A WORKS CO. MANUAL · NO. 09

# The Solo Consultant Works

*How to turn the experience you have already earned into a business.*

The Works Co. · Trade manuals

**A Works Co. manual · No. 09**

*How to turn the experience you have already earned into a business.*

---

The Solo Consultant Works. Version 1.0, 2026. Published by The Works Co. (UK).  If the manual is not right for you, write to refunds@theworksco.co.uk on the day you buy and we will refund you in full, no questions asked, and you keep every file. Your purchase includes free updates for life: when we revise figures, rules or templates, you get the new version at no extra cost. The pricing, tax and regulatory facts in these pages reflect UK practice as we understand it in 2026; they are a starting point, not formal advice. For your own tax position, contracts and insurance, take proper professional advice.

---

## How to use this manual

This is a working manual, not a book to admire. The fastest way to get value from it is two passes.

**First pass: read it through.** Start at the front and read to the end without stopping to act. Do not open a spreadsheet, do not register a company, do not redo your pricing. You are building a map. By the end you will understand the whole shape of a one-person consultancy: how the niche, the authority and the sales process fit together, where the money comes from, and where the lumpy months hide. A read-through takes an evening or two.

**Second pass: work it.** Go back to the chapter that matches where you are right now and do the work. Open the relevant Toolkit file, run the relevant prompts, and produce something real: a positioning line, a rate, a proposal, a pipeline. Most chapters tell you exactly what to do, when to do it, what it costs and what it earns. Treat each chapter as a job, not a chapter.

Two companions sit alongside the manual.

**The Toolkit** is ten Excel spreadsheets: a self-assessment scorecard, a profit and loss tracker, a pipeline tracker, a rate calculator, a positioning worksheet, a proposal and statement-of-work template, a delivery checklist, an income-stack planner, a capacity planner and a first-90-days checklist. Appendix A lists them. When a chapter points you to a file, open it and fill it in with your own numbers.

**The Prompt Library** is sixty AI prompts, organised to match the work in the manual: finding your niche, writing proposals, pricing engagements, drafting content, handling objections and more. Appendix B explains how to use them. The prompts are a drafting aid and a thinking partner, not a substitute for your own judgement; you still own every word you send to a client.

You do not need permission to skip around. If you already have a niche and clients and you only want to fix your pricing, go straight to the pricing chapter and the rate calculator. The manual is built to be useful in pieces.

One honest note before you start. A consultancy is your own expertise sold on your own terms; it is real work, and it is not for everyone. If, by the end of the first pass, this is plainly not the business for you, that is a good outcome, and the refund stands. We would rather you spent the money well than carried on with a business that was never yours.

PART ONE

# The Foundations

Chapter 01

# The Solo Consultant Opportunity

On a Monday in March, Richard sits at the small desk in the spare bedroom of his house in Guildford. It is 8:50am. At nine he has a call with a manufacturing firm in Reading who pay him £2,500 a month to be, in effect, their part-time operations director — two days a fortnight, on the phone, in their spreadsheets, in their hard decisions. At eleven he has a different call: a logistics company who have read a proposal he sent on Friday for a £9,000 project to fix the way they plan their warehouse shifts. Between the two calls there is a gap, and in that gap he makes a cup of tea and does the sum he still finds slightly hard to believe.

Three days a week of work. Last month he billed £9,200. His old salary as an operations manager was £58,000 — about £4,800 a month before tax. He is now earning more, in less time, with no commute, no line manager, and no one to tell him which Monday he can take off. He is not a different person than he was eighteen months ago. He knows the same things he always knew. The only thing that changed is that he stopped giving that knowledge to one employer for a fixed wage and started selling it to several businesses at its real price.

That is the whole opportunity, and the rest of this manual is about how to build it deliberately rather than by accident.

## What a solo consultancy actually is

A solo consultancy is a one-person business that sells expertise and judgement you have already earned. You take the years of experience sitting in your head — the things you know how to do that other people will pay not to have to work out for themselves — and you sell them as advice and projects to businesses that need them. You reposition what you already are into income, on your own terms.

It is not a start-up in the usual sense. You are not inventing a product, raising money, or hoping a market appears. The market already exists: businesses that lack a skill in-house and would rather rent it than hire for it. You are the skill. Your job is to package it, price it, and put it in front of the right people.

The work takes a handful of forms, and most consultants end up doing several:

- **Advisory and consulting projects** — a defined piece of work for a fee.
- **Monthly retainers** — a fixed sum each month for ongoing access to you.

