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CONTRACTORS AWARDS 2025 PROJECT OF THE YEAR: ORNATE INTERIORS FOR ITS WORK AT BRADFORD LIVE

Skills:

Confidence, skills, and site-readiness: Why Drylining Bootcamp programmes work

Sustainability:

Turning opportunity into action - Embedding sustainability in customer experience

Educational:

Learning from across the pond: Insights from the AWCI Conference in the U.S.

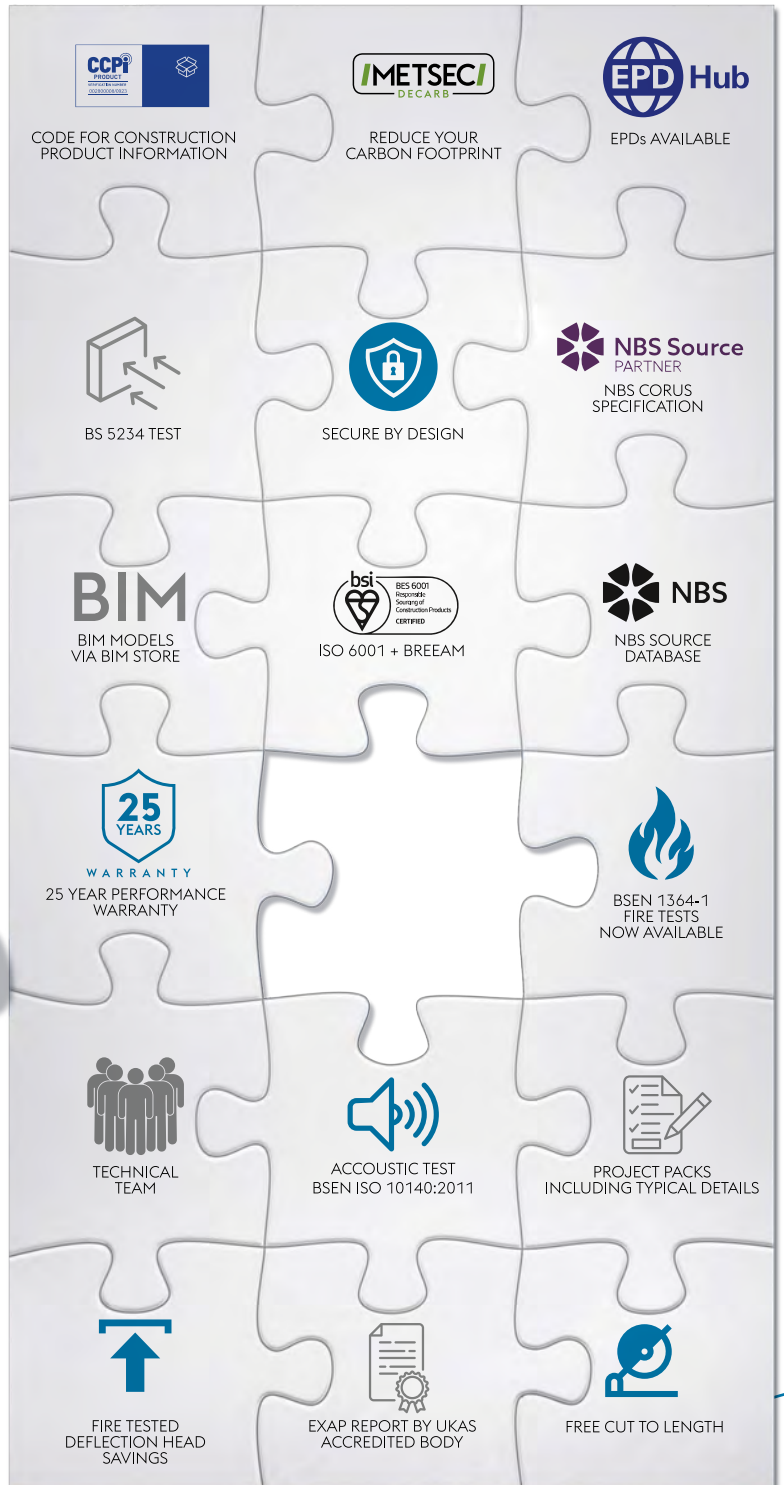


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OPENING THE FLOOD GATES: WHY WE NEED TO RETHINK PROVISIONAL SUMS

IAIN MCILWEE
Chief Executive,
Finishes and
Interiors Sector



Estimating in construction is always going to be an inexact science, particularly when working on existing buildings. We can't blame clients for wanting to know what things are going to cost; but any demand for certainty must be balanced with a careful and fair consideration of risk, especially in how it is distributed across the supply chain.

What we cannot afford is it to be based on aggressive, Dutch-auction-style procurement tactics, or contracts that leave the supply chain confused about their responsibilities, short of time, and fighting to keep their head above water. I've written before about the consequences of forcing our industry to operate in "survival mode!"

The introduction of Part 2A Duty Holders into the Building Regulations is designed to define roles more precisely and eliminate confusion. The regulator is even recommending that we check whether the client is aware of their responsibilities under the revised regulations before work begins. They also remind us that statutory obligations cannot be contracted out.

Remember, Part 2A applies to all building works, from "shed to Shard"

Despite this, as reported on page 23 of this issue, we are seeing increasing confusion over design responsibility, which is now manifesting in disputes. The more we try to define risk, the less risk those involved in upstream design seem prepared or able to take and the deeper into the supply chain the risk soaks.

The RIBA Plan of Work was developed to identify payment points and contractual milestones within a construction project. Since its establishment, however, both buildings and the landscape have become a lot more challenging.

It is increasingly difficult to define a project by stages (which are not defined clearly in any standards or contract).

A challenge for architects now is that designing into Stage 3 can create significant challenges in Stage 4, particularly with respect to the mechanical and electrical

(M&E) layout and how that interfaces with other parts of the building.

This can ultimately leave buildings unbuildable or installations difficult to evidence.

The Plan of Works focuses on the need to overlap Stages 4 and 5, in reality, the greater focus should be on Stages 3 and 4. If design risk is fractionalised the risk of non-compliance increases because the need for communication and collaboration (which all take time) becomes more complex and costly.

But procurers hold the purse strings, and the "Responsible No" is noble, however, it's hard not to follow the money and isn't business, ultimately "taking a punt"?

We can't push back the tide, but we can start to revisit the tools that were developed to help control the flow of risk and ensure that those upstream are held to account as well — before it's too late.

Provisional Sums were conceived to provide a buffer, a mechanism to communicate where clarity is lacking and proposed solutions cannot be accurately priced in a void of information.

They were designed to accommodate situations where there's a lack of time to manage information properly and to guide procurement without hamstringing the supply chain.

JCT contracts allow for both defined and undefined provisional sums. Defined

Provisional Sums are relevant for situations where enough detail has been provided for contractors to plan and estimate with reasonable accuracy. The RICS's New Rules of Measurement recommend that the details provided to support defined provisional sums typically include the nature and construction of the work, how and where the work is fixed to the building, quantities indicating the scope and extent of the work and any specific limitations.

Undefined sums, on the other hand, are for situations where some or all of this is lacking, leaving the risk with the employer.

At FIS we continue to support the Conflict Avoidance Process (again featured in this issue), which is grounded in the ethos of identifying points of conflict before they escalate into disputes. If it should be a provisional sum it is potentially a point of pain and conflict.

Provisional sums are designed to support effective risk management. Unfortunately, their use has slowly been eroded through procurement processes, and they often get struck — or even bullied — out of tenders.

Provisional sums were designed and have the potential to be the flood gate in the risk management dam, a mechanism to identify where design detail or information provision are lacking, to hold those upstream to account. Without them, the risk that flows downstream has the potential to drown the supply chain.



FIS are launching a new e-learning course this summer on Estimating in the Finishes and Interiors Sector. The course is designed to help ensure that commercial and contractual risks are well understood, accurately priced, and efficiently discussed. It will be freely available to members.

Welcome

SPEC FINISH

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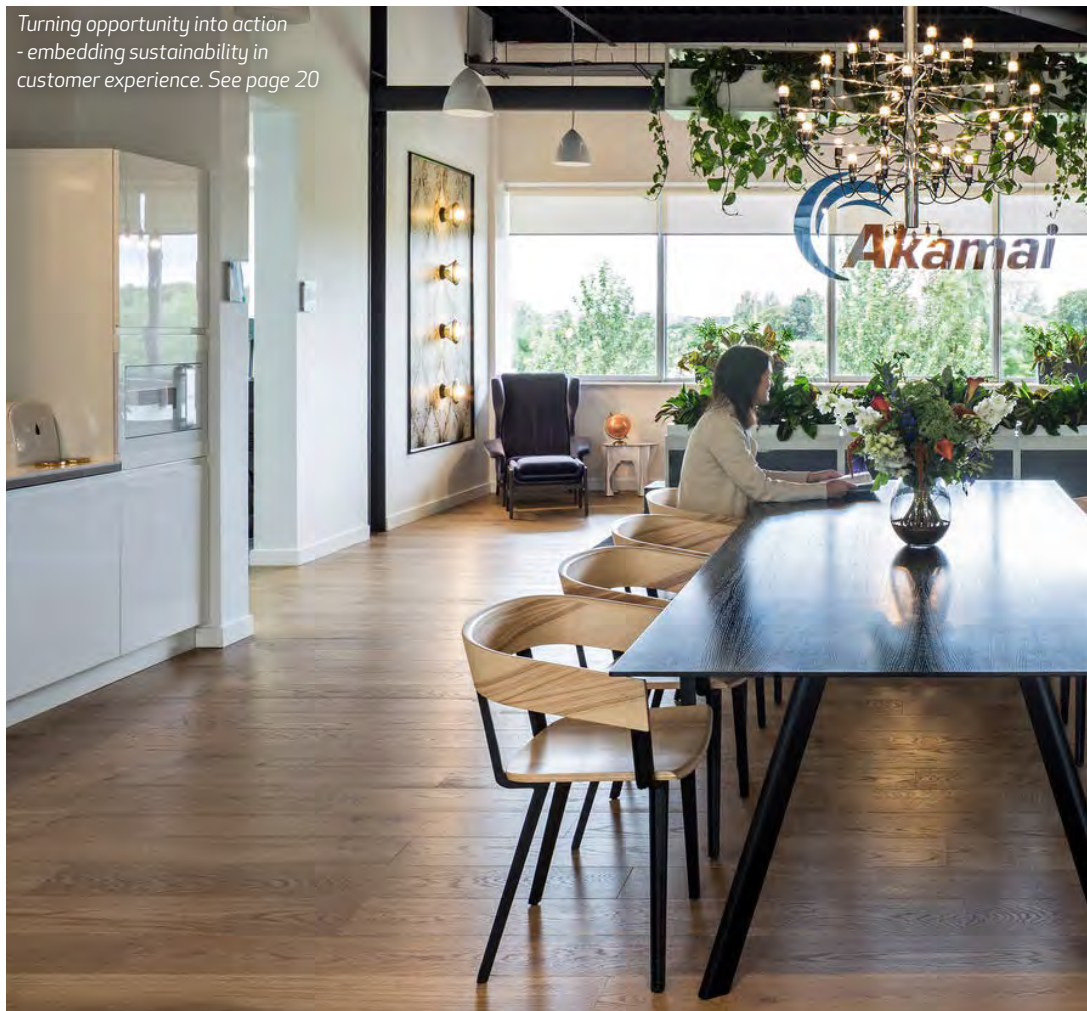
Contractors Awards 2025 Project of the Year: *Ornate Interiors* for its work at *Bradford Live*

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Turning opportunity into action
- embedding sustainability in
customer experience. See page 20



WELCOME

TO THE JULY ISSUE OF SPECFINISH

I recently had the privilege of attending the FIS Contractors Awards Lunch at the stunning Royal Lancaster Hotel in London. As always, it was inspiring to witness nearly 600 leading figures from the sector come together to celebrate the achievements of the winners. It was a wonderful afternoon, made even more special by reconnecting with both new faces and very old friends — Justin and Susan from Howard Plastering — whom I've known for nearly 50 years. It's funny how worlds collide. Congratulations to the winners and all those who were shortlisted. To find out more about the outstanding winners across all the categories, visit page 30.

In this issue, I had the pleasure of interviewing Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions. She shared her 24-year journey with the company, highlighting her dedication to the business, the construction industry, social value, and wellbeing. To read more, turn to page 14.

On page 16, you'll find that the Contracts Group of the Conflict Avoidance Coalition (CAC) convened a diverse panel of industry experts to explore how construction supply chains can work together to adopt a more responsible approach to contracting.

Penelope McCallum, Head of Sustainability for EMEA, and Maria Russo, Head of Customer Experience for EMEA at Unispace, discuss the impact of construction on global CO₂ emissions and biodiversity loss. They firmly believe that we already have the tools needed to build sustainably — the real challenge lies in adoption, which ultimately hinges on effective communication and a strong customer experience. To read more, turn to page 20.



Please let us know about your projects and company news as we do like to feature members as much as we can. No project too small... david.crowson@warnersgroup.co.uk

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Siniat takes industry-leading step to accept formal design responsibility

In a first for the UK construction sector, Siniat has announced it will formally take design responsibility for the system information and standard details it issues, marking a significant shift in accountability for construction risk and specification.

