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SPEC FINISH

FIS

The magazine of FIS
representing the finishes
and interiors sector

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OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ISSUES: HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR EMPLOYEES

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CHALLENGING OURSELVES WITH BETTER QUESTIONS

A universal answer is often a pipedream, but a set of common questions is key to helping us find the right solution.

IAIN MCILWEE
Chief Executive,
Finishes and
Interiors Sector



The FIS Conference at the Workspace Design Show was a couple of days spent putting our questions to leading experts, helping us confront key challenges together. We didn't solve construction, but there is always solace in realising that our problems are shared. In almost every session, we returned to some fundamental truths — whether it's productivity, sustainability, quality, safety, or compliance — better is about:

- Clear allocation of responsibility and accountability (defined in contracts that accurately describe this).
- Engaging the right people at the right time (almost always that means earlier and in a more collaborative way than we do now!)
- Thinking ahead, making it easy for the next person in the chain (not just shovelling risk).
- Thinking beyond the end of the project (considering the whole life of the building and the products used to build it).
- Always about asking the right people, the right questions at the right time.

As I sat there soaking up all the information, I started thinking about the next set

of questions — and whether the questions we are being asked are the right ones. Too often, these are driven by:

- Can you do it cheaper? (Not if we cut corners what will this mean to our outcomes and the overall lifetime costs?).
- Can you do it quicker? (Not if you accelerate the programme, what risks does that introduce?).

I'm sure you could come up with your own set of questions that would help lead us to better results, but here's my starter for 10: Would you build it like that if...

- You had to show it off as work you're proud of in five years' time?
- It was you carrying the materials to the site face?
- You had to maintain it?
- Your kids had to sleep in there?
- You had to dismantle it?
- You had to pay to dispose of it at the end of its life?

We kept coming back to systemic thinking. The fractionalisation of design and risk in construction means there are more and more moving parts. Changes to the Building Regulations recognise this and focus the process on clarity of duty, particularly the coordinating duties of Principal Designer and Principal Contractor — someone responsible for the overall design and engineering performance of the building and someone for making sure we built it like that.

The conference was also a reminder that it isn't always easy. Affordable is a hard line. Invariably we have to compromise, but compromise is an answer, but it doesn't excuse not asking the questions. To understand what we are compromising, we still have to ask the right questions.

It is clear from the discussion that the intent is there, but in the real world we are not seeing the changes yet. But yet doesn't mean we won't, and I finished quoting Bob Dylan (I blame the ear worm linked to seeing the Bob Dylan film the weekend prior). "The old road is rapidly changing".

The regulators, the planners, the funders and the insurers are waking up to the need for change — the clients too are now driven by enhanced regulatory responsibility that they can't just contract out, while the regulator is guided by legally binding carbon targets. While this is, ironically, driving negative behaviours, it is beginning to draw out better questions. From this, we can take hope. In hindsight, I wish I'd finished with a different quote: systemic change doesn't happen overnight, and sometimes it may feel imperceptible, but...

"The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year."

So maybe the most important question now is "What are we going to do different next time!?"

Welcome

SPEC FINISH

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SpecFinish magazine wrapper

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XFrame won the Sustainability Innovation Award and was voted by the audience as the Overall Innovation of the Year. (L-R) Collecting the Sustainability Innovation Award was Paul McIntosh, Founder & CEO of XFrame from David Crowson, Editor of SpecFinish and Iain McIlwee, CEO of FIS.

WELCOME TO THE APRIL ISSUE OF SPECFINISH

On writing this, it feels like spring is finally here, and we have the hope of longer and brighter days. On a personal note, I think this generally gives us all a spring in our step and a positive outlook on dealing with the challenges life and business throw at us.

February, however, as always, provides some cheer, as I attended the exceptional two-day FIS Conference and Innovation Awards at the Business Design Centre in London.

It is always exciting to meet attendees and hear the informative and, at times, surprising presentations and insights from the guest speakers. One of the guest speakers I had the pleasure of listening to and then meeting was the charismatic and dynamic Kevin P'ng, who, I am delighted to say, has shared with us on page 12 a very honest and interesting reflection on his journey so far. This includes his unconventional entry into construction after being a DJ, his progression from an admin role to Managing Director, and his determination to challenge what he calls the industry's norms while advocating for a more progressive and collaborative approach.

I also had the pleasure of presenting the Sustainability Innovation Award at the Innovation Awards ceremony, which showcases the innovative spirit within the finishes and interiors sector, debunking the myth that innovation is lacking in the construction industry. Congratulations to all the winners in the three categories, those shortlisted, and the overall Innovation of the Year winner, as voted for by the audience: XFrame for their product, XFrame Circular Built Solutions. You can read more about the awards on page 24.

There was a notable absence from this event, Joe Cilia, who has now retired. Joe was an integral part of the FIS team for 15 years. He is well-known and respected throughout the sector, and his knowledge, enthusiasm, and experience will be greatly missed. Thank you, Joe, and I am sure you will join me in wishing him well in his retirement. Read more on page 28.

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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Shining a light on bad practice (not our walls)

Drylining contractors are facing unfair snagging practices on plaster or tape and jointed walls using LED lights at shallow angles close to, or directly against the surface of the wall to highlight surface imperfections which would otherwise be acceptable under industry standard inspection methods. This is increasingly done in order to substantiate delay, reduction or withholding of payment causing hundreds or small businesses to struggle making ends meet.

We need to encourage people into the industry but when young people see the culture, the bullying the ruthless nature that is so obvious in our industry it leaves them cold and many leave before they have had chance to really see what a good career the construction industry can offer.



FIS has published a technical note detailing best practice in finishing trades and appropriate methods of inspection which can be found on our website: <https://tinyurl.com/3jx6x6hn>

Government unveils comprehensive response to Grenfell Inquiry

The Government published its full response to the Grenfell Inquiry, detailing its plans to address all 58 of the report's recommendations. The response reiterates the Government's commitment to delivering a "strong response" to the recommendations. The changes will be delivered using a "three-phased approach" over the course of this Parliament to deliver "meaningful change as quickly as possible."

49 of the recommendations are being accepted in full by the Government and other responsible organisations. Regarding the remaining nine, which are all directed at the Government, it accepts them in principle and outlines in its response how it will implement them.

To coincide with the response, the Government published a construction products green paper, which outlines proposals for system-wide reform of the construction products sector, the regulatory regime that governs it, and the institutions responsible for ensuring safe products that can be used safely.

Among the other recommendations, number 21 will be particularly significant for the finishes and interiors sector.

Recommendation 21: That a licensing scheme operated by the construction regulator be introduced for principal contractors wishing to undertake the construction or refurbishment of higher-risk buildings and that it be a legal requirement that any application for building control approval for the construction or refurbishment of a higher-risk building (Gateway 2) be supported by a personal undertaking from a director or senior manager of the principal contractor to take all reasonable care to ensure that on completion and handover the building is as safe as is required by the Building Regulations. (113.33)

The Government accepts this

recommendation: They will review the impact of the new dutyholder regime in relation to higher-risk buildings, working with the sector to determine how they can go further, including introducing a licensing scheme for principal contractors where a licence may be granted on the basis of criteria aligned with the dutyholder requirements and can be withdrawn for failure to achieve compliance with the regulations.

To read the Governments response in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/ycy8r7u4>

Improving the commercial management of construction projects

One of the most common pitfalls for contractors is failing to issue contractual notices at the required time. Notices play a crucial role in protecting entitlements to extensions of time (EOT), additional payments, and other contractual rights. The CICV has produced a number of practice notes to guide contractors on best practice.

Practice Note 1: Notice

Aimed at improving the commercial management of construction projects by guiding subcontractors and contractors on best practices.

Practice Note 1A: Notices under NEC

Highlighting key specific notice provisions under NEC3 & 4 Engineering and Construction Contracts and the NEC3 & 4 Engineering and Construction Subcontract.

Practice Note 2: Records, records, records

Designed to enhance commercial management in construction projects by promoting best practices for record-keeping.

Practice Note 3: Contract amendments

Aims to highlight key contractual risks, explain why early contract review is essential, and provide guidance on managing amendments effectively.

Practice Note 4: Variations & compensation events

Highlights the risks associated with variations in construction contracts, including onerous clauses, conditional precedents, and the risks of performing work without formal instructions.

Practice Note 5: Payment applications & schedules

Provides best practices for preparing and managing payment applications to maximise your chances of getting paid on time and in full.

To read the Practice Notes in full visit: <https://www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/contractual-and-legal/conflict-avoidance-pledge/>

HOW CAN YOU EDUCATE AND INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION?

Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training, explores the vital role that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Ambassadors and the Fit-Out Futures Network play in inspiring the next generation of workers into our sector and helping to shape the future of the construction industry.

STEM Ambassadors: Who they are and what they do

In an era where the construction industry is evolving rapidly, the need for skilled workers is more crucial than ever. Enter STEM Ambassadors — dedicated professionals who use their expertise and passion to inspire the next generation of workers. Their impact on encouraging young people in the construction sector is significant, and here is how they make a difference.

- **Sharing real-world experiences:** STEM Ambassadors bring invaluable insights from their personal career journeys, shedding light on the diverse opportunities that the construction sector offers. By sharing their day-to-day experiences, challenges, and successes, they paint a realistic picture of the industry. This transparency not only sparks interest but also motivates young people to envision themselves in various roles within construction.
- **Engaging workshops and demonstrations:** Hands-on learning is a powerful tool, and STEM Ambassadors excel at it. By hosting interactive workshops and demonstrations, they allow individuals to engage with the practical aspects of construction. Whether it is through virtual reality tours of construction sites or live demonstrations of cutting-edge technology, these experiences make the learning process engaging and tangible, igniting a passion for the field.
- **Mentoring and guidance:** The journey through training and career development can be daunting, but with STEM Ambassadors as mentors, they can provide invaluable support. Establishing

mentorship programs fosters an environment where individuals can receive guidance, navigate challenges, and build confidence. This mentorship not only helps with skill development but also creates a sense of belonging within the industry.

- **Promoting diversity and inclusion:** A thriving construction industry is one that embraces diversity. STEM Ambassadors actively advocate for inclusivity by encouraging participation from underrepresented groups. By sharing success stories and providing resources, they help break down stereotypes and create opportunities for a more diverse workforce, enriching the industry as a whole.
- **Creating pathways to apprenticeships:** Collaboration is key in building a robust workforce. STEM Ambassadors work with educational institutions and industry partners to create clear pathways to apprenticeships. By developing tailored programs that align with industry needs, they ensure that apprentices receive the necessary training for a successful career, bridging the gap between education and employment.

Through these multifaceted efforts, STEM Ambassadors are not just inspiring apprentices; they are helping to shape the future of the construction industry. By emphasising the dynamic and rewarding nature of construction, they are cultivating a new generation of skilled professionals ready to embrace growth and innovation. As they continue to champion the cause, the future of construction looks brighter than ever.



Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training

FIS and Go Construct STEM Ambassadors

The Go Construct STEM Ambassador Scheme is a programme that aims to inspire young people to consider a career in construction and the built environment by showcasing the amazing career opportunities in construction. The scheme is partnered with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB).

