

SPEC FINISH

FIS

The magazine of FIS
representing the finishes
and interiors sector

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CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION THROUGH GIRLS CAN BUILD

Industry Opinion:
Prospects for
construction 2026

Health and Safety:
The trouble with stubble –
How to manage workers
with facial hair

Technology
Tech that transforms:
Improving sustainability
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PAUL MACINTOSH
XFRAME & Bridgehead

BETTER BUILDING IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT RE-EXAMINING THE FOUR CORE RISKS

Tackling design, time, cost and cash with fair contracts, prompt payment, and early specialist input is essential to deliver more homes, faster, safer, and greener.



IAIN MCILWEE
Chief Executive, Finishes and Interiors Sector

As businesses, we're being driven to do more – build faster, greener and safer, invest in the recruitment and training of the next generation, and prove competence at every turn. Of course we should, but the reality is that I don't speak to anyone who doesn't want to raise the bar and build not just buildings we can be proud of, but an industry we can be proud of too.

Sadly, I speak to many who feel hollowed out by these demands – demands too often delivered with sticks and very little in the way of carrots. If we are going to fight for better, there is a hard truth we must keep repeating: We cannot shift the dial on productivity, sustainability, skills or compliance until we tackle head-on the four core risks that govern construction – design, time, cost and cash – and ensure we procure in ways that fairly share risk, reward investment and recognise positive behaviours.

The evidence is stark. Our latest low and mid-rise housing report shows specialist contractors routinely provide 60 to 78 days of credit to much larger clients; retentions are frequently withheld and post award price cuts are disturbingly common. These are not victimless frictions, they are structural barriers to the outcomes policymakers and clients say they want.

Design

If design accountability is blurred and time compressed, defects and rework rise, programme risk increases, and compliance becomes harder to assure. Our Reading research found what many experience daily: risk is pushed down through amended contracts, design responsibility is muddled, and specialists are engaged too late to add value or to de-risk buildability. We know this is a false economy. Early and transparent engagement with those who will engineer, integrate and install interior systems is the single best way to reduce waste and improve both quality and safety outcomes. Procurement must stop treating specialists as price takers and start enabling their expertise to shape deliverable designs.

Time

Programming and a lack of empathy in time allocation are compounding our risks. The housing report highlights limited pipeline visibility. Less than a third of firms get six weeks' notice to mobilise. When appointments are delayed to chase price, the programme still expects delivery on the original dates, so time risk is simply exported to the supply chain. That is when corners get cut, supervision thins, and site teams are left doing the impossible. Realistic call offs and earlier, partnership-based appointments are not luxuries; they are preconditions for safe, compliant and productive delivery.

Cost

Competitive tension has its place, but a race to the bottom corrodes everything. We conflate cost and value at our peril. Our Reading report documented "regressive procurement practices," postcode lotteries of bespoke terms and post award "value engineering" that is too often just retrospective price-cutting. If we want sustainable supply chains, we must restore the primacy of unamended standard forms, evaluate investment in people and capability, not just the lowest number, and reward the firms that carry the overhead of training, supervision and quality management.

Cash

If cash flow is starved, firms defer investment in training, digital tools and modern methods. Slow and inconsistent payment, withheld retentions and routine undervaluation tie up hundreds of millions in working capital that should be building capacity, skills and resilience. Late cash means late investment, late apprentices, late upskilling for the Building Safety regime, and late adoption of modern methods. Enforceable 30-day payment as standard, automatic release of retentions, and wider use of Project Bank Accounts where appropriate are not radical asks; they are the minimum for a modern industry. If people are starved, they do not tend towards a Dunkirk spirit; they turn on each other. This is what is happening here – we are cannibalising construction.

Change

This is not just about fairness; it's about outcomes. Want better productivity? Stabilise cash and time, and you unlock planning standardisation and off-site integration. Want genuine sustainability? Enable early specialist input so low-carbon choices are buildable and do not unravel on site. Want more skills? Give firms predictable pipelines and prompt payment so they can carry apprentices and trainees, not just contingent labour. Want stronger compliance? Use contracts that clarify responsibilities and align with insurability, rather than dumping unmanageable risk downstream. The Reading report maps the route, and our housing evidence shows the cost of inaction.

This is our repeated message to all who will listen: procure for performance, not just price. Use simple, standard contracts; pay on time and in full; stop post-award chip away; plan call offs realistically; and weight tenders to favour those who invest in training and competence. Do that, and you will get more homes, faster, to a higher standard – with a greener footprint and a safer legacy. Keep rewarding short-termism, and we will continue draining the very capacity we need to deliver.

Welcome

SPEC FINISH

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Cover image:

The team getting hands on during a classroom session

SpecFinish magazine wrapper

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WELCOME

TO THE APRIL ISSUE OF SPECFINISH

Like many of you, I was glued to and inspired by the performances at the Winter Olympics. What stood out to me most were the mixed team events. In the snowboard cross, Huw Nightingale delivered increasingly strong runs, improving in every round, while Charlotte Banks produced an outstanding performance to ultimately secure gold. In the skeleton mixed team event, the gender roles were reversed. Tabitha Stoecker sat in fourth place after her run before Matt Weston worked his magic, and together they claimed gold.

What these moments reinforced for me was the power of collaboration. Success in team events is rarely about one flawless performance from start to finish. It is about partnership, trust, and collective resilience. At times, the excellence of one individual lifts the entire team. At other times, when someone is not at their best, they are supported by those around them and brought back on track, excuse the pun. True collaboration creates an environment where strengths are amplified, weaknesses are steadied, and shared belief turns potential into success.

This issue is filled with examples of individuals supporting one another and collaborations that stand strong and make a meaningful difference. On page 10, we hear about two training facilities, reinforcing their businesses commitment to skills development and sustainable careers in the fit-out sector.

I spoke to Louisa and Olivia Priestley who are leading DSP (Interiors), carrying Andy Priestley's legacy forward with skill, values, pride and next generation leadership. You can read the full story on page 14.

On page 18 Dr Noble Francis, the widely respected Economics Director at the CPA, shares his thoughts on construction output, which is forecast to grow by 1.7% in 2026, with housing weakness offset by growth elsewhere despite ongoing cost and skills pressures.

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

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Competency Frameworks now available to support competence and compliance in the finishes and interiors sector



The Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) has developed a series of industry Competency Frameworks to provide clear, practical guidance to support competence, compliance and best practice across the built environment.

These frameworks are reflective of real working practice, defining the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours required for individuals working in key finishes and interiors occupations.

Their availability marks an important milestone in ensuring compliance with the Building Safety Act, which requires individuals to be able to demonstrate competence for the work they undertake.

The Ceilings, Drylining, Fibrous Plastering, Moveable Walls, Solid Plastering, Raised Access Flooring and SFS (Steel Framed Systems) Competency Frameworks are now available by visiting: www.thefis.org/skills-hub/competence-frameworks

Each Competency Framework sets out a consistent, structured approach to competence and includes Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviour statements and implementation plans.

Together, these elements give employers, individuals and clients confidence that roles are being carried out safely, effectively and in line with legal and industry expectations.

Right to Work checks: Increased enforcement puts construction under the spotlight



According to the Home Office, arrests for illegal working are now at a record high. This increase in enforcement activity means employers must be confident that their processes for checking an individual's right to work in the UK are compliant and up to date.

What employers can do

There are three accepted routes for carrying out Right to Work checks, depending on the individual's status and documentation:

- **Digital checks via a certified Identity Service Provider:** Employers can use an approved digital identity service to check individuals holding a valid British or Irish passport (or Irish passport card). Employers must still confirm that the person

presenting for work matches the verified identity, which can be done via a video call.

- **Online checks using Home Office services:** Where an individual holds an eVisa or certain other documentation, checks can be completed using the Home Office online service. In specific circumstances, such as where an application or appeal is outstanding, employers can use the Employer Checking Service.
- **In-person manual document checks:** Employers may also conduct manual checks by physically obtaining, checking and copying acceptable documents.

Why this matters

Employers who carry out Right to Work checks correctly, in line with Home Office guidance, gain a statutory excuse, protecting them from liability if an individual is later found to be working illegally.

Without this protection, employers face significant financial risk, with civil penalties of up to £60,000 per worker.

To read the story in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/yurk38jr>

CITB funding crisis hits Employer Networks



CITB has recently issued a further update to clarify recent reports surrounding funding for Employer Networks.

In a recent statement, a CITB spokesperson said: "Following recent articles that have been published, we wanted to ensure that the correct information is being shared.

"It is incorrect that CITB has stopped taking all bookings for training and we have not said there is no more money for training courses. Employer Networks are a budget-led initiative and due to the significant increase in uptake. Training can be booked that takes place after 1 April and any training that is already booked in ahead of 1 April will continue as planned".

CITB acknowledged that this news may be frustrating for some, but said that increased uptake shows that more employers are being supported with their training needs.

CITB also confirmed that it continues to support plant and scaffolding training, apprenticeships and other key courses through its grants scheme¹. And there are a number of free courses and resources that are available through various funded projects.

Addressing comments about reserves, CITB said that the reported £78.9m relates to its reserves as of March 2025, which was published in December. As a charity and Arm's-Length Body it must maintain a minimum reserve level of £50m and CITB expects to be close to this level by 31 March.

Source

1. www.citb.co.uk/levy-grants-and-funding/grants-and-funding/

WHY BESPOKE SOLUTIONS CREATE BARRIERS TO REUSE

Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion, spoke to **Hattie Emerson**, Project Manager for the FIS Project Reuse and Head of Construction Sustainability at McLaughlin and Harvey, and **Darcy Arnold-Jones**, Circular Economy Lead and Project Architect at Marks Barfield Architects (MBA), to learn more about the important roles they are playing to reduce carbon, waste, and material insecurity in the fit-out sector, their thoughts on bespoke products and the FIS Reuse initiative which is a key part of their work.

Flavie began by asking Hattie and Darcy, “Can you introduce yourselves and provide us with an insight into your roles?”

Hattie said: “I’ve spent more than 20 years working across the built environment sector, with facilities management companies and tier one contractors. The inefficiency of the industry has motivated me to push for better practices, particularly to reduce waste intensity and advance circularity. I’m particularly passionate about biobased and natural materials and the connectivity of buildings to place. I’m also actively involved in the ACAN Circular Economy Taskforce, developing industrywide initiatives to drive change.”