The move comes at a time when the construction industry is under mounting pressure to address risk, error, and compliance. According to the Get It Right Initiative (GIRI), errors cost the sector between £10–25 billion annually, with spending on error estimated to be seven times the total annual profit of the UK construction industry.

This impact is already being felt. Recent research by Siniat found that 65% of contractors say that the cascading of risk

and liability is placing them under financial strain, with some firms having to lay off staff, and 64% say that these issues have even pushed some firms into administration.

The role of the Building Regulations Principal Designer (BRPD), introduced under the Building Safety Act, adds further complexity. This legally defined role requires the appointed designer to ensure that all aspects of a project meet current Building Regulations, while coordinating with manufacturers, designers and installers to ensure full compliance.

In this climate, Siniat's announcement is a watershed moment. By taking full accountability for the standard design details it provides, Siniat is aiming to bring clarity, reduce downstream risk, and support



duty holders through the critical Gateway 2 compliance process.

This decision has particular significance for passive fire protection systems, which can make up 5–15% or more of a building's interior, depending on the specification. These areas have long suffered from grey zones around liability, particularly when combining different systems or adapting designs on-site.

The manufacturer says that it will continue to support contractors, designers and principal designers with clear system documentation, classification reports, technical guidance, and specification support as part of this transition.

To read Siniat's statement in full, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/2vzdjswe>

CITB Consensus passes despite pushback from FIS

CITB has announced that 67% of construction employers have voted in favour of its Levy plans, confirming Consensus support for its Levy Proposals aimed to help provide training for the construction industry over the next three years.

FIS was one of two Prescribed Organisations that disagreed with the Levy proposals. A full report has been submitted to CITB, documenting the results and providing direct feedback from the FIS community.

The result means that Levy rates are proposed to remain the same for 2026–29. The proposed Levy arrangements are:

- PAYE: 0.35%
- Net paid (Taxable) CIS Sub-contractors: 1.25%

- Increase the Levy Exemption and Reduction Thresholds to £150,000 and £500,000.

If the employee payroll and Net paid (taxable) CIS subcontractors combined is less than £150,000, employers will not pay a Levy. If it is between £150,000 and £499,999, they will receive an automatic reduction of 50%.

CITB has now submitted the results to the Department for Education to ratify. Once ratified a new Levy Order can be raised. For more results information visit: <https://tinyurl.com/y5fredkt>
Find out more about how your Levy will be invested in construction skills by exploring the Strategic Plan visit: <https://tinyurl.com/27mpud39>

Immigration White Paper 'Restoring Control over the Immigration System'

The Home Office has announced that new measures were unveiled in the Immigration White Paper 'Restoring Control over the Immigration System'¹ to reshape their immigration system towards those who contribute the most to economic growth, with higher skills standards for graduates and workers.

New requirements on employers to boost domestic training will end the reliance on international recruitment.

Every area of the immigration system – work, family, and study – will be tightened up, to reduce record-high levels of net migration and restore control and order to the immigration system.

Core principles of the plan include:

- **Reduce net migration:** Ensure migration levels are controlled and manageable.
- **Link to UK skills needs:** Align immigration with domestic training and skills requirements, avoiding over-reliance on foreign workers.
- **Fair and clear rules:** Make the system transparent and effective, with Parliament-defined rules, especially around family life.
- **Enforce the rules:** Strengthen enforcement, including tackling illegal work and deporting foreign criminals.



- **Promote integration:** Support community cohesion through English language requirements and assessing migrants' contributions.

To read comments regarding this announcement from FIS Chief Executive **Iain McIlwee** visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/4vm3rmvh>

Source

1. <https://tinyurl.com/3vf7trxf>



CONFIDENCE, SKILLS, AND SITE-READINESS: WHY DRYLINING BOOTCAMP PROGRAMMES WORK



Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training

Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training, provides insight into the Skills Centre Bootcamps, specifically the Drylining programme and we share the thoughts from a tutor and candidates who strongly believe the programme equips learners with the skills and confidence needed to launch successful careers.

The Skills Centre Bootcamps

The Bootcamps which include: Introduction to Cladding occupations, Management and supervision, TfL re-activate, Construct gateway to work and Internal/external insulation and Drylining are intensive, short-term training programmes designed to equip individuals with specific, in-demand skills.

Typically running for 6–8 weeks, their primary goal is to bridge the gap between the skills employers need and the talent available in the labour market. As the construction industry faces a growing skills shortage, particularly in trades such as drylining, these bootcamps are playing a crucial role in addressing the imbalance between demand and supply.

The Skills Drylining Bootcamp programme

FIS is actively engaging with The Skills Centre by visiting several of its training locations to observe the programmes in action. During these visits, FIS representatives had the opportunity to speak directly with both tutors and learners about their experiences.

These conversations provided valuable insights into the quality of the training and highlighted how the hands-on learning approach is helping participants develop the practical skills needed for the construction industry.

Discussions with tutors emphasised the industry-focused expertise being passed on to learners, while conversations with



learners offered valuable feedback on how the training is preparing them for real-world work environments.



Bradley Bacon, Bootcamp Tutor at The Skills Centre, providing guidance to a candidate

Bradley Bacon, a bootcamp tutor who works closely with aspiring dryliners in the construction industry, explained to Beena that with a strong focus on hands-on, job-ready training, the bootcamp aims to equip learners with the skills and confidence they need to launch successful careers.

Beena asked Bradley some questions to take a closer look at his role, the bootcamp's approach, and how learners are supported throughout their journey. Here's what Bradley said.

Can you describe the goals and structure of the bootcamp?

The goal is to get learners ready for work in construction, mainly in drylining, with skills that make them immediately employable. The course combines classroom-based learning with hands-on practical training, focusing on key areas such as health and safety, correct use of tools, and performing real drylining tasks.

What makes this bootcamp different from other training courses?

We focus on giving every learner a genuine opportunity to start a career in construction. It's not just about teaching technical skills, we also help learners understand what employers are looking for and support them in finding work. The hands-on, practical training is focused on real site tasks, which helps learners feel more prepared and confident when they step into the workplace.

What kind of transformation do you typically see in the learners from day one to completion?

Learners often start with little or no experience, but by the end of the bootcamp, they have gained the skills and confidence to carry out drylining tasks to a good standard. They leave feeling ready to work

on-site and with a clear understanding of what's expected of them in a real job.

Are there any standout stories or successes that have stayed with you?

Yes there is. A few people I've put forward to employers have reached out to tell me how successful they have been. In several cases, the companies have recognised their potential and either promoted them to the next stage in their careers or offered them apprenticeships, which they've accepted. It's incredibly rewarding to see that kind of progress.

What challenges do learners face, and how do you help them overcome these?

They often struggle with confidence, lack of experience, and understanding what is expected on site. We help by providing hands-on practice, clear guidance, and ongoing support, allowing them to build their skills step-by-step and feel ready for work.

How do you adapt your teaching to suit different learners' needs?

I provide extra support where needed, use simple and clear instructions, and demonstrate tasks in a practical, hands-on way. We ensure that every learner can progress at their own pace and receive the help necessary to succeed.

How do you work with employers to help learners transition into work?

We collaborate closely with employers to understand their requirements and ensure our learners are trained to meet those standards. Additionally, we assist learners in connecting with job opportunities and support them in becoming site-ready for their first roles.

How would you like to see this course evolve in the future?

I would like to see the course expand with stronger links to employers, providing learners with even more job opportunities. Additionally, I want to continually improve the training by incorporating new techniques and materials that reflect the latest practices on modern construction sites.

After hearing Bradley's answers, Beena said: "Bradley's dedication to both teaching and job placement shines through in every aspect of the course. By combining technical skills with real-world applications, this bootcamp offers a clear pathway to success in the construction industry, equipping learners with the tools they need to thrive on the job site."

Beena also spoke **Igor Ramos** and **Ethan Buzor**, both previous Drylining Bootcamp candidates, to get their thoughts and experiences on the programme.



Igor said: "I first heard about The Skills Centre through Universal Credit and job fairs. It seemed like a great opportunity, so I decided to check it out.

"What I really enjoyed about the course was the practical side of things. We had a fantastic tutor who supported us every step of the way, whether through hands-on tasks or by clearly explaining the theory. His guidance made the learning process much easier and more enjoyable.

"One of the key pieces of advice I received was to always be punctual. This helped me stay on top of the material and ensure I was fully prepared for each session."

Igor shared with Beena that before joining the bootcamp, he only had a green construction card, but after completing the course, he was able to work towards his blue card. He said: "This has been instrumental in securing an apprenticeship and advancing my career in construction. The course not only helped me gain more skills but also put me in a stronger position within the industry.

"The whole experience was really helpful, especially with how the tutor structured the lessons. They made everything easy to understand, which helped me complete all the required programmes successfully.

"After finishing the bootcamp, I was offered a trial with Measoms, which then led to an apprenticeship working on-site in London. I am now learning to install and cut materials for drylining, using the latest techniques and tools, and I feel confident in the skills I've developed."

He concluded by saying: "The bootcamp provided me with the training and support I needed to get where I am today. Before, I knew nothing about drylining, but now I have a solid foundation and hands-on experience.

"Since starting my apprenticeship, my life has really changed. I've gained a stable job, which allows me to provide for myself. I've also developed a solid routine, which helps me stay punctual and organised — key traits for a successful career in construction."

Ethan told her: "I discovered The Skills Centre while searching online for apprenticeships that offered training in 'interior structures'. I was referred to the centre, and it turned out to be a perfect fit.

Ethan Buzor



"What really stood out to me was how down-to-earth and relatable my tutor, Bradley, was. He made learning enjoyable and engaging, and his constant encouragement pushed me to reach my goals. He was always there to help me stay on track and motivated."

Bradley's advice was simple but powerful: "Put your best efforts forward, be punctual, and if drylining is something you're passionate about, those two things will help you achieve your goals."

"With the qualifications I've earned, I'm excited to continue my journey in drylining and aim to hit new milestones during my upcoming apprenticeship.

"Every time I talk about how I found The Skills Centre, I can't help but feel it was a sign from God. It motivated me to stop waiting for the next opportunity to come to me and instead take action to find the right opportunity myself.

"The experience has been incredible. Without The Skills Centre's support, I wouldn't have accomplished so much in such a short time, nor would I have formed the connections I've made with others here. My mentors played a huge role in helping me secure a two-week trial with Measoms, which was a success and allowed me to move on to the next stage of my apprenticeship, gaining valuable site experience in drylining.

"Not only did The Skills Centre help fund my qualifications, but they also provided real-world advice and gave me the experience I needed to fast-track into full-time employment. Without their guidance and support, I wouldn't have been able to secure a job as quickly or succeed as well as I have."

He concluded by saying: "Bradley, my tutor, played a huge part in igniting my enthusiasm for the industry. His stories and real-life experience on construction sites motivated me to work hard and succeed for myself.

"Currently, I'm learning how to become a dryliner, doing tasks like first skin, second skin, measuring, and fitting boards. The bootcamp was key in preparing me for this, with a balanced mix of practical and theoretical learning that reflected what I would actually face on construction sites.

"My life has definitely changed since the bootcamp. It's given me access to so many more opportunities, and it's helped me establish a routine. I've become more organised, punctual, and self-disciplined, which has set me up for success moving forward."

How you can get involved?

This partnership highlights FIS's ongoing commitment to championing high-quality, industry-led training and ensuring that the next generation of skilled professionals is prepared to meet the evolving demands of the sector. The Skills Centre Bootcamps are proving to be a vital route into meaningful employment, offering practical, job-ready training that aligns with real industry needs. The collaboration between FIS and The Skills Centre remains central to this effort — bridging the gap between training and employment. However, to maximise the impact of these programmes, continued engagement from employers is essential. By providing work trials, mentoring, and job opportunities, businesses can not only fill current skills gaps but also play a key role in shaping a more diverse, resilient, and future-focused workforce.

If you would like to find out more or are able to offer employment opportunities for these candidates, email beenanana@thefis.org or mariefliinter@thefis.org or call **0121 707 0077**.



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PRODUCT, PROCESS, PEOPLE - DESIGN, SELECTION, INSTALLATION AND TESTING OF CONSTRUCTION FIXINGS

FIS Head of Technical **James Parlour** spoke with **Peter Gordon**, Technical Manager at Rite-Fix, and **Michael Curley**, Technical Sales Manager at etag, about the importance of best practice and risk management for contractors using fixings.



James Parlour, FIS Head of Technical



Michael Curley, Technical Sales Manager at etag



Peter Gordon, Technical Manager at Rite-Fix

As building design evolves and safety regulations tighten, ensuring the right fixings for interior finishes has never been more important. The majority of fixing failures that occur on projects are predominantly down to incorrect fixing selection and installation issues. If the right fixing is selected and installed within the manufacturers guidelines, in conjunction with preliminary (pull-out) and on-site (proof) testing carried out by competent persons, you should be able to eliminate the risk of a fixing failing and negate consequential economic loss, injury and in the worst case, fatalities.