Go Construct STEM Ambassadors are construction professionals and tradespeople who act as the face of the industry for young people, sharing their real-life experiences and bringing to life the use of STEM within the sector.

FIS has an established and growing Go Construct STEM Ambassador Network, with ambassadors across our membership.

The Fit-Out Futures Network

The Fit-Out Futures Network was launched by FIS in 2024 to encourage and empower change by capturing and enhancing the thoughts, ideas, and energy of rising stars and individuals from diverse backgrounds within the sector. Fit-Out Futures operates as a dynamic network that connects people from diverse backgrounds and younger individuals working in the community, allowing them to share experiences and contribute their insights into the work of FIS.

The network consists of emerging professionals who are redefining the future of the fit-out industry. Their mission is to drive innovation and create a modern, inclusive sector that attracts and empowers the next generation of talent.

The FIS STEM network and the Fit-Out Futures Network complement each other perfectly, creating a natural pathway to engage young people in both the industry and our sector.

A “Day in the life”

I spoke to three industry figures, all of whom are FIS STEM Ambassadors, and two are committee members of the Fit-Out Futures Network, to learn what a typical day looks like when they are engaged in these activities. Here's what they had to say:



Paul Mulinganie, Commercial Plaster Support Manager from British Gypsum

Paul Mulinganie, Commercial Plaster Support Manager from British Gypsum, said: “Being a STEM Ambassador is a fantastic part of my role, as it allows me to encourage young people into what I believe is the best trade in the world. I participate in many assemblies, which are great to do, and then go into individual classes to share my journey of 40 years in the industry this year.

“I have been incredibly lucky to see students, whom I met in the classroom, make the transition into the trade.

“I tend to visit my commercial site first and then head to the school. A lot of the time, it's a “guess my role?” activity, and while few guess it right immediately, the engagement becomes obvious when I discuss the history and skills involved. Nowadays, especially with AI and the changes it will bring to the job market in the coming years, a trade is a job that will always be in demand. The satisfaction of seeing what you've done or created can be priceless.

“STEM is key to giving students a taste of different roles. Even though it's not for everyone, for those considering a trade, it's the perfect opportunity to discuss the role and the variety within the trade.”



Oliver Turkman, Marketing Manager at Apton Partitioning

Oliver Turkman, Marketing Manager and STEM Ambassador from Apton Partitioning, tells us about his experience and links with STEM and being on the Fit-Out Futures Network committee.

“As always, my day starts with caffeine, a quick check of my emails, and a scroll through Apton's LinkedIn, Instagram, and NBS accounts to stay on top of everything,” said Oliver.

He continued by saying: “Today, I am working on a Fit-Out Futures workshop for a school in Bromsgrove, which I will be running with **Greg Greves**, Membership Coordinator at FIS. That means that most of my morning is spent brainstorming ideas, mainly focused on how to keep a group of primary school kids engaged for half an hour (easier said than done)!”

“This will be my third STEM event with Fit-Out Futures. The first was at a school in Wolverhampton with Greg and **Ed Tapper**, Site Supervisor at Tapper Interiors, and the second in Dudley with **Anna Cooper**, Senior Designer at Architectural Wallsz. Those sessions really showed why it's so important to reach kids early and give them a better idea of the different careers in construction.

“At my first STEM career days, we asked the kids what they thought of when they heard the word “construction.” Naturally, they mentioned what they could see: bricklaying, roadworks, and people in hi-vis vests. In the second event, they initially thought a senior designer was only related to fashion.

“These experiences are shaping the way I want the third workshop to go, and one of my main goals is to open their minds to the diverse range of careers in construction, beyond what's visible to them.

“By the time I've worked through ideas and put together a rough plan, it's lunchtime. A homemade sandwich or a meal deal, with the daily Wordle keeping me busy.

“As the workshop comes together, I can switch back to my Marketing Manager role at Apton Partitioning. I start by planning the social media posts for the week. Today, I'm focusing on a bespoke acoustic glass door we've created, which has a narrower profile for a project. Luke, our Technical Design Engineer, gave me the heads up, so I head round to the factory to take some photos before the door gets wrapped. After editing the photos, I spend the last hour of my day looking at our website's performance. I look at which pages are performing well and where we might need to adjust and tweak our strategy based off the data.”

Oliver concluded by saying: “And that's about it for the day. It's been a mix of marketing and STEM work, two different but both really interesting areas. Fit-Out Futures is all about helping young people see construction in a new light, and it's great to be involved in that. With the workshop plan coming together, I'm looking forward to the next event!”



Anna Cooper, Senior Designer at Architectural Wallsz

Anna Cooper, Senior Designer and STEM Ambassador from Architectural Wallsz, shares with us her reasons for becoming a STEM Ambassador and her involvement with the Fit-Out Futures Network.

Anna explained that she decided to become a STEM Ambassador as a way of helping to educate young people about the wide range of opportunities available in the fit-out industry and to challenge misconceptions about what it means to work in construction. She said: "Many people still associate construction solely with on-site labour, but in reality, the industry is a hub of innovation, creativity, and problem-solving, offering a diverse range of career paths."

"I am the Senior Designer at Architectural Wallsz, and a Committee Member of the Fit-Out Futures Network, initiated by the Finishes and Interiors Sector."

"My day-to-day work is incredibly varied. As a designer in an SME, I oversee projects from conception to completion, covering everything from marketing and client education to project installation. One of the key challenges in the construction industry, particularly when working with innovative systems, is developing and launching new products while ensuring everything aligns with the latest building safety and healthcare design standards. This requires a great deal of research and collaboration with other designers, engineers, and industry specialists."

Anna passionately said: "One of the main reasons I wanted to become a STEM Ambassador was to share my personal experience and help break the stigmas around construction-related careers. My journey into this field was unexpected — I initially pursued an LLB in law but soon realised that it wasn't the right path for me. As someone who has always been creative, I had been discouraged from pursuing a career in design because I wasn't aware of the opportunities available in technical and commercial design roles. However, working at Architectural Wallsz has allowed me to find a career that satisfies both my passion for creativity and my interest in rules, regulations, and problem-solving."

"Through my role as a STEM Ambassador, I've had the opportunity to interact with students, answer their questions, and open their minds to careers they may never have considered. In a recent STEM activity, I participated in an exercise designed to challenge stereotypes about different professions. The students were asked to guess what my job was based solely on a few hints, and it quickly became evident that many of them associated 'designer' exclusively with fashion, clothes, and makeup. This realisation was eye-opening and it reinforced the importance of initiatives like STEM outreach in broadening students' understanding of career opportunities."

"Beyond school visits, I have taken part in industry events, mentoring, and panel discussions with the Fit-Out Futures Network, all with the goal of raising awareness about challenges and opportunities in the fit-out industry. My involvement with the Fit-Out Futures Network has been instrumental in linking the goals and initiatives of the STEM programme with those of the network, helping to promote careers in the fit-out sector and ensuring young people have access to guidance and information that may otherwise be difficult to find."

She concluded by offering advice to anyone considering becoming a STEM Ambassador: "Go for it. Many young people are unaware of the vast opportunities available in STEM fields, particularly in construction. If more professionals took the time to engage with students, the impact it would have is invaluable. Being a STEM Ambassador has been a fulfilling and eye-opening experience for me, and I look forward to continuing to challenge misconceptions and showcase the exciting possibilities within the fit-out and construction sectors."

How to become a STEM Ambassador

Anyone working in the industry can be a Go Construct STEM Ambassador. You just need to be passionate about construction and the built environment, and willing to share your experiences with others.

Ambassadors lead a wide range of activities, including:

- Running a trade stand at a careers fair, answering questions and handing out leaflets
- Delivering a talk, sharing your experiences of getting into and working in the industry
- Leading practical sessions or workshops, giving young people a taste of life in construction
- Providing one-to-one mentorship to someone who is just starting out
- Helping teachers to develop curriculum resources and activities
- Network with like-minded professionals, developing your career as an ambassador.

To become a Go Construct STEM Ambassador, you will typically need to:

- **Visit the website:** www.goconstruct.org/educational-resources/go-construct-stem-ambassadors
- **Register with Go Construct:** Sign up on the Go Construct platform, creating a profile that details your background, experience, and interest in promoting STEM in the construction industry.
- **Complete training:** There is often some basic training or induction for STEM Ambassadors. This could include learning about safeguarding, how to engage with young people, and effective ways to promote STEM in the construction sector.
- **Apply for opportunities:** Once you're a registered ambassador, you can access various outreach opportunities such as school visits, career fairs, and STEM events. You can select the events and activities that suit your interests and schedule.

Alternatively, if you have any questions about becoming a STEM Ambassador, please get in touch with marieflinter@thefis.org who will be happy to offer you guidance and support.



TAKE BACK SCHEMES – CLOSING THE LOOP

An unacceptable 300 tonnes of waste is going to landfill every day from the fit-out sector. **Flavie Lowres**, FIS Sustainability Champion, discusses successful take-back schemes with four manufacturers, which have been created to help reduce the wastes and carbon emissions generated by our sector.



Flavie Lowres,
FIS Sustainability
Champion

The publication of the Overbury study on the environmental impact of CAT B projects and the Net Zero Carbon Building Standard (NZCB standard) has highlighted the importance of not only focusing on new

builds but also considering the impact of the fit-out sector. The NZCB standard shows that the embodied carbon target for a new build office should be below 600 kgCO₂eq/m², and a CAT B fit-out should be no more than 260 kgCO₂eq/m², reducing to 25 kgCO₂eq/m² by 2050. This will need to be achieved by using products with lower embodied carbon, as well as reused products.

The fit-out sector has often been quoted as being wasteful, with 300 tonnes of waste going to landfill every day. The circular economy approach looks at these wastes as resources and maximises the potential for their next life, either through closed-loop recycling or reuse opportunities. There are many ways to achieve this, but one key method is for manufacturers to take back their products. There are already successful examples of reuse take-back schemes, such as the RMF scheme for the take-back of raised access

flooring, and more are coming to life. Below are four more recent examples: recycling of mineral ceiling tile offcuts (Zentia), end-of-life recycling of flat glass (Saint-Gobain), and reuse of metal ceiling canopies (OWA) and glass partitions (Optima).



Zentia's Pinnacle Partner Programme and its take-back scheme

Zentia's Pinnacle Partner Programme is an initiative for specialist ceiling installers and is designed to elevate the standards of ceiling installations across the UK and Ireland.

The scheme offers a range of exclusive benefits, one of which is exclusive access to Zentia's off-cut recycling service, enabling installers to return unused ceiling tile off-cuts for recycling. This ensures that Zentia's Pinnacle Partners create less waste when completing their ceiling projects.

By collaborating with Pinnacle Approved Partners, the company aims to take back and recycle all off-cuts of its tiles from approved partners on future projects, thereby reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill sites. The returned materials are incorporated into the baseboard mix of new ceiling tiles.

Roy Gleiwitz, Regional Sales Manager at Zentia, said: "We are always looking for ways to improve our sustainability credentials, and the Pinnacle Partner off-cut recycling scheme is an example of this, as well as our commitment to UK manufacturing.