Darcy explained that she has five years’ professional architectural and hands-on expertise in design, retrofit, and deconstruction. She said: “I approach projects with a pragmatic understanding of how to reduce waste and embed circular principles. This is grounded in a wider ambition to radically change our industry in the face of the Climate Emergency.”

“I also run a part-time Circular Economy consultancy, DAR.CE Studios, to work with partners (e.g., Reusefully) who are equally intent on progress. I am a member of the Edge and the Circular Do-Tank.”

“Alongside my day jobs, regenerative design and circular economy leadership has been a core passion and focus of mine over the past three years. This role includes developing Circular Economy consultancy services, material reuse strategies, regenerative frameworks, and project-based advisory support. My material reuse and systems expertise spans donor-recipient relationship development, material passporting standards, and engagement with deconstruction and reuse-led projects.”

Hattie went on to explain that she is the Project Manager for the FIS Project Reuse pilot study, which is addressing the physical and



Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion



Hattie Emerson, Project Manager for the FIS Project Reuse and Head of Construction Sustainability at McLaughlin and Harvey



Darcy Arnold-Jones, Circular Economy Lead and Project Architect at Marks Barfield Architects

logistical challenges of demounting products during strip-out and reinstalling them in other commercial offices (changing ownership).

“We are developing case studies to share learnings and costs to help de-risk and scale product reuse. This includes understanding the costs involved and when reuse is commercially viable, which early evidence shows is more often than people think!” she said

Flavie then asked, “**What types of projects do you get involved with, and why and how did you become involved in reuse?**”

Hattie commented that the project generally receives products from CAT A fit-outs, where products have been installed for less than a year despite being warrantied for five years or more. Typically, these products are sent for recycling, even though they are fully functional and have considerable residual value.

Hattie explained the FIS Project Reuse is currently focusing on metal ceiling tiles and luminaires.

She went on to say: “This initiative is providing a practical platform to test and scale product reuse in commercial fit-outs. By focusing on demounting and relocating metal ceiling tiles and luminaires on real projects - we literally get into the nuts and bolts of reuse. We work with stakeholders from across

the value chain to establish the commercial sensitivities such as cost, quality and warranty concerns and work to derisk selection of quality used products. “It also generates case studies and guidance that encourage designers and contractors to embed design for deconstruction, making it easier for future projects to reuse products onsite or offsite.”

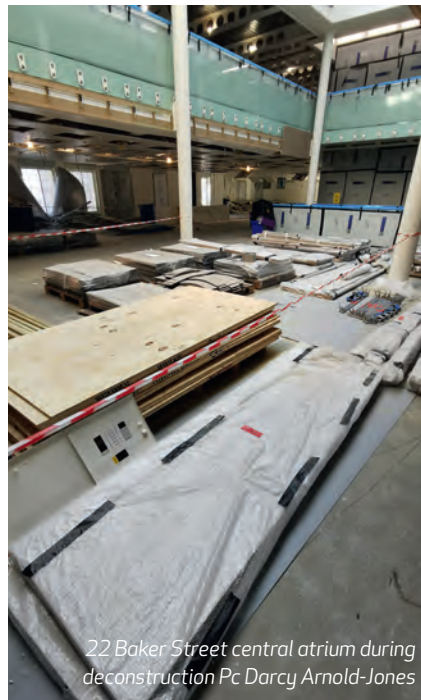
“The initiative is one of the projects that has emerged from the FIS Sustainability Leadership Working Group, which was set up by FIS five years ago to explore how to accelerate sustainability in the fit-out sector through collaboration. The project is funded by FIS members and wider stakeholders.”

More information can be found out about FIS Project Reuse by visiting: www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/sustainability/reuse/

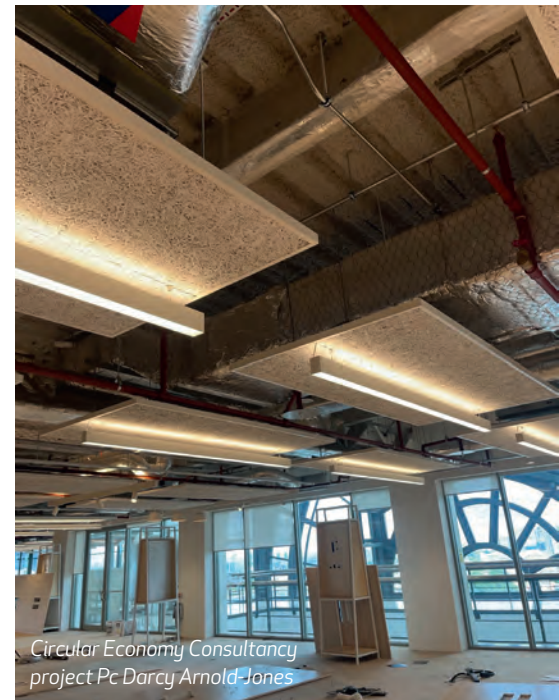
Darcy said: “I have worked on a range of projects with reuse embedded at every stage. These include large commercial office refurbishments in Central London, such as 22 Baker Street, where we saved 577,041 kgCO₂e (A1-A5) and £1,655,660 by championing reuse in situ. This jumpstarted a series of projects, mainly based in London, where I acted as either Architect or CE Consultant, to help facilitate reuse in situ or find homes for good quality second hand materials...often becoming a salesman for the reused!”



22 Baker Street completed central atrium @Morley Von Sternberg



22 Baker Street central atrium during deconstruction Pc Darcy Arnold-Jones



Circular Economy Consultancy project Pc Darcy Arnold-Jones

"I am currently working on a Grade II-listed community building, striving to source second-hand materials, and an educational building, aiming to minimise waste through efficient design and reuse in situ."

Both interviewees agreed that the main drivers for why and how they became involved in reuse were a reduction in carbon and waste, as reused products can save an average of 85% embodied carbon compared to new, reduce waste, and support material security. The war in Ukraine, among wider global uncertainties, recently led to increased material prices and uncertainty in supply.

The carbon impact of fit-outs has become a key issue in the sector. Studies carried out by Overbury show that the carbon emissions from the structure of buildings can be quickly overtaken by the emissions generated by repeated fit-outs, especially as fit-out cycles accelerate, as is currently the case (See Fig. 1).

Darcy pointed out that many clients have set up Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) strategies, which leads them to look for ways to reduce their carbon impact. It is becoming increasingly common for funders to set requirements to identify innovative and carbon-saving solutions in order to award funding. Aside from this, MBA has a strong drive to champion regenerative design and reduce the impact of their projects.

Julia Barfield, one of the founders of MBA, sits on a steering group for Architects Declare and was one of the main organisers of the London Eye Circular event in October 2025, which brought together 400 people to discuss the circular economy.

Darcy said: "MBA has been a great place to test my keen interest in sustainability on projects, and projects such as 22 Baker Street came at an opportune time to implement a reuse strategy. Previous business as usual projects showed great recycling figures, but in reality, demonstrated downcycling, which raised concerns at MBA and a desire to do better."

"MBA works on a range of projects, from smaller pro bono schemes with limited budgets to larger commercial projects. The question then became how to move excess or stripped-out products from larger projects to smaller ones."

Flavie was keen to ask Hattie and Darcy, **"How they would define bespoke, and could they provide some examples?"**

Darcy shared her view, explaining that bespoke products can be defined in various ways. They can be products that are not

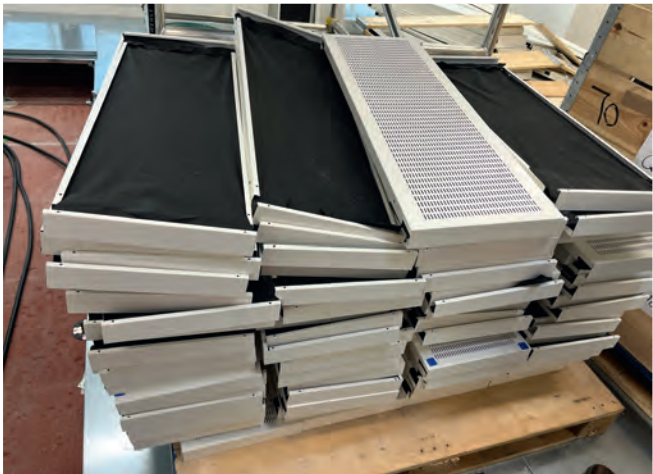
available off the shelf — that is, not products a supplier produces regularly. She said: "They can also be products that only work for a specific project, either because they were designed to make a statement or because their bespoke size or shape makes future reuse difficult in another building."

Hattie added that products that are designed to fit with a specific finish — such as luminaires designed and manufactured to fit a specific ceiling system — pose challenges for reuse as they cannot be decoupled to be used as individual components.

Hattie recalled the example of a ceiling raft system installed in a CAT A space, with bespoke elements and a known limited installation period. Upon demounting, they examined the luminaires and found that, although they were excellent, high-quality products, their mounting was bespoke and only compatible with that particular ceiling system and finish. As a result, they could not be used

Fig. 1





Above: Woolgate Cat
A ceiling raft with
bespoke luminaires
Pc Hattie Emerson

Left: Woolgate Cat
A ceiling panels
demounted
Pc Hattie Emerson

Flavie's final question to Hattie and Darcy was, **"What message would you give them so that they create less bespoke?"**

After the discussion, both agreed that design for deconstruction should be embedded in products and spaces.

Darcy said: "Do not design for obsolescence or for yourself — think about the future life."

Hattie's advice was to consider using standard sizes, how to deconstruct and remove the product from the building, and whether the product can be upgraded — for example, to achieve better energy efficiency, different colour rendering, or to meet changing regulations or design trends.

independently of the ceiling tiles, significantly limiting their reuse potential. Most were therefore sent for recycling, despite having only been used for a fraction of their potential lifespan.

Darcy noted: "Some systems can be defined as bespoke in their installation and fixings because they need to be deconstructed in a specific order. This means that deconstruction is not only time-consuming but also requires specialist skills, which can increase costs."

"Obviously, items tied to the latest fashion or a specific client aesthetic are difficult to reposition in another building. This is the case with the Rathborne Place tiles, which have an unusual perforation size and a shiny finish. Those were lucky to have found a suitable new home," said Hattie.

Darcy recalled the example of a beautiful solid wood door that was an unusual size and too large to be removed from a building without cutting it. She also mentioned that fashionable floor-to-ceiling height doors and glazed partitions can make relocation very difficult.

Both agreed that, overall, any items designed for a specific area can be classified as bespoke.

This includes chandeliers in lobbies and joinery pieces such as reception desks.