The UK's Building Safety Act 2022 has transformed contractor responsibilities, placing a greater focus on safety, documentation and accountability. As such many principal contractors are now implementing fixing policies. Many of these are built around BS 8539 (BS 8539:2012+A1:2021) which is the first code of practice for the selection and installation of post-installed anchors in concrete and masonry. The standard is also the framework on which the Building Safety Act is built on in regard to design, selection and installation of fixings. The main emphasis of this code of practice, is to ensure all stakeholders within the construction process have clear responsibilities and that best practice is driven through competency and traceability.

According to BS 8539 where a fixing for an application is specified, that product should be procured and installed in accordance with manufacturers installation guidelines. This fixing can be replaced with an alternative but only in accordance with clause 10 change management, which states "equal and approved anchors can be used with the same parameters". But a big issue for many in the finishes and interiors sector is that often the fixing system hasn't been designed by a consultant engineer and it becomes the responsibility of the contractor to "specify" the fixing system. This is where manufacturers and competent distributors can assist in ensuring the fixing selection is correct for the application and complies with the relevant approvals required.

"During my 30-plus years in the technical fixings industry, I have been asked to attend many projects where failures and system collapses have occurred," says Peter. "There are also many well-documented failures, which have resulted in large consequential losses for contractors – and, unfortunately, some have even resulted in fatalities. In the vast majority of these cases, malfunction of the fixing was not the cause of the problem, instead either the wrong fixing was selected for the type of substrate or there was poor installation practice," said Peter.

This emphasises the importance of making sure the product you are selecting is correct for the substrate it's being installed into

and that it is installed strictly in line with the manufacturer's guidelines. Too often installers tend to go with "this is what I've always used", irrespective of whether the product is suitable for that application. It is this sort of bad practice that BS 8539 is looking to eliminate. Within the standard, installers should be trained as competent, and their installation requires signing off by a trained supervisor. Apart from assessing the substrate and the load requirement, there are other criteria that are critical for correct fixing selection. These include relevant approvals for substrate, environment and fire rating as well as compliance of manufacturers recommended spacing, edge distance and minimum embedment depth criteria. BS 8539 stipulates that you should always use a fixing that carries a European Technical Approval (ETA) where one exists. This means the fixing has been independently tested and the recommended loads verified for the approved substrate. Most manufacturers also provide data sheets showing the fixing suitability, minimum edge and minimum spacing. Also stated is the minimum embedment required to ensure the stated loads are achievable an information showing the correct tools required to ensure correct installation. These are a great source of information and should be obtained and read prior to any installation.

The importance of testing

In many cases there might be an application where there is no data or approval from manufacturers due to the nature of the substrate. This is often the case with refurbishment of existing buildings, where there is no data available for the existing substrate, or there may be some unusual substrates such as block and beam systems, or hollow pot systems. To ensure the correct fixing is selected for these applications, it is often necessary to carry out preliminary load testing. This will either take the form of suitability testing, where the applied load for the fixing is known then tested to a set

“suitability load”. This ensures the substrate is capable of carrying the weight of the system being fixed. Sometimes the strength of the substrate needs to be ascertained before a design for the system can be produced. This can be done by carrying out “allowable load testing”. In this scenario the fixing is tested to destruction, then safety factors are applied, to produce a maximum load that can be applied to the fixing.

While the Building Safety Act does not mandate fixing tests, it does require a golden thread of information with detailed records documenting all materials used. To comply with BS 8539, the person carrying out these pull-out tests should be certified as competent. Currently the accepted measure of competency to carry out this work, is that your tester should be CFA approved, and they carry the CFA accredited card that shows them to be “Advanced Approved”. There is also a card qualifying people to carry out proof testing. This only confirms a competency to test pre-installed anchors which checks the quality of installation. As such testers with this type of card should not be doing tests that ascertain the suitability of a fixing for an application. This type of testing should only occur once the fixing system is deemed suitable after preliminary testing and on the back of the suitability tests and the fixing has already been specified and installed. Test reports should be produced and submitted explaining the reason for the test, type of fixing tested, loads achieved and the relevant safety factors applied under the CFA guidance note “Procedure for testing Construction fixings”. This will ensure best practice has been applied during testing and give a traceable thread of evidence regarding the suitability and selection of the installed fixing. The test document can then be added for any threads of information and used as a consultation document if the fixing suitability is questioned.

The Construction Fixings Association (CFA) has a register of approved testers¹ for both preliminary (pull-out) and on-site (proof) testing. Certified testers carry credentials, conduct detailed site analyses, and produce a report that assesses a fixing in line with the manufacturer’s recommendations. As well as helping to improve building safety, this testing supports the golden thread and helps mitigate the heightened liability risk that many contractors, specifiers and building owners face.

To support the increased demand and importance of pull-out testing, distributors offer value-added services, including efficient and certified pull out testing. Critically, such services are available with a quick turnaround of days rather than weeks, and as long as fixings are purchased via the distributor, testing is often free of charge.



While on site, distributor representatives can also advise and train contractors on correct installation methods, helping ensure consistent performance across all fixings.

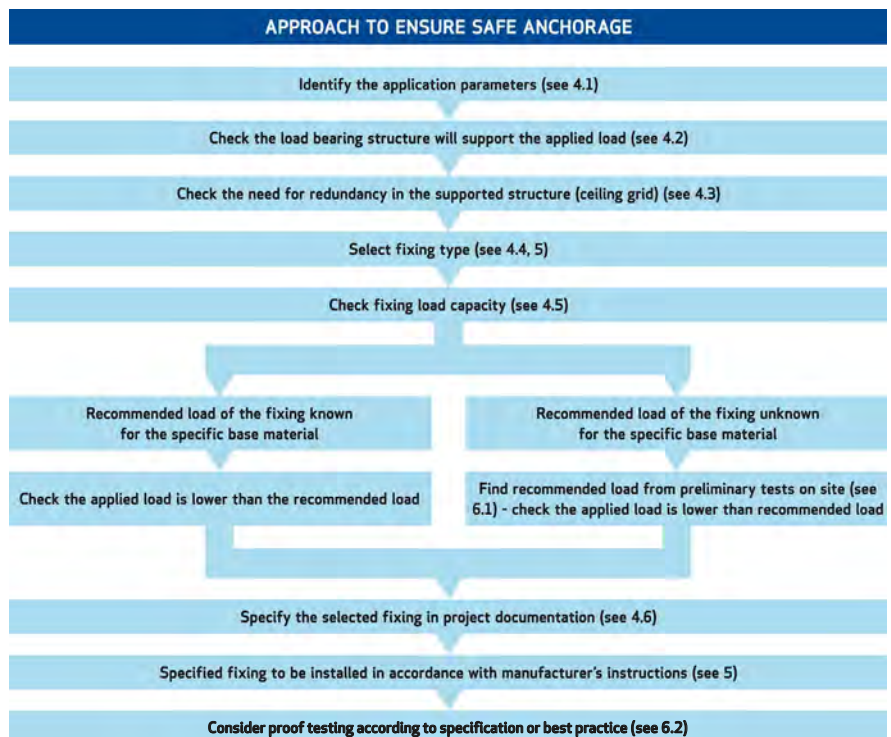
Michael said: “Despite the clear benefits of pull-out testing, it is sometimes overlooked. In projects where fixings appear straightforward, contractors may assume that manufacturer guidelines provide sufficient reassurance. Budget pressures can also play a role, as testing is typically charged on a per-test basis, meaning that costs can escalate if multiple tests are required across a large site.

“Pull-out testing helps contractors understand the capabilities of a specific fixing

by testing it in situ and is no longer just an additional step in the process. It has become a crucial element of modern construction, providing reassurance that fixings will perform under real-world conditions. It is essential for installers to embrace testing as part of their standard practice. By partnering with a distributor or other approved organisation that offers on-site testing and technical support, contractors can ensure that their fixings are fit for purpose, reducing risk and improving overall project quality.”

Installation method and installer competence

The other major cause of fixing failure is the quality of installation. Fixings that carry a European Technical Approval would normally have a datasheet explaining the parameters of the fixing, load performance detail, and a prescribed installation method which needs to be followed. If the installation method isn’t followed correctly, or the parameters stated are not adhered to and there were to be a subsequent failure, the installer would most likely be responsible for this. Today, there is a much bigger emphasis to comply with the BS 8539 stipulation that installers should be competent. The route to competency for installers can be through installer training seminars by distributors or manufacturers, so the installer can then be certified as competent. Alternatively, Toolbox Talks on the specific system being installed can be carried out. This is often done on site, but some manufacturers do supply an online facility for this type of training. →



Case study

Paradise View, Birmingham City Centre

This is a refurbishment of an old office block to change usage to apartments. Like many refurbishing projects this is a good example of where fixing selection is crucial. The soffits throughout this project were plaster coated terracotta hollow pots, supported by narrow concrete beams with a high level of reinforcing bar with a shallow concrete cover. The application was for ceiling hangers and partition track with deflection heads. None of the key fixing manufacturers had any data for fixing to terracotta pot. Extensive preliminary testing was therefore required to find a suitable fixing system to support the ceiling in this material. There were also areas where fixings needed to be installed into the narrow concrete beams. This caused issues with edge distance, so a fixing system was selected with limited expansion that could be used close to the beam edge. Fortunately, there is manufacturers data supporting this type of installation into concrete beams using a narrow edge distance, so in this case a fixing selection was

Paradise View



made with the combination of manufacturers data and using the preliminary load testing regime, to ascertain an allowable load for the terracotta pot.

Partition showing pot and concrete beams



Terracotta pot



Terracotta Pot Soffit



www.rite-fix.co.uk
www.etagfixings.co.uk

Source
 1. the-cfa.co.uk/Membership/findtesters.asp

FIS has published a Best Practice Guide to Selection and Installation of Top Fixings for Suspended Ceilings in conjunction with the Construction Fixings Association that outlines the process of design and selection as well as the role of testing in detail. To read the guide visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/8uz8zb43>

FIS
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BEST PRACTICE GUIDE
**SELECTION AND
 INSTALLATION OF
 TOP FIXINGS FOR
 SUSPENDED CEILINGS**

www.thefis.org





Best practice in retrofit insulation: How technical guidance prevents condensation issues

Technical expertise is crucial when it comes to retrofit projects. The UK's existing building stock presents unique challenges, particularly when it comes to improving thermal performance without creating condensation issues.

"This is where our range of both PIR and XPS products really comes into its own," David explains. "Different situations demand different solutions. Sometimes you need the high thermal performance of PIR boards, other times the moisture resistance of XPS might be important."

To help with this, the team is developing guidance through the Celotex Guide to Retrofit, which will help specifiers understand exactly where and how to use different insulation types effectively.

Looking ahead: Where do technical support teams see the future of insulation heading?

Looking ahead, David sees the UK construction industry moving away from traditional cavity walls. "We need to think about buildings as complete systems. A wall specification isn't just about the wall anymore. It's about how that wall works with every other element. Does it support the ventilation strategy? How does it impact airtightness? How can we reduce thermal bridging? These are the questions we need to answer now."

Sustainability is another key driver shaping the future of insulation, according to Mike. "The carbon footprint of insulation is going to be at the forefront in years to come," he says. "It's not just about how an insulation product performs during its lifetime, but also how it's made. Exploring alternative raw materials is a key focus moving forward."

This all shows that as building methods evolve, clear technical guidance will remain essential. And for specifiers, having the right support behind the scenes could be a key factor to getting it right on site.

FIND OUT MORE



BEHIND THE SCENES OF INSULATION TECHNICAL SUPPORT

From U-value calculations to on-site installation support, how do technical support teams help builders, contractors and merchants specify and install insulation with confidence?

Creating buildings designed for reliable thermal efficiency isn't simply about material selection. It demands precise understanding of how insulation integrates with the entire building fabric. That's where technical teams at manufacturers like Celotex come in.

We spoke to Mike Vaczi, Technical Director at SOPREMA – the company that recently acquired Celotex – and Team Leader, David Milner, to find out what goes on behind the scenes of a technical support team.

A day in the life: How technical teams solve real insulation challenges

Sometimes, technical support means the team getting their boots dirty. "One morning we could be reviewing BBA documentation for our PIR boards," says David, who brings a diverse background in geophysics, engineering and technical problem-solving to his role. "By lunch, we might be helping a

house builder solve a tricky cavity tray detail. Then in the afternoon, I could be training our sales team on the key differences between PIR versus XPS in below-ground applications."

While David and the team are handling day-to-day Celotex insulation support, Mike – who worked up from a site hand to leading teams and now drives technical standards – oversees the bigger picture. His responsibilities span multiple brands and manufacturing sites, where he ensures that everything from initial product testing to on-site installation guidance meets the highest standards. He says: "It starts with how the product is made, tested and verified to be fit for purpose before it even reaches the market."

And then there's the fact that U-values need to be worked out correctly, ensuring everything the Celotex team communicates aligns with Part L and Building Regulations. "For us at Celotex and SOPREMA, it's very, very important that the correct information we put out is unambiguous."

A PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions, shares with **David Crowson**, Editor, her 24-year journey with Mansell Building Solutions, championing the business, the construction industry, social value, and wellbeing.

