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EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNALS

Claimants: Mr B Pownall
Mr S Caspall

Respondent: E.On Control Solutions Limited

Heard at: East London Hearing Centre

On: 19 September 2018

Before: Employment Judge Allen

Representation

Claimant: Mr K Aggrey-Orleans (Counsel)
Respondent: Mr S Chegwin (Solicitor)

JUDGMENT ON A PRELIMINARY HEARING

1. Mr Caspall's first claim form presented on 6 June 2018 is amended to alter the early conciliation number to the number of Mr Caspall's first early conciliation certificate, namely R122672/18/09.
2. The Respondent's application for strike out of Mr Caspall's claim is dismissed.
3. The unlawful deductions from wages claim that Mr Pownall makes pursuant to section 23 and 13 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 in claim numbers 3201201/2018 and 3201202/2018, for the sum of £4,615.27 and as set out in paragraph 40(3) of his particulars of claim is hereby dismissed as withdrawn.

REASONS

1 This is a case in which there appeared at first sight to be two Respondents: Matrix Control Solutions Limited; and E.On Control Solutions Limited. In fact those two Respondents are actually one in that Matrix Control Solutions (hereafter MCS) became E.On Control Solutions Limited (hereafter E.On). It is also a case in which there are two relevant early conciliation certificates. The first is a certificate obtained by Mr Caspall against MCS, date of receipt by ACAS of the notification 26 February 2018, date of issue by ACAS of the certificate 28 March 2018. The second obtained by Mr Caspall naming E.On date of receipt by ACAS of notification 5 June 2018, date of issue by ACAS of the certificate 20 June 2018.

2 The parties have agreed that the correct name of the single Respondent going forward is now E.On Control Solutions Limited. No point is taken in relation to the old name being used on any early conciliation certificate or any claim form. This hearing concerns a jurisdictional question concerning Mr Caspall's original claim form. There are in fact four claim forms involved for each of Mr Caspall and Mr Pownall, whose claim is to be heard alongside that of Mr Caspall.

3 Claim forms with case numbers 3201201/2018 and 3201202/18 were presented on 6 June 2018. The second claim forms with numbers 3201209/2018 and 3201210/2018 were presented on 11 June 2018. The third claim forms with numbers 3201211/2018 and 3201212/2018 were also presented on 11 June 2018 and the fourth claim forms with numbers 3201469/2018 and 3201470/2018 were presented on 13 July 2018.

4 In Mr Caspall's case the first claim form presented on 6 June 2018 was against MCS and E.On. It cited an incorrect early conciliation certificate in error, having cited the early conciliation certificate obtained for Mr Pownall rather than the one which had been obtained for Mr Caspall. That early conciliation certificate was only against MCS in any event and the claim form was accepted from both Claimants only in respect of MCS, the early conciliation certificate not having named E.On and the Employment Tribunal not being aware the E.On was the same company by a new name and therefore the claim against E.On having been rejected under Rule 12(1)(f) of the 2013 Tribunal Rules of Procedure. The second claim which was against E.On on 11 June 2018, again with the wrong early conciliation certificate stating the certificate reference relating to Mr Pownall rather than the one relating to Mr Caspall. That was rejected under Rule 12(1)(f) again because E.On was not named in the early conciliation certificate. The third claim against MCS and E.On was again accepted only against MCS and again had the wrong early conciliation number contained within it. The fourth claim form submitted on 13 July 2018 was submitted at a point at which the Claimant, Mr Caspall had now obtained an early conciliation certificate naming E.On and he now brought a claim against E.On with a citation of a certificate which did at least name him but which was the second certificate rather than the first one. Those claims were accepted by the Tribunal against E.On. At no point did the Tribunal reject Mr Caspall's claims because he had cited the wrong early conciliation number.

5 The Respondent filed its response to the Claimant's claim pointing out that the wrong early conciliation certificate naming Mr Pownall had been used by the Claimant and arguing that the Tribunal must reject the claim under Rule 10 and 12 and denying that Rule 3(1)(a) of the early conciliation rules was capable of applying in this case.

6 All of the Tribunal rejections of the claims against E.On can be set to one side given the clarification now brought to these claims in that MCS is E.On or rather that MCS became E.On.