Flavie asked, **"Why do people specify bespoke products?"** based on the challenges this can create for reuse.

Darcy mentioned that it is often the designer's agency that drives the specification, as they have a vision for the look and feel of a space. The client is sold a dream at concept design that the designer aims to match in visualisations, leading to a vision which can often only be achieved through bespoke. One issue that has occurred recently is that if a designer uses AI visual software to produce imagery, it is essentially make-believe and the result is likely to be more bespoke.

Hattie added that it is in the manufacturers interest to sell bespoke products as they demand a premium. She also noted the people responsible for designing the space, manufacturing, or installing the products often do not consider how the product will be removed from the building or deconstructed for relocation. They focus on the "now," rather than future applications.

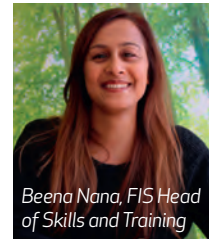
<https://marksbarfield.com/>



22 Baker Street deconstructed bespoke door
Pc Darcy Arnold-Jones

INVESTMENT IN SKILLS: IF NOT YOU, WHO?

Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training, takes a look at two training facilities, reinforcing their businesses commitment to skills development and sustainable careers in the fit-out sector.



Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training

In the finishes and interiors sector, the quality of our projects ultimately depends on the people delivering them. Across the industry, we face familiar challenges: skills shortages, tighter margins, increasing complexity, and rising expectations around compliance and performance. These pressures are not going away, and they affect everyone from installers and supervisors to project managers and contractors. Meeting them requires more than discussion; it demands real investment in people, practical training, and ongoing professional development.

At its core, our sector depends on competence, confidence, and capability on site. Every project relies on teams who

understand both the details and the broader context, who can work efficiently while maintaining high standards, and who are equipped to handle the demands of modern construction. Investing in these skills does not just benefit individual workers; it improves productivity, reduces errors, and helps ensure projects are delivered safely, on time, and to the right standard.

Structured training and development also create clear pathways into the sector. Whether it's apprentices learning the basics, career switchers building practical knowledge, or experienced teams refining their skills for complex projects, providing access to relevant learning helps raise standards across the board. It's about giving people the confidence

to perform their jobs well and the competence to meet the demands of clients, regulations, and industry expectations.

As a sector body, we know that investment in skills is not optional, it is fundamental. While we cannot control every pressure facing the construction industry, we can control how seriously we take workforce competence. Supporting and developing people is the most effective way to protect standards, strengthen the sector, and ensure lasting success. This is why initiatives like ATJ Group and Rockfon's recent focus on practical, hands-on training are so important, and why raising skills and capability remains central to the future of finishes and interiors.



The opening ceremony (L-R) Dale Harper-Jones, Managing Director of ATJ Group, the Mayor of Basingstoke, Cllr Colin Philimore and Iain McIlwee, CEO of FIS. Pc Xposed Photography



Bringing together industry leaders, partners, and stakeholders. Pc Xposed Photography

ATJ Group opens new training facility and launches ATJ People

Dale Harper-Jones, Managing Director of ATJ Group, explained that the 30 January marked a significant milestone for the ATJ Group with the official launch of ATJ People, alongside a showcase of ATJ Plant and ATJ Plant Training at its new facility in Basingstoke.

The event brought together industry leaders, partners, and stakeholders to celebrate a major investment in skills, training, and sustainable workforce development.

The Mayor of Basingstoke, **Cllr Colin Philimore** joined the celebrations, formally

opening the facility and cutting the ribbon alongside Dale, and **Iain McIlwee**, CEO of Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS).

Dale said: "The addresses from the Mayor, Iain and me highlighted the importance of collaboration across the finishes and interiors community to tackle the skills shortage and create meaningful career opportunities for new entrants to the industry.

"The launch was attended by representatives from Tier 1 contractors, leading suppliers and key industry stakeholders, including the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). Guests were invited to tour the new facility, which has been purpose-designed to support both practical and classroom-based learning"

Accredited training and sustainable plant operations

Dale explained that a key feature of the tour was the new PASMA training room, underlining ATJ's commitment to delivering accredited training in-house. **Pete Harley** and **Zak Morris** hosted a detailed session on ATJ Plant, outlining how the business is embedding sustainable principles into its plant operations and wider service delivery. The session also provided an overview of PASMA and the enhanced internal training provision set to commence this spring, ensuring operatives are equipped with the knowledge and competencies required for modern construction environments.



Introducing ATJ People

Central to the day's celebrations was the introduction of ATJ People, a new employment and training pathway designed to attract and develop new talent. **Tori Mitchell** presented the programme to guests, explaining that it has been developed in partnership with Construction Skills People and is proudly sponsored by British Gypsum.

Tori said: "The employment and training pathway is specifically aimed at unemployed individuals aged 19 and over who have the Right to Work in the UK. Delegates begin

their journey with five weeks of academy-based training, focusing on the fundamentals of drylining and overall site readiness. On completion of the academy phase, every delegate is guaranteed an interview with ATJ People and, subject to successful outcomes, will be offered full-time employment on a structured two-year programme working across ATJ construction sites.

"The two-year pathway has been carefully designed to combine on-site experience with continued professional development. Delegates will return to the academy at regular intervals to refresh and advance their skills, undertake specialist tool and manufacturer training, and achieve a range of recognised qualifications and certifications. These include PASMA, IPAF, NVQ Level 2 and a variety of short life-skills courses to support confidence, communication and long-term career progression."

Practical learning in action

The tour concluded in the practical training area, constructed by ATJ Trainer **Graham Makey** using materials generously sponsored by key supply chain partners, including British Gypsum, Equestrian Fencing and Minster, commented Dale.

He said: "Here, guests were given an overview of the five-week academy syllabus and the structure of the subsequent two-year programme. Graham answered questions and even invited attendees to try their hand at cutting plasterboard, offering a tangible insight into the hands-on learning experience delegates will undertake."

He went on to explain that the first academy cohort commenced on 16 February and is already making strong progress. The team is looking forward to supporting their development over the coming weeks and guiding their transition onto live sites.

A long-term commitment to closing the skills gap

In conclusion Dale said: "For ATJ Group, the launch represents more than a new facility; it signals a long-term commitment to addressing the skills gap, investing in people and creating real opportunities within local communities. By supporting unemployed individuals into sustainable careers, ATJ is not only strengthening its own workforce pipeline but also contributing positively to the wider finishes and interiors sector."

<https://atjones.net/>

Nigel Watkins, Commercial Director, Rockfon



Building skills, not just ceilings

Nigel Watkins, Commercial Director at Rockfon, discusses their large capital investment in an 865 m² training centre in Northamptonshire.

Nigel explained that it was not a vanity project or simply ticking a CSR box. It was a deliberate decision to support the people who install Rockfon's acoustic wall and ceiling systems and protect standards across the sector.

Nigel said: "We operate in a fragmented industry, and we all know the challenges, including skills shortages, pressure on programmes, tighter margins, and rising expectations around compliance and performance. If we want better outcomes,

we have to invest in capability. For us, that meant creating a dedicated facility with a full-time Technical Trainer delivering courses 52 weeks of the year.

"In the past 12 months, we have trained more than 250 people, and we are only just getting started."

Supporting the people who make it happen

He explained that suspended ceilings do not install themselves. Behind every finished project is a team of installers, supervisors, project managers, and distributors who need to understand both the product and the details of its installation.

He said: "Our training centre supports suspended ceiling installers, main contractors, office fit-out businesses, and specialist distributors. The aim is simple: To help people become more confident, more competent, and more efficient in their roles.

"At entry level, many start with our '**Suspended Ceilings for Beginners**' course, which combines classroom learning with practical installation. It is popular with apprentices, new starters, career switchers, and office-based staff who want to fully understand what happens on site.

"From there, we offer more advanced and specialist sessions. An installer might need guidance on a specific system or

an unfamiliar detail. Others want to build confidence with non-standard grids or complex layouts. Fit-out contractors regularly use the centre to practise installing newer solutions such as Rockfon OneFrame and Rockfon Hub before introducing them on live projects. →

Showcasing practical training





Bays at the training centre

→ “Every business has different pressures. Our job is to provide practical support that reflects that reality.”

Taking risk out of projects

One of the most valuable aspects of the training centre has been its use for pre-construction mock ups, commented Nigel.

“We regularly bring together our technical team, designers, main contractors, and subcontractors to test concepts before they reach the site. It is a far more productive conversation when you are standing in front of a full-scale mock-up rather than reviewing drawings on a screen.

“A recent NHS mental health unit project required a ceiling solution that was impact resistant, helped mitigate tampering, and achieved Class A sound absorption, a challenging combination. In our training bays, our Technical team developed and tested two bespoke approaches: a rigid suspension system and a direct fix solution.

“The process allowed everyone to agree technical, quality and aesthetic standards early, and gave installers the opportunity to practise before work began on site. That preparation reduces uncertainty, improves efficiency and ultimately supports programme delivery,” said Nigel.



Demonstrating collaboration in the supply chain

The business case for training

Sharing feedback from attendees, Nigel explained that this reinforces why the training matters. 92% described their training as very beneficial, 96% said they would recommend it to a colleague, and 84% said it will improve their efficiency. In practical terms, this translates into broader service capability, improved productivity, and better quality control, getting it right the first time rather than rectifying issues later.

Nigel concluded by saying: “We also hold ourselves to the same standard. Over 90% of our employees have

completed structured, hands-on training in the past year. If we want to be a credible partner to installers and contractors, we need to understand the realities of site as well as the theory.

“For me, investment in skills is not optional. It is fundamental to raising standards in the finishes and interiors sector.

“We cannot control every pressure facing construction, but we can control how seriously we take competence. And that feels like a responsibility worth investing in.”

www.rockfon.co.uk/training/

Investing in people is more than a strategy; it is the foundation of a strong, sustainable finishes and interiors sector. Whether through hands on training, structured development programmes, or practical learning opportunities, supporting workforce capability ensures projects are delivered efficiently, safely, and to the highest standards.

The message for the industry is clear: addressing skills gaps, developing talent, and creating clear pathways into the sector are essential. Businesses that prioritise training and professional development not only improve quality and compliance but also build a confident, resilient workforce ready to meet current and future challenges.

Ultimately, it is the people on site who make every project a success. By equipping them with the right skills, knowledge, and experience, we protect standards, enhance performance, and strengthen the reputation of the sector. Every investment in training is an investment in quality, safety, and the long-term growth of finishes and interiors.