- **Fractional or interim roles** — a few days a month as a part-time head of something, or a temporary full-time stint covering a gap.
- **Workshops and training** — you in a room (or on a call) teaching what you know.
- **Audits and diagnostics** — a structured look at a problem with findings and recommendations.
- **Productised consulting** — a fixed-scope, fixed-price package that you sell again and again.

Chapter 5 turns each of these into something specific you can sell. For now, hold the shape in your head: advice and projects, with retainers and packages giving the whole thing a steady spine.

## Why now

Solo consulting has always existed. What has changed is that the conditions for it are unusually good, and several of them point the same way at once.

**You can charge real money for a day of your time.** In the UK in 2026, consultant day rates run from around **£400 to £1,200 and beyond** — junior or generalist at the lower end, senior or specialist at the top. Projects are scoped to the value they create, commonly **£2,000 to £20,000 or more** each. A monthly retainer typically sits between **£1,000 and £5,000**. These are not fantasy numbers; they are what businesses already pay, because a competent specialist who fixes the problem is cheaper than the problem.

**The overheads are almost nothing.** Starting costs are genuinely low — roughly **£200 to £1,500**. A laptop you already own, a simple website, professional indemnity insurance, a few basic tools. There is no premises, no stock, no staff. The real investment is the expertise and reputation you have spent years building, and that is already paid for.

**Retainers give you stability that contractors used to lack.** Project work alone is lumpy. Retainers and a steady pipeline smooth it. More on that below, because it is the difference between a stressful living and a calm one.

**The work can be done from anywhere.** Most of Richard's clients have never been to Guildford and never will. Remote, hybrid, a call and a shared document — this is now normal, and it widens your market from your town to the whole country.

**One consultant is more productive than one consultant used to be.** AI does the grunt work — the first draft of the report, the research, the framework, the call prep — so you spend your hours on the judgement clients are actually paying for. Chapter 13 covers the tools. The short version is that the output of a single skilled person has gone up.

There is an honest counterweight to all this. The market is more crowded than it has been in years. Waves of redundancies pushed a lot of experienced people into independent work, and there is now an oversupply of *generalist* capacity. The good news, and it is the whole game, is that specialist rates have held. A sharp niche is no longer a nicety; it is how you avoid competing on price with everyone who calls themselves a consultant. That is Chapter 4's job, and it matters more than it ever did.

> **COACH MOMENT** Do this sum now, on paper. Take your last gross salary and divide by about 220 — a rough count of working days in a year once you take out weekends, holiday and slack. That is what your old employer paid per day of your time. Now look at the £400–£1,200 day-rate range. The gap between those two numbers is not a trick. It is the margin your employer kept, the risk you are now carrying yourself, and the price of selling and admin you now do unpaid. Knowing the real spread keeps you from underpricing out of nerves in your first month.

## What you can earn — and the ceiling

It helps to be plain about the money, including its limits. There are three broad brackets in the UK in 2026.

| Stage | Rough annual income | What it looks like |
|---|---|---|
| Part-time / building | £15,000–£40,000 | Alongside other work, or ramping up. A few clients, finding your feet. |
| Full-time solo | £50,000–£120,000 | This is the core of the book. Your billable days times your rate. |
| Premium / scaled | £150,000–£300,000+ | Associates, products, high day rates — needs real authority and systems. |

The full-time bracket has a hard piece of arithmetic inside it that you should understand from day one. Your income is your billable days multiplied by your rate, and **you only have so many days**. You cannot sell more than you have, and you should not try to bill every one — you need days for selling, admin, learning and rest. A realistic working year is perhaps 110 to 150 genuinely billable days, not 220.

So the maths of a comfortable full-time practice is simple. At a £700 day rate, 130 billable days is £91,000. Push the rate to £900 and you reach the same money in barely 100 days. **You get to the top of the bracket by raising your rate and the value of your work, not by**

**working more days** — there are no more days. That single insight shapes everything that follows in this manual, and it is why pricing (Chapter 7) and authority (Chapter 9) get so much attention. The ceiling is real. The way through it is to charge for outcomes rather than hours, and eventually to earn from things that are not your hours at all (Chapters 11 and 12).

## The model: niche, authority, sales — held steady by retainers

Underneath all the tactics there is one model, and it has three working parts plus a stabiliser.

