true to its fair-minded ethos.



What were Essential's challenges?

- A non-hierarchical, co-operative structure comprising a rotating management committee, disciplinary and grievance panels, and a welfare panel to support wellbeing. Employees didn't necessarily have the skillset or experience needed to address issues effectively.
- A committed and enthusiastic HR team, but with limited practical and technical HR experience.
- Unwieldy policies and procedures that had evolved over time and were not fit for purpose.
- Multiple versions of key documents such as employee handbooks and contracts, creating confusion and inefficiency.
- A need for flexibility, to work with HR in a way that is clear and legally compliant, while allowing the organisation to take the time it needs to make decisions in a truly egalitarian way.

At a glance

Sector: Food trading co-operative

Workers: 120

PES services:

- HR support
- Group health broking
- Group risk broking

How did PES help?

Chaired panel meetings for complex situations

In a couple of particularly complex situations, we chaired panel meetings, ensuring legal compliance and good outcomes for everyone involved.

Streamlined policies and procedures

We reviewed and re-wrote Essential's employee handbook and employment contract, consolidating older versions into streamlined, refreshingly different documents.

“ Because PES is a small, local organisation, the continuity of contact has been great. They have worked hard to understand us. Their advice holds us to our responsibilities, but is nuanced enough to reflect our structure and values. ”

Ian Eastwood, HR team

Getting under the skin of the organisation

In a worker co-operative, changes require a majority vote to be passed. We attended employee meetings to explain why this documentation needed updating, to help employees make an informed vote.

We became a retained supplier delivering ongoing support

Our willingness to listen and work with Essential led them to appoint us as a retained HR partner. Since then the relationship has gone from strength to strength.

What difference have we made?

Reduced administration By streamlining policies and documentation, we have saved administrative time and effort for the HR team, helping them carry out their roles more effectively.

Developed skills and confidence Our day-to-day coaching and support has helped grow employees' skills, so that procedures run more smoothly.

Allowed the ethos to flourish We understand what Essential is trying to do, so our support is pragmatic, common sense and tailored to a very specific set of needs.

“ The PES HR team are excellent. They are accessible and responsive, and turn things around quickly. As well as understanding our needs, they have a refreshingly direct manner. With PES, we know we're not just dealing with 'consultants'. Their dedicated HR experts are a great fit for us. ”

Ian Eastwood, HR team

Contact us

We'd love to hear from you. You can reach us by telephone on 01454 808658, or by emailing us at: hello@wearePES.co.uk.