7 With hindsight it was not helpful for four claim forms to have been issued. However, there was understandable confusion caused by the Employment Tribunal's innocent rejection of the claims against E.On (the new name for MCS) and it was understandable for Mr Caspall's solicitors to get a new early conciliation certificate naming E.On. What the Claimant now seeks to do is to either rely on the first claim form, amended to include the correct first early conciliation number; or to rely on the most recent claim form, which includes an early conciliation number which refers to the second certificate in Mr Caspall's name, which the Respondent says is out of time and which the Claimant says is either in time or that it was not reasonably practicable to have brought in time. The Respondent says that the claims should have been rejected under Rule 10 or Rule 12 and in the absence of such rejection, they should now be struck out.

8 The relevant law is set out in Section 18A of the Employment Tribunals Act 1996; Section 207B of the Employment Rights Act 1996; Rules 2, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 29 and 37 of the Employment Tribunal Rules 2013; and Regulation 3 and para 4 of the Early Conciliation Rules 2014 - as follows:

ETA 1996

18A Requirement to contact ACAS before instituting proceedings

(1) Before a person ("the prospective claimant") presents an application to institute relevant proceedings relating to any matter, the prospective claimant must provide to ACAS prescribed information, in the prescribed manner, about that matter. This is subject to subsection (7).

(2) On receiving the prescribed information in the prescribed manner, ACAS shall send a copy of it to a conciliation officer.

(3) The conciliation officer shall, during the prescribed period, endeavour to promote a settlement between the persons who would be parties to the proceedings.

(4) If—

(a) during the prescribed period the conciliation officer concludes that a settlement is not possible, or

(b) the prescribed period expires without a settlement having been reached, the conciliation officer shall issue a certificate to that effect, in the prescribed manner, to the prospective claimant.

(5) The conciliation officer may continue to endeavour to promote a settlement after the expiry of the prescribed period.

(6) In subsections (3) to (5) "settlement" means a settlement that avoids proceedings being instituted.

(7) A person may institute relevant proceedings without complying with the requirement in subsection (1) in prescribed cases. The cases that may be prescribed include (in particular)— cases where the requirement is complied with by another person instituting relevant proceedings relating to the same matter; cases where proceedings that are not relevant proceedings are instituted by means of the same form as proceedings that are; cases where section 18B applies because ACAS has been contacted by a

person against whom relevant proceedings are being instituted.

(8) A person who is subject to the requirement in subsection (1) may not present an application to institute relevant proceedings without a certificate under subsection (4).

...

(11) The Secretary of State may by employment tribunal procedure regulations make such further provision as appears to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient with respect to the conciliation process provided for by subsections (1) to (8).

(12) Employment tribunal procedure regulations may (in particular) make provision—

(a) authorising the Secretary of State to prescribe, or prescribe requirements in relation to, any form which is required by such regulations to be used for the purpose of providing information to ACAS under subsection (1) or issuing a certificate under subsection (4);

(b) requiring ACAS to give a person any necessary assistance to comply with the requirement in subsection (1);

(c) for the extension of the period prescribed for the purposes of subsection (3);

(d) treating the requirement in subsection (1) as complied with, for the purposes of any provision extending the time limit for instituting relevant proceedings, by a person who is relieved of that requirement by virtue of subsection (7)(a).

ERA 1996

207B Extension of time limits to facilitate conciliation before institution of proceedings

(1) This section applies where this Act provides for it to apply for the purposes of a provision of this Act (a “relevant provision”). But it does not apply to a dispute that is (or so much of a dispute as is) a relevant dispute for the purposes of section 207A.

(2) In this section—

(a) Day A is the day on which the complainant or applicant concerned complies with the requirement in subsection (1) of section 18A of the Employment Tribunals Act 1996 (requirement to contact ACAS before instituting proceedings) in relation to the matter in respect of which the proceedings are brought, and

(b) Day B is the day on which the complainant or applicant concerned receives or, if earlier, is treated as receiving (by virtue of regulations made under subsection (11) of that section) the certificate issued under subsection (4) of that section.

(3) In working out when a time limit set by a relevant provision expires the period beginning with the day after Day A and ending with Day B is not to be counted.

(4) If a time limit set by a relevant provision would (if not extended by this subsection) expire during the period beginning with Day A and ending one month after Day B, the time limit expires instead at the end of that period.