**A clear niche.** Not "I help businesses" but "I help mid-sized manufacturers fix their production planning." A sharp niche commands higher rates, makes referrals easy ("you need to talk to Richard, he does exactly this"), and means clients arrive already half-sold because you are visibly the person for their specific problem. The generalist competes with everyone; the specialist competes with almost no one.

**Authority.** A reputation in your niche so that, over time, clients come to you rather than you chasing them. It is built quietly — a point of view, useful content, the occasional talk, work that gets talked about. Authority is slow and it compounds, which is exactly why you start it early.

**A sales process.** The unglamorous engine: conversations that turn into proposals that turn into well-priced engagements. This is a skill, not a personality trait, and it is learnable. Chapter 6 is the longest in the book for a reason — winning clients is the make-or-break of the whole thing.

**Retainers, smoothing the lumpiness.** Project work is feast or famine if you let it be. A big project lands, you are flat out for six weeks, then it ends and your income falls off a cliff while you scramble for the next one. Retainers fix this. A handful of clients paying £1,500 to £3,000 a month gives you a floor — income that arrives whether or not you closed a new project this week. Richard's £2,500 retainer covers his mortgage and his core bills before he sells a single day of project work. Everything on top is upside, not survival. Productised packages do similar work: predictable scope, predictable price, easier to sell repeatedly. A serious solo practice is a base of recurring income with project work stacked on top, not a series of anxious gaps between big jobs.

> **MENTOR MOMENT** I have watched good consultants nearly quit, not because they could not get work, but because the *rhythm* broke them. They lived in a cycle of frantic delivery followed by silent, frightening empty weeks, and the fear in the empty weeks pushed them into underpriced work just to make it stop. The ones who lasted did one boring thing: they got two or three retainers

in place early and protected them above everything. A floor under your income changes how you sell. You stop negotiating from fear. You can say no to a bad-fit client or a lowball fee, because you are not one quiet month from trouble. Build the floor first. The exciting work is easier to win when you are not desperate for it.

## Who this suits — and who it does not

We would rather be honest than sell you something that is not yours. Solo consulting genuinely suits some people and genuinely does not suit others.

**It tends to suit you if you:**

- have real, differentiated expertise that businesses already pay for;
- are willing to sell yourself, or willing to learn how;
- can stay steady through the feast-and-famine rhythm of independent work;
- manage your own time without a boss standing over you;
- can earn and hold a client's trust.

**It tends not to suit you, at least not yet, if you:**

- do not yet have a distinct skill someone would pay a premium for — get a few more years in first;
- dislike selling so deeply you will avoid it until the pipeline runs dry;
- need a guaranteed, steady salary in your account every month from day one;
- take rejection hard enough that a "no" stops you for a week.

None of these is a permanent verdict. Expertise deepens, selling is learnable, and a financial cushion makes the lumpy months survivable. But you should walk in with your eyes open. The biggest shift is this: you are no longer only doing the craft. You are now in sales and delivery and admin, and the craft is one part of a wider job. Chapter 2 gives you a proper self-assessment to test this honestly before you commit.

And the most honest thing we can say: we would rather you spent the £47 this manual cost on a coffee with someone you love than on a business that was never going to be yours. If by the end of Chapter 2 this is plainly not for you, take the same-day refund, keep the materials, and spend the afternoon better.

## How to use this manual, the Toolkit and the Prompt Library

You are holding three things, not one. The **manual** is the thinking and the method. The **10-file Excel Toolkit** turns the method into things you fill in — a self-assessment scorecard, a pricing calculator, a client and pipeline tracker, a proposal builder, a 90-day checklist and more. The **60-prompt AI Library** is the set of ready-made prompts that put the modern tools to work — researching a client, drafting a proposal, shaping a report, preparing for a call.

Use them together. When a chapter points you to "the Pricing tool (toolkit 04)" or "the Client/Pipeline tracker (toolkit 03)," open the file and use it rather than reading past it. The manual without the Toolkit is theory; the Toolkit without the manual is a spreadsheet you do not yet know how to read. The Prompt Library is what makes one of you do the work of a small team. Updates are free for life, so the prompts and tools keep pace as the work changes.

You can read this straight through, and Part One to Three is the natural order for someone starting from scratch. Or you can jump to what you need — pricing, first clients, scaling — and come back. Either way, do the exercises. A manual you only read changes nothing.