When speaking to Angela, what was clear from the outset was her passion, leadership, and strong sense of purpose. Her drive goes beyond making Mansell Building Solutions one of the UK's most experienced specialist contractors in off-site construction — it is about benefiting the wider industry, supporting her staff, and championing social value, sustainability, and collaboration.

From 2001: An amazing journey

Reflecting on her journey, Angela told me that after 17 years as operations director at Mansell Building Solutions, she and her sister Stephanie took over the second-generation family business from their father in 2018. She said: "It's been an amazing journey so far. I've been the managing director since 2019 and since then I've been working hard to take Mansell into a positive future."

Under her leadership, the business has grown into one of the UK's most experienced specialist contractors in off-site construction. Angela added: "We have a 45,000 sq ft manufacturing facility producing around 100,000 m² of structural panels every year.

"As you can tell, I'm very passionate about championing Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and I'm proud of Mansell's role in advancing off-site framing and modular building solutions in the UK. MMC and off-site brings many benefits, including better quality control through factory conditions, less time on site, and less reliance on increasingly rare trades like Bricklaying. The biggest benefit, is that when done properly, our off-site, MMC-led approach offers peace of mind to clients because they get certainty in the finished product.

"In 2023, our commitment to innovation secured a coveted spot on the £2 billion off-site Homes Alliance framework, placing us amongst the nation's leading modular construction providers."

Angela clearly understands the importance of a forward-thinking approach when it comes to a business's environmental impact. She said: "We're not just improving our own carbon footprint; we're helping to set an example for the wider industry. Reducing carbon emissions is an important



Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions

part of our industry's future. Through innovation, hard work and our embracing of MMC, we've been able to stand tall and lead the way on building better, more energy efficient homes."

During our conversation, we discussed social value, and Angela shared her guiding philosophy: 'delivering homes for local people, by local people' in Greater Manchester. To achieve this, the business prioritises employing and upskilling local talent and uses local supply chains to provide affordable housing solutions that leave a lasting legacy. Angela also explained her commitment to giving back. In the past year alone, she has helped raise over

£10,000 for charity and through Mansell, she continues to invest in community programmes, reinforcing the role of construction as a force for social good.

Angela's leadership and the impact she has made on the business have earned industry recognition. Mansell was honoured as "Employer of the Year" at the 2023 City of Manchester Business Awards. She said: "This was a proud moment and a reflection of the positive, people-centred culture we have cultivated at the business."

Angela has also received personal accolades, including being awarded the prestigious status of Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Building (FCIOB) in 2023. The FCIOB review panel commended her as a "passionate, knowledgeable, and influential leader," affirming the respect she commands across the construction industry.

More recently, in 2025, Mansell has been shortlisted for multiple honours, including Supply Chain Partner at the Northern Housing Awards, the Innovation & Collaboration Award at the North West Regional Housing Awards, and Construction Business of the Year at the City of Manchester Business Awards.

During her tenure as managing director of Mansell and North West Regional Chair for FIS, Angela has become a prominent voice driving positive change across the industry. She relishes speaking to audiences on construction innovation and collaboration, and sharing her knowledge and experience on national platforms including at UKREiiF, MIPIM and the annual Housing Conference.



(L-R) Stephanie and Angela outside of Mansell Building Solutions



Angela presenting at one of her many industry engagements

The future is collaborative construction

When discussing her thoughts and solutions to the challenges currently facing the industry, Angela said: "Collaborative construction will go a long way in helping us overcome many of the challenges the industry is facing and that's why I'm such a vocal proponent of it. At Mansell, we look to engage with the wider construction team at a project's earliest stages. This always leads to better, more cost-effective outcomes and builds certainty for our clients."

She recalled several recent thought-provoking roundtable events she hosted, which resulted in strong commitments from attendees to a call for change. This included sessions at UKREiiF and MIPIM, where Angela facilitated honest, insightful, and engaging conversations about the real-world challenges of construction delivery. She said: "A big topic in the last year has been centred on the new housing targets and what the industry can do to get back to building 300k homes a year. Collaboration featured heavily in those conversations, with a more joined up approach between local authorities, developers and the supply chain seemingly vital to a change in approach."

"This call for a new way of doing things has been embraced by round table participants. As always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and from Mansell's experience, the earlier they're brought into a project, the better the end result is and the more certainty they're able to deliver to their clients. With true collaboration, it's not just the quality that increases, it's the volume."

Wellbeing: Mental health and neurodiversity

Angela explained that this subject is something personal for me. I'm neurodivergent—and a parent to children

sitting their GCSEs and A Levels who are also neurodivergent. She said: "It is something that shapes how I lead, how I parent, and how I show up in the world."

"I talk openly about this because it matters. Neurodivergent people face challenges that are still misunderstood or ignored — especially in high-pressure industries like construction. It's not just about awareness; it's about action. That means better support, more flexibility, and spaces where people don't have to mask or justify how they work best."

"For those who don't know, 'neurodivergent' simply means our brains work differently — whether that's ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia or something else. It's not a deficit. It's just difference. And with the right environment, that difference can be a huge strength."

"I use my platform to share the reality — on social media, on panels, at events — because too often the story is told about us, not by us. My message is simple: inclusion isn't a box-tick; it's a shift in mindset. And when we build workplaces that include different ways of thinking, everyone benefits."

"There is a huge link in our industry between poor mental health and undiagnosed, unseen neurodiversity. We must wake up and understand what's really going on. We need to focus on brain health (the cause) and mental health which are very often just the symptoms. I see my role as being part of that awareness shift and part of the change."

Angela's story is one of legacy and transformation: Taking the torch from her father and carrying it forward to light new paths in the industry. Angela is not just leading a business; she is leading by example, inspiring change.

www.mansellbuild.co.uk

PEOPLE IN BRIEF

Dean Pinner has been appointed as Managing Director (Contracts Division) for Minster and Frazer (part of the STARK Building Materials Group)

Dean has extensive leadership across supply chain, sales, and specification, having worked in the building materials supply industry for 35 years.

His expertise and deep understanding of the sector will help Minster and Frazer deliver a further enhanced service for its customers.

www.minsteronline.co.uk
www.frazersolutions.co.uk

Troax UK appoints Kelly Henaghan as Managing Director

Kelly brings extensive leadership experience and a results-driven approach that aligns perfectly with Troax's mission: to deliver world-leading safety solutions with precision, reliability, and innovation at the core.

As Managing Director, Kelly will spearhead the UK business into its next phase of growth - championing operational excellence, strengthening customer relationships, and ensuring that Troax continues to set the benchmark for safety in industrial environments.

This appointment reinforces Troax's commitment to strong, forward-thinking leadership as they continue to invest in our people, our products, and the future of safety.

www.troax.com

The Pallet LOOP appoints Principal Contractor Account Manager

The Pallet LOOP (part of BSW Group) announced the appointment of **Laura Smythe** as its new Principal Contractor Account Manager. Working as part of a wider team, dedicated to pallet recovery, Laura will focus on driving the return of LOOP's reusable green pallets among Tier One contractors.

www.thepalletloop.com

CONFLICT AVOIDANCE: RESPONSIBLE CONTRACTING ROUNDTABLE

To mark the end of Conflict Avoidance week, the Contracts Group of the Conflict Avoidance Coalition hosted a roundtable under Chatham House Rules to consider how construction supply chains can collectively establish a more responsible approach to contracting.

Participants

- Liz Barclay**, Small Business Commissioner (roundtable chair)
- Sarah Fox**, Legal Consultant at 500 Words
- Sally Guyer**, Global Chief Executive Officer at World Commerce and Contracting
- Professor Stuart Green** at The University of Reading
- Kevin P'ng**, Managing Director at BW: Workplace Experts
- Anthony Armitage**, General Counsel at Thirdway Interiors
- Kate Kennedy**, Contracts Transformation Leader at Laing O'Rourke
- Dale Harper-Jones**, Managing Director at ATJ Group
- Rob Driscoll**, Director of Legal and Business and Association Secretary at Electrical Contractors Association
- Samantha Peat**, Group Board Advisor at VIC Holdings and Chair of the CLC Professional Indemnity Insurance Working Group
- Len Bunton**, Owner of Bunton Consulting Partnership and President of the Conflict Avoidance Coalition
- Ruth Wilkinson**, Legal Director at Hill Dickinson
- Alistair McGrigor**, Partner at CMS
- Peter Higgins**, pD Consult and Chair of the NEC4 Contracts Board
- Iain McIlwee**, Chief Executive at FIS

Act that contribute to conflict and have distorted the role of adjudication, and the Late Payment Regulations.

The role of the Conflict Avoidance Process (CAP) and Pledge, along with more standardised contract processes, was noted. These were also linked to the need for clearer communication around the consequences of negative behaviours (particularly in relation to insurability and compliance) and the importance of promoting better practices to clients and their advisors. It is ultimately the clients and advisors who, whether wittingly or otherwise, often set in motion a sequence of events through their approach to contract management.

Setting the scene: Write the contract for the marriage and not the divorce

The roundtable kicked off with two insightful keynotes. Sally Guyer, Global Chief Executive Officer at World CC, provided a global, non-construction specific overview drawing on their research. This identified challenges that businesses experience navigating the current legal process; the top three being length and complexity, ambiguities in clauses, and impenetrable language.

The initial discussion examined the causes and consequences of the routine amendment of standard form contracts, which has become the norm in the construction industry. The conversation focused on the confusion, inefficiency, and serious insurability concerns created by the current "normal practice".

The discussion moved on to how we can escape a cycle of behaviours that are demonstrably damaging to the construction industry. The need to simplify and streamline the contracting process was discussed. The merits of standard form contracts and standardising our approach to contract management needs to be emphasised. Costs associated not only with set-up and administration, but also with the rising expense of adjudication, featured heavily in the debate — as did the ultimate human cost resulting from the commercial tension created through contracts.

Suggestions for how improvements were linked to technology (particularly Artificial Intelligence to improve accessibility of information) and a renewed examination of key regulatory areas including the duties and responsibilities defined in the Building Safety Act, areas of the Construction



It was noted that problems are not unique to construction, as contracting inefficiencies plague 76% of businesses, with 60% dissatisfied and only 39% of professionals believing contracts support success. A mere 16% think negotiations focus on relevant issues. This highlights a pervasive problem beyond construction.

Table 1 highlight the disparities between what is deemed most important when starting a business relationship, where effort tends to be focused, and the key causes of dispute.

The conclusion was that few businesspeople find contracts accessible, usable, and at times question if they really support core commercial and organisational values and objectives.

Sally suggested that the commercial contracting space needs a rethink and we need far more effectively integrate the way we contract into how we conduct ourselves as businesses, and famously stated: "We need to write the contract for the marriage and not the divorce." The current approach, rather than being a simple process to describe and clarify our relationships, has become confusing and complicated. This cannot be acceptable when only 15 to 20% of adults in the UK have literacy skills at level four or above, and understanding B2B contracts generally requires literacy skills well above this.

Anthony Armitage, General Counsel at Thirdway Interiors, also gave a short keynote to set the scene for the debate. He passed comment on a historical statement made in 1866 by The General Builders Association. He said: "It is not right to bring under the builder's consideration legal conditions the effect and value of which he cannot rightly estimate without consulting his solicitor."

He moved on to focus on the rationale for maintaining the integrity of these contracts. This involved using the DOCTOR approach to help identify the opportunity (see Table 2).

Anthony's presentation differentiated between updating a template to ensure the contract is relevant to the project, client, or commercial deal, and changes designed to fundamentally shift the risk balance.

Table 1

	Most Negotiated Terms	Most Disputed Terms	Most Important Terms
1	Limitation of Liability	Price / Charge / Price Changes	Scope and Goals / Specification
2	Price / Change / Price Changes	Delivery	Price / Charge / Price Changes
3	Scope and Goals / Specification	Scope and Goals / Specification	Delivery
4	Indemnification	Service Levels	Service Levels
5	Liquidated Damages	Invoices / Late Payment	Payment / Payment Options
6	Intellectual Property	Payment / Payment Options	Responsibilities of the Parties
7	Payment / Payment Options	Responsibilities of the Parties	Acceptance
8	Warranty	Liquidated Damages	Product Specification
9	Delivery	Amendments / Charges to Contract	Amendments / Charges to Contract
10	Termination	Warranty	Limitation of Liability

He asserted that any template update should always be clearly explained, marked up, and never change the main clauses. He emphasised the recent Construction Leadership Council (CLC) statement cautioning the sector against amendments that undermine insurance provisions.

He also stressed the significant work involved in interrogating an amendment, understanding the risk created, and then representing this risk initially to the tender team for appraisal within the tender context. Subsequently, it must be presented to project teams to ensure the risk is controlled wherever possible. Often, the level of risk being shifted is unacceptable, and this extensive process diverts time and effort from more productive aspects of project development.

Anthony also advocated that beyond the CAP, adopting CLC recommendations. He concluded that contract standardisation strengthens the industry by providing clarity, reducing costs, and fostering collaboration, though effectively implementing this remains a challenge.