"By participating in this programme, contractors not only gain access to quality-assured installation services but also contribute to a more sustainable construction industry through the recycling of ceiling tile off-cuts and the sharing of invaluable knowledge."

www.zentia.com



Saint-Gobain Glass Forever programme

Saint-Gobain Glass is part of the 360 year old, global, Saint-Gobain Group, a business focused on the development and manufacture of construction and industrial product solutions, that help to make the world a better home. In September 2019, Saint-Gobain pledged that the Group would undertake a transition towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

"All areas of the Saint-Gobain Group are working to reduce carbon emissions and the need for virgin raw materials in the manufacturing of products.

"Glass Forever by Saint-Gobain Glass, launched in 2001, is a circular economy approach to flat glass recycling. The programme provides hands-on support and guidance to those involved in the glazing, construction and de-construction supply chains to recover as much end-of-life flat glass (cullet) as possible, to be re-manufactured into new, high-performance flat glass at Saint-Gobain's glass manufacturing site in Eggborough, East Yorkshire.

"Glass Forever is a comprehensive programme that provides solutions to recover cullet from all waste streams including pre-consumer cullet which includes off-cuts made during the processing of flat glass into glazing, and post-consumer cullet found in end-of-life buildings and refurbishment projects.

"Companies across glazing, construction and de-construction are partnering with Saint-Gobain to use the Glass Forever programme as part of their waste management processes, as one tonne of cullet can save 700kg of carbon being released into the atmosphere, and potentially saves 1.2 tonnes of virgin raw materials being used in the production of flat glass," said **Lee Glover**, Sustainability & Net-Zero Delivery Manager at Saint-Gobain Glass UK & Ireland.

www.saint-gobain.com/en



How OWA is giving its customers more with its new take-back scheme

Acoustic ceiling systems manufacturer OWA recently launched its new metal S14 acoustic canopy and with it, a new take-back scheme to help reduce waste product being sent to landfill.

Suitable for use across multiple sectors, S14 has been designed to enhance any contemporary open-plan interior space while offering class A sound absorption. The standard rectangular-shaped 2m by 1m canopies come in one piece to create stunning "floating" ceiling designs and have an integrated acoustic pad and suspension rods which make them easy to install, relocate and demount.

OWA's take-back scheme is available for projects where the standard S14 acoustic canopies are specified as part of the initial CAT A fit-out. Should the canopies no longer be required, OWA can collect the packaged and palletised products for reuse on other projects, including charitable and community initiatives. Customers can also choose a recycled and "nearly new" S14 acoustic canopy for their next project.

Andrew Smith, Managing Director of OWA's UK division, comments: "Take-back schemes play an important part in reducing waste and promoting the reuse of materials which is exactly why we wanted to offer this service to our customers. As a member of the FIS Sustainability Leadership group, I am well aware of the challenges, and opportunities, that those working in the interiors sector are facing in the quest to reduce the environmental impact of our work. Designing for deconstruction and promoting the reuse of materials, especially for CAT A fit-outs where the ceiling lifespan might be relatively short, is one solution and one that can work extremely well for everyone".

www.owa-ceilings.co.uk



Take back, reuse & recycle: Closing the loop on sustainable interiors

"Sustainability isn't just a goal at Optima – it's a responsibility. Our take-back service ensures that UK-installed Optima products are repurposed or recycled, keeping valuable materials in circulation and reducing environmental impact. By extending the lifecycle of our materials, we help lower greenhouse gas emissions, conserve resources, and minimise waste," said **Andrew Stammers** TechIOSH, Energy, Sustainability & Standards Support Lead at Optima.

Andrew continued by saying: "Through this initiative, we carefully demount systems, separate materials, and return them to our UK manufacturing facility. Components fit for reuse are repurposed for future projects as pre-owned systems, while others are responsibly recycled. In 2024 alone, we diverted nearly 15 tonnes of aluminium to Hydro Aluminium for recycling and recovered over 600 ironmongery components – including hinges and lock housings – for reuse. While bespoke glass panels are often unsuitable for reuse, we ensure all recovered glass is recycled appropriately.

"At Optima, sustainability drives innovation. By integrating circular economy principles into our operations, we close the material loop, maximise the potential of our glass partitions, and reinforce our commitment to responsible manufacturing."

He concluded: "We make decisions based on what's right, not just what's required. For us, leading the way in sustainable partitioning isn't about standing out — it's about standing firm in our principles."

<https://optimasystems.com>

In conclusion

It is not always simple for manufacturers to take back their products. For starters, they lose control of their products once sold – they may know when it has been installed, but they do not know if it is still there.

Mining the existing urban environment for resources sounds like a no-brainer, as it is a source of raw materials, but it is not without risks. For starters, manufacturers may need to adjust their manufacturing processes, ensure confidence in the quality of the supply, and manage quantities effectively. If they take back products for reuse, they must also have confidence in the market. For these reasons, I believe it is important to raise the profiles of these schemes to support their success.



FIS is also piloting a project to enable the reuse of suspended metal ceiling tiles and luminaires. The learnings are being shared on our website: www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/sustainability/reuse

During this project, we have learned a great deal about reusing products. In particular, we have discovered that segregating (for recycling), careful disassembly and packaging (for reuse), and early engagement are key to the success of the take-back process. If you are interested, it is important to speak with manufacturers to understand the conditions (type, quantity, condition, packaging, costs, etc.) of the take-back schemes to ensure their success.

FROM NIGHTCLUB DJ TO MANAGING A £250M FIT-OUT BUSINESS

Kevin P'ng, Managing Director at BW: Workplace Experts, discusses with **David Crowson**, Editor, his unconventional entry into construction, his inspirational journey from an admin role to Managing Director, and his determination to challenge what he calls the industry's norms while advocating for a more progressive and collaborative approach.



Kevin DJing in a nightclub



Right: Kevin P'ng, Managing Director at BW: Workplace Experts

Charismatic, dynamic, intelligent, and passionate — these qualities together depict a person who not only draws others in but also inspires and energises them, while also being knowledgeable and deeply committed to their goals. I have met people in the past who possess these qualities, and when I recently met Kevin and witnessed his presentation, Rethinking design co-ordination - What is the future for novation and design and build, at the FIS Conference at the Workspace Design Show, I could see why he holds the prestigious position of Managing Director at BW: Workplace Experts and is viewed by many in our industry as a shining light.

Reflecting on his journey, Kevin explained, that his entry into construction was unconventional. He was extremely open about his early years. At 22, he failed his master's in architecture and environmental engineering, which left him with debt and no clear direction. He spent a year managing events and DJing in nightclubs before taking an admin role at a builderswork contractor. He said: "This wasn't just my first construction job — it was an immersion into contracting and the industry's intricate machinery.

"From processing invoices, I became fascinated with how every part of a project interconnected. That curiosity evolved into an interest in costs, estimating, and ultimately quantity surveying. I worked as a subcontractor, main contractor, and consultant, gaining a holistic understanding of the industry. Each role deepened my appreciation for the complexities of construction."

From 2013: The incredible journey

Kevin told me he joined BW: Workplace Experts in 2013. At that time, it was a £50m turnover business with 50 staff and six surveyors. He proudly said: "Today, the business is over five times that size, and my own growth has mirrored this transformation. From delivering my first BCO-winning project to managing projects worth £10m, then £20m, £30m, £50m, and beyond.

"In tandem, leadership has been an ongoing journey. I went from managing and being responsible for numbers to much more — extending my reach to leading people, culture, and vision.

"My growth has been shaped by incredible individuals whose integrity and resilience

have inspired me. Construction is high-pressure and demands quick decision-making. Despite this, collaboration and camaraderie continue to reassuringly shine through.

"Growth inevitably brings challenges. As BW: Workplace Experts scaled, we had to balance expansion with retaining our identity. How do you maintain a close-knit culture while adapting to the demands of a £250m business? This required streamlining processes, strengthening team structures, planning for succession, and investing in training. Delegation was key — successful management is not about doing everything yourself, but about building and empowering an efficient team.

"This year, I turned 37 — coinciding with BW: Workplace Experts 25th anniversary. Our growth has been symbiotic, and the past 12 years at BW: Workplace Experts have been extraordinary."

Challenging the norms

Beyond internal growth, industry leaders must challenge established norms, especially in areas such as procurement, preconstruction, and risk. In my opinion, too often contractors

avoid sharing knowledge due to misplaced fears of collusion. Yet, without dialogue, how can we improve? Projects today suffer from fragmented interests and misplaced risk. If we are serious about change, we need to talk, explained Kevin.

Kevin said: "Construction's biggest challenges remain trust, ownership, and accountability. The industry has long prioritised the lowest price and fastest programme over long-term value. Every failed project proves why this must change. Trust cannot be built on one-sided contracts and transactional relationships; it needs collective responsibility. Recent regulatory changes have offered us a much-needed wake up but also an opportunity to move away from outdated procurement models and foster long-term partnerships."

The future: A progressive and collaborative approach

Kevin went on to say: "Technology will be instrumental, bringing transparency, predictability, and efficiency however, technology alone will not solve the systemic cultural challenges. That requires a mindset shift — from fragmentation and competition to co-operation and accountability. Leadership must push for a different way of working. Those of us in senior roles have a responsibility to drive this change and leave a positive legacy."

Looking ahead

"My focus for the next 12 years is to ensure we continue setting the standard — not just in project delivery, but in leadership, culture, and collaboration.

"Change cannot happen overnight, but it starts with how we think, build, and engage. Construction has always been an industry of problem-solvers, but for too long, we have been solving the wrong problems. The future must be different. It must be about trust, fairness, and a shared commitment to doing things better. That is the industry I want to help build and inspire," concluded Kevin.



(L-R) Kevin P'ng, Managing Director and William McDonagh, Construction Director of BW: Workplace Experts

www.wearebw.com

PEOPLE IN BRIEF



Causeway Technologies promotes Paul Devlin to CEO as Phil Brown transitions to Executive Chairman

Causeway Technologies announced that Chief Operating Officer Paul Devlin, has been promoted to Chief Executive Officer. In his new role, Paul will head the executive senior leadership and guide the day-day operations of a workforce of more than 500 employees addressing the needs of over 3,000 customers worldwide. At the top of Paul's agenda will be accelerated growth fueled by the roll out of CausewayOne, including a significant investment in Data and AI as well as building on the unique culture of the company.

www.causeway.com



Encon appoints new Regional Fire Protection Manager

The Encon Group has appointed Joe Hindmarch as its new Regional Fire Protection Manager for the Midlands and North. Joe is responsible for providing passive fire protection support to customers in the region, as well as Encon's internal and external sales teams. Joe will work closely with Encon's North East, Leeds, North West, Wrexham, Nottingham and Birmingham branches to support customers with the products, knowledge and guidance they need for their projects.

www.encon.co.uk



Lorna Hagan joins the GIRI Training & Consultancy training delivery team

In response to the growing demand for Get It Right Initiative (GIRI) training, the GIRI Training & Consultancy has expanded its team of trainers with the addition of Lorna Hagan.