## What success looks like in one year

Picture Richard twelve months before that Monday in Guildford. He had just left his job, had one nervous half-promise of work from a former employer, and a website that said almost nothing. He did the unglamorous things in order: he got set up properly (Chapter 3), sharpened his niche from "operations" to one specific industry's planning problem (Chapter 4), built a small menu of offers (Chapter 5), and spent his first ninety days activating his network and having conversations rather than waiting (Chapters 6 and 14).

A year on, his picture is ordinary and good. Two or three retainers form a floor of around £5,000 a month before he sells anything else. A steady trickle of projects sits on top, priced on the value they create rather than the hours they take. He works three or four focused days a week, turns down work that does not fit, and has a reputation in his niche that now brings a share of his enquiries to him. He is not rich, and he is not finished — the path up from here is real rate rises, bigger engagements, and income that is not tied to his own hours. But he is earning more than his old salary, on his own terms, doing work he is good at.

That is the destination. The next chapter helps you decide, honestly and before you spend another penny of effort, whether it is yours to reach.

---

*Sources for market context: The Work Crowd — UK Day-Rate Guide 2026; ConsultFees — Consultant Daily Rate 2026 Benchmarks; Primewise — Fractional CMO Day Rate UK 2026.*

Chapter 02

# Is This For You?

It is a wet Wednesday in March, and Fiona is sitting at her kitchen table in Edinburgh with two browser tabs open. One is her old payslip: £58,000 a year as a senior operations manager, a job she was good at and quietly tired of. The other is a blank document titled "Fiona Reid — Operations Consulting." She has fourteen years of experience, a head full of how to fix broken supply chains, and a former colleague who messaged last week to ask whether she would "take a look at something" for a fee.

She is not asking whether she could do the work. She knows she can do the work. She is asking a harder question: is this actually for me? Could she sell it, price it, survive the quiet months, and still be glad she left?

That is the right question, and this chapter is built to help you answer it honestly. Not to talk you into it. A solo consultancy costs very little to start — **£200 to £1,500** in the UK in 2026, mostly a website, professional indemnity insurance and a few tools, because the laptop is already yours. The real investment is your reputation and your nerve. Before you spend either, let us be straight with you about who thrives here and who finds it miserable.

## The Quiet Truth: You Are Now in Sales and Delivery

Here is the thing nobody tells you clearly enough, so we will.

When you were employed, your job was the craft. Someone else found the clients, set the prices, chased the invoices and absorbed the dry spells. You showed up, did good work, and were paid on the same day each month whether the company won or lost that week.

The day you go solo, you take on two more jobs on top of the one you already know. You are still the operations expert, or the marketing strategist, or the finance lead. But now you are also the person who has to **find the work** and the person who has to **make the money land** — the sales function and the finance function, rolled into the same body that does the delivery.

This is not a footnote. For many people it is the whole story of whether they last. A brilliant consultant who will not pick up the phone, write the follow-up email, or say a price out loud will earn less than a competent one who does those things without flinching. The craft gets you in the room. The selling and the running of the business decide whether you eat.

> **COACH MOMENT** Try this before you read on. Set a timer for two minutes and say out loud, to an empty room, the sentence you would say to a prospective

client about your fee: "My day rate is six hundred pounds," or "This project would be eight thousand pounds." Notice what happens in your body. If you cringed, flinched, or instinctively added "but I could do it cheaper," that is not a reason to stop — it is a muscle you have not built yet. Chapter 7 builds it. But notice it now, honestly, because you will be saying versions of that sentence for the rest of your working life.

None of this means you must become a slick salesperson. Most good consultants are not. The selling that works in this business is quiet and consultative — listening hard, understanding a problem, and proposing a fair way to fix it. We cover exactly how in Chapter 6. But you do have to be willing to do it. If the idea of ever asking someone to pay you fills you with a dread that does not pass, this may genuinely not be your path, and it is far cheaper to know that now.

It is worth being concrete about how the three jobs share your week, because the surprise catches people out. In a typical full week, a working solo consultant might spend roughly half their time on delivery — the actual client work — and the other half split between finding the next engagement and running the business: proposals, calls, invoicing, admin, the website, the unpaid hour reading around a client's industry. That second half is not waste. It is the half that keeps the first half fed. When new consultants quietly resent it, what they are really resenting is that nobody is paying them by the hour for it. The mental shift that has to happen is this: you are no longer paid for hours. You are paid for outcomes, and the selling and the running are simply the cost of being allowed to deliver those outcomes at a good price.

## This Is For You If

Read these slowly. Be honest, not aspirational. You are looking for an honest yes, not a hopeful one.