PEOPLE IN BRIEF

(L-R) Dave Callan, Simon Williams, Dan Morris, Craig Newman



CCF strengthens its regional service with four senior appointments

Following a recent reorganisation, CCF has appointed four experienced Regional Directors from within the business.

- Central Regional Director **Simon Williams**
- South West Regional Director **Craig Newman**
- North Regional Director **Dan Morris**
- South East Regional Director **Dave Callan**

Well known within the industry, the new regional leadership team shares a clear focus on strengthening collaboration across branches and ensuring customers benefit from best-practice, competitive value and responsive local support. They will also be responsible for mentoring and supporting branch, operational and sales teams, helping to drive efficiency, consistency and performance across the network.

www.ccf ltd.co.uk



Adam Worrall named Managing Director of Willmott Dixon Interiors

Willmott Dixon Interiors has appointed **Adam Worrall** as its new Managing Director.

Worrall steps into the role following his tenure as Deputy Managing Director since July 2024.

Having progressed through roles on site to director, Worrall brings more than 25 years' experience across the Willmott Dixon Group.

To read the story in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/nh8fwfa6>

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FAMILY, LEGACY AND LEADERSHIP: AN INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEY DRIVEN BY PRIDE

Louisa and **Olivia Priestley** are leading DSP (Interiors), carrying Andy Priestley's legacy forward with skill, values, pride and next generation leadership. **David Crowson**, Editor, has spoken to them about their challenging and inspirational journey.



(L-R) Mason, Louisa, Olivia, Andy and Harrison Priestley enjoying a family holiday

When a family business is built on decades of hard work, trust, and reputation, its story is often inseparable from the people behind it. For DSP (Interiors), that story was shaped for years by **Andy Priestley**, a man known not only for his professionalism and craftsmanship, but also for his commitment to doing things properly, every time.

So, when Andy suddenly passed away in 2024 at the age of just 57, the loss was deeply felt both personally and professionally. For many, it could have marked the end of a chapter. For DSP, it became the beginning of something else: a continuation of his legacy, led with strength and resilience by two women determined to carry it forward.

Rising to the challenge

Today, DSP is proudly driven by Andy's wife, Louisa, and his daughter, Olivia, who stepped up in the most challenging circumstances imaginable, taking on the responsibility of leading a respected business while navigating grief, expectation, and the pressure that comes with stepping into roles many still assume belong to men.

There was no gentle transition period. No easing into responsibilities. The reality was immediate: clients needed answers, projects needed managing, teams needed reassurance, and the business needed direction.

Louisa said: "Although I had been involved in the running of DSP from the start, I hadn't been hands-on for some time, and Olivia was just completing her Business and Spanish degree when Andy died — so it was an extremely rapid learning curve for us.

"I knew I'd have to employ a Managing Director (MD) or become the MD, and it felt more appropriate to take on the role myself. I'd previously worked as an Account Manager at Stella Artois, where I was the only woman in a team of seven salesmen, and after a few weeks in the role, I realised there were similarities. But there's no denying we had to learn the ropes quickly!"

Trials and advancement

Sadly, the traumas were not over for the Priestley family. Just two months after taking on the MD role, Louisa was diagnosed with breast cancer, which led to six months

of chemotherapy, surgery, and a further 12 months of immunotherapy. If Olivia had been expecting a steady transition into the role, those plans quickly disappeared.

Olivia said: "Becoming Marketing Director a few months after graduation was a rapid introduction to the business world and to a company I'd heard my dad talk about my whole life. When mum then became ill, the team and I had to step up. It was definitely a steep learning curve.

"What we all soon discovered was that the business was like a second family and it was sometimes the only constant amidst all the distractions of real life. Mum was able to keep in touch with the business in between treatments, and for me it was very much sink or swim."

Happily, Olivia did more than swim and was even shortlisted for a Young Leadership Award just a few months after taking up the reins. And 12 months on, Louisa has finished her treatment and is back in the business full time.

Yet, for all the headlines their journey could generate, Louisa and Olivia are keen to stress that this is not a "female success story" in the token sense. They are success stories, full stop, who happen to be women in a traditionally male dominated industry.

They lead with confidence and competence, proving that knowledge and results speak for themselves. They have earned respect not by being loud, but by being consistent and, wherever possible, raising the bar.

Commitment and culture

Olivia added: "From my very first day, the DSP team made me feel at home. Aaron, our Design Director, who was my dad's right-hand man, taught me the ropes with genuine enthusiasm and patience.

"I've started to enjoy being on site with the lads now too. Being the only young woman on site felt daunting at first, but it

now feels more natural. Our team have so much expertise and knowledge that they're passionate about sharing, and no question is ever silly. I love learning from them."

"I've fallen in love with so many elements of the job and really enjoy seeing every part of a project come to life. Over the past year, my role has evolved from focusing solely on marketing to taking part in site surveys, client meetings, estimating furniture, contributing to design ideas and finishes, and building a new enquiries process using a CRM system and a cloud based server.

"But I'm equally interested in understanding the compliance regulations and the technical detail that sits behind every project. I'm hoping to start some site safety courses soon."

Olivia explained she has more recently started an FIS training program that sets out to create systems and processes to streamline projects and integrate AI tools. But the last two years have seen enormous changes in the industry.

Louisa said: "Economic headwinds have not always been favourable, and inflation and rising construction costs have squeezed margins everywhere.

"Lead times on materials have been longer than pre-pandemic levels, and since the Grenfell disaster, building control regulations have been tighter than ever.

"But perhaps the biggest challenge in our industry is the recruitment of young talent, to ensure the business is sustainable in the long term."

But DSP has an advantage in this area, one of Louisa and Andy's twin boys, Harrison, is an apprentice at the firm, a move that is both practical and symbolic, as the next generation learns the trade.



(L-R) Olivia and Louisa at their office in Derby

Louisa said: "Mason, who is at university, and Harrison have grown up around the business, so they understand the values it is built on. But they also have their own drive and their own ambitions, and it is wonderful to see Harrison channelling that into DSP.

"It is important to us that young people coming into the industry see it as a career, not just a job. We want DSP to be somewhere people can learn, progress, and build something they are proud of."

That focus on people has always been part of DSP's DNA. The company's reputation has been built not only on quality fit-outs and meticulous project delivery, but also on the relationships that sit behind them, with

clients, suppliers, and the wider team.

The company does not outsource its work, and any contractors it does work with have been part of the DSP journey for more than 20 years.

And over that time the firm has worked with some of the biggest companies in the East Midlands, including Rolls Royce, Alstom, SureScreen Diagnostics, Ward Recycling, Charterspace and KTM Motorsports.

In a sector where deadlines are tight and expectations are high, DSP has earned trust by being the business that communicates clearly, turns up, and delivers exactly what it promises.

While the past year could have understandably caused the company to pause, Louisa and Olivia have instead used it as a catalyst. They have retained the traditional standards Andy insisted on, while modernising the way the business operates and positioning DSP for the future.

Louisa concluded by saying: "We are very aware that people are watching. Clients want reassurance, and our team want stability. We have had to step up and make decisions at pace, but we have never lost sight of what DSP stands for. We do not cut corners. We do not overpromise. We do it properly."

DSP (Interiors) may have faced one of the toughest years imaginable, but the company's foundations remain intact and its future looks strong.

Because the legacy Andy built hasn't been left behind. It's being carried forward, with pride, by the people who knew him best and who are making sure his standards, his values and his name continue to shape everything DSP does next.



Louisa and Andy on a well-deserved holiday

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION THROUGH GIRLS CAN BUILD

Varsha Patel, Marketing and Communications Lead at OCL Facades, shares with us the remarkable progress of their Girls Can Build programme.



Varsha Patel,
Marketing and
Communications
Lead at OCL Facades

OCL is a proud family-run construction business specialising in external facades, internal drylining and cladding remediation across complex residential and commercial developments. With more than two decades of experience, our

teams work closely with developers, main contractors and design teams to deliver high-quality building envelope and interior solutions, supporting projects from concept through to completion. Built on strong unrivalled values we are committed not only to delivering exceptional buildings, but also to making a positive contribution to the wider construction industry.

That commitment extends to investing in the future workforce that will shape our sector.

Since its inception in 2024, the Girls Can Build programme has engaged more than 2,200 young people, from primary school pupils as young as seven to sixth form students in mainstream and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) schools, challenging outdated perceptions of construction and opening eyes to the breadth of opportunities within our sector.

The impact is measurable

Girls Can Build is not a pilot idea or a one-off social value activity. It is an exciting and much needed movement, and the numbers reflect that momentum.

A total of 2,255 young people were engaged from 2024 to 2025, with 1,267 participating within the first 12 months, 883 engaged during 2024, and 1,372 participating in 2025. Growth has not plateaued - it is accelerating.

We have now partnered with 18 schools, including 13 primary schools, 4 secondary schools, and 1 SEND school.



This breadth is important. True inclusion means ensuring exposure across different ages, abilities and educational settings, not just traditional pathways.

To deliver this impact, these brilliant Girls Can Build advocates have facilitated 45 structured sessions and contributed 249 hours of volunteered time, alongside their demanding day jobs and with full support from OCL Facades.

Behind every statistic is a professional giving their time, sharing their experience and actively reshaping how young people perceive our sector.

These figures demonstrate more than reach. They demonstrate commitment. They demonstrate consistency.

They also show that when the industry takes responsibility for its own pipeline, meaningful change is possible.

At primary school age, perceptions about "what jobs are for me" are already forming. When 98% of girls leave a session excited about construction, we are not just delivering an assembly - we are shifting mindsets at the point they are being shaped. For our industry this is where we need to plant the seed and help bridge the gender parity gap that continues to widen.

Pupils taking part loved the positioning and framing of the sessions, with their comments

reaffirming the effectiveness of the delivery:

- "Dressing up was so much fun!"
 - "It was interesting to learn about the varied jobs!"
 - "I loved everything!"
 - "I can't wait to tell my dad about today!"
- What stands out is not just their enjoyment, but their growing awareness.

Tackling the "Low paid, long hours graft" perceptions

When we launched the secondary school provision last year, one message came through loud and clear: many teenagers still see construction as low-paid, physically exhausting work with long hours and limited progression. For many girls in particular, it simply does not feel like a career path for them.

The reality, however, is very different. The construction sector in the UK employs over 2 million people. While the industry has historically been male-dominated, women now represent around 15% of the overall construction workforce. They remain significantly under-represented in site-based roles, however, making up only around 1% of the on-site manual workforce.