Contracts have become legal weapons not operational guidance

In terms of how widespread the practice of amendments is, the 2023 Finishes and



Interiors Sector Report by Professor Stuart Green at The University of Reading confirms what we all experience in UK construction: that standardisation is dead. It has been replaced by bespoke contracts loosely based on standard forms but which include onerous and increasingly uninsurable terms; the report particularly highlighted risk dumping associated with design as a challenge.

One contributor expressed their concern saying: "Contracts have become legal weapons, not operational guidance." The current process undermines trust, creates unnecessary workload, and ultimately fuels commercial tension in the supply chain.

Rather than helping money to flow, the contractual process often does the opposite, creating tension and fuelling disputes. This undermines confidence and creates uncertainty, which in turn leads to a lack of investment in skills and innovation. These commercial conditions also contribute significantly to the alarming statistic that 83% of people in construction have had a mental health issue. Furthermore, a construction worker is roughly four times more likely to die from suicide than an average UK worker. →

Table 2





Beyond simple amendments, the power imbalance and lack of genuine attempts to make the process collaborative were also called out.

The concept of adopting a “Responsible No” was discussed, whilst an important message, the power imbalance and competitive nature mean that, despite clients often having unreasonable or irresponsible expectations, the limitation is that someone always seems willing to sign. Ultimately, risk is parcelled up and passed through the supply chain, with each party seeking to offset their risk and believing they have done so by passing it on to someone else. This prevents good companies from improving and allows the poorer end of the market to thrive.

Of particular concern was the expectation to absorb responsibility for issues outside of direct control, such as pre-existing conditions or full responsibility for a novated design that contains errors. This is especially problematic in a design and build environment where design responsibility is transferred and aggressive procurement has been favoured over careful and coordinated design development.

The potential to price risk more effectively and create a red (under no circumstances, as it is commercial suicide), amber, green approach to accepting amendments was highlighted as best practice. While some work has been done

on red lines (by organisations like FIS and ECA) there is not a concerted approach to adopting this, nor enough effort made to communicate the impact to clients.

He said: “When you stop and think that the 1.6% is roughly what the sector makes in profit, the prize is big: if we halve our legal costs, we double our profits.”

Change needs to start at the top

There was little defensible rationale for the practice of contract amendments beyond those related to clarifying project-specific risks and issues. It was recognised that the initiator of the amendment process is typically the client instructing their lawyers. Clients, too, are often driven by funding conditions for their project that cause them to operate within tight contractual constraints – a developer, despite their best intentions, may be stuck with certain procurement and contractual constraints placed upon them by financiers or banks.

Main Contractors were also cited as not doing enough to protect the supply chain, simply accepting onerous amendments and cascading these. At times, they add additional amendments, creating an avalanche effect as contracts move further into the supply chain. The discussion highlighted the need for better contract administrators to help ensure risk is set at a reasonable level and communicated effectively within the business carrying it.

The 500-word concept, more visual “comic contracts,” and Plain English contracts were all seen as possible alternatives to complex paper-based standard forms. These innovations aim to make contracts more accessible and user-friendly.

A more collaborative approach could be encouraged through the CAP.

The importance of educating clients and practitioners was emphasised. This should focus on the benefits of standard forms, the risks associated with non-compliance and potential future failures, and the amplified cost of amendments across the entire supply chain.

The process of amendment has become self-supporting

The fact that construction spends 1.6% of turnover (probably an underestimate, as this figure was cited from 2018 research and adjudications have been increasing at a rate of around 10% per year since then), which is double the industry average, suggests our relationships have become overly complex and potentially over-lawyered. Beyond the financial cost, the time involved in negotiating amendments and resolving avoidable disputes is unacceptable. Pursuing a claim in the Technology and Construction Court, for instance, can take three years from issuing the claim to getting a trial listed, and costs are “eye-watering.”

The costs of adjudication have also significantly increased. Concerns were expressed that the process has been hijacked. The introduction of statutory adjudication provisions has, rather than helped, allowed the process to become unduly dragged out and used by employers to settle complex claims. Adjudication was supposed to be a mechanism to help contractors get paid on time: a quick fix, with the process completed within the project’s schedule.

The problem is compounded by concerns over adjudicator quality and the lack of a single oversight body. Even a successful adjudication doesn’t guarantee swift settlement, as decisions can be challenged and overturned — often over years — leaving businesses at risk of insolvency before an award is paid.

A clear recommendation emerged: adjudication should be pushed back towards being a mechanism to settle payment disputes only, rather than being used for complex or negligence-based issues. Consideration should be given to limiting adjudications to a defined project period such as the end of the defects period or even practical completion.

In the interim the discussion highlighted why, considering the challenges, we need to focus on the CAP and encouraging a collaborative mediation.

Contracts are increasingly onerous and uninsurable

The need to consider the practice of amendments and their impact on insurance provisions was revisited at several points in the conversation. Emphasis was placed on the fact that most professional indemnity insurance policies are written to “cover contractual obligations to the extent that they are no more onerous than liabilities would be in the absence of a contract.”

In real terms, this means anything that has been put into a contract that takes a party

beyond “reasonable skill and care” could potentially invalidate their professional indemnity insurance policy and may provide a reason not to pay out in a “hard market.”

Concern was expressed that this is not fully understood and that more needs to be done to communicate this risk to clients.

Integrated Projects Insurance and the corresponding use of Allianced Contracts were proffered as improvements over the disjointed Professional Indemnity Insurance approach that the market currently adopts. Whilst these have been used to great effect on some landmark projects, they are almost always special cases and less relatable to the wider market. The key sticking point is the need for front-loading information required for underwriters to provide cover - this requires a fundamental shift in procurement and has to date been resisted with case studies linked to large projects and not necessarily relatable to smaller more “normal” projects.

The potential for the mutualisation of construction insurance was raised as a method of encouraging a different approach, effectively with the industry taking a position in its own risk. However, the scale of the challenge — including complexity, inconsistencies, and fragmentation across the sector — made it an unrealistic proposition.

Is regulation likely to drive change?

Remediation Orders, introduced since Grenfell to force landlords and developers to make retrospective corrections to previously completed projects, are having a significant impact, but implementation has been slow. In the longer term, a tightening of enforcement is likely to have an increasing effect on wider behaviour.

The new Duty Holder regime, enshrined in the latest update to the Building Regulations, is a key rationale for a reset. The culture of risk dumping and lack of clarity discussed is seen as completely contrary to the intent of the Building Safety Act. Starving businesses of cash, befuddling them with confusing information, and passing risks related to compliance around the supply network are all at odds with the simple concept of clients ensuring they have allowed appropriate time and resources to support works.

All agreed that the Act could and should be the most significant driver for reducing attempts to re-allocate unreasonable levels of risk through contract amendments and improving payment practices.

It was felt that the Construction Act also had a role to play. One participant described it as “an absolute disaster, all this nonsense about due dates and final dates.”

The payment process should be simple: the provider applies for payment based on what was agreed. As one participant questioned, “Why do we need multiple opportunities to reduce and delay payments?”

Opportunities such as payments held in trust, project bank accounts, deposits, and greater transparency were seen as ways to improve efficiency and support a more collaborative, stable supply chain — helping to ease ongoing cash flow issues

that often drive poor behaviours. Clients’ interest in sustainability was also viewed as a positive force for change, encouraging the collaborative, circular relationships essential to delivering truly sustainable projects.

The role of technology and artificial intelligence

Returning to the points in the CLC Statement regarding making changes in the body of the contract and ensuring they are clearly explained, it was suggested that those using standard form contracts had often not effectively embraced technology. This was seen as contributing to the continued use of schedules of amendments over a “track change” approach.

While JCT and NEC have started to provide interactive tools, they rely on all parties in the contractual chain paying to access an enhanced subscription level, which many deemed too expensive.

AI tools have been adopted to streamline contract reviews, noting that this offers promising short-term support. However, while AI can certainly help, and more can be done to promote its use, this should ultimately be a stop-gap solution. Technology should support effective change, not excuse amendments or limit the drive to improve collaborative and fair contracting practices in the construction industry.

Next steps

To drive real change, we must show how contract reform — tied to regulatory shifts and insurability — directly affects building safety by clarifying responsibilities. A focused presentation to the Building Safety Regulator, supported by research, can demonstrate how clearer contracts improve safety outcomes. This reinforces the principle that responsibility can no longer be contracted away.

World CC’s construction-specific data is key to this argument. It highlights how current practices — low contract effectiveness and high dispute rates — undermine safety and insurability. Further targeted research is needed to offer solutions and prove that reform is essential.

The group supports reforming the Construction Act to improve adjudication standards and limit ‘pay less’ tactics, drawing on the Irish model. It also intends to contribute to ongoing reforms of Late Payment Rules.

The Conflict Avoidance Pledge has real value, and efforts should continue to expand adoption. Law firms have a role to play in supporting conflict avoidance, which often

aligns with their clients’ best interests and still allows for legal action if needed. The group also recommends exploring, through the CAC, stronger links between the Pledge and contract amendments.

The group sees an opportunity to influence standard contract providers to use technology to simplify and clarify amendments, moving away from cumbersome schedules.

Better contract management is vital, as no consistent standard currently exists. World CC’s work on a new ISO-aligned standard presents an important opportunity. When combined with tools like the Pledge and digital systems, this could drive safer and more efficient project delivery.

FIS has also committed to developing 500-word subcontracts. The group will stay involved, helping draft and monitor pilot projects to produce repeatable case studies that highlight improved contracting practices.

To read in full interesting content of the Roundtable event visit:

www.thefis.org/conflict-avoidance





Demonstrating where the ethos Listen, Guide, Deliver has been implemented and moved from simply building spaces to building relationships

TURNING OPPORTUNITY INTO ACTION - EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY IN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Penelope McCallum, Head of Sustainability for EMEA and **Maria Russo**, Head of Customer Experience for EMEA at Unispace, discuss the impact of construction on global CO₂ emissions and biodiversity loss. They firmly believe that we already have the tools to build sustainably – the real challenge lies in adoption, which ultimately depends on effective communication and customer experience.



*Penelope McCallum,
Head of Sustainability
for EMEA at Unispace*



*Maria Russo, Head of
Customer Experience
for EMEA at Unispace*

Approximately 57.6 million people live in urban areas in the UK, compared to around 10.5 million in rural areas. This means that around 84% of the UK population resides in cities (Statista). Unsurprisingly, these areas are more likely to experience poorer air quality. Across the UK, up to 48,000 deaths have been directly attributed to poor air quality (Clean Air Programme). This excludes broader health impacts like reduced life expectancy and conditions such as asthma, heart disease, and cancer – there is also growing evidence that it also significantly affects mental wellbeing.

So why is this relevant to construction?

Because we spend 90% of our time indoors – whether at home or at work. While not all pollutants come from buildings, design and construction play a key role in filtering and protecting against them. Through improved insulation, ventilation, and material choices, the industry now has the tools to significantly reduce the impact of air pollution.

Looking more broadly, the environmental impact of construction is huge. According to

the World Green Building Council (WGBC), buildings are responsible for around 40% of global CO₂ emissions, 50% of all extracted materials, 33% of water consumption, and 35% of global waste generation. On top of this, construction is also responsible for approximately 30% of global biodiversity loss (Arup).

These figures are set against a backdrop of increasing pressure: by 2050, the global population is projected to rise by 27% – reaching 9.8 billion. Meanwhile, the total global building floor area is expected to double by 2060. This places the construction sector firmly among the top three most environmentally damaging industries, alongside agriculture and energy.

Yet despite this, construction rarely receives the same level of media attention for change. Aviation, for example, is frequently criticised, and while it undeniably contributes to climate change, it accounts for only 2.5 to 3% of global CO₂ emissions. Notably, just 10% of the global population uses air travel. In contrast, every one of the 8.6 billion people expected to be on Earth by 2050 will live, work or be affected by the

building industry – yet the urgency to reform construction remains underrepresented in the media and is driven mainly by well-informed clients or organisations with robust sustainability goals.

Many solutions already exist but are not always utilised. We know how to build better. But adoption of these practices is not happening at the scale or speed needed. The IEA state that “More rapid changes are needed to get on track with the Net Zero Emissions by 2050 (NZE) Scenario. This decade is crucial for implementing the measures required to achieve the targets of all new buildings and 20% of the existing building stock being zero-carbon-ready by 2030.

There are many reasons for this – but a key one, in our view, is communication and the importance of customer experience in really driving forward change and demonstrating to our clients the opportunities that exist by improving the sustainable performance of their assets.

Focussing on the UK we are all aware of the importance and opportunities associated with sustainable construction that include but are not limited to:

Designing for demountability, circularity, urban mining, UKGBC pathway to Net Zero, biophilic design, nature based solutions to name but a few and this is on top of certified schemes such as WELL, LEED, BREEAM, Fitwell and SKA.

When we engage with internal teams and customers, do we tailor the opportunities to suit the audience?

Do we upskill staff, so everyone understands the opportunities or do we wheel in the expert for ten minutes and take them away again? Why do we assume the expert will convey the right message?

With external influences and media messaging with bias, have we created a subject that is seen as too scientific and as such is it now seen as a hurdle or opportunity? Do we sell a cost or an opportunity?