**You have genuine, differentiated expertise that businesses will pay for.** Not "I'm a good all-rounder," but a specific thing you know deeply — how to turn around a struggling warehouse, how to make a SaaS product retain customers, how to get a planning application through. Years of earned judgement that another business lacks in-house. If you cannot yet name the specific problem you solve better than most, that is fixable (Chapter 4), but it has to become true before clients appear.

**You are willing to sell yourself, even if you find it uncomfortable.** Not that you love it. That you will do it consistently. The willingness matters more than the talent.

**You are resilient through feast and famine.** Project work is lumpy. You will have months where three clients want you at once and months where the phone is silent and your bank balance drops. The consultants who last expect this and plan for it. The ones who panic at the first quiet fortnight tend to take bad work at bad prices, or quit.

**You manage your own time well.** No manager, no fixed hours, nobody noticing if you spend Tuesday reorganising your desk. The structure now comes entirely from you. Some people find this liberating. Some quietly fall apart without it.

**You can hold a client's trust.** Consulting is sold on trust before it is sold on skill. Clients hand you their problems, their numbers, sometimes their failures. If you are discreet, reliable and straight with people — including when the news is bad — you have the raw material. Trust is the moat we return to in Chapter 15.

**You have, or can build, a network.** Most first clients come from people who already know you are good — former colleagues, past employers, people in your industry. Fiona's first enquiry came unprompted from an ex-colleague. If you have burned every bridge behind you, the road is harder. If you have a reputation, you have a head start worth more than any marketing budget.

## This Is Not For You (Yet) If

The same honesty in the other direction. A "not yet" is not a verdict on you as a person. It is information.

**You do not have differentiated expertise yet.** If you are early in your career, or your skills are broad but shallow, you may be better served spending two or three more years getting genuinely good at one thing inside a job that pays you to learn. Consulting sells depth. You cannot fake it, and clients can tell.

**You genuinely hate selling and will not do it.** Not "find it awkward" — most people do. We mean a settled refusal: you will not make the call, send the proposal, or name the price, and no amount of structure will change that. Without a flow of new conversations, a solo consultancy starves. Be honest with yourself here. It is the single most common reason capable people fail at this.

**You need a steady, certain monthly income from day one.** This is a real and respectable need. If you have a mortgage that must be covered next month and no buffer, the feast-and-famine rhythm of early consulting can be genuinely dangerous. The honest move is to build the business on the side first (the **£15,000–£40,000** part-time bracket), keep some income flowing, and only go full-time once you have a few months of expenses saved and a client or two committed. Chapter 14 lays out exactly that path.

**You cannot handle rejection.** You will hear no. Prospects will go quiet after a great call. Proposals you were proud of will be ignored. None of it is personal, but all of it stings, and it never fully stops. If a single rejection ruins your week, the volume of it in early consulting will grind you down.

> **MENTOR MOMENT** In fifteen years I have watched a lot of people make this leap. The ones who struggled were almost never short on talent — the market is full of brilliant people earning little. They struggled because they treated the business side as beneath the craft. They wanted to be paid to be excellent and resented every minute spent on selling, pricing or chasing an invoice. The ones who thrived made a quiet peace with a simple fact: you are not paid to be excellent. You are paid to solve a client's problem and to be findable, trustworthy and easy to buy from while you do it. Make that peace early and the rest is learnable.

## The Feast and Famine Is Not a Bug

Let us be specific about the lumpiness, because it frightens people off and it should not, once you understand it.

Project work arrives in waves. A consultant might bill £14,000 across a strong April, then £3,000 in a quiet August when half their clients are on holiday. A December slowdown is normal across most of the UK. If you measure your business by any single month, you will lurch between euphoria and panic, and neither is useful.

Serious consultants smooth this deliberately. The main tools are **monthly retainers** — a client paying, say, **£2,500 a month** for ongoing access to your judgement — and a steady pipeline of conversations so that as one project ends another is starting. A consultant with two retainers at £2,500 each has £5,000 of baseline income before a single project is signed. That is the difference between a nervous practice and a calm one. We build this in Chapters 9 and 12.

Here is a rough picture of where this goes once it is working. A full-time solo consultant in the UK typically earns **£50,000 to £120,000 a year**, capped by how many days you can bill and at what rate. Day rates run **£400 to £1,200 and up**; the range is wide because field and seniority vary enormously. With authority, products and associates, some reach **£150,000 to £300,000 or more** — but that needs systems and reputation, not just more hours. We are not promising you the top of that range. We are showing you the shape of the ladder so you can decide whether the climb is one you want.