That perception gap is exactly what Girls Can Build addresses, for teenagers putting the focus on allyship at the forefront.



Our first graduates of Girls Can Build

forward and invest in the next generation, we can't expect the problem to fix itself.

"This isn't about ticking a social value box. It's about taking responsibility for the sector we're part of. As an SME, we may not have the scale of a tier one contractor, but we have influence, we have passion and we're choosing to use it.

"The return we're looking for isn't financial. It's cultural. It's about ensuring that in ten years' time, there is a stronger, more diverse talent pool coming into construction. But for that to happen at scale, the industry needs collective buy-in. One company can make an impact but together, we can change the narrative entirely!"



The team getting hands on during a classroom session

A call to the sector

The Finishes and Interiors community is uniquely positioned to influence the next generation. We are specialists. We are innovators. And we are employers who urgently need fresh talent.

If 727 girls in just two months can leave a session rethinking their future, imagine the impact we could have as a collective.

Together, we can ensure more girls and boys discover that construction is not a fallback career. It is credible. It is skilled. It is rewarding. And it needs them.

To discuss the programme further, you can contact us by emailing:

office@ocl.london

<https://ocl.london/>

Through interactive assemblies and workshops, we demystify the many avenues open to young people by showcasing roles and pathways beyond hands-on construction - from design, project management, and surveying to estimating, health and safety, finance, and marketing. Not all roles require university qualifications, yet they can be equally, if not more, rewarding. For today's Gen Alphas, the salaries associated with construction roles are often the biggest eye-opener.

Girls are beginning to understand that construction is diverse, creative, technical, and full of progression opportunities. There is a place for girls, with roles to suit every interest and every strength.

Breaking stereotypes and bridging the construction skills gap

The construction industry faces a significant skills shortage, with an urgent demand for new talent. Estimates suggest that the UK will need to recruit hundreds of thousands of new construction workers by 2027 just to meet workforce demand.

At the same time, the workforce is ageing rapidly: around 35% of current construction workers are over 50, and large numbers are expected to retire in the next decade. Without a pipeline of younger recruits entering the sector, meeting future demand will become increasingly difficult.

Diversity also lags behind the wider population. Only 6% of construction workers come from a minority ethnic background, compared with around 13.8% in the broader UK workforce.

When these figures are considered alongside the fact that 98% of primary-aged girls left our Hackney sessions excited about construction, the importance of early intervention becomes clear.

The issue is not interest. The issue is exposure.

Opening young minds to construction careers

Feedback from schools has been overwhelmingly positive. Many now request a presence at careers fairs and enrichment days, describing the assemblies as "essential."

One teacher commented: "Girls Can Build was fantastic. The girls came away from the assembly and workshop enthused about

the possibility of careers in construction and engineering. It was great that they were given the opportunity to see careers that perhaps they had not considered in the past."

That phrase — "careers they had not considered in the past" — perfectly captures the purpose of the programme.

There remains a significant information gap within careers education. Too often, guidance still defaults to perceived "traditional" pathways, with construction rarely presented as a viable or attractive option — particularly for girls. Yet when young people are given clear information about the roles available, the training routes and the earning potential within the sector, many express genuine interest in pursuing these careers.

At a time when the industry faces an ageing workforce, a growing skills shortage across both trades and technical professions, and the continued under-representation of women and diverse communities, broadening access to accurate careers information has never been more important.

By bringing construction directly into classrooms, Girls Can Build is helping ensure that the next generation sees the sector not as an overlooked option, but as a dynamic industry full of opportunity, progression and purpose.

Leadership perspective: A commitment beyond commercial return

For OCL Facades, Girls Can Build is not driven by commercial gain.

As an SME, committing time, people and resource is a conscious decision, and one that reflects the company's long-term view of the sector.

James Harris, Managing Director at OCL Facades, explains: "We're an SME. Every hour our team spends delivering Girls Can Build is time away from project delivery, tenders or commercial activity. There is no direct financial return on this programme, and that's exactly the point.

"We care deeply about the future of our industry. We're operating at a time when construction faces a widening skills gap, an ageing workforce and persistent under-representation of women and diverse communities along with Gateway 2 and BSR challenges. If businesses like ours don't step

PROSPECTS FOR CONSTRUCTION IN 2026

Dr Noble Francis, Economics Director at the Construction Products Association (CPA), shares his thoughts on construction output, which is forecast to grow by 1.7% in 2026, with housing weakness offset by growth elsewhere despite ongoing cost and skills pressures.



Dr Noble Francis, Economics Director, Construction Products Association (CPA)

Construction activity in 2026 is in a similar position to how it was last year, with subdued activity in the largest construction sectors, such as housing new build and repair, maintenance, and improvement (rm&i), offset by growth in key niche areas including commercial refurbishment and fit-out, data centres and infrastructure. Last year was challenging for many firms across the construction supply chain, and this year is likely to be equally challenging. However, there remain key opportunities for firms working in those key niche growth areas.

Overall, construction activity is forecast to grow by 1.7% in 2026. On the positive side, the uncertainty surrounding the Autumn Budget, which affected homeowners, homebuyers, businesses, clients, and investors, was over in November. In addition, gradual interest rate cuts are expected to support both consumers and businesses.

House building

Activity in house building, the largest construction sector, began to recover at the start of 2025 but tailed off sharply after April. It remained subdued coming into this year, as affordability is a key constraint in higher-priced parts of the country, while site viability is a key problem in lower-priced areas. High-rise residential developments are affected by substantial delays at the Building Safety Regulator (BSR), even after planning approval, particularly in London.

Housing repair, maintenance, and improvement

Overall, private housing is forecast to grow by 1.5% this year. Housing rm&i, the second largest construction sector, also remains subdued. This is despite many homeowners having finance available for home improvement as homeowners have chosen to save rather than spend, especially on big-ticket items, as consumer confidence remains poor and uncertainty remains high.

Commercial construction

Commercial construction experienced mixed fortunes in 2025, and this is likely to remain the case this year as well.

For firms working on smaller, high-end, high-value refurbishment and fit-out, activity remains very strong and is expected to continue over the next few years, as around 70% of the commercial building stock needs retrofitting to avoid becoming stranded assets that cannot be let due to energy-efficiency standards from 2030.

In addition, demand is focused on grade 'A' quality office space, where the vacancy rate is likely to fall to zero in the coming years.

However, new large commercial developments, including 'back-to-frame' refurbishment projects, which often cost £150-200 million, are increasingly difficult to justify given the excess existing building stock, especially with high construction and financing costs remaining major challenges,

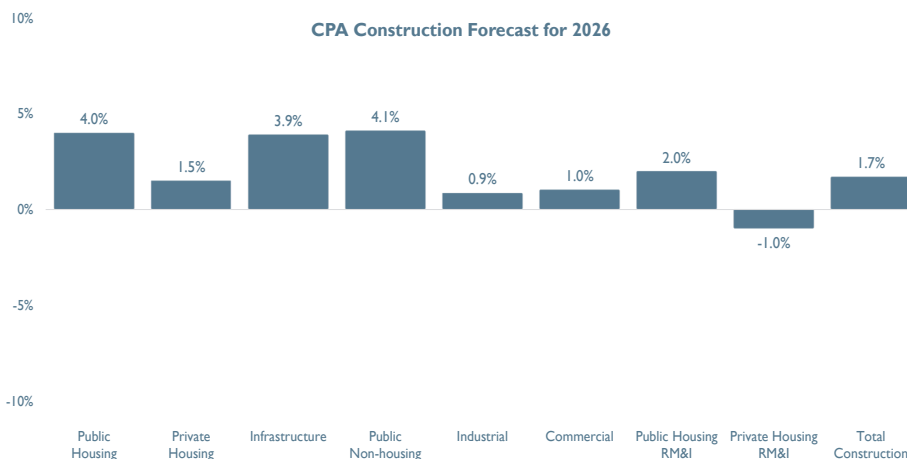
and investors are adopting a 'wait-and-see' attitude to increased uncertainty. There are a few projects in the pipeline, but they keep being pushed back.

Student accommodation investment and university construction activity remain strong despite financial pressures on some universities, but there are still BSR delays on new student accommodation projects at Gateway stages 2 and 3. Overall, commercial output is expected to rise by 1.0% this year.

Public non-housing sector

One key area where growth is expected is the public non-housing sector, which primarily includes education, health, defence, and prisons. Activity on the Schools Rebuilding Programme appears to be accelerating, and future waves of the programme should now come through more quickly.

An increase in long-term capital funding for defence is also expected to drive significant growth. While activity on the New Hospital Programme has historically been slow to materialise, it is likely to accelerate from a low base. The Government also intends to increase investment in prison, probation, and court capacity. However, the ability to deliver projects on the ground remains a critical constraint. Delivery has been poor to date, and despite strong increases in investment, growth in this sector is still expected to reach only 4.1% in 2026.



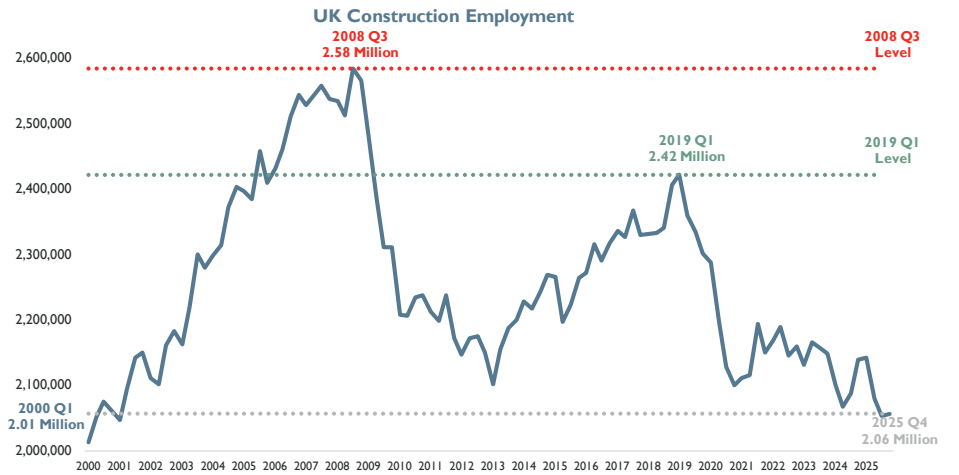
Source: CPA

Looking at key risks

On the positive side, if consumer, business, and client confidence improves, this could drive stronger UK economic and construction growth. In addition, two further interest rate cuts this year, in Spring and Autumn, are likely to support confidence, spending, and investment.