Let's be clear here, sustainable buildings do cost more. According to the WGBC, Capex costs maybe higher (0 to 1.2%) but long-term benefits ensure these costs should be recouped within around 5 years through:

- Capital values up to 20%
- Rental premiums up to 12%
- Avoidance of stranded assets
- 30yrs cumulative costs for standard fit out €1500/m²
- 30yrs cumulative for circular design €700/m² (ARUP) so actual savings to be made.

For tenants in commercial buildings staff productivity can increase up to 15% which equates roughly to £17,400 of output per worker (CBI) and a positive impact on retention rate of up to 23% (JLL). Then less tangible but no less important increased customer bases and operational costs.

So the business case is there, but how do we communicate the business case into each project?

How do we turn opportunity into action?

The problem isn't a lack of knowledge. As the previous section shows, we know how to build better – and we understand the economic, environmental, and social benefits. Yet adoption still lags. One of the biggest reasons isn't technical – it's human. It's how we communicate and engage in the right way. Essentially how we deliver customer experience.

We can achieve sustainability goals when we listen closely – ideas can then thrive.

Customer experience and sustainability: Interdependent partnership

Sustainability and customer experience are not separate disciplines. In fact, they are deeply connected – and mutually reinforcing. To meet our long-term environmental, social, and economic goals, we must do three things well:

- **Listen:** Understand client needs, including their sustainability ambitions, operational priorities, and long-term goals.
- **Guide:** Communicate clearly, offer options, and tailor sustainable solutions to the audience.
- **Deliver:** Provide seamless, high-quality experiences that make it easy to choose sustainability – and celebrate the outcomes.

According to Bain & Company, 80% of companies believe they deliver superior customer experiences, yet only **8% of customers agree**. How we measure and understand customer satisfaction, especially in light of this significant gap, matters – because if we're not delivering great experiences, we're not building the trust needed to drive change.

Embedding sustainability through the entire customer journey

To truly integrate sustainability, it must be part of the full project lifecycle – not just a feature, but a mindset. Here's how this looks in practice, aligned to the RIBA Plan of Work:

- **Stages 0-1: Strategic definition and preparation:** Build trust through open dialogue. Ask thoughtful questions. Co-create a clear brief with defined sustainability goals. Define objectives from the outset.
- **Stages 2-4: Design and preconstruction:** Deepen trust by aligning design with client values. Keep objectives visible. Involve delivery teams early and share insights to ensure a smooth handover into construction.
- **Stage 5: Construction:** Sustain trust with regular updates. Communicate challenges clearly. Support timely, confident decisions.
- **Stages 6-7: Handover and use:** Trust doesn't end at completion. Stay engaged, ask for feedback, act on it, and celebrate shared achievements. At Unispace, post-occupancy evaluations and surveys are core to our offering to ensure objectives are exceeded in creating a customer-centric, future-proofed space.

Making the case: Why experience matters

Customer experience isn't just a "nice to have" – it's measurable, powerful, and profitable:

- 86% of buyers are willing to pay more for a great experience (PwC)¹.
- 80% of customers say they are more likely to do business with a company if it offers personalised experiences. (Forbes)²
- 77% of consumers view brands more favourably if they seek out and apply customer feedback. (Microsoft)³
- Companies with a customer-centric culture are 60% more profitable (Deloitte)⁴
- A single poor experience can drive away 32% of customers, even from brands they love. (PwC)⁵

Excellent Customer Experience helps sustainability efforts get noticed, appreciated, and widely adopted.

So, what are three key takeaways?

- 1. Clear communication:** Builds trust and accountability and ensures ideas are heard and business cases developed.
- 2. Consistency across touchpoints – develop a methodology that all projects can follow:** In service, messaging, and delivery – these sets expectations and reduces the potential for friction.
- 3. Sustainability:** Integrated across the project lifecycle creates lasting value for clients, communities, and the planet. The ethos is simple but powerful:

Listen, Guide, Deliver.

When we do this well, we move from simply building spaces to building relationships – and driving real change. At Unispace using a set methodology that includes all subject disciplines from Strategy, Design, and FF&E, through to Construction across each stage, ensures a consistent approach, that clients are listened to, and opportunities for sustainable improvement maximised. Client aspirations can then be front and centre with bespoke strategies for each project identified and delivered.

www.unispace.com/

Source

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FIS Scottish Awards Lunch

Voco Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow
12 September

FIS AGM/Regional Meeting

Hill Dickinson, The Broadgate Tower, London
16 October



The Broadgate Tower, London

FIS Training Awards Lunch

Plasterers Hall, One London Wall, London
25 November

For further information of these events visit: www.thefis.org/events

DESIGN RESPONSIBILITY IN CONSTRUCTION: WHO REALLY CARRIES THE RISK?

Jonathan Bond, Partner – Real Estate – Construction, and **Amy Campbell**, Associate at DAC Beachcroft LLP, look at the impact of recent case law in light of the growing risk for subcontractors, where design responsibilities are increasingly pushed down the supply chain. They highlight the importance of clear contracts, well-defined responsibilities, and appropriate insurance as key tools for managing this risk.

Design liability

The allocation of responsibility for design is one of the key allocations of risk between the parties involved in a construction project.

Professor Stuart Green, Reading University, in his report “Procurement in the finishes, fit-out and interiors sector in 2023”² said: “The prevailing tendency is for contracting parties to off-load design risk onto others with an inevitable blurring of responsibilities. The result is that nobody is ever completely sure who is responsible for what. The broader reality is that reports such as Latham (1994) make recommendations, but in practice nothing really changes. Indeed, many would argue that procurement practices in respect of design responsibility are getting worse rather than better. Yet in the wake of the Grenfell tragedy the continuous blurring of responsibility cannot be allowed to continue, not least because of the stringent requirements of the Building Safety Act.”

Design confusion is one of the leading cause of disputes encountered through the FIS Legal Helpline. According to FIS CEO, **Iain McIlwee**: “It is clear, despite attempts by the Regulator to define Duty Holders, for parts of the market, roles and responsibilities have become increasingly blurred when it comes to design and in some cases I fear they are deliberately opaque in the contract”. Problems such as the inadvertent transfer of design liability through embedding co-ordination requirements into a contract are placing unexpected and unclear design obligations on a subcontractor and pushing responsibility beyond the installation obligations that specialists have traditionally fulfilled.



Jonathan Bond, Partner – Real Estate – Construction at DAC Beachcroft LLP

Design disputes

Disputes linked to design can include variations, incorrect design, timing of design and the co-ordination of and interface of different design packages. These issues typically arise due to design responsibility and scope of works not being clearly understood by the parties at the time a contract is entered into.

Several recent cases have dealt with disputes related to the extent of design responsibility and the interpretation and extent of the scope of the works.

Workman Properties Ltd v Adi Building & Refurbishment Ltd [2024] EWHC 2627 (TCC)

This case considered a dispute related to design. The parties had entered into a JCT Design and Build Contract 2016 for



Amy Campbell, Associate at DAC Beachcroft LLP

extension works to an existing dairy. The contract was heavily amended in favour of Workman Properties Ltd (“**Workman**”) as the employer to create single point contractor responsibility for design and construction of the works. The dispute centred on provisions within the Employer’s Requirements which included a statement at paragraph 1.4 providing Adi Building & Refurbishment Ltd (“**Adi**”) would be fully responsible for the complete design, construction, completion, commissioning and defects rectification of the works noting that design had already been developed by Workman to the end of RIBA Stage 4. Paragraph 1.5 of the Employer’s Requirements went on to provide that Adi had to review the design order to ensure that the employer’s requirements were met. Adi complained that the design

had not been developed to the end of RIBA Stage 4. A dispute arose as to who was contractually responsible for completing the design up to RIBA Stage 4/BSRIA Stage 4(i). Workman's position was that the contract put all design responsibility on Adi who in turn argued that the second part of paragraph 1.4 of the Employer's Requirements if it was for Workman to provide this design. Following an initial adjudication where the adjudicator found in favour of Adi that Workman had warranted that the design had been completed to the end of RIBA Stage 4 but that in fact it had not done so Workman issued Part 8 proceedings to seek a declaration from the Court as to the contractual position in relation to design responsibility. The Court concluded that the contract put all design responsibility onto Adi, even though paragraph 1.4 of the Employer's Requirements did refer to Workman having developed the design to the end of RIBA Stage 4. This was because this provision in isolation was not sufficient to override all of the other provisions of the contract. Adi had sought to argue a very narrow point as the legal risk profile of the contract was very robust and, in the main, the risk profile of the Employer's Requirements was also aligned with the contract conditions leaving Adi limited room to manoeuvre.

BNP Paribas Depository Services Ltd & Anor v Briggs & Forrester Engineering Services Ltd [2024] EWHC 2903 (TCC)

This is a similar case. BNP Paribas Depository Services Ltd ("BNP") also entered into a JCT Design and Build Contract 2016 with Briggs & Forrester Engineering Services Ltd ("B&F") for the design and construction of stair pressurisation works in risers of a 30-storey 1960s office skyscraper. It too was heavily amended in favour of BNP. A dispute arose in relation to the extent of asbestos removal works and whether B&F owed a duty to BNP to carry out further asbestos surveys and then further asbestos removal works as may be required. B&F said that its obligations in relation to asbestos removal were limited to the asbestos identified in a quotation from its specialist licensed asbestos removal and disposal subcontractor. This was narrower than that which the Employer's Requirements provided for. Further asbestos was then discovered outside the scope of this quotation. B&F said that this was not part of its scope of work and that it would not undertake such works without an instruction from BNP. The parties could not be reconciled. B&F issued a suspension notice and then a termination notice on the basis BNP was

preventing it from completing the works by not providing an additional asbestos survey or an instruction for B&F to carry out this activity. There were also additional structural defects which were uncovered which added another layer of complexity to the dispute. The Court concluded that the Employer's Requirements made it "plain beyond serious argument" that the design and build obligation and the risk in relation to the scope of the works necessary to provide the complete stair pressurisation installation including the carrying out of any additional asbestos survey was "firmly" on B&F. The Court also considered wider termination issues. The risk profile of the JCT Design and Build Contract for this project was consistent with that in the case of Workman Properties Ltd v Adi Building & Refurbishment Ltd and so B&F also took full responsibility for the design and carrying out and the completion of the works.

Critical lessons to take away

Both of these cases relate to design and build projects where the parties had entered into heavily amended contracts which created single point contractor responsibility for design and construction of the works. Typically subcontracts flow these obligations down to supply chain insofar as they relate to supply chain packages. This can extend to supply chain assuming design co-ordination, design interface and integration with other trades which are not always clearly set-out or necessarily understood by the parties. These are key concerns for FIS. If the works had been procured using a JCT Standard Building Contract then the legal risk profile of the contracts would have been different and these cases may have had a different outcome but the key points for subcontractors to always consider is to ensure your contract is clear in relation to design (if any) and scope of works.

Be clear on Scope and Duty of Care

How a client procures a construction project will inform how design liability is allocated between the parties which in turn will influence how a main contractor then manages and flows design risk down to its supply chain.

All recent cases reaffirm that, where a subcontractor has design obligations, clarity around the extent of the subcontractor's

design obligations and a suitable duty of care in relation to design is critical. Typically, a contract will include an express duty of care so that a subcontractor uses "reasonable skill and care" to progress design. Where a contract is installation only then there is a requirement that the materials are reasonably fit for their intended purpose.

Agreeing the legal risk profile of a contract is only part of the process. It is also essential that scope documents are correct, and the technical documents set out the agreed position between the parties.

How can subcontractors manage design liability

Ensure at the outset of a project that the contract is correct. This may extend to ensuring:

- technical and commercial derogations are included to reflect the agreed position at the end of a negotiated tender process;
- technical due diligence is carried out to ensure no fitness for purpose obligations in relation to design are included in any scope documents;
- legal and insurance advisers to any professional indemnity policy will respond to a claim under the contract; and
- there is a suitable duty of care in relation to design included in the contract.

Instructions during any construction project are inevitable but it is important to start from the agreed scope of works and agreed risk profile of a contract when it is entered into and wherever possible to not derogate from this. Where any instruction is a variation to the agreed scope of works ensure:

- there is always a paper trail which tells the story behind each instruction and why it was made to ensure that the extended scope is clearly set out and agreed by all parties;
- if the scope of works is installation only ensure no design liability can accrue from commenting on construction issue drawings or providing additional detail which may amount to design development; and
- it is clear who takes the risk on the performance of any substituted materials with the wider works to avoid any unintended liability for co-ordination or materials approval.

www.dacbeachcroft.com/en/

Source

1. <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/111049/1/2301271-FIS-Survey-Report-2023-v14%202.pdf>



The Distributor of Choice



KNAUF AIRLESS FINISH: REVOLUTIONISE YOUR SURFACE FINISHING

Knauf Airless Finish, available from Encon & Nevill Long branches, is a ready-mixed spray alternative to traditional plaster that provides a seamless blend of performance, efficiency and quality to finishing walls and ceilings.

Made from crushed marble, the ready-mixed product simplifies and accelerates the construction process by eliminating the complexities of traditional gypsum plaster.