Lorna began delivering the training in February. She is a civil engineer with more than 20 years experience in the construction industry and a member of the Chartered Quality Institute. She has worked for organisations including Graham, J Murphy & Sons, and Farrans Construction in roles such as site engineer, site agent, cost estimator, quality manager, and head of quality.

www.getitright.uk.com



Peter Slaney announces his retirement – well, semi-retirement

Peter Slaney, Managing Director at Hartsmere UK, recently shared: "The time has finally come for me to retire – well, at least semi-retire."

Peter confirmed that he will remain actively involved with FIS, particularly in training and qualifications, and with The National Open College Network (NOCN) to provide NVQ assessments and apprentice EPA's in interior systems.

He thanked everyone he has worked with throughout the last 38 years, especially those in the movable wall business.

www.hartsmere.co.uk



COMPETENCY AND DIGITALISATION: HOW THE INDUSTRY IS REACTING TO NEW COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

Turning challenges into opportunities through cooperation and collaboration, as well as the impact of digitalisation, were at the heart of a recent FIS roundtable sponsored by British Gypsum that focused on how to meet new competence requirements.

Participants

Iain McIlwee, Chief Executive at FIS (roundtable chair)
Dave Robinson, Head of Technical Support at British Gypsum
Craig Pratt, Technical Development and Training Director at Saint-Gobain Interior Solutions
Amanda Long, Chief Executive at CCPI
Debbie Carlton, Director at Dynamic Knowledge
Kate Milford, Director at Milford & Marsh
Dan Brown, Strategic Relationship Manager at GQA Qualifications
Martin Kalamees, Co-Founder & CEO at Werk
Jade Sandhu, HR Manager at Measom
Hayriye Mazzotta, Executive Assistant at SCL Interiors

Competence to deliver against the functional requirements of the Building Regulations is now a legal requirement – this has been set down in primary legislation. The requirement applies to all involved in design and building works. Whilst the full impact is taking time to filter to enforcement, this is a game changer and to meet the challenge, new mechanisms are being devised

(through the Building Safety Regulator) to define competence standards, deliver and measure these in the real world and ensure employers are able to evidence competence at every level of the supply chain.

With so much going on, FIS brought together a selection of experts from product manufacturers and contractors along with standard setters, technologists and training

providers. The aim was to try to look at where the sector is at in meeting the challenge, identify problems or bottlenecks and, crucially, to spot where improvements could be made.

"There is much to be done and we are very much at the start of the change process", said Amanda Long, Chief Executive of Construction Product Information, the non-profit behind the Code for Construction Products Information (CCPI). She explained that it has made a good start with 100 firms registered with the CCPI having either completed or going through the assessment resulting in 100 product sets now on the market carrying the CCPI Assessed mark (representing in the region of 1600 products). Whilst this is growing monthly, she noted that there are approximately 26,000 product manufacturers in the sector, so there is a long way to go. And there are sectors that are very slow, such as product distributors, which is a concern as 60% of product is being sold through distributors rather than direct.

The CCPI has a robust assessment process to evidence that product information going into the marketplace meets the standards of the Code. Driving positive culture change is a key part of it, so the leadership and culture element begins with an 80-point survey for staff across each product manufacturer. That survey is supported by in-person validation interviews across a sample of staff; anonymity in reporting is key so that the process can really effectively understand the culture of the organisation in terms of prioritising product safety and product information and marketing. CCPI also has an online issues portal that has already been helpful in supporting the assessment process.

The CCPI organisational assessment is not just a tick-box process. The organisational assessment element of the CCPI process is the critical gateway for manufacturers wishing to present product information. Ultimately the CCPI helps to build greater confidence in product information and marketing that has been independently assessed.

"Grenfell showed that companies were choosing not to provide all the product information. We expect any company to undergo and pass the organisational assessment before we review their product information against the Code," Long explained. She said there is usually a correlation between

how the company does in the organisational assessment and the quality of their product information and marketing.

One company that has gone through the entire CCPI process is British Gypsum. Dave Robinson, Head of Technical Support at British Gypsum, says staff now think about CCPI compliance from the outset when producing new content. Staff are trained to different levels, with each not only aware of the questions they can answer but the ones they cannot. There is a hierarchy, and each person can escalate queries to the correct person authorised to provide that information.

The company has withdrawn from giving safety-critical advice verbally, over the phone. It requires written questions and provides written answers that leave an audit trail.

Debbie Carlton, Director at Dynamic Knowledge, suggested more of the construction industry workforce would use and understand verbal answers on the phone. Not everyone will or can email. She said there were good AI solutions available (developed in highly-regulated financial trading rooms) that could turn those conversations into accurate transcripts to be kept as evidence that the correct information had been provided.

Martin Kalamees, Co-founder and CEO at Werk believes that 90% of the workforce in London do not have English as their first

language. It is a smaller but still significant proportion in the rest of the country too. That means working out how to provide product information, as well as skills and training, in workers' native languages.

Jade Sandhu, HR Manager at Measom confirmed they are considering looking at mechanisms to source workers from overseas due to shortages of skilled labour. Language remains a central issue.

Kalamees had other observations about workers. They tend to want to learn only what they need to do their job at the time. No two workers will need exactly the same training. They don't all need to be sent on the same course at the same time. The danger is that if you offer a much wider course, people will learn new skills they may never use, or that will be out of date by the time they get to use them, there can be a lot of waste in training if not effectively targeted. The optimum is small bursts of specific, relevant training to plug their individual skills gaps which relates to the work they do.

"You cannot solve this without technology, at least to some extent. Training people has to be very personalised, so you only give them what this particular individual needs. It has to be in their language, and it has to be in a small portion – in a micro learning format," Kalamees said. →

Dave Robinson



Jade Sandhu



Iain McIlwee



Dan Brown



Hayriye Mazzotta



Craig Pratt



Kate Milford



Martin Kalamees



Debbie Carlton



Amanda Long





Evidence of that training and competency gained through training then needs to be recorded and made easily accessible so it follows the individual from job to job. Concerns were raised that the CSCS card system is not being equipped to measure competency holistically, merely identity and qualifications.

The competencies of supervisors is pivotal. "From the data we've gathered from contractors, it's not just operatives that are lacking certain competencies: it's also the supervisors. If you have supervisors who don't know how to use specific products or materials, how can they supervise and check the operatives? Or how can they train them?" Kalamees said.

The challenge is that the qualification and training regime hasn't worked like that to date. A new approach is emerging linked to the creation of competency frameworks. Kate Milford, from Milford & Marah, is an independent expert and involved in building the sector's new competence regime. It takes time to seek employers' views on what needs to be included and to what standards. Milford admitted this also means that current focus is largely on what is needed now and not what might be needed in the future.

Forecasting the future was important, everyone agreed. And describing currency of competence in terms of hours of continuing professional development (CPD) for trades was not necessarily relevant. Robinson flagged up that plumbers have to revalidate their qualification every five years, but fitters of fire-critical systems don't. Why the anomaly?

He also queried why designers don't have to show product-level competency. This delays involving the people with the skills, knowledge and experience until too late in the process, after key decisions have been made. Those people, on site, then have to adapt designs to the practical characteristics of the products.

FIS Chief Executive, Iain McIlwee lamented the "lack of a joined-up approach". He said: "Design development and the who and how is a particular area of concern. The principal designer competency standard doesn't mention the design responsibility matrix, which you would think was a mainstay of what a principal designer is there to do – to coordinate design."

Qualifications came in for further criticism from the group. Many are based on notions of occupations that the industry doesn't work to.

In other cases, qualifications are loaded just to get the qualification graded at level two or level three to attract funding or to meet thresholds set by card schemes. This both means people are trained to do things they may never do or it limits the opportunity to develop advanced qualifications. One person described that as "the tail wagging the dog." There were tales of workers leaving courses because they felt too much was irrelevant to their work and of apprentices jacking in their course because they could earn more unqualified.

Employers in the sector want clarity – and fast. Hayriye Mazzotta, who manages training and HR for SCL Interiors, explained that she can get the same results from two different qualifications, so needs to know which she should be choosing. "There's no direction of how to get to this competency. Should we be going through this qualification or that qualification? We don't know," Mazzotta said.

And it's all taking too long. Kate said: "There is a lot of lag in the system," explaining that it takes time to implement the competence frameworks developed and pointing out that it had taken 12 months to update the national occupation standards in one subject. Sandhu complained: "There are so many discussions being had, but it seems like not a lot of outcomes."

Debbie raised the importance of aligning the Skills, Knowledge, Experience, and Behaviours (SKEB) approach to competence through the need to align to clear, defined duties and activities that individuals actually undertake. She asserted that it is to be possible to use AI to make it simple for firms and individuals, but there is a lack of digitalisation in the strategic approach we are seeing from both industry and Government. Job or task requirements could be cut and pasted into the system leaving technology to cross-match relevant qualifications

and standards and spit out exactly which intervention is needed, when and where.

There are huge cultural hurdles to leap. Milford said: "We've seen a massive drive towards funding things occupationally, creating occupational frameworks, creating occupational pathways. And that's fine, as long as you expect people to come in at one end of that process, pop out at the other end of the process, and do that for the rest of their life.

"But that's becoming less and less the real world, with people multi-skilling, people moving around their careers in different ways – horizontal progression as well as vertical progression."

She continued: "There is nothing built into the system that allows for that in an intelligent way, that allows for it to be funded and subsidised, that allows for people to build competence now and evidence additional competence later on. And that is a huge piece that we have missing. We need to advocate for that within the wider skill system on behalf of the built environment sector, because we need that in ways that potentially people in other areas don't."

Carlton agreed but was sceptical. "Skills England sits under the Department for Education. Its DNA is primarily education. They're so far removed from the world of work that I'm not sure we're going to get that," she said.

The evidence was that the current system was not working. Dan Brown, Strategic Relationship Manager at GQA Qualifications said: "Candidate registrations didn't surge as expected when Industry Accreditation ended last year, likely due to doubts about enforcement on-site. Similarly,

uncertainty remained over the introduction of individual competency checks during the contract awarding process, but they are being introduced, and many have been caught unprepared. I think, collectively, this could indicate that the Building Safety Act messaging hasn't quite reached on-site workers as effectively as expected, highlighting issues with its format, audience, or placement. At worst, it may be a warning sign that some elements of the workforce are wilfully ignoring the Act or have reason to doubt that it is even being enforced.

As an Awarding Organisation, we have aimed to be proactive in our messaging and engagement with training centres, sector representative organisations, and subcontractors. Our efforts have also extended beyond training and qualifications, we continue to contribute to competency-setting working groups, such as the Joint Competency Initiative for the Building Envelope Sector (JCI)"

Craig Pratt Technical Development and Training Director for SGIS said they are always reviewing their training offer as a manufacturer and how they support the construction industry from both their digital platforms and their four training academies.

But a lot of the big issues are structural and would require a sea-change from Government and regulators. Bite-sized chunks of personalised training, product-specific where necessary, in your own language, digitally recorded and transportable, with clear guidance on the competencies required now, tomorrow and in the future, all seemed a long way off.

There's widespread support for competency and evidence-based system but shoe-horning that into an old, outdated vocational education and training system won't solve the problem. The industry is willing, the technology exists, but will the Government listen?