On the negative side, however, the construction sector continues to face the lagged impacts of the challenges from last year. These are likely to lead to more specialist subcontractor and small builders' merchant insolvencies in the first half of this year. This is likely to be exacerbated by clients being more price sensitive and by main contractors putting pressure on the supply chain to avoid passing on cost increases.

Looking beyond this year, the biggest medium-term concerns are a lack of skilled trades. As an industry, we have lost a significant proportion of the old-age demographic of skilled trades in the last



Source: ONS

few years and they are not going to come back. Plus, we do not get enough new skilled trades into the industry. Construction apprenticeships, college places and skills bootcamps all have high dropout rates.



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THE TROUBLE WITH STUBBLE - HOW TO MANAGE WORKERS WITH FACIAL HAIR

Facial hair prevents tight-fitting RPE from sealing, placing workers' health at risk, so they must be clean-shaven or use PAPRs. **Daniel Windle**, Paralegal at DAC Beachcroft LLP, explains the responsibilities of businesses to provide safe and suitable PPE.

Facial hair is increasingly common in today's workforce, but when it comes to respiratory protective equipment (RPE), stubble and beards present a serious compliance challenge. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) research confirms that facial hair compromises the seal of tight-fitting masks, reducing their effectiveness and exposing workers to hazardous substances.

Why clean-shaven matters

HSE Report RR1052¹ confirms that the clean-shaven requirement for tight-fitting RPE is essential. Even short stubble can break the seal on masks, such as FFP3 filtering facepieces and half masks, significantly reducing protection. This effect can start within 24 hours of shaving and worsens as facial hair grows. Since the impact is unpredictable, enforcing a clean-shaven policy is the only practical solution.

HSE guidance is clear: facial hair, including stubble, prevents a proper seal. Where

there are legitimate reasons for maintaining a beard, such as religious observance or medical conditions, employers must provide alternative RPE that does not rely on a tight fit. Allowing workers with facial hair to wear tight-fitting masks without a proper seal breaches health and safety law and undermines an organisation's respiratory protection policy.

Alternatives for workers who cannot shave

If shaving is not an option, workers must use an alternative. The most common solution is a powered air respirator system (PAPR), which delivers filtered air into a loose-fitting headtop or helmet. These systems do not rely on a face seal and are suitable for workers with beards or stubble. Although they involve higher upfront costs, they eliminate compliance risks and improve comfort. Businesses should ensure any alternative equipment meets all relevant safety standards.



Daniel Windle, Paralegal at DAC Beachcroft LLP

Legal duties: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provision

The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2022 have added a tier of complexity by extending PPE obligations to "limb (b)" workers. Businesses are required to treat limb (b) workers the same as employees when it comes to PPE provision: where PPE is required, it must be supplied free of charge, and employers must provide training and instruction in its correct use.



as individuals who agree to perform work personally for another party that is not a client or customer of their own business. A genuine, unfettered right of substitution usually negates limb (b) status, making the individual self-employed. However, courts scrutinise substitution clauses closely: if the right is theoretical or restricted, the worker could still be deemed limb (b).

There are essentially two key questions:

- 1 Is there an obligation to perform the work personally?
- 2 Is the other party a client or customer of the individual's own business?

If the answer to the first is yes and the second is no, limb (b) status is likely.

For our members, this distinction is critical. Treating subcontractors as limb (b) workers triggers PPE obligations. Conversely, asserting a genuine substitution right supports the position that PPE provision is not legally required, though many firms still supply PPE for commercial and compliance reasons.

Employment status and PPE obligations

Determining whether an individual is an employee, a limb (b) worker, or genuinely self-employed is a fact-specific exercise. Government guidance² emphasises that status depends on factors such as personal service, the level of control exercised, and whether the individual is operating a business in their own right.

Where an individual meets the definition of a limb (b) worker under section 230(3)(b) of the Employment Rights Act 1996, the PPE at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2022 require businesses to provide PPE on the same basis as employees.

Some labour-supply arrangements, such as ganglabour models, can make worker-status assessments more complex. Businesses should ensure they proactively discuss arrangements and any potential limb-worker status with the business providing the labour, to ensure all parties are meeting their responsibilities. They should also consider taking legal advice on the specifics of the contractual appointment and the obligations created, where appropriate.

What if someone refuses to shave?

Employers should begin by confirming the minimum RPE requirements through a risk assessment and specifying appropriate equipment. For most PPE, such as hard hats, gloves or safety glasses, employees generally accept the issued items. Footwear often allows for more personal choice, provided it meets the required specification.

A similar approach can apply to RPE. If a worker chooses not to comply with a clean-shaven policy for personal reasons, they may be permitted to source their own alternative, provided it meets the businesses specification and legal standards. Evidence of compliance should be required.

However, the situation changes if the refusal is based on protected characteristics, such as religious observance or medical conditions. In these cases, employers have a duty to consider reasonable adjustments, such as providing PAPRs with loose-fitting hoods that do not require a face seal. If no reasonable alternative can be provided, legal advice should be sought before considering disciplinary action. Employers must balance health and safety obligations with equality and human rights considerations.

The overriding principle is that employers must meet their health and safety duties, but where a worker cannot shave for religious or medical reasons, reasonable adjustments should be explored. If no suitable adjustment is available, legal advice should be sought before considering formal action.

Commercial considerations

Beyond compliance, providing suitable RPE fosters trust and reduces downtime from enforcement action. While PAPRs involve upfront investment, they can improve productivity by reducing fit-test failures, enhance workforce diversity and inclusion, and demonstrate best practice to clients and regulators.

Key takeaways

Tight-fitting RPE requires a clean-shaven face; there can be no exceptions for stubble. If shaving is not possible, PAPRs with loose-fitting hoods provide a compliant alternative.

Under the PPE at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2022, employers of limb (b) workers must supply PPE free of charge where it is required and ensure proper training. Substitution clauses in contracts affect whether a worker is classed as limb (b), so contracts should reflect reality.

Finally, document risk assessments and seek legal advice where religious or medical exemptions apply. Employers must still protect workers from harm, but they should explore reasonable adjustments for those who cannot shave for religious or medical reasons, provided these do not compromise safety.

dacbeachcroft.com

Source

1. <https://tinyurl.com/yy6e6eyw>
2. <https://tinyurl.com/mtz7rtc>



Workers may choose to wear their own PPE, but the employer remains responsible for ensuring that any personally sourced equipment meets the required safety standards. Those who are genuinely self-employed fall outside the scope of these regulations, but the responsibility to ensure correct RPE use applies across the supply chain. Failure to comply can lead to enforcement action, including sanctions and fees for intervention, which remain common in the finishes and interiors sector.

Who counts as limb (b)?

When this obligation was first introduced, it was made clear that the duty to provide PPE will not apply to those who are genuinely self-employed. However, HSE guidance notes that every employment relationship will be specific to the individual and the employer. As such, the precise status of any worker may only be determined by a court or tribunal.

Section 230(3)(b) of the Employment Rights Act 1996 defines limb (b) workers

SHINING A LIGHT ON BAD PRACTICES (NOT OUR WALLS) IN THE HOUSEBUILDING SECTOR



James Parlour, Technical Director at FIS, discusses how the FIS Shine a Light campaign has published guidance, e-learning modules, masterclasses and connects with major new research to help businesses improve quality and compliance.



James Parlour,
Technical Director
at FIS

A frequent concern we have heard from FIS members who work in the housebuilding sector relates to unfair behaviour toward the drylining and internal finish packages.

Change won't happen unless we stand above

the parapet, which is why FIS is committed to shining a light on bad practices.

Last year, to support our members, FIS launched its Shine a Light campaign to help drive out improper snagging of plaster finishes which often results in contractors suffering from delayed and or incomplete payments.

This year, we are also sharing the results of our industry leading research on "Procurement, Payment and Contract Management: The challenges in the low and mid-rise housing sector" to further support our members operating in this challenging environment.

What are the bad snagging practices?

The original focus of the Shine a Light campaign was oriented narrowly toward reports from FIS members of general contractors and

housebuilders using bright lights at very close range during snagging inspections, which highlights small defects in plaster finishes that would otherwise be undetectable. This is contrary to the guidance outlined in both British Standards and the technical standards underpinning popular home warranty schemes.

The guidelines within BS EN 13914-2, for example, outline levels of quality and smoothness in plaster finishes that should be specified, and, perhaps most importantly, the assumptions that should be made in the absence of a specification stating otherwise. The standard also prescribes the relationship between final and site lighting conditions and the circumstances under which a plaster finish should be viewed, with natural light from either the centre of the room or a two-metre minimum distance.

Addressing the bad practices

FIS has published detailed technical guidance¹, which we recommend our members download and share with their clients and contractors to help better manage expectations. This guidance sets out:

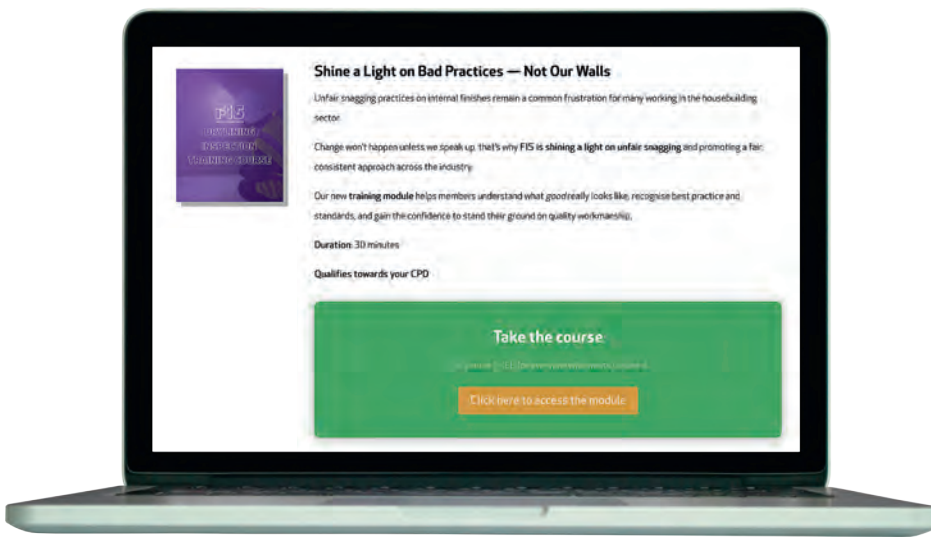
- Drylining installation, jointing and plastering tolerances
- Standardised inspection methods
- Lighting conditions on site, during inspection; and

- What should be specified and what should be assumed in the absence of a specification.