(5) Where an employment tribunal has power under this Act to extend a time limit set by a relevant provision, the power is exercisable in relation to the time limit as extended by this section.

ET Rules 2013

2 Overriding objective

The overriding objective of these Rules is to enable Employment Tribunals to deal with cases fairly and justly. Dealing with a case fairly and justly includes, so far as practicable— (a) ensuring that the parties are on an equal footing; (b) dealing with cases in ways which are proportionate to the complexity and importance of the issues; (c) avoiding unnecessary formality and seeking flexibility in the proceedings; (d) avoiding delay, so far as compatible with proper consideration of the issues; and (e) saving expense. A Tribunal shall seek to give effect to the overriding objective in interpreting, or exercising any power given to it by, these Rules. The parties and their representatives shall assist the Tribunal to further the overriding objective and in particular shall co-operate generally with each other and with the Tribunal.

5 Extending or shortening time

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The Tribunal may, on its own initiative or on the application of a party, extend or shorten any time limit specified in these Rules or in any decision, whether or not (in the case of an extension) it has expired.

6 Irregularities and non-compliance

A failure to comply with any provision of these Rules (except rule 8(1), 16(1), 23 or 25) or any order of the Tribunal (except for an order under rules 38 or 39) does not of itself render void the proceedings or any step taken in the proceedings. In the case of such non-compliance, the Tribunal may take such action as it considers just, which may include all or any of the following—

- (a) waiving or varying the requirement;
- (b) striking out the claim or the response, in whole or in part, in accordance with rule 37;
- (c) barring or restricting a party's participation in the proceedings;
- (d) awarding costs in accordance with rules 74 to 84.

10 Rejection: form not used or failure to supply minimum information

- (1) The Tribunal shall reject a claim if—
 - (a) it is not made on a prescribed form; ...
 - (b) it does not contain all of the following information—
 - (i) each claimant's name;
 - (ii) each claimant's address;
 - (iii) each respondent's name;
 - (iv) each respondent's address; or
 - (c) it does not contain all of the following information—
 - (i) an early conciliation number;
 - (ii) confirmation that the claim does not institute any relevant proceedings; or
 - (iii) confirmation that one of the early conciliation exemptions applies.
- (2) The form shall be returned to the claimant with a notice of rejection explaining why it has been rejected. The notice shall contain information about how to apply for a reconsideration of the rejection.

12 Rejection: substantive defects

- (1) The staff of the tribunal office shall refer a claim form to an Employment Judge if they consider that the claim, or part of it, may be—
 - (a) one which the Tribunal has no jurisdiction to consider; ...
 - (b) in a form which cannot sensibly be responded to or is otherwise an abuse of the process;
 - (c) one which institutes relevant proceedings and is made on a claim form that does not contain either an early conciliation number or confirmation that one of the early conciliation exemptions applies;
 - (d) one which institutes relevant proceedings, is made on a claim form which contains confirmation that one of the early conciliation exemptions applies, and an early conciliation exemption does not apply;
 - (e) one which institutes relevant proceedings and the name of the claimant on the claim form is not the same as the name of the prospective claimant on the early conciliation certificate to which the early conciliation number relates; or
 - (f) one which institutes relevant proceedings and the name of the respondent on the claim form is not the same as the name of the prospective respondent on the early conciliation certificate to which the early conciliation number relates.
- (2) The claim, or part of it, shall be rejected if the Judge considers that the claim, or part of it, is of a kind described in sub-paragraphs (a), (b), (c) or (d) of paragraph (1).
- (2A) The claim, or part of it, shall be rejected if the Judge considers that the claim, or part of it, is of a

kind described in sub-paragraph (e) or (f) of paragraph (1) unless the Judge considers that the claimant made a minor error in relation to a name or address and it would not be in the interests of justice to reject the claim.

(3) If the claim is rejected, the form shall be returned to the claimant together with a notice of rejection giving the Judge's reasons for rejecting the claim, or part of it. The notice shall contain information about how to apply for a reconsideration of the rejection.

13 Reconsideration of rejection

(1) A claimant whose claim has been rejected (in whole or in part) under rule 10 or 12 may apply for a reconsideration on the basis that either—

- (a) the decision to reject was wrong; or
- (b) the notified defect can be rectified.