DEBUNKING THE TOP TEN MYTHS ABOUT ASBESTOS

Despite increased awareness and regulation, several myths about asbestos persist.

Sasha Brailsford, Operations Manager at the UK Asbestos Training Association (UKATA), takes a look at these and discusses what our sector needs to know.



Sasha Brailsford, Operations Manager at UKATA

UKATA

Asbestos remains a significant health hazard in the UK and each year, asbestos-related diseases continue to claim more than 5,000 lives. It is especially hazardous for those in the finishes and interiors sector who frequently work in older buildings where asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) are still present.

"UKATA is dedicated to improving the quality and standards of asbestos training, with the ultimate goal of protecting workers and the public from the risks associated with asbestos exposure.

"To achieve this goal, it is vital that we continue to discuss and educate in order to debunk any myths associated with asbestos," said Sasha.

She went on to dispel some of these common myths.

1. Asbestos was banned long ago, so there's no risk anymore

While the use of asbestos was banned in the UK in 1999, an estimated 1.5 million buildings still contain asbestos, and any structure built before the year 2000 may potentially house this hazardous material. This includes properties constructed as recently as the 1990s. Finishes and interiors professionals may encounter asbestos in walls, ceilings, pipework insulation, and floor tiles during renovations.

2. Only people in construction or demolition are at risk of asbestos exposure

Although high-risk jobs like construction and demolition are commonly associated with asbestos, those in the finishes and interior sectors are also at risk. ACMs can be found in decorative coatings, textured ceilings, pipe insulation, and certain adhesives - common materials for interior work. Drilling, sanding, or disturbing these materials can release harmful asbestos fibres. Recent research shows a rise in asbestos-related diseases among people with no direct exposure, often due to second-hand exposure from asbestos fibres unknowingly brought home on clothing or equipment. These fibres can be inhaled by family members, including children, posing serious health risks.

3. Asbestos is only dangerous if you handle it directly

Asbestos fibres are dangerous when airborne, not just when handled. Even simple activities, such as moving an item covered in asbestos dust, can release fibres into the air. This airborne asbestos can then be inhaled by anyone in the vicinity, posing serious health risks over time.

4. Asbestos can be easily identified by appearance

Many people believe they can spot asbestos by its texture or colour, but this isn't true. Asbestos was added to over 4,000 products in various forms and colours, and it is often indistinguishable from asbestos-free materials. The only way to identify asbestos is for a sample to be taken by a competent person and analysed by a UKAS Laboratory.

5. Some asbestos products are safe

There are no "safe" asbestos products in the UK, as all forms of asbestos use are now banned. If a product or material contains asbestos, it is considered hazardous. While some countries still permit the controlled use of asbestos, the UK fully prohibits its import, sale, and use.

6. A little exposure to asbestos won't hurt you

Asbestos exposure is cumulative; every exposure adds to your lifetime risk of developing serious diseases, such as mesothelioma, lung cancer, or asbestosis. Even brief or low-level exposure can contribute to long-term health risks. That's why even minor disturbances in asbestos-containing materials should be treated seriously.

7. Domestic properties don't contain asbestos

While commercial and industrial buildings are often associated with asbestos, many domestic properties also contain ACMs, particularly if they were built or renovated before the 1999 ban. Asbestos can be found in household materials, including textured coatings, insulation, and even certain vinyl floor tiles. For finishes and interiors professionals working in homes, it is crucial to stay alert to potential ACMs.

**DANGER
ASBESTOS**

8. Only white asbestos (chrysotile) was widely used in the UK, and it's not harmful

Although white asbestos (chrysotile) was the most commonly used form, it is still hazardous. Chrysotile asbestos is associated with lung disease, including cancers, just like blue (crocidolite) and brown (amosite) asbestos. All forms of asbestos are classified as carcinogenic, meaning they can cause cancer.

9. Asbestos-related diseases develop quickly

Asbestos-related diseases typically have long latency periods and can take 15 to 60 years to develop after exposure. This delay often makes it difficult to link health issues directly to asbestos exposure. By the time symptoms appear, the disease is often at an advanced stage, which is why prevention is so critical. Each year in the UK, asbestos-related diseases continue to claim more than 5,000 lives. In 2022 alone, there were 2,257 deaths attributed to mesothelioma, with a similar number of lung cancer cases linked to past asbestos exposure. Additionally, there were 493 deaths recorded in 2022 where asbestosis was mentioned on the death certificate, excluding those that also noted mesothelioma.

10. Asbestos training is unnecessary for interior and finishes work

Asbestos awareness training as a minimum is a legal requirement for anyone who may encounter ACMs in their work. For those in the finishes and interiors sector, this training can be crucial as it teaches how to identify potential asbestos risks, what to do when asbestos is suspected, and the procedures to follow to minimise exposure. Not only does training improve safety, but it also ensures compliance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012, which applies to all trades.

Summary

The finishes and interiors sector faces unique asbestos risks due to the nature of the work and the presence of ACMs in materials that are frequently handled, disturbed, or removed. Understanding the facts about asbestos and dispelling these common myths can make a significant difference in protecting health and ensuring safety on the job.

For more information or to book asbestos training, visit: www.ukata.org.uk or call **01246 824437**.

Michelle Armstrong, Head of Membership at FIS said: "Asbestos has slipped out of the headlines a bit in recent times, but we cannot get complacent.

"It is true that usage has been banned since the turn of the century, but it was so widely used historically that we will continue to encounter it in refurbishment works for many, many years to come. If disturbed and inappropriately managed, it is a killer and one of the worst we have known in construction – there is no safe level of exposure.

"It is critical that construction workers know how to identify and react when they encounter asbestos, not just for their own safety, but for all those around them. This new partnership is about ensuring that the next generation of construction workers have access to the training they need and are not at risk from decisions made in the past and eminently avoidable mistakes that ignorance and complacency may allow today."



Michelle Armstrong, Head of Membership at FIS

Join our webinar

An opportunity to dig deeper into some of the myths around asbestos and to put your questions to **Wayne Bagnall**, UKATA Speaker.

Date: 10 April

Time: 11.00 to 12.00

Register your free place at:

www.thefis.org/project/asbestos

DRIVING ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOR CONTRACTORS

James Parlour, FIS Head of Technical, discusses how FIS has responded to the recent competency requirements of the Building Regulations, guiding the fit-out community and setting measurable standards for competence.



James Parlour, FIS Head of Technical

Changes to the Building Regulations in England and Wales have hard coded an expectation that businesses carrying out building work can evidence that individuals possess the necessary Skills, Knowledge, Experience, and Behaviours (SKEB), and that organisations have the capability to competently fulfil their duty as a designer or contractor. Clients have legal obligations to ensure they have done everything reasonably possible to appoint contractors and designers who are competent and Building Control Officers will be responsible for verifying this.

The industry has already taken great steps in ensuring individual competence, with a wide range of trade organisations undertaking an exceptional effort to map out and establish baseline competence for installers across all sectors of construction. We are now poised to take on the same work for non-installer roles in future.

However, in the case of organisational competence, outside of the key dutyholder roles covered by the PAS 8670 series of standards, there is much less clarity on how to move forward with specificity and proportionality across the different sectors, with the Government only referencing the HSE-published Managing for Health and Safety.

Much of the conversation around organisational competence for operators outside the principal dutyholder roles has been focused on how we measure, assure and provide accreditation of competence. More attention is now required to provide guidance on the specific challenges

contractors face in demonstrating capability, beyond just the ability to finance multiple accreditation schemes.

The role of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) and third-party installer schemes

Pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQ), derived from the now-withdrawn PAS 91, have provided valuable criteria for the accreditation of business assurance across a comprehensive set of essential management systems. In some cases, these questionnaires provide a valuable framework for the contractor to understand what is required and structure their information. They also allow for a level of proportionality, with differing criteria available depending on the level of risk (e.g., additional scrutiny for businesses working on higher risk buildings).

The Build UK Common Assessment Standard (CAS) was introduced to provide savings to the supply chain by driving consistency and common recognition of “deemed to satisfy” criteria among major recognised assessment bodies. Essentially, this means that once a business achieves CAS certification with one recognised assessment body, the data can be shared with other bodies, eliminating the need for businesses to complete the assessment multiple times.

This should provide tangible savings, but research conducted by FIS in early 2025 shows that it is taking time for the message to filter through to clients. While 81% of responding FIS members hold accreditation to the CAS, only 40% of tenders currently reference it, and there has been limited effort and opportunity to try and get this connected. FIS is encouraging members to revisit this in the months ahead.

FIS Chief Executive, **Iain McIlwee** stated: “CAS offers an opportunity to rationalise accreditations, save money and reduce the time spent uploading the same information in multiple places. However, this opportunity can only be realised if people are aware and alert to the opportunity. Through our Responsible No campaign, we are

encouraging all businesses to challenge any tender that references a specific scheme, to see if CAS will meet the requirements. If it is not possible to alter the requirement on this project, it is something FIS and Build UK are eager to address directly, ensuring that future work avoids wasting valuable resources in the supply chain and takes advantage of the opportunity that CAS offers.”

Third-party installer schemes provide a more detailed level of inspection and accreditation for subcontractors engaged in specific activities. Currently, these schemes are primarily focused on fire performance characteristics. They establish standard procedures that must be adhered to, monitor training, and stipulate required levels of supervision. Regular audits and inspections are conducted to verify ongoing compliance and quality. United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accredits certification bodies that operate third-party installer schemes. This means that UKAS evaluates and verifies that these certification bodies meet the required standards and are competent to assess and certify installers.

Defining organisational competence for specialist subcontractors and the importance of proportionality

FIS has formed an industry-led panel of experts from across the supply chain to consult on and steer all of our upcoming work in this area. At our launch meeting in January, we discussed all of the areas where the current mechanisms fail and what needs to be done to move forward.

Some of the gaps identified in the way we currently measure and substantiate competence among subcontractors are:

- Lack of focus on auditing on-site activities and ensuring management systems are understood and being utilised by site operatives in practice.
- Disconnect between office and site capabilities was highlighted as particularly challenging. It is often easier to demonstrate competence of a site worker than those involved in pre-construction.

- Controls around performance characteristics, other than fire performance covered by third party installer schemes, and all characteristics for packages not covered by third-party installer schemes, such as raised access flooring.

- Challenges with PQQ include:

- Failure to address specific packages, which limits standardisation around level of detail and different clients and contractors having different requirements.
- Inability to robustly evaluate of a contractor's unintentional participation in functions such as design.
- The scope of the common assessment standard level PQQ is subject to mission creep led by a desire to compete among recognised assessment bodies. This leads to a failure in mutual recognition and increases the cost burden of compliance within the supply chain.

It has been made clear to FIS through our industry panel that specialist subcontractors require a more robust framework that:

- Is proportional to the risk being undertaken by the contractor, both in terms of the work package and the building risk category.
- Does not force contractors to duplicate efforts already undertaken as part of business assurance and PQQ.
- Allows lower-value projects and clients to responsibly manage competence under the requirements of legislation, outside of the business assurance and PQQ framework.
- Interrogates at a closer level of detail and specificity according to:
 - The work package, e.g., drylining, suspended ceilings, raised access flooring, etc.
 - The type of contractor, e.g., design & build, fit-out, specialist subcontractor, and labour-only subcontractor.
 - The sector in which the contractor is operating, e.g., commercial, low-rise residential, healthcare, education, etc.