Following this work, late last year we released a short duration training module on our growing e-Learning platform², designed to instruct those carrying out quality control checks on drylining finishing. In addition to offering valuable CPD hours, this course can be taken by anyone who conducts these inspections, whether they are carrying out QC checks on their own work, snagging work carried out by subcontractors, or conducting inspections for the purposes of a home warranty scheme, to improve consistency and ensure that important relationships in the supply chain are not needlessly thrown away in a search for marginal profit gains.

FIS and its members have collaborated with the National House Building Council (NHBC) and the Home Builders Federation (HBF) to launch a new series of drylining masterclasses aimed at improving skills, quality and compliance within the construction industry³.

Developed to support both new entrants and experienced professionals, these practical training sessions will be delivered at NHBC's network of training hubs. The programme is designed to raise standards across the drylining trade, a critical element of modern building interiors that often lacks structured training opportunities.



The bigger picture

When we take the advice of BS EN 13914-2, stand back and look at the problem from further away, we see larger problems in the procurement model, payment practices and contract management.

In the final quarter of 2025, FIS conducted a survey of specialist contractors active in the housebuilding supply chain. The focus was on drawing out the factors that diminish the sector’s ability to perform and ultimately invest in more modern methods of construction.

The key conclusions are as follows:

- Payment is slow for most subcontractors:** 80% of the surveyed sample report post-application payment periods of 30–39 days with national and regional housebuilders. SME housebuilders tend to pay faster, with 23.5% paying in less than 30 days, but the highest proportion still pay in 30–39 days (64.7%). This indicates that specialist contractors in the supply chain typically provide 60–78 days of credit to their often significantly larger clients.
- Retentions are a systemic drag:** Over half of retentions are not released on time across every housebuilder type, with 80% reporting that they sometimes, or worse, fail to recover retentions when working with national housebuilders.
- Post-award price pressure is common:** Around two-thirds of respondents report being asked to reduce price post-award when working for national and regional housebuilders.
- Contracts are often bespoke and rarely checked by lawyers:** Developer bespoke forms dominate, and 65–72% of subcontractors never take legal advice before signing a contract.
- Pipeline visibility is limited:** Only 20–35% report call-off periods of six or more weeks, hindering resource planning. Whilst social value requirements are often built into contracts, their impact on the ultimate target remains limited, with concerns expressed over the way that they are measured, monitored and ultimately delivered.
- Cashflow creates strain for individuals:** 41% of respondents feel stressed about cashflow most or all the time. Firms lean heavily on merchant or manufacturer credit and corporate credit cards.

- Training investment does not keep up with demand:** While 64% claim to offer apprenticeships and 68% claim to employ trainees, the majority report limited numbers. Whilst some improvement is expected, there is limited optimism that the fundamental shift needed is close. Training investment is often mandated through contracts, however, respondents expressed concerns that this can be a tick box exercise with limited real-world impact.

Fig. 1

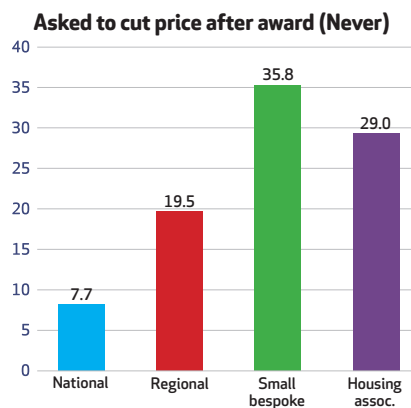


Fig. 1 shows responses to a question about how often specialists are asked to reduce their price after being awarded a contract. The values represent the percentage of respondents who are never asked to do so, by client.

Fig. 2

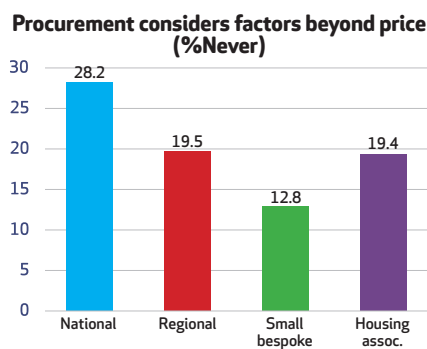


Fig. 2 also breaks down data according to the type of client and again represents the percentage of respondents that never see factors other than price drive procurement decisions.

It is clear that aggressive price-first procurement, inconsistent and delayed payment, post-award price reductions, and regressive retention practices have weakened the specialist supply chain.

The full findings of this survey can be found on the FIS website by visiting: www.thefis.org/housebuilding-research

Research confirms industry findings

Our research underpins the key conclusions of the recent Industry Training Board (ITB) Review⁴ conducted by Mark Farmer. Talking about their review Mark said: “Nothing short of combined legislative interventions across prompt payment, project bank accounts, responsible procurement, self-employment v PAYE incentives, workforce licensing, more stringent building regulations and a consumer rights revolution will force the necessary change at an industry-wide level”

Conclusion

Every business has a legal responsibility to ensure that reasonably foreseeable business risks are addressed. But what do you do when the risk you are being asked to absorb is too great, the request moves you outside your competence and insurance coverage, the contract is too onerous, or you are being asked to do the impossible? Sometimes the right thing to do is to say “No”⁵. It isn’t easy, but the alternative could be catastrophic!

Remember, you are not alone. We are aware that commercial pressure from housebuilders is prevalent in the industry, and we encourage members to inform us when they encounter these bad practices.

You can reach out in confidence to **Iain McIlwee**, FIS CEO, via email at ianmclwee@thefis.org or by calling **07792 959481**.

Source

- www.thefis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Technical-Note-Standards-for-Plaster-Finish.pdf
- www.thefis.org/skills-hub/training-offers-for-members/fis-training-modules/drylining-inspection-training-module/
- www.nhbc.co.uk/training/course-index/dry-lining-masterclass
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/2023-industry-training-board-itb-review
- <https://www.thefis.org/about-us/fis-campaigns/responsible-no/>

TECH THAT TRANSFORMS: IMPROVING SUSTAINABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

We discover how technology is streamlining design, boosting collaboration, and enabling smarter spaces.

At the recent FIS Interiors Insight Live event held at the Business Design Centre, London (alongside Workspace Design Show), **Iain McIlwee**, Chief Executive at FIS, chaired a session discussing how technology only delivers value when paired with trusted, structured data. Accurate information reduces rework, cuts costs and carbon, and ensures projects are built as designed.

We hear the key take aways from the three guest speakers.

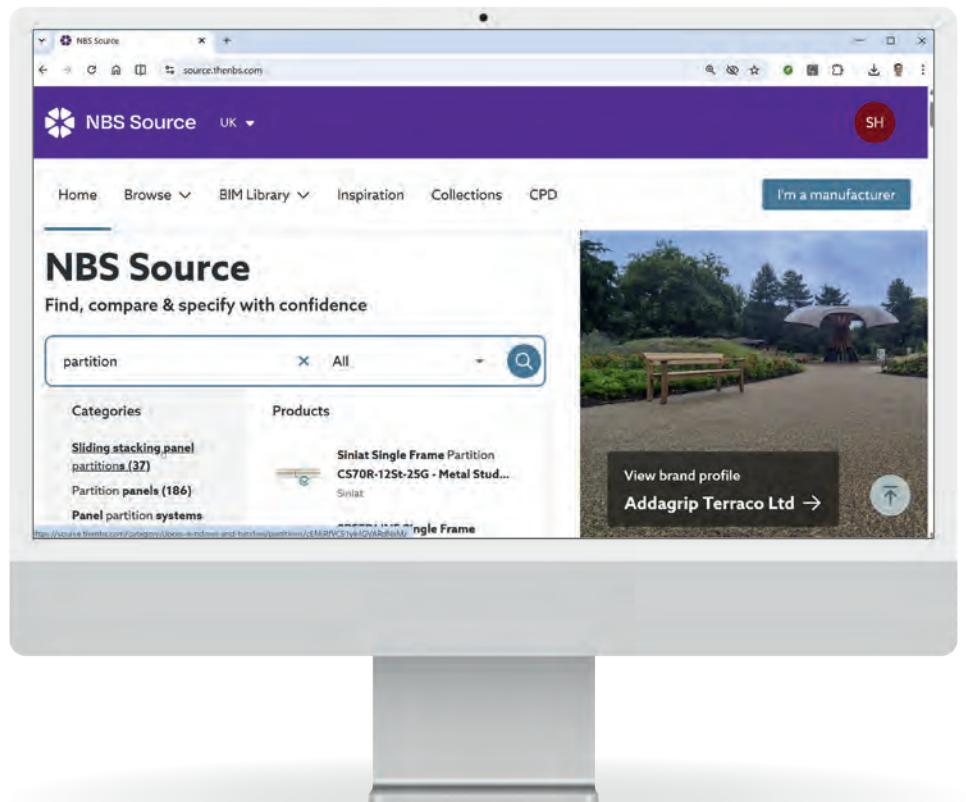


Dr Stephen Hamil, Innovation Director at NBS, part of Hubexo

The NBS viewpoint

Dr Stephen Hamil, Innovation Director at NBS, part of Hubexo, explained that construction technology is evolving rapidly. New platforms, automation tools, and AI-driven workflows promise efficiency gains across design, specification, and delivery. But technology alone has limited value in construction. He said "Without well-structured, trusted technical content underpinning it, even the most sophisticated digital tools will struggle to deliver meaningful outcomes.

"For Construction Technology (ConTech) to genuinely transform the industry, it must combine capable technology with authoritative, structured data. Technology without content is constrained. Content without structure is unusable. And data without trust is risky.



"At NBS, we have always placed the quality of technical content first. Our reputation has been built on rigour, standardisation and industry alignment. We see BIM for what it truly is: information modelling. It is not simply a 3D model created in Revit or Archicad. It is the structured, reliable exchange of product and project information throughout the building lifecycle."

Stephen provided three examples of how they are trying to unlock this potential for construction professionals and manufacturers.

Unique identification through GS1

We have partnered with GS1 to introduce globally recognised unique identifiers into construction product information. In an industry where product naming can vary, descriptions can change, and versions evolve over time, unique IDs create clarity.

They enable precise referencing across specifications, schedules, procurement systems and digital twins. The result is reduced ambiguity, improved traceability and greater confidence that the product specified is the product delivered and maintained.