(2) The application shall be in writing and presented to the Tribunal within 14 days of the date that the notice of rejection was sent. It shall explain why the decision is said to have been wrong or rectify the defect and if the claimant wishes to request a hearing this shall be requested in the application.

(3) If the claimant does not request a hearing, or an Employment Judge decides, on considering the application, that the claim shall be accepted in full, the Judge shall determine the application without a hearing. Otherwise the application shall be considered at a hearing attended only by the claimant.

(4) If the Judge decides that the original rejection was correct but that the defect has been rectified, the claim shall be treated as presented on the date that the defect was rectified.

29 Case management orders

The Tribunal may at any stage of the proceedings, on its own initiative or on application, make a case management order. Subject to rule 30A(2) and (3) the particular powers identified in the following rules do not restrict that general power. A case management order may vary, suspend or set aside an earlier case management order where that is necessary in the interests of justice, and in particular where a party affected by the earlier order did not have a reasonable opportunity to make representations before it was made.

37 Striking out

(1) At any stage of the proceedings, either on its own initiative or on the application of a party, a Tribunal may strike out all or part of a claim or response on any of the following grounds—

- (a) that it is scandalous or vexatious or has no reasonable prospect of success;
- (b) that the manner in which the proceedings have been conducted by or on behalf of the claimant or the respondent (as the case may be) has been scandalous, unreasonable or vexatious;
- (c) for non-compliance with any of these Rules or with an order of the Tribunal;
- (d) that it has not been actively pursued;
- (e) that the Tribunal considers that it is no longer possible to have a fair hearing in respect of the claim or response (or the part to be struck out).

(2) A claim or response may not be struck out unless the party in question has been given a reasonable opportunity to make representations, either in writing or, if requested by the party, at a hearing.

(3) Where a response is struck out, the effect shall be as if no response had been presented, as set out in rule 21 above.

EC Rules 2014

Regulation 3.— Exemptions from early conciliation

(1) A person ("A") may institute relevant proceedings without complying with the requirement for early conciliation where—

- (a) another person ("B") has complied with that requirement in relation to the same dispute and A wishes to institute proceedings on the same claim form as B;

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(b) A institutes those relevant proceedings on the same claim form as proceedings which are not relevant proceedings;

(c) A is able to show that the respondent has contacted ACAS in relation to a dispute, ACAS has not received information from A under section 18A(1) of the Employment Tribunals Act in relation to that dispute, and the proceedings on the claim form relate to that dispute;

(d) the proceedings are proceedings under Part X of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the application to institute those proceedings is accompanied by an application under section 128 of that Act 1 or section 161 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 2; or

(e) A is instituting proceedings against the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service or the Government Communications Headquarters.

(2) Where A benefits from the exemption in paragraph (1)(a), the requirement for early conciliation shall be treated as complied with for the purposes of any provision extending the time limit for instituting relevant proceedings in relation to that matter.

Rules Para 4. If there is more than one prospective respondent, the prospective claimant must present a separate early conciliation form under rule 2 in respect of each respondent or, in the case of a telephone call made under rule 3, must name each prospective respondent.

9 I have been referred in able submissions from both representatives to the relevant rules and to a number of relevant authorities some of which have been provided to me. There was no dispute that these were 'relevant proceedings' to which the early conciliation regime applied. The requirement to notify ACAS of a claim prior to bringing an ET claim is mandatory as is the requirement to obtain a relevant certificate prior to instituting proceedings under s18A(1) and (8) ETA 1996. In this case there is no doubt that the Claimant did notify ACAS and did obtain a certificate on 20 March 2018. In *Science Warehouse v Mills* [2016] ICR 252, the EAT had considered whether a Claimant who sought to add a claim of victimisation by way of amendment to her existing claim of pregnancy and paternity discrimination was obliged to go through the EC procedure again with regard to the new claim and it held that she was not. Her Honour Judge Eady QC took the view that S.18A ETA, which applies the EC procedure in relation to any 'matter', should be given a broad interpretation in order to avoid disputes and satellite litigation as to whether proper notification has been given of each and every possible claim subsequently made to a tribunal. Although amendments to an existing claim are not listed in S.18A(7) as a category of exception, this is because amendment is a matter for the tribunal's case management powers in respect of which no specific exemption is needed. In *Mist & Derby Community Health Services Trust* [2016] ICR 543, EAT, HHJ Eady QC, followed her own decision in *Mills* to hold that there was no requirement for a claimant who sought to add an additional respondent to an existing claim to go through the EC procedure again in respect of that application. The decision as to whether to permit such an amendment fell within the tribunal's general case management powers under rule 29 of the Tribunal Rules. HHJ Eady QC was satisfied that this approach was consistent with rule 34, 'which specifically addresses the addition or substitution of parties in ET proceedings without reference to any further EC requirements', and with the overriding objective. Mr Justice Langstaff in *Drake International Systems v Blue Arrow* [2016] ICR 445 referred with approval to those decisions of HHJ Judge Eady QC and again it was held that no further early conciliation procedure was required where a Claimant sought to amend a claim to substitute one Respondent for another. Mr Justice Langstaff commented that a happy consequence of his analysis is the avoidance of stultifying satellite litigation in respect of the early conciliation procedure. That wish was not sadly something which was granted to Mr Justice Langstaff as further case law has