The different skills needed versus traditional plastering methods combined with the high-quality results, makes Airless Finish an effective solution for projects challenged by the availability of skilled trades. It also opens opportunities for those looking for a different approach to plastering or for specialist contractors with transferrable skills, such as painters and decorators.

Quick & Efficient Application

Airless Finish is most ideal for projects where extensive application is required such as high-rise residential buildings, commercial offices, healthcare, schools or student accommodation.

The spray application covers up to an impressive 250m² per day with two people and can be sprayed up to three metres from the ground using a high-pressure

piston pump, accelerating project timelines and reducing the need for steps or hop ups. Airless Finish also dries within 24 hours with consistent air flow, which means a second coat can be applied the next day, benefitting follow-on trades.

Manual preparation work is reduced too, decreasing the physical strain on workers. As the product is ready-mixed, it requires no primers or bonding agents and minimal water supply on-site, avoiding the need for heavy water buckets. This makes applying Airless Finish less arduous.

Flawless & Durable

Engineered for a flawless Level 5 finish, Airless Finish provides a smooth and consistent, white surface that removes the need for a mist coat, making the wall or ceiling ready for painting or decorating.

Furthermore, the consistent, high-quality finish minimises snagging, preventing cost overruns and reducing post-application returns. As it dries white, other follow-on trades are more cautious when working in the space, perceiving it as the final finish.

Sustainable

Airless Finish contains very low Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) – total VOC levels over 28 days are under 1mg/m³ – making it a safer and more sustainable application method. The packaging is also fully recyclable, and wastage is minimal at around 1%.

Don't forget the prep work!

All good finishes start with good preparation. The Airless Finish system includes the spray finish, ancillaries, Ready-Mixed Jointing compound, tapes and beads. Associated products include plasterboard, metal sections and accessories for the complete solution.

Project Focus

Airless Finish was the ideal solution for the regeneration of 368 high-end apartments at West Bar – part of a £300 million scheme at the heart of Sheffield city centre. Encon & Nevill Long played a pivotal role, working closely with specialist contractor Wing Plastering Ltd and Knauf UK & Ireland to exceed client expectations. Read more:

www.encon.co.uk/campaign/knauf-airless

FIND OUT MORE

Encon & Nevill Long are specialist divisions of The Encon Group – the UK's 'Distributor of Choice' for building materials and interior finishes with branches nationwide stocking an extensive range from known and trusted brands. As the leading distributor of Knauf products, our specialist and knowledgeable teams are on hand to support your next interiors project. Get in touch to learn more or discover the full Knauf range at www.encon.co.uk.

SHAPING THE STORY: WHY TALENT, IMAGE AND INCLUSION ARE CRUCIAL TO CONSTRUCTION'S FUTURE

A recent report revealed that our sector must do more to showcase its diversity, inclusivity, and wide range of career paths. We take a look at the findings and explore some of the solutions.

Ryan Jones,
Managing
Director at
SLG Agency



Ryan Jones, Managing Director at SLG Agency, explained that before founding Deconstruction – a not-for-profit created to help reposition the construction sector in the eyes of the public – he spent the past decade in marketing roles within the built environment. He said: “What struck me repeatedly was the mismatch between how I saw the industry and the people within it, and the way the sector is portrayed and discussed by those on the outside.

“This isn’t just a communications issue, it’s a strategic risk for the entire sector. In a labour market where every industry is fighting for skills, construction is starting several paces behind.

“To properly test this hypothesis, I commissioned Construction Deconstructed 2024 — a nationally representative public survey of 2,000 respondents, delivered by YouGov. The results were eye-opening. Here are some of the headline stats from the report.”

The disconnect between value and appeal

Just 16% of the public would personally consider a career in construction. Among those aged 18–24 in full-time education – individuals at a critical decision-making stage in their career journey – that number drops even further.

Despite this, more than half of respondents (51%) said they would recommend a career in construction to a young person.

“People don’t see themselves, or perhaps their children, working in construction. That’s the perception gap we need to close. And we won’t bridge it through tactical recruitment ads or one-off outreach projects. We need to rethink entirely how the public sees our sector,” said Ryan.

Nearly one in five respondents said they’d be more likely to recommend the sector if it felt more welcoming to people of all backgrounds and abilities.

Ryan continued: “We know that the interiors sector in particular, has roles that span physical, cognitive, and creative skillsets. But unless we show that diversity – not just demographically, but functionally – we risk missing out on incredible talent that simply doesn’t know it belongs here.

“It’s not just about ‘doing the right thing’! It’s about accessing the full spectrum of capability the market has to offer, and being seen as a sector where everyone can thrive.”

Not just a careers challenge – a brand crisis

The top associations with construction jobs are “dirty” (52%), “strenuous” (69%)

and “unsafe” (26%). Just 12% called it “forward-thinking,” and only 10% viewed it as “intellectually stimulating.”

Ryan explained this isn’t just frustrating, it’s dangerous. If all people see are the clichés, then many of the very roles we need to fill will remain invisible, including the ones in digital, design, logistics, client services, sustainability and on, and on.

He said: “I can tell you that no amount of salary benchmarking or job board listings can fix a brand problem this deep. We need to make the interiors sector (and construction more broadly) visible, relatable and inspiring again.”

Visibility = Viability

The research also revealed that the public do see construction as important – when prompted to think about outcomes. They want more housing (71%), better schools (56%), improved roads (43%). And they’re ready to recommend the sector to others – especially if it paid better, offered more skilled roles, and was more inclusive.

Ryan said: “The challenge isn’t whether our sector matters. It’s whether we can show it in a way that connects. In short: people support the outcomes, but they don’t understand the industry that delivers them.



“The healthcare sector, by contrast, benefits from a single, powerful brand in the NHS. Despite being much maligned, this unified brand gives it emotional resonance, national visibility, and a clear route for engagement – whether you’re looking for a job or a purpose. Put it another way, imagine being the Minister forced to argue for its closure...”

“Construction has no such anchor. The consequence? We’re asking people to navigate a fragmented, complex industry without a map. Even the most motivated candidates might not know where to start.”

To learn more about Deconstruction and to download your copy of Construction Deconstructed visit:

www.thisisdeconstruction.com

Right now, countless organisations are doing great work – from Build UK to individual firms and trade bodies like the FIS and the Home Builders Federation (HBF), as well as running excellent events such as the “50 Careers in a Day” Careers Festival. Here are some of the solutions they recommend and have implemented to tackle the challenges mentioned.

Tackling the challenges

Based on his experience and insights from the report, Ryan believes the challenges can be effectively addressed by:

Going broader, not narrower: We need sophisticated mass marketing: clear, consistent, emotionally resonant storytelling aimed at everyone.

Showing the full picture: The public can’t aspire to roles they can’t see. We need to elevate the whole sector – not just the visible, traditional trades.

Creating a shared focal point: One entry route. One message. One destination for anyone curious about careers in construction. And from there, let them explore the rich diversity of paths that exist.

Ryan concluded by saying: “We have to tell the story better and deconstruction exists to create a platform and give the industry the insight and tools it needs to speak in a unified, credible, and inspiring voice, because

if we don’t take control of the narrative now, we’ll lose talent not to other sectors, but to a lack of understanding. In a world where perception drives behaviour, that’s a risk we can’t afford to take.

Andy George, Director of Industry and Skills at HBF, explained that the Home Builders Federation (HBF) is taking decisive action to address the growing skills gap by delivering a wide range of skills, training, and talent attraction programmes in collaboration with members, education partners, and industry bodies.

Andy said: “We launched Partner a College, a two-year pilot programme funded by CITB, in response to some of the issues with the talent pipeline, with the goal that the initiative will set a future benchmark for how industry can engage with education providers to support education and training.

“Through meaningful engagement with colleges, the programme aims to help tailor construction courses, embed industry expectations, and give students practical insights into careers in home building.

“The pilot builds on established work with skills hubs across the UK, where we continue to invest in upskilling the current workforce. Over 11,000 tradespeople have benefited from our Brickwork and Roofing Masterclasses, delivered in partnership with CITB, NHBC, and other trade bodies. We are also helping to drive through new qualifications and standards which will help future-proof a competent workforce and supporting workforce wellbeing through free mental health training”

Andy told us about initiatives like the Women into Home Building programme which is currently supporting over 30 women who are undertaking the spring work experience programme. He said: “With our members, and the STEM Ambassador programme, we are helping to attract new talent, while diversifying and inspiring the next generation.”

He concluded by saying: “We encourage the wider industry to consider how it can contribute to this effort. Programmes like Partner a College and skills hubs will only succeed with widespread participation from across the sector. But industry cannot act alone.

“We are calling on the Government to take a more active and coordinated leadership role. Skills policy must be practical, industry-aligned, and easy to navigate – and early and ongoing industry involvement in policy development is essential to ensuring solutions address the realities faced by employers and training providers alike.

“Through sustained collaboration between industry, education, and government, we can build a workforce ready to meet the housing challenge ahead.”

www.hbf.co.uk/

On 20 May, the AluK Design Studio in London hosted the “50 Careers in a Day” Careers Festival. The festival was organised by Building Our Skills, and brought together students and careers professionals. It was designed to promote the wide variety of careers available across the construction industry, highlighting the sector’s diversity, creativity, and opportunities for progression, explained **Beena Nana**, FIS Head of Skills and Training.

Beena said: “It offered an engaging environment where attendees could explore job roles across exhibitors – from design and engineering to façade installation and heritage crafts.”

FIS attended the festival to promote the variety of exciting career paths available in the finishes and fit-out sector. Representing a fast-growing part of the construction industry, she said: “We helped to showcase the value of industry-led training, craftsmanship, and career progression in areas such as drylining, plastering, ceiling installation, and interior systems. We were supported on the day by Locker & Riley, a specialist heritage plastering firm, and **Keith Langton**, a highly respected heritage plasterer. Together, we delivered an engaging, hands-on activity that introduced students to the intricate art of decorative plasterwork.”

She went on to explain the festival created a platform for collaboration and highlighted the critical role of employer engagement in supporting future talent pipelines. With programmes like Skills Bootcamps and apprenticeship pathways gaining traction, the message is clear: young people need exposure, encouragement, and real-world insight to consider construction as a rewarding, creative, and sustainable career option – The “50 Careers in a Day” was a success.

She concluded by saying: “We were proud that FIS and its members played a central role in delivering engaging activities, the day demonstrated how industry partnerships can truly inspire the next generation.”

Future careers festivals:

Date: 2 July

Venue: Emirates Old Trafford Cricket Club

Date: 8 July

Venue: St Andrews Stadium, Birmingham

If you would like further information about either of these festivals, please contact Beena Nana at beenanana@thefis.org

Image courtesy of HBF



LEARNING FROM ACROSS THE POND: INSIGHTS FROM THE AWCI CONFERENCE IN THE U.S.

Dale Harper-Jones,
Managing Director
at ATJ Group



Dale explained that he was introduced to Michael Stark, CEO of AWCI, by FIS Chief Executive Iain McIlwee. He said: "Michael piqued my interest, and I was eager to learn more about the AWCI and further understand how U.S. specialist contractors are leveraging technology and addressing key challenges such as safety, labour shortages, training, sustainability, and collaboration.

"I wanted to use my findings and key takeaways to benefit the ATJ Group as the content was thought provoking and very relevant to the UK market."

"In September 2024, I had the opportunity to attend the AWCI 2024 Industry Leaders Conference in the U.S. and would like to share some of these key takeaways with you. Here they are:"

How the US address safety concerns in the drywall and ceiling industry

Safety emerged as a paramount concern during the conference discussions. The U.S. drywall and ceiling sector has faced significant safety challenges, with falls, slips, and trips being particularly prevalent. In 2023, these incidents accounted for 39.2% of workplace deaths in the construction industry, highlighting the need for enhanced safety protocols.

To combat these issues, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has intensified its focus on safety within this sector. Notably, OSHA renewed its alliance with the Drywall and Acoustical Tile Contractors Association in January 2023 to promote workplace safety and health. This

Dale Harper-Jones, Managing Director at ATJ Group, attended the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry's (AWCI) 2024 Industry Leaders Conference in Hollywood, California. He shares how U.S. specialist contractors are leveraging technology and addressing the same key challenges as their counterparts in the UK.

collaboration aims to provide information, guidance, and training resources to construction industry employers, emphasising the importance of safeguarding workers.

In addition to this, AWCI has developed comprehensive safety guidelines tailored for wall and ceiling industry workers. These guidelines show best practices for fall protection, personal protective equipment, and hazard communication, aiming to mitigate common risks associated with drywall and ceiling installations.

Tackling labour shortages with technology and workforce development

A consistent theme throughout the conference was the challenge of attracting and retaining skilled labour. In the U.S., the average age of a dryliner is approaching 50, and — much like in the UK — the pipeline of young talent is worryingly thin.

To address this, some U.S. contractors have adopted prefabrication and modular solutions, not only to improve efficiency but also to reduce reliance on large on-site teams. As with the UK, this approach requires significant upfront investment in time, resources, capital and crucially, it demands strong commitment and collaboration across the supply chain.