FIS has looked to the world of conformity marking and Assessment and Verification of Constancy of Performance (AVCP) systems, which require manufacturers to use methodologies with varying levels of stringency according to the risk associated with the performance characteristic, in order to measure and declare that characteristic. FIS is proposing that industry agree on and drive adoption of a risk-based outline, which allocates the parties that should assess key identified functions as per the draft outline shown in Fig 1.

Setting the standard

To support contractors in bringing this all together, FIS has published (and made freely available to members) its Integrated

Risk Profile		Product/Package		
		Safety Critical	Regulated	Un-Regulated
Building / Use Category	High Rise Residential	1	2	3
	Low Rise Residential & High Rise Commercial	2	3	4
	Low Rise Commercial	3	4	4

Assessment of Key Functions		Risk Profile			
		1	2	3	4
Organisational Function	Selection of products against performance characteristics				
	Assessment of compatibility of product performance data within the application/environment				
	Allocation of labour (functions) with competency relevant to specific manufacturer and performance characteristics				
	Competence management and training plans for key functions				
	Information management of product data including evidence of performance				
	On-site quality control relevant to warranting specific performance characteristics in service				
	Auditing of management systems				
	Auditing of installations				
Key Functions: Accountable Person, Site Supervisor, Technical Manager, Installer, Procurement Manager		Contractor Self-Declared 	Assessed by Principal Contractor 	Assessed by 3rd Party 	Assessed by 3rd Party (UKAS)

Fig 1. Contractor risk-based assessment framework

Management Standard. The aim is for this to serve both as guidance for contractors and as a standard to measure organisational competence for contractors in the finishes and interiors sector.

This document was very well received by our newly formed industry panel, and a tier-one main contractor in attendance described the guidance as "the missing link" in subcontractor competence. FIS will use this industry panel to curate improvements to the document over time, ensuring it delivers on the identified goals with appropriate proportionality.

Trade association membership remains an important measure of assurance for organisational competence in the sector, as recommended by the Industry Competence Steering Working Group 2. FIS is committed to updating its own membership vetting process over time according to the evolving requirements of the industry.

We already take a principally site-based approach in response to some of the issues identified with the current frameworks and will look to deploy the integrated management standard, along with its built-in proportionality, to better align our membership vetting with the requirements of the supply chain. Another critical role is to simplify the requirements and ensure that everyone in our community is supported in understanding how they need



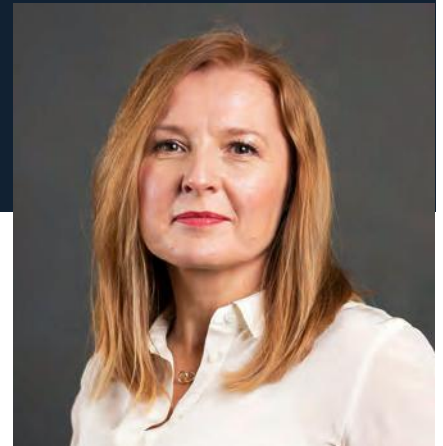
to adapt to change, while also being equipped with the tools to deliver compliance.

To download the FIS Integrated Management Standard through our new Organisational Capability Toolkit, visit: www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/product-process-people

Occupational health and safety

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ISSUES: HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR EMPLOYEES

Staggering figures from the HSE continue to show unacceptable rates of occupational health issues among construction workers. **David Crowson**, Editor, spoke to **Norma McKibbin**, Occupational Health & Wellbeing Clinical Lead at Portview, and asked her about the benefits of having this role in-house and her recommendations to help address these horrendous statistics.



Norma McKibbin, Occupational Health & Wellbeing Clinical Lead at Portview

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recently reported 78,000 workers in the construction sector suffered from work-related ill health (new or long-standing) from 2021 to 2024. Of these, 40,000 construction workers reported musculoskeletal injuries, and 14,000 reported work-related stress, anxiety, or depression. Yet research shows that two out of three sickness absences could be prevented with occupational health interventions. However, only half of businesses in the UK work with an Occupational Health provider! (Society of Occupational Medicine¹).

Here is what Norma had to say in response to David's questions.

What was the trigger for Portview employing an Occupational Health & Wellbeing Clinical Lead?

I joined Portview in November 2019 to set up the Occupational Health Service. The appointment was requested by both the Health & Safety (H&S) and the Human Resources (HR) Managers. From a health and safety perspective, health surveillance is a mandatory requirement for the construction sector, and my role was to initiate the Health Surveillance Program.

From an HR perspective, we had been using external Occupational Health providers on an ad-hoc basis. It was felt that an in-house Occupational Health presence would better understand the business and support employees and management more effectively.

How would you describe occupational health?

As an employer, you are legally required to prevent physical and mental ill health in your workers that may occur as a result of your business activities (HSE). Occupational health assists employers to look after the health of their employees. So a healthy team is vital to an organisations overall success.

An important aspect of occupational health is concerned with how work and the work environment can impact on workers' health, both physically and psychologically. It also considers how workers' health or existing medical conditions can affect their ability to perform their job.

Why was an Occupational Health & Wellbeing Clinical Lead selected, rather than another medical professional?

The HSE provides specific guidance to businesses on how to assess the competence of occupational health professionals, including the need for



The creation of a healthy environment for all employees

experience relevant to the workplace. The guidance states that an occupational health professional, doctor or nurse should hold additional qualifications in occupational health. In my case, I was selected due to my dual qualifications as a Specialist Nurse Practitioner in Occupational Health and a Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist. My skills and experience aligned with the needs of Portview as a business.

What does a typical day look like for you?

One of the reasons I enjoy my role is that I can never describe a "typical day," as there is always a degree of uncertainty about what the day will bring. While there are common tasks, such as management referrals, health surveillance, psychological support, self-referrals, policy development, travel to construction sites, health promotion, and service delivery planning. As individuals we cannot always plan for a period of ill health and occupational health by its very nature has to be responsive to this which means that the best laid plans for your day don't always go to plan!!!

What are the most frequent health challenges that Portview employees face and what signs should other businesses look out for?

I have been with Portview for just over five years, and in my experience, the most common physical conditions that present are cardiovascular issues, particularly high blood pressure, and musculoskeletal pain, mainly in the back and upper limbs. Psychologically, the conditions align with those seen across the construction sector, including stress, anxiety, and depression.

I would say that, as a business, it's a "key skill" that managers should implement, rather than just looking for signs. The key skill is "communication." A manager who knows their team well and communicates with them regularly will quickly notice any changes in mood, behaviour, an increase in minor ailments, or changes in performance and productivity. It's about noticing the "signs" through regular contact, good communication, and asking the right questions that truly makes a difference.

From an occupational health perspective what are the main challenges that businesses within the construction sector face?

The main challenges that the construction sector face:

Ageing workforce: The Office for National

Statistics reported that in the period April to June 2022 there were 111,308 construction workers over the age of 65 in active employment. As we all age we are more likely to develop medical conditions. Supporting these employees to remain in work is vital not just for the employees themselves but for businesses so essential knowledge and skills are not lost. Healthy and supported employees contribute to society and benefit rather than burden the wider economy. Given the UK shortages and challenges facing businesses within construction recruiting new talent to the sector it is vital that we retain and support the talent we have.

Mental ill-health: The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) describes mental ill-health in the construction sector as a "silent crisis, with males three times more likely to take their own life, or die by suicide than those in other sectors." The CIOB also reports that, "48% of construction workers have taken time off work due to unmanageable stress". As a predominately male workforce where a culture of "putting up and pushing on" to ensure project timelines are met can come at a cost, both human and financial. Increased stress and poor mental health in any workforce can reduce productivity, impact on quality, affect employee morale and increase the likelihood of accidents and injuries on site due to reduced focus and concentration.

What would you recommend other businesses do to support their employees?

Businesses could consider reaching out to the following charities to guide them through what support mechanism and training would best meet the needs of their business and employees:

- Lighthouse Construction Charity: www.lighthouseclub.org
- Mates in Mind: www.matesinmind.org
- Building mental health in construction - Mind: <https://tinyurl.com/muka3m9a>

At Portview we have partnered with the Lighthouse Construction Charity to support both our employees, subcontractors and work partners.

What have you initiated that did not previously exist and how has it impacted positively on Portview employees?

Construction workers, due to the nature of their work, are often exposed to the elements, especially the sun. It can be challenging for them to find time to visit

their GP for health concerns, particularly if they are working away from home.

In 2024, I initiated a mobile dermatology clinic for the second year, led by a Clinical Nurse Specialist. She visited our sites in Belfast and London. This clinic was run alongside Sun Awareness Week and provided an opportunity for our employees to consult with a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Cancer Dermatology regarding any concerns they had about moles. 30% of attendees at the clinic required a referral to their GP or a private dermatologist for treatment or removal of a pre-cancerous mole.

What did the staff think of this initiative?

I completed a customer satisfaction survey following the clinic and some of the comments are noted below:

- "I was very nervous before the appointment. Norma and Rhonda are exceptional at what they do! From the minute I walked in, they put me at ease and made me feel very comfortable."
- "Excellent clinic I can't rate it highly enough."
- "It was a very positive and informative session and I will look forward to being screened next year."
- "I will use more sun cream in future and not take my skincare for granted."
- "The assessment exceeded my expectations. So informative and reassuring."

How would other SME's find out more about Occupational Health should they wish to implement an Occupational Health Service?

Occupational health will work alongside your business to give the best advice on how to manage the health and wellbeing of your employees.

To find out more visit:

- Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) | The Society of Occupational Medicine: www.som.org.uk/small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-smes
- Find an OH Provider | The Society of Occupational Medicine: www.som.org.uk/find-oh-provider-company
- Occupational health - Overview: www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/occupational-health/index.htm
- Occupational Health | Factsheets | CIPD: <https://tinyurl.com/ms9x3a8y>

<https://portview.co.uk>

Source

1. www.som.org.uk

SHINING A LIGHT ON INNOVATION IN OUR SECTOR

The FIS Innovation Awards, presented at the FIS Conference on 26 February, showcased the innovative spirit within the finishes and interiors sector, debunking the myth that innovation is lacking in the construction industry.

The Awards, which are an integral part of the FIS Conference, recognise and celebrate innovation in the finishes and interiors sector showcasing companies that are paving the way for greater efficiency and collaboration.

The three categories, Digital, Product and Sustainability, were independently assessed by a panel of expert judges. The winner of each category was then invited to deliver a short pitch on their innovation to the audience, with the audience determining the overall 2025 Innovation of the Year.



Digital Innovation Sponsored by PROCORE

Recognises outstanding innovation in the digital landscape that is contributing to demonstrable improvements in efficiency or quality outcomes related to interior systems.