demonstrated. In *Compass Group v Morgan* [2017] ICR 73, the EAT held that an EC certificate is not necessarily limited to events that pre-date it and that a constructive dismissal claim was covered by an early conciliation certificate issued before the Claimant's resignation.

10 I have no doubt that in this matter only the first early conciliation certificate was effective for the purposes of stopping the clock and extending time as set out in Sections 207B(3) and (4) of the Employment Rights Act. The extension of time provided by the early conciliation process would not in any event been required by Mr Caspall in relation to his claim forms presented on 6 June or 11 June which were in time in relation at least to his effective date of termination of 14 March 2018 and therefore if that claim form had contained the right early conciliation number there would be no jurisdictional argument.

11 There is nothing to prevent a claimant from contacting ACAS on a further occasion to seek assistance on a voluntary basis in order to achieve resolution of his or her dispute but a second early conciliation certificate does not operate to extend time for a second time and if there were any doubt about that it was made clear by the judgment in *HM Revenue & Customs v Serra Garau* [2017] ICR 1121, EAT. The statutory provisions do not allow for more than one early conciliation certificate per matter to be issued by ACAS if more than one such early certificate is issued the second or a subsequent certificate is outside the statutory scheme and has no impact on the limitation period.

12 Looking first at the second claim form, presented on 13 July 2018, which was clearly out of time and not assisted by any extensions of time based on the second early conciliation certificate. Mr Chegwin says that no 'reasonable practicability' argument could hope to save it given that claim forms, albeit citing the wrong early conciliation certificate, were presented in time on both 6 June and 11 June 2018. On that issue, I note with interest HHJ Eady QC's comments at paragraphs 41 – 45 of *North East London NHS Foundation Trust v Zhou* UKEAT/0066/18/LA relied upon by Mr Aggrey-Orleans. In that case, a Claimant had failed to transcribe the ACAS Early Conciliation ("EC") certificate number correctly (missing off the last forward slash and final two digits) and when the mistake was corrected, the Claimant was out of time. HHJ Eady QC did not regard a mistake on the part of the Claimant or her solicitors as automatically meaning that their conduct was unreasonable. She commented that there appears to be no sensible reason for the failure to afford the ET a similar discretion in respect of transcribing the EC number than that provided in respect of a party's name but that given the mandatory language of Rule 10(1)(c)(i) of the ET Rules, she was unable to see how the requirement could be mitigated by means of the overriding objective. However she agreed that the error in question was nothing other than minor and technical and did not consider it could be said that this kind of mistake was anticipated by the earlier case law (such as *Wall's Meat* or *Dedman*) and that it may be a reasonable mistake – for the purposes of determining whether it had been reasonably practicable to have brought the claim in a proper form within time.

13 In this case the Employment Tribunal focused on the 'wrong Respondent' question albeit that it turned out to be in fact the same Respondent. The Tribunal did not reject the case on the basis of the incorrect early conciliation number (which it could have done), which may have enabled the Claimant to make good the error and resubmit the claim in

time. In that regard, in the circumstances of this case and noting the absence of any prejudice to the Respondent, I considered it at least arguable that the Claimant's mistake did not equal unreasonableness and that therefore it was arguable that it was not reasonably practicable to bring a claim in time. That leaves open of course the question of whether any rectification of defect was obtained within a reasonable period of time thereafter.