What stood out most was the level of investment in workforce development. Several firms are collaborating directly with high schools and trade colleges, offering apprenticeships and hands-on training labs — many of which are partially funded through state and federal grants. This coordinated effort between industry, education, and Government is impressive, and stands in contrast to the more fragmented approach we are still developing in the UK.



Attendees congregating outside the Loews Hollywood Hotel. Photo republished with permission from the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry

Training goes digital and visual

Training delivery is evolving in the U.S., with some standout innovations. One notable example came from a contractor using augmented reality (AR) to train new operatives. By wearing AR headsets, trainees could view layered digital instructions overlaid onto real-world environments — ideal for learning how to install complex ceiling systems or achieve specific fire-rated partition requirements. This method has significantly reduced induction times and improved first-time quality.

For UK specialist contractors facing the challenge of getting trainees site-ready quickly, there's potential in this approach. A cost-effective VR/AR training hub, or even mobile training units could help accelerate learning, reduce rework, and support delivery on increasingly complex projects and specifications.

Sustainability

Sustainability was a key focal point throughout the event, not just in terms of materials, but in overall construction practices. One standout presentation showcased how digital twins are being used to simulate material usage and waste before a single sheet of plasterboard is cut. By testing multiple build scenarios virtually, the contractor reported a reduction in waste of up to 20%.

On the material front, U.S. suppliers are beginning to respond to growing demand for Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and carbon footprint data, although uptake appeared limited. The role of clients is pivotal where Government or institutional clients demand low-carbon solutions, contractors respond accordingly. The lesson for the UK is clear: if we want to see meaningful sustainable progress, demand must come from the top of the value chain.

Collaborative tech and clear expectations

In my experience, conflict on site — whether contractual or interpersonal — erodes both productivity and morale. A forward-thinking approach gaining traction in the U.S. is the use of Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) platforms. These systems bring scheduling, scope, and real-time issue tracking together into a shared digital space.



Day 2 of the Conference is in full swing. Photo republished with permission from the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry.

These platforms promote transparency between trades, contractors, architects, and clients (end to end). Problems can be flagged and resolved early, preventing them from escalating into disputes. One U.S. subcontractor described it as “clearing the fog before it settles.”

For the UK, there is an opportunity to embrace these platforms to generate real value from them. However, this will require investment in training and, critically, full buy-in across the entire value chain to ensure consistent and effective implementation.

In summary

The specialist contractors I met were not adopting technology for its own sake. Their approach was grounded in pragmatism,

embracing digital tools and new processes where they solved real problems. At its best, technology was not replacing skills, but enabling them to thrive in a more complex, digital construction environment.

As we face many of the same pressures, tight margins, an ageing workforce, and rising sustainability expectations, it's important that we look beyond our borders for smart, workable ideas. The U.S. market showed me that experimentation and collaboration are very much alive and well. The U.S. market did not appear as fragmented as it is in the UK, and it demonstrated to me that early engagement and a collaborative approach are key to successful project delivery and long-lasting, sustainable relationships.

About the AWCI

AWCI provides valuable technical and product information, education and training, industry contacts and the collaborations essential to operating a successful business. It is the principal organisation advocating the interests of contractors, suppliers and manufacturers in the wall and ceiling industries in the U.S.

On 11 March 1918, 26 lathing and plastering contractors assembled to form the Contracting Plasterers International Association (CPIA). The founders of this new organisation planned for the CPIA to perform two important functions: to establish friendly and cooperative interests among the members and to provide service to the building public.

As time passed, the CPIA would change its name four times to mirror a change in the industry or in the association's membership. The first name change occurred in 1955. In an effort to oppose any effort to separate the lathing from the plastering trade, the new name became the Contracting Plasterers' and Lathers' International Association (CPLIA). In 1969, when the volume of drywall/acoustical tile being contracted by CPLIA members had increased significantly, the association changed its name to the international association of the Wall & Ceiling Contractors (iaWCC's). After a successful merger with the Gypsum Drywall Contractors International, iaWCC's name was changed to a combination of the two merging organisations, iaWCC/GDCI. The two associations consolidated 1 July, 1976.

Finally, after the merger had “settled,” the name was changed to the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries International, and more recently, the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry.

Today, more than 100 years since its founding, AWCI represents nearly 2,400 companies and organisations in the acoustics systems,

ceiling systems, drywall systems, exterior insulation and finish systems, fireproofing, insulation, prefabrication/panelisation and stucco industries. Members are contractors, suppliers and manufacturers and those in allied trades. AWCI's mission is to connect people in the wall and ceiling industry to innovate, grow and succeed.

Mission

To provide resources to grow, research to inform, and philanthropy to Caring Action Relief in Emergency Situations (CARE), in support of the wall and ceiling industry.

Future Conferences

Industry Leaders Conference

November 11-13

Louisville, Kentucky

Registration opens July 28

www.awci.org/events/industry-leaders-conference

BUILD26: AWCI's Convention + Expo

March 15-18, 2026

New Orleans, Louisiana

Registration for members will open October 6; nonmembers

November 3

www.AWCIbuild.org

To find out more visit: www.awci.org

Celebrating the industry's best

FIS announced the winners of its prestigious Contractors Awards at a gala lunch held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in the heart of London.

The ceremony on 5 June honoured the remarkable craftsmanship, exceptional collaboration and exemplary adherence to best practices within the finishes and interiors community. Showcasing a diverse array of fantastic projects, the event recognised the outstanding achievements of FIS members in eight categories.

Guest judge **Mike Hayes**, previously of PwC, announced Ornate Interiors for its work



Project of the Year Winner: Ornate Interiors for its work at Bradford Live

at Bradford Live, as the winner of the 2025 Project of the Year, which he selected from the award-winning projects.

Commenting Mike said: "Selecting one winner from an outstanding and diverse range of projects made the job of final selection extremely difficult. This project not only represents an exceptional technical achievement but revitalised an historic building which had stood derelict for two decades."

Commenting on this year's entries, independent FIS Award Judges, **Tony Pieri** and **Colin Hunter** said: "We don't just judge these projects on their overall finished appearance. Other factors – sustainability, design input, problem-solving, logistics, value-added initiatives and integration – are all factored into our assessment of the work involved. As ever, the final judging evaluation comes down to minimal decimal point differentiation between those achieving or not achieving an award.

"As usual, FIS contractor members have excelled themselves in presenting to us a myriad of high-quality, stunning projects and it has been a real pleasure to witness such outstanding and varied work again this year".

The awards were announced by double Olympic gold-medallist James Cracknell OBE and presented by category sponsors Minster, SIG, British Gypsum, CCF, Go Interiors, Protektor, Hadley Group, Troldekt, Zentia and EPD Insulation Group.

To find out more about the outstanding winners across all the categories, visit: <http://www.thefis.org/award-winners-2025>

Ornate Interiors receiving their Project of the Year award



New online Innovation Hub launched to showcase cutting-edge products, digital tools, and sustainable solutions for finishes and interiors sector

A new Innovation Hub, developed by the Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) officially launches this month, to redefine how innovation is discovered, shared and adopted across the finishes and interiors sector.

The Innovation Hub brings together the latest in product development, digital transformation, and sustainability-driven design under one virtual roof. Housed on the SpecFinish platform, the Hub also features award-winning innovations from the FIS Innovation Awards.

Designed to serve architects, designers, specifiers, contractors, and manufacturers, the Innovation Hub showcases new solutions that are shaping the future of interior environments.

From smart materials and digital planning tools to low-carbon finishes and circular economy models, the platform provides curated access to what's next in the industry.

Key features of the Innovation Hub Include:

- **New products:** Discover the latest cutting-edge materials, finishes, and systems directly from leading brands and emerging disruptors.
- **Digital solutions:** Uncover the latest digital tools that help streamline project planning – from reuse and circular solutions to capturing the golden thread of information.

• **Sustainable Innovations:** Access verified green solutions, low-impact products, and initiatives aligned with LEED, WELL, BREEAM, and other standards. With the sector under increasing pressure to innovate responsibly and digitally, the Innovation Hub provides a much-needed platform to accelerate adoption of forward-thinking solutions.

Visit: www.specfinish.co.uk/innovation-hub to explore the Innovation Hub

For further information or for any questions please contact FIS at info@thefis.org or call **0121 707 0077**.

GO Interiors launches fresh new website for interior construction professionals

GO Interiors, an independent national distributor of interior building materials, has launched a fresh new website, bringing its customer-first ethos into the digital space. Designed for contractors, builders, and developers, the platform offers a seamless, user-friendly experience with simplified product categorisation, interactive tools, and expert resources.

Finding the right insulation, suspended ceilings, drylining, office partitions, and fire protection materials from trusted brands like Siniat, British Gypsum, Knauf, Zentia, Rockfon, Ecophon, Isover, Rockwool, Guardian, Promat, TruLine, and Superglass is now easier than ever, thanks to improved navigation and enhanced functionality.

Key features of the new website

- Comprehensive product catalogue: Quickly find the right solution with intuitive navigation
- Interactive manufacturer price changes tool: Stay up to date with the latest pricing
- Live chat support: Instant access to expert assistance
- Accurate product information: Developed in close collaboration with leading manufacturers to ensure clarity and accuracy
- FIS guides and resources: Including the Specifiers Guide to Drylining and best practice installation references

To find out more visit: www.gointeriors.co.uk

Knauf Insulation announces new low-carbon rock mineral insulation plant in North Wales



Knauf Insulation has announced the intended location of its new rock mineral insulation manufacturing plant in Shotton, Clwyd, North Wales (UK).

Strategically located less than two miles from the existing Knauf Insulation Queensferry plant, the large-scale facility will be constructed on land to be acquired from Tata Steel's existing operational steelworks in Deeside. With an annual capacity in excess of 100,000 tonnes, the new plant demonstrates a strong commitment to meet the growing market demand for sustainable, non-combustible insulation solutions.

This major investment of circa €200 million will be a UK-first, submerged arc furnace electric melting technology to produce low embodied carbon insulation.

Beyond delivering an even more sustainable portfolio of products, the planned Shotton facility is poised to play a vital role in the local economy. The project is expected to generate around 140 direct jobs across a variety of roles; from skilled manufacturing positions to engineering, warehouse and administrative functions. Additionally, the plant will further stimulate regional supply chains and create additional indirect employment opportunities.

Subject to planning, environmental and other considerations, construction of the Shotton plant is scheduled to begin in 2026, with production anticipated to start by the end of 2027.

To read the story in full visit: <https://specfinish.co.uk/knauf-insulation-announces-new-low-carbon-rock-mineral-insulation-plant-in-north-wales>

Members milestones

Workplace Interiors Co: Max Hough, Director at Workplace Interiors Co, recently shared that the company has made the UK's Best Workplaces List.

Max said: "I can't explain how proud I am of the team for this Great Place to Work UK achievement – because yes, it's a team effort and a huge credit to our wonderful group."

Portview: Paul Scullion, Managing Director at Portview, announced that the company is proudly celebrating 50 years of delivering extraordinary spaces across the UK, Ireland and beyond.

Paul said: "It began in Belfast in 1975 as a humble construction company and has grown into a trusted fit-out partner for many of the world's most prestigious brands.

This milestone not only reflects the company's impressive achievements but also its core values of Genuine, Respect, Excellence, Ambition and Teamwork."

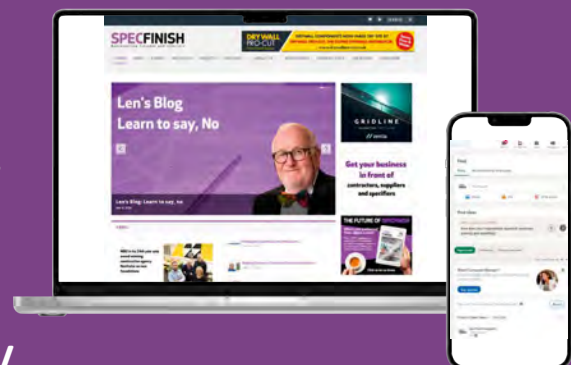
Middlesex: The company has reached the significant milestone of 20 years — a testament to two decades of determination, resilience, innovation, growth, and success. They reflected on the journey, noting how they have overcome challenges, embraced opportunities, and evolved into the company they are today. They thanked their team, brilliant suppliers, and the trust of their valued clients, stating that none of this would have been possible without them.

To read more about these amazing achievements visit: <https://specfinish.co.uk/category/news>

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Digest the latest insightful and engaging News, Projects, Products, Events and Features from our sector at www.specfinish.co.uk and our Social Media site on LinkedIn

www.linkedin.com/company/specfinish-magazine/



REWARDING INDUSTRY'S BEST



FIS

CONTRACTORS AWARDS 2026

DEADLINE 31 OCTOBER 2025
• Apply online at thefis.org

The FIS contractors awards celebrate high levels of craftsmanship and best practice in the finishes and interiors sector. The awards are a platform for contractor members to demonstrate the quality and excellence of their work to clients and the wider sector.

#FISawards



“Winning the 2024 FIS Project of the Year was a pinnacle moment for Space Interior Systems. I’m so proud of my team and our work, and it’s great to have that recognised.”

NICK BOND
MANAGING DIRECTOR
SPACE INTERIOR SYSTEMS