Winner: Circuland Product: Circuland Platform

Developed in collaboration with key industry stakeholders, Circuland offers an AI-powered platform that creates Digital Passports for construction products and assets, ensuring end-to-end traceability and secure data exchange throughout their lifecycle. By automating the creation of digital twins for materials and products, Circuland brings transparency, automation, and simplicity on building level to complex calculations and reporting on carbon footprint, circularity, costs,



(L-R) Angelo Mermiklis, Co-Founder & CTO at Circuland, received the award from Brett King, Director of Industry Transformation at Procore and Iain McIlwee, CEO of FIS

safety, and regulatory compliance. It addresses the growing demand for Digital Passports, which are set to become a regulatory requirement across Europe under the upcoming EU Digital Product Passport policy.

The Circuland Platform offers four main functions:

- Generation and Maintenance of Products Passports
- Generation and Life Cycle Update of Buildings Passport
- Access to Materials Stock Database
- Data-based Marketplace for used resources

www.ciculand.co.uk

**Shortlisted: Chalkstring
Innovation: Chalkstring
www.chalkstring.com**

**Shortlisted: Material Index
Innovation: Material Index Platform
www.material-index.co.uk**

Product Innovation Sponsored by **SIMONSWERK GROUP**

Recognises outstanding innovation in products that support improvements in efficiency, productivity and performance.

Winner: Architectural Wallsz Product: Fire Rated Back-to-Back Headwall

This innovative product is a prefabricated, configurable Medical Gas Headwall that has an EI60 Fire Rating under BS EN 1364-1. Created primarily to enhance healthcare spaces, it provides a fully compliant solution with all the benefits of bespoke, factory built interior partitioning. The tested system offers a wide range of healthcare-grade 3D laminated finishes, vacuum formed around the MDF panels, improving the durability of the system compared to gypsum alternatives, and eliminating cracks and vulnerabilities caused by edge-banding.

The product also aids hospitals' efforts to reduce face-mounted ancillaries and improve



(L-R) Ian Strangward, Managing Director and Anna Cooper, Senior Designer at Architectural Wallsz, received the award from Rod Flanagan, National Product Manager at Simonswerk and Iain McIlwee, CEO of FIS

infection prevention standards, no matter the performance and functionality required of the wall itself.

In addition to the clinical benefits of the product, aesthetic and biophilic features can be introduced to the healthcare facility as a standard.

This solution was developed to accommodate back-to-back patient headwalls with a fire rating requirement of 60 minutes and below. The panelised wall system is made up of pre-constructed aluminium frames, with the cavity-fed services and fire-resistant insulation installed off-site, and finished with 3D laminated MDF boards. The 30mm fire septum is formed of two layers of 15mm fire board, stabilised by custom fabricated steel 'T' and 'U' Sections.

www.awallsz.co.uk

Shortlisted: British Gypsum
Product: Gypframe LF Connectors
<https://www.british-gypsum.com/products/metal-products/gypframe-lf7-connector>

Shortlisted: Selo
Product: FumaCE
www.selo.global

Shortlisted: Simplis The Access Panel Company
Product: FrameSmart Fitting Kit
www.accesspanels.co.uk

Sustainability Innovation Sponsored by **SPECFINISH** Representing Finishes and Interiors

Recognises outstanding innovation that is contributing to demonstrable improvements in sustainable outcomes related to interior systems.

Winner: XFrame Product: XFrame circular built solutions

With 40% of global waste a result of the building industry, XFrame was developed from a vision to create a modular wall framing system that reduces building industry waste and facilitates end-of-life recovery and reuse.

XFrame's proprietary technology platform delivers custom modular and reusable spaces, unlocking circularity and minimising waste. The system comprises 12 standard components that are assembled using no more than a rubber mallet to form structurally braced framing panels, meaning no nails or glues are required. Linings are mounted using patented clips allowing easy removal and replacement.

XFrame enables an entire wall to be de-mounted back to individual components for reconfiguration and reuse. It also uses 20% less raw materials than traditional timber frame methods of construction.

XFrame's scalable technology automates design, manufacturing, and documentation, improving efficiency and material selection. Manufactured with locally sourced plywood,



(L-R) Collecting the award was Paul McIntosh, Founder & CEO of XFrame, David Crowson, Editor of SpecFinish and Iain McIlwee, CEO of FIS

XFrame can be deployed globally without the need for new manufacturing facilities. XFrame is adaptable, offering flexibility for commercial, retail, and structural applications. Its evolution positions it as a leader in Circular Built Solutions for the commercial and retail sectors.

www.xframegroup.com

Shortlisted: The Pallet LOOP in partnership with British Gypsum
Product: The Pallet LOOP
www.thepalletloop.com

Shortlisted: F&T Terrix
Product: Spray Plaster and Paint System
www.ft-terrix.com

Innovation of the Year

Winner: XFrame
Product: XFrame circular built solutions



To read more about the FIS Innovation Awards winners and shortlist visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/34jsnj2f>

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FIS Awards Lunch

Royal Lancaster Hotel, London
5 June

FIS Scottish Awards Lunch

Voco Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow
12 September



The 2024 FIS Scottish Awards: Project of the Year and Specialist Installation – Over £1m, Gold Winner, was Roskel Contracts for the Clarice Pears Building at the University of Glasgow.

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



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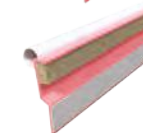
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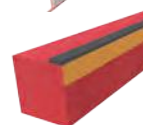
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A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO AVOIDING AND MANAGING CONFLICTS



Tom Brown, Managing Director at DBM Building Contractors (DBM), shares with us a challenging project where they adopted the principles behind the Conflict Avoidance Pledge (CAP) by having consultancy support. The advantages of this decision were evident throughout the project.

Tom explained that in 2023 DBM became signatories to the CAP. He said: "We believe that by adopting the principles behind the CAP, we are protecting our business, providing value for money to the client, and ensuring early intervention in issues. This allows us to resolve challenges promptly, so we can focus on delivering a high-quality project within the relevant timescales. Additionally, it has helped the client to recognise that we are entitled to additional costs in circumstances where there have been significant variations that have impacted the duration of a project."

Case Study

DBM had an opportunity to tender for a project involving the refurbishment of a listed townhouse building. The aim was to convert the building into new office spaces for the client, along with a three-story extension at the rear to accommodate test bakeries and additional office space.

During the course of our tender negotiations, we suggested to the client's design team that we would like the CAP incorporated into the contract. We explained the beneficial purposes of doing so and emphasised that we are a non-confrontational business. Given the complexities of the project, we anticipated that several issues would arise, which we could resolve through early intervention and collaboration. Unfortunately, this proposal was not accepted, and the design team indicated that any issues should be dealt with through the dispute resolution procedures in the contract, which we found to be very disappointing.

Despite our disappointment that the CAP would not be incorporated, we continued with the project. However, during the duration of the contract, we elected to adopt the principles behind CAP and sought consultancy support from **Len Bunton**, Owner of Bunton Consulting Partnership and the Chair of the Steering Group of the Conflict Avoidance Coalition, to handle the valuation of variations, payment applications, and the preparation of the final



account as the project progressed. As it turned out, Len's involvement was invaluable.

We were able to identify that some of the contract documents were not accurate and that some of the quantification within the contract documents did not accurately reflect the works executed on site.

Also, during the contract, Len had a watching brief, was copied in on all correspondence, and was able to help us flag up any issues of concern, ensuring these were addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

It would be true to say that a number of design difficulties have been encountered on this project, but by DBM adopting the principles of the CAP, we have identified these at the earliest possible date and discussed them in detail with the design team. We also encouraged client involvement so that the client was fully aware of what was happening on the project.

Many technical difficulties also arose on the project, the clients relied on our building expertise, and we met with the architects and engineers on many occasions to resolve the issues.

Unfortunately, the project was significantly delayed, however, Len helped us to provide the proper notices under the contract and ensure we were maintaining records of delay and disruption. We also took a significant number of photographs of the work in progress, as this could be relied upon as evidence at a later date.

We successfully negotiated an acceptable extension of time for the appropriate loss and expense and also relied on Len to assist

us in the proper valuation of variations. There is no doubt that the client and their design team recognised that we were doing our absolute best to resolve issues in the early stages, without resorting to any confrontational tactics. Nonetheless, we did indicate to the client and the design team that we would follow the provisions in the contract for giving notices, ensuring all parties were fully aware of emerging issues on the project.

As we move towards the completion of the project, we want to endorse the use of the CAP, where early intervention took the form of face-to-face meetings and discussions rather than both sides hiding behind a blizzard of email communications. We were able to communicate constructively as the works progressed. There is no doubt in our minds that we have learned a great deal from adopting the course of action described above, and we will continue to operate our business based on early intervention, identifying issues, and producing constructive solutions for debate and discussion.

www.dbmbuildingcontractors.co.uk

Commenting on his involvement in DBM's projects, Len said: "I have been assisting Tom on some projects he has been involved in, and DBM is an excellent company to work with. Tom unhesitatingly signed the CAP. Although the client in this case study did not embed CAP into the contract, DBM ran the project as though it had. Any issues were dealt with quickly on this complex project, which was not without its difficulties. We engaged through face-to-face communication and discouraged communication by email.

"I am delighted to say that DBM has committed their supply chain to observe the principles of CAP. All in all, it has been a highly rewarding experience."

To learn more about CAP, visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/9wjpxdd>

COMMUNITY NEWS



FIS Technical Director Joe Cilia retires

It is with mixed emotions that FIS announced the retirement of Technical Director **Joe Cilia**, in January this year. Joe was an integral part of the team for 15 years, he is well known and respected throughout the sector and his knowledge, enthusiasm and experience will be greatly missed.

Commenting on his career, Joe said: "I am so lucky to have been able to work with some of the most gifted, talented and knowledgeable people in our sector, all of whom shared the common goal of making the sector better for those earning a living from it, and those working and living in the spaces created and built by the sector."

'Above all I have strived to make a difference, which I hope will be my legacy. I have been fortunate to work in this industry for over 45 years and will not be able to walk past a site in the future without looking and wondering."

FIS Chief Executive **Iain McIlwee** added: "Joe's contribution to our organisation, community and sector has been immense. His technical knowledge and inquiring mind are matched with a genuine passion that has underpinned the success of so much of his work."

"Whether it be developing standards and guidance, briefing specifiers, leading collaborative testing programmes or guiding an individual member through a specific dispute or problem, every day his work has helped someone and some days it has helped everyone."

"On a personal note, I learned so much from Joe and feel privileged to have worked alongside him. We all wish Joe well in his retirement and on behalf of our team, community and sector I want to express our gratitude for all he has delivered in a career well spent."

To read the story in full visit: www.thefis.org/2025/01/31/fis-technical-director-joe-cilia-retires

Identifying risk and recommended negotiation positions

FIS has produced guidance to support members on responding to onerous contractual terms¹. Prepared for specialist contractors, it is a summary of the typical risk's businesses should look out for when engaging in a contract with clients or main contractors.

The guidance supports the FIS "Responsible No" campaign, which is a targeted approach from FIS to challenge negative behaviours and empower the supply chain to challenge situations where the transfer of risk through contract is not reasonably apportioned or clear. The "Responsible No" is a constructive way so that we can, together, work to deliver a clearer approach to risk management and improve culture, compliance, and safety in the construction sector.