14 However, the solution to the difficulties in this case is to be found in the first claim form. In *Sterling v United Learning Trust*, UKEAT/0439/14/DM, the Claimant had not fully entered the ACAS conciliation number she had been given on her application form, and that the Employment Tribunal had rejected it under Rule 10(1)(c)(i). No argument was made that it had not been reasonably practicable to submit the claim on time. Mr Justice Langstaff in the EAT held that if a Claimant provided an incorrect ACAS conciliation number on the claim form the Tribunal was obliged to reject the form but it was open to the Claimant to apply for reconsideration of such a rejection. In that case the ACAS early conciliation number had been entered incorrectly on the form by mistake and despite expressing sympathy with the litigant Mr Justice Langstaff held that that was a bar. Mr Chegwin said that Mr Caspall's case is similar in that a wrong early conciliation number was entered on his claim form. Mr Aggrey-Orleans says that an important difference is that the claim form in *Sterling* was rejected by the Tribunal and that Mr Caspall's form was accepted by the Tribunal at least in relation to what was thought at the time to be one of the two possible Respondents. Therefore it was not open to the Claimant to apply for reconsideration under Rule 13. If the form had been rejected Mr Aggrey-Orleans says the Claimant would also have had time to have corrected this relatively minor error. Mr Aggrey-Orleans also relies in this regard on the additional complicating factor referred to above of the Tribunal having rejected the claims against E.On although not MCS on the basis that no EC certificate named E.On when in fact they turned out to be the same body. He says that the sort of errors that have occurred are of the same nature of error as that which is remediable under Rule 12(2A) in relation to names of the parties. However, Mr Chegwin says that it is very close to the sort of errors in *Sterling* which did prove to be a bar to that Claimant's case proceeding. Paragraph 22 of *Sterling* is of some assistance to me. It states as follows:

"Once it is accepted that the Tribunal was entitled to think that the form did have a couple of digits missing, the question is whether the Tribunal was then obliged to reject the form. The wording of Rule 10 was not significantly in issue before me. Where the rule requires an early conciliation number to be set out, it is implicit that that number is an accurate number. The Tribunal had found it was not. Once that appeared to be the case, the Tribunal was obliged to reject it, and that rejection would stand, subject only to reconsideration, which here was not asked for. Although that might have been the failure of Mr McKenzie and not the Claimant herself, the Tribunal Judge had Mr McKenzie before him as her representative and was entitled, therefore, to think that there was no application for reconsideration."

15 Mr Chegwin correctly points out that the consequence of Rule 13(4) is that on any reconsideration of a rejection, the claim shall be treated as presented on the date that the defect was rectified. However in Mr Caspall's case that rejection did not happen. It did not

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happen under Rule 10 and it did not happen under Rule 12 (at least on the basis for the wrong early conciliation number). I take account of the fact that Rule 10(2) and Rule 12(3) both require the reasons for the rejection to be pointed out to the Claimant and for information about how to apply for a reconsideration to be provided. In my judgment the claim form having been accepted and not rejected does leave open to me the possibility of permitting an amendment to the first claim form, as I am invited to do by the Claimant in order to correct the error made in making reference to the wrong early conciliation number. The Respondent has not suggested to me that any prejudice is caused to it if I permit that amendment, accepting that its argument today is a technical argument albeit one based on a certain amount of authority as cited to me by Mr Chegwin.

16 I have reminded myself of the Guidance in the Presidential Practice Direction on Amendments. In my judgment this is a minor amendment to rectify a mistake and it is clearly in line with the overriding objective and the general principle of access to justice to permit the amendment to the first claim form altering the early conciliation number to the number of Mr Caspall's first early conciliation certificate, namely R122672/18/09. The first claim form having been in time and now amended to comply with the relevant rules the case of both Mr Caspall and Mr Pownall can proceed.

17 The parties having both notified the tribunal after the hearing that Mr Pownall wishes to withdraw part of his claim relating to unlawful deduction from wages, that part of the claim is dismissed upon withdrawal.

18 Case management orders are made in a separate order.

Employment Judge Allen
4 October 2018