For Fiona, the maths is plain. If she bills even three days a week at £600 for forty working weeks, that is £72,000 — more than her salary, working less. The catch is the word "if." It assumes she finds the clients, holds her price, and survives the months where the three days are not there. The opportunity is real. So is the work behind it.

## The Self-Assessment Scorecard

Reading lists is one thing. Scoring yourself honestly is another. **Toolkit file 01, the Self-Assessment Scorecard**, turns this chapter into ten questions you rate from one to five — covering the depth of your expertise, your comfort with selling, your financial buffer, your network strength, your tolerance for uncertainty, and your self-discipline.

Use it properly. Score yourself as you actually are on a normal Wednesday, not as you imagine you would be once inspired. A low score on selling does not disqualify you — it tells you to read Chapter 6 twice and start practising before you quit anything. A low score on financial buffer tells you to build part-time first. The scorecard is not a gate you pass or fail. It is a map of where your work lies before you begin, so you spend the **£47** this manual cost you, and the months that follow, with your eyes open.

If you want to pressure-test a specific worry — say, whether your expertise is differentiated enough — the **Prompt Library** has prompts that interrogate exactly that, asking you the uncomfortable questions a sceptical client would.

## The Refund, Honestly

We will end with something we mean.

This manual, the **10-file Excel toolkit** and the **60-prompt AI library** cost you **£47**, and it comes with free updates for life. If you have worked through this chapter and the honest answer is "not me, or not now," we would genuinely rather you knew that today than three stressful months and several bad decisions from now. Email **refunds@theworksco.co.uk** and we will refund you the same day, no friction, no form to fill, no reason required. Keep all the materials — they are yours regardless.

We are not saying that to sound generous. We are saying it because a manual is a poor place to spend money on a business that was never going to be yours. We would rather you put the £47 toward a coffee with someone you love than toward a venture you talk yourself into against your own better judgement.

But if you read the two lists above and felt a steady pull toward the green-light side — if you have the expertise, you are willing to sell even when it is uncomfortable, and the lumpy months sound survivable rather than terrifying — then you are exactly who this manual was written for. Fiona closed her old payslip tab that Wednesday afternoon. The blank document stayed open.

The next decision is the unglamorous, foundational one: how you actually set this business up — limited company or sole trader, IR35, insurance, the contract you never work without. That is Chapter 3, and it is where a real consultancy begins.

Chapter 03

# Setting Up the Business

It is a Friday morning in St Albans, and Sanjay is sitting at his kitchen table with a cooling mug of tea and three browser tabs open. He left his head-of-operations job a fortnight ago. A former employer has already asked him to scope two days a week of advisory work, and an old supplier wants a process audit. He has the work. What he does not yet have is a company, a business bank account, an insurance policy, or a contract he would be comfortable putting his name to.

He has picked Friday on purpose. He wants the structure decided and the paperwork moving before the weekend, so that on Monday he can talk to clients as a proper business rather than a man with good intentions and a personal current account. By lunchtime he has incorporated a limited company for about £50, opened a free business bank account that will be live in a few days, and booked a call with an accountant for the following week. The professional indemnity insurance took eleven minutes and cost him under £400 for the year.

None of this is glamorous. All of it matters. Get the setup right once, quietly, and you spend the next three years thinking about clients instead of admin. Get it wrong and you spend those years untangling it. This chapter walks you through every decision Sanjay made that Friday, in the order a sensible person makes them.

## Limited company or sole trader

This is the first real fork in the road, and most consultants end up taking the limited-company path. It is worth understanding why, because the reasons are practical rather than fashionable.

A **sole trader** is the simplest possible setup. You and the business are the same legal person. You register for Self Assessment with HMRC, you keep records, and you pay income tax and National Insurance on your profits. There is no incorporation, no Companies House filing, and very little ceremony. For someone testing the water part-time, or earning at the lower end of the brackets in Chapter 1, it is a perfectly respectable place to start.

A **limited company** is a separate legal entity that you own and direct. It costs about £50 to incorporate at Companies House and can be done in a single sitting. The company wins the work, the company gets paid, and you draw money out as a mix of salary and dividends.

# That was Chapter 1.

The other twenty chapters, the Excel toolkit and the

AI prompt library are in the full bundle.