FIS strongly recommends members use unamended contracts. We clearly set down the arguments for members to push for this through our guidance published – Using Standard Form Contracts². However, the campaign isn't about being militant, where amendments are inevitable, it is still vital to identify the worst of the risks and revert with a recognised industry compromise position recommended. This is what this document helps FIS members do.

Source

1. <https://tinyurl.com/mrx8ppv5>

2. <https://tinyurl.com/28b2kph4>



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FIS appoints Damian Hill as Technical Projects Manager



FIS is delighted to announce the appointment of **Damian Hill** to the newly created role of Technical Projects Manager, following the retirement of its Technical Director Joe Cilia. A seasoned professional with over 30 years of experience in the interiors sector, Damian brings a wealth of technical knowledge and leadership to FIS during an exciting time of transformation.

As part of this transition, **Jim Parlour** has been promoted to Head of Technical, progressing from his previous position as Technical and Vetting Manager. These changes form part of FIS's commitment to evolve and expand its technical support services for the £10 billion finishes and interiors sector.

Damian will play a pivotal role in supporting FIS as the leading technical authority for the finishes and interiors sector. His primary responsibilities will include managing technical projects, collaborating with the FIS team, members, and external stakeholders to enhance and update technical resources, and ensuring that FIS continues to deliver high-quality technical guidance, training, and support for the sector.

"I am absolutely delighted to be joining FIS and look forward to working with the exceptionally talented team and all members of this amazing sector," said Damian.

"Having spent 30 years within the interiors industry, I am excited to bring my knowledge, experience, and passion to continue the great work FIS does for its members in promoting quality, collaboration, innovation, safety, and best practice."

Hill's extensive background in the interiors industry includes 24 years at SIG, where he held various roles across sales, business development, and training in core interior products. Most recently, as Ocula Partitions Technical and Training Manager since 2018, he has overseen product development, performance testing and certification, compliance, and systems training. Hill has also been an active member of the FIS Partitions and Pods Working Group, staying up-to-date on the latest developments and providing valuable insights to help shape the future of the sector.

Commenting on the new role, Jim said: "Damian brings a wealth of experience as a technical communicator, having provided functional training to hundreds of staff in all interior construction product disciplines. We are looking forward to accelerating our development of the FIS e-learning platform, advancing competence standards for estimating, procurement, and design functions, as well as receiving project management support for all our technical activities and membership vetting efforts."

The addition of Damian to the FIS leadership team, alongside Jim's promotion, marks a key step in FIS's efforts to enhance its technical support and resources for the finishes and interiors sector.

www.thefis.org

Willmott Dixon Interiors delivering £12m roof works at National Maritime Museum

Work is progressing on the delivery of essential improvements to the roof of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London.

Willmott Dixon Interiors has installed more than 23,000 sq ft of new, sun-protected glazing, above the museum's central court area.

The £12 million project is designed to address water ingress and reduce solar heat gain issues associated with the existing glazing of the Grade I listed building.

It is expected to provide better acoustics and a much-improved visitor experience, and comes more than 24 years after the original installation of what was then Europe's largest free-span glazed roof.

All outdated glazing has been fully recycled, in line with the project's ambitious sustainability and waste reduction goals.

Alongside the roof upgrades, Willmott Dixon Interiors is carrying out a deep clean and servicing of the building's capital plant, including chillers, air coolers, air handling units, and the underfloor heating and cooling system, which will also undergo a flush. Existing plate heat exchangers are being replaced, and enhancements are being made to the air-cooling systems to improve efficiency and performance.

Additionally, works to the internal space will include the renewal of electrical lighting, power, and data systems.

To read about the project in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/nbhppe2y>



Aerial photograph of the new glazed roof which has been installed in the Grade I listed building

Pexhurst helps to inspire the next generation of construction and property professionals

Fit-out and refurbishment contractor Pexhurst rolled out its latest initiative, The Pexhurst 2050 Challenge, in collaboration with Oaklands College in Hertfordshire, aiming to engage students in forward-thinking, sustainable design, helping to bridge the gap between education and industry while inspiring the next generation of construction and property professionals.

The first instalment of the Pexhurst 2050 Challenge, which took place during National Apprenticeship Week 2025, saw construction T Level students compete in a Dragons' Den-style competition, where they presented their vision for the future of commercial spaces. Given the task of designing a warehouse, office, or retail park for the year 2050, students were challenged to incorporate sustainability, wellbeing, and market value-enhancing features into their concepts.

Pexhurst Director **Nick Tagliarini** said: "We are committed to fostering the future of our industry by engaging with young talent. The 2050 Challenge was a fantastic opportunity for students to develop their creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills while considering the future of sustainable design. We loved seeing their innovative ideas and hope this experience inspires them to pursue careers in construction and property."

The challenge took place over the course of a day, where students worked together to refine their concepts before presenting their designs to a panel of judges. Each



team had 10 minutes to pitch their vision, with all entries demonstrating impressive consideration of staff and customer wellbeing, as well as nature-focussed design. The winners were recognised for their emphasis on social value and the customer journey.

Pexhurst also hosted a Question Time-style event for the students to learn more about what employers are looking for in apprentices, and the type of construction paths available.

Bob Nosedá, construction skills consultant at Oaklands College, said: "We are thrilled to have partnered with Pexhurst for this exciting challenge. This initiative helps to provide students with hands-on opportunities which allow them to gain real-world insights into the industry and develop

key skills that will be invaluable as they progress in their careers."

The Pexhurst 2050 Challenge not only highlights the importance of businesses engaging with young people but also showcases the industry's commitment to sustainable and future-focused development.

FIS CEO **Iain McIlwee** was part of the 2050 Challenge judging panel. He said: "People often think that engaging with schools and colleges is about us promoting the sector and passing on information.

"As a community we need to do more of this, listening to the next generation and hopefully, at the same time, helping them find the right path into construction."

You can find out more at: www.pexhurst.co.uk/the-pexhurst-2050-challenge-national-apprenticeship-week-2025

Adaptavate partners with industry to trial its low-carbon alternative to plasterboard

Adaptavate has partnered with British Land, Royal London Asset Management Property and Overbury to install and monitor the performance of its low-carbon alternative to plasterboard, Breathaboard, at 1 Triton Square. The trial aims to drive much-needed innovation in the construction industry so it can decarbonise quickly enough to achieve net zero targets.

Developed over the last 10 years with Adaptavate's patented technology, Breathaboard is a drop-in solution to reduce CO2 emissions and waste in the wallboard market and the built environment. The product is a

natural, scalable, carbon sequestering alternative to plasterboard, one of the most widely used construction products.

It can save up to 4kg of CO2/m² in a market of around 13bn m² capacity. What's more, through this industry defining partnership and project, this product is proven to be installed in the same way as plasterboard. This is part of Adaptavate's founder's vision of creating industry defining innovations that help the construction industry decarbonise without changing the way buildings are renovated or constructed.

Adaptavate

This announcement follows recent news that Breathaboard meets wallboard industry standards after being independently tested. The trial at Triton Square, the first on a large-scale commercial site, will provide Adaptavate the last key proof point needed to ensure the product meets the demands of modern construction and is ready for commercialisation.

To read the story in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/4easewb6>

www.adaptavate.com

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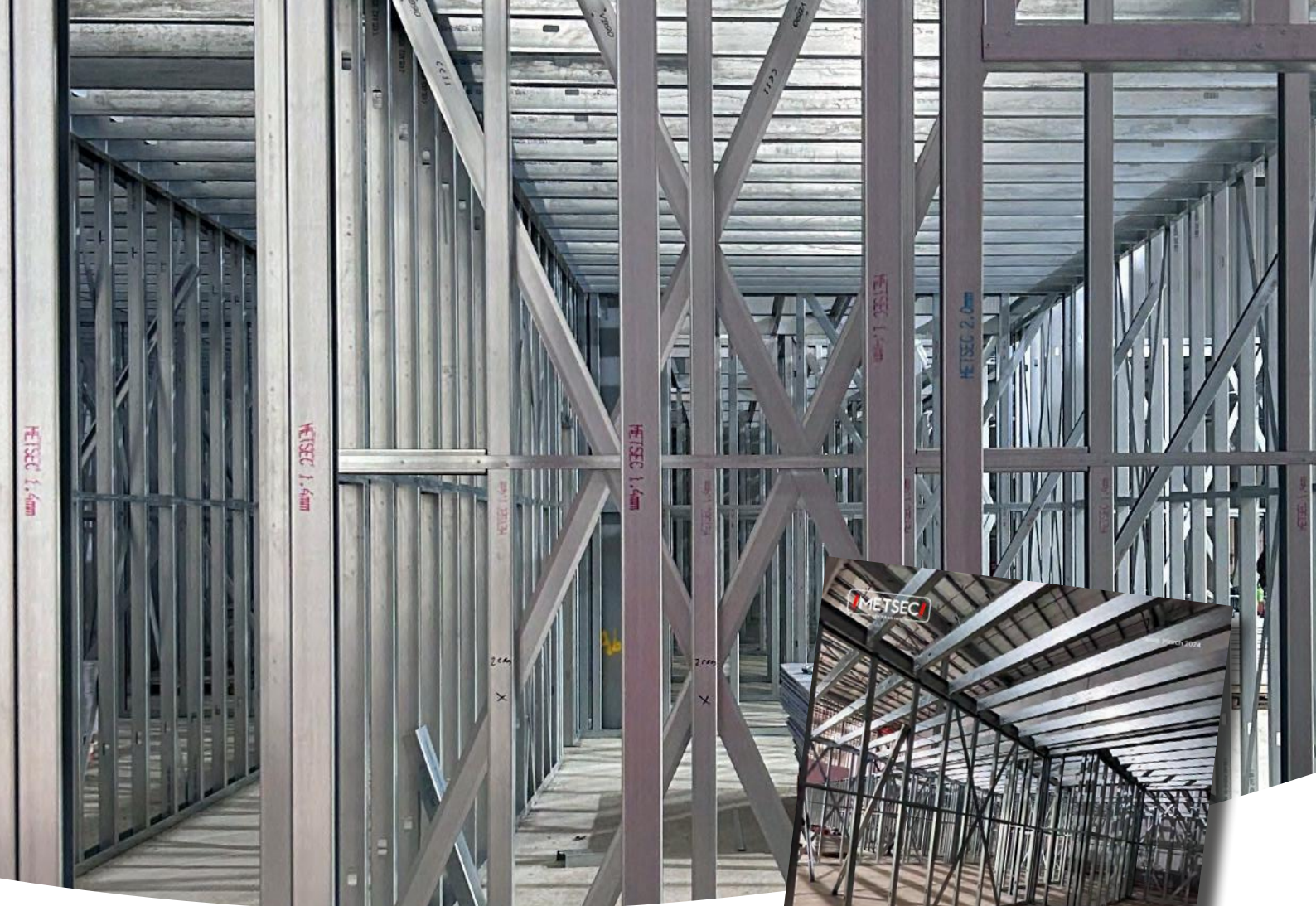


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