Structured data aligned to standards

Working with leading gypsum board partition manufacturers, we have developed consistently structured product datasets aligned to relevant standards and classification systems. This enables transparent filtering and like-for-like comparison based on performance criteria rather than marketing language. Designers can interrogate acoustic ratings, fire performance, durability and sustainability metrics in a consistent format. Manufacturers benefit from fair comparison. Specifiers benefit from clarity. Projects benefit from informed decision-making.

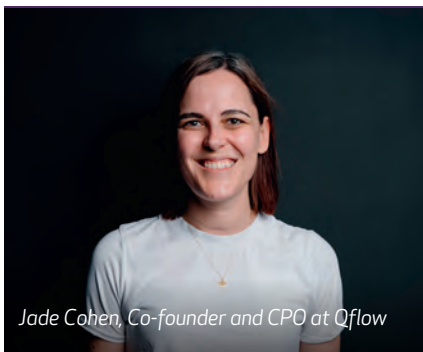
Sustainability information through Eco Platform

We are now members of Eco Platform, the leading European organisation for Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs). Sustainability is increasingly data-driven. But unless environmental information is structured, verified and integrated into specification workflows, it remains difficult to use effectively. By embedding structured EPD data within manufacturer product information, we enable sustainability considerations to be assessed at the point of specification – not retrospectively. Better data supports better carbon decisions across the project lifecycle.

“Rubbish in, rubbish out” has long been a criticism of BIM. Poor quality or inconsistent data inevitably leads to unreliable outputs. Our focus is to change that. By prioritising trusted, standardised and structured technical content alongside robust digital tools, we enable technology to fulfil its potential.

He concluded by saying: “In construction, transformation will not come from software alone. It will come from the combination of technology and high-quality information, working together. That is the foundation we continue to build at NBS.”

www.thenbs.com



Jade Cohen, Co-founder and CPO at Qflow

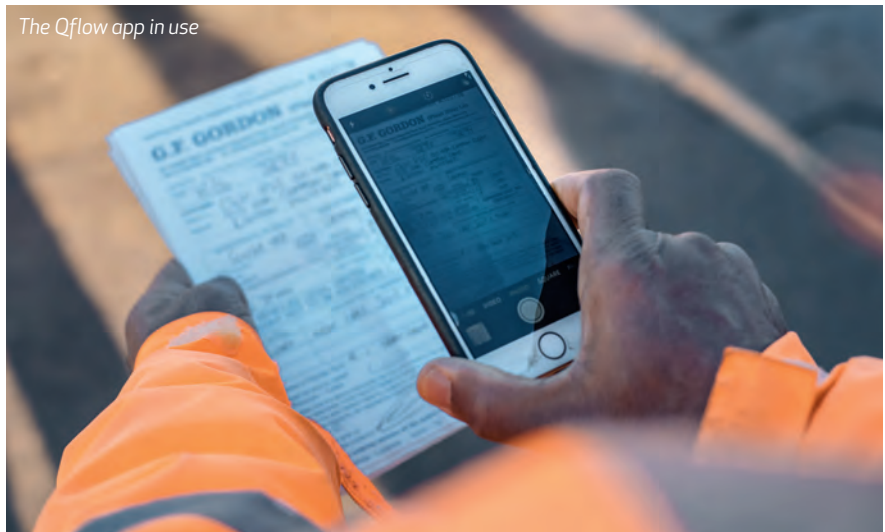
From design to build: Unlocking value with data

Design, construction, and operation are three phases currently separated. However, they should not be and do not need to be.

In a time where costs have never been higher and margins thinner, it is more imperative than ever to mitigate unnecessary material waste and risk, explained **Jade Cohen**, Co-founder and CPO at Qflow.

Jade said: “However, there is a big disconnect that still exists between the various phases of planning, through to design, and construction. This disconnect results in an average risk of over £2 million per project in the UK, due to avoidable mistakes that are happening in the materials

The Qflow app in use



supply chain. These mistakes could largely be prevented with access to the right information at the right time.

“As one example of technology being applied in this space, Qflow is helping to bridge the gap between “what I designed” with “what did I actually build?”. It uses AI to extract data on materials delivered and to identify risks against design requirements. The result is faster and more effective quality control during the construction phase, along with reduced material waste.

“However, the even greater value that technology such as this can provide is legal assurance. Robust data exists to prove what was delivered, when it was delivered and by whom, creating a complete audit trail of a building’s materials.”

She commented that the only way to utilise the power of AI in this way is to ensure that the data feeding it is of the highest possible quality. We are no longer talking about the quality of physical materials, but about the quality of digital information. If our digital representation

of physical reality is inaccurate, then AI will produce suboptimal outputs at best, or misleading guidance at worst.

“At Qflow, we focus heavily on ensuring that the data feeding AI is as robust and accurately represented as possible. By digesting both design documentation and on-site delivery tickets, a substantial amount of data processing and enrichment is required to ensure the data is usable for further analysis.

“All of this is to say, that if access to good quality data were more readily accessible on-site, and this was housed in the right places, then there is a lot that can be unlocked when it comes to ensuring we build what we intended, rather than a slight variation of it,” said Jade.

She concluded by saying: “The technology exists to support this by removing the painful data experiences away from project teams, and equipping them with the insights needed to ensure construction delivery remains on time and on budget, bringing back the potential for healthier margins and more data rich buildings.”

<https://qualisflow.com/en-us/us-home/>





Brett King, Director of Industry Transformation EMEA at Procore Technologies

The invisible carbon cost of bad data

Brett King, Director of Industry Transformation EMEA at Procore Technologies, explained that in the interiors and fit-out sector, we have become very good at counting the carbon in a carpet tile. We scrutinise Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and debate circularity. That matters. But on most projects, the biggest source of environmental and financial waste is not the wrong material choice. It is rework.

Brett said: "In the finishing trades, waste is rarely a failure of intent. It is a failure of information. When a ceiling is ripped out because an MEP clash was not caught, or a partition is relocated because an approval sat in a Sent folder for three weeks, we burn profit and bin carbon. Every loop of rework carries a triple penalty: financial, programme and carbon.

"FIS research highlights fragmentation in design responsibility across the finishes sector. When interiors teams sit at the end of a broken information chain, the

consequences are physical. Materials are manufactured, transported and installed, only to be removed. Skilled labour is spent undoing rather than doing. Programme certainty disappears.

"Yet we rarely talk about the root cause: data friction. Construction is now a data heavy industry. Thousands of request for information, variations and inspection records are generated on every project. But for many contractors, that data is trapped in silos, spreadsheets or email chains."

He continued by saying: "When cost control does not connect to site updates, and design revisions do not flow cleanly into procurement, teams reconcile versions instead of preventing issues. Decisions are made on partial visibility. Projects are managed reactively, not predictively. In that environment, data becomes overhead rather than insight.

"The invisible carbon cost of bad data shows up in skips, not dashboards."

Brett went onto explain that there is a lot of noise around AI driven decision making. He said: "Some see it as the answer to everything. Others roll their eyes the moment it is mentioned. The reality sits somewhere in between. The real challenge is not adopting AI. It is fixing the gap between collecting data and actually using it to make better decisions.

"The journey to being truly data driven is not about jumping to automation. It is about moving from answering "What happened?" to acting on "What should we do next?"

"When firms remain stuck reporting on the past, they react after waste has already occurred. Rework is the physical

symptom of that maturity gap. AI will not rescue a broken system. It is a force multiplier, not a magic wand.

"It does not fix bad data. It accelerates whatever process you already have. Feed it fragmented, inconsistent information and it will help you make expensive mistakes faster. You cannot automate a mess.

"If intelligence is to play a meaningful role in interiors, the fundamentals must come first. Structured data. Clear ownership. Connected workflows."

Commenting on the difference between a predictable project and a reactive one Brett explained that this is rarely the skill of the installers. It is the flow of information.

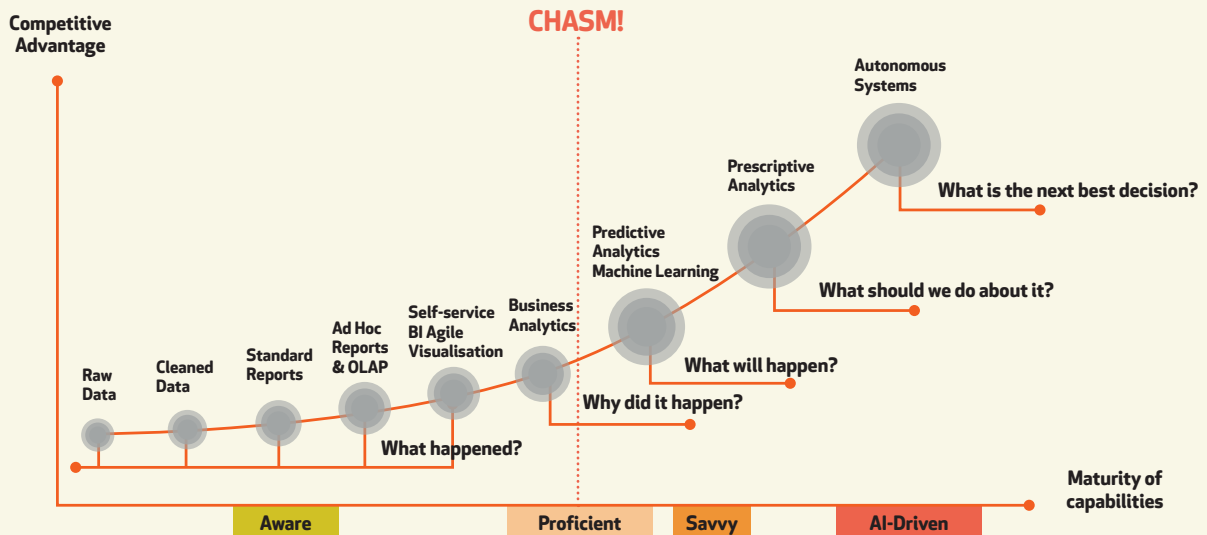
"When commercial control, design coordination and site execution are connected, revisions are caught earlier, approvals are tracked rather than chased, and site progress informs the commercial position in real time. The Golden Thread becomes operational control. And that is where the Green Thread of sustainability becomes measurable. "Sustainability in interiors is not a separate green initiative. It is the outcome of getting it right first time," he said.

In conclusion, Brett said: "When data flows cleanly, rework reduces. When process is connected, productivity stabilises. When decisions happen earlier, carbon reduces by default.

"Until we fix the way information flows through interiors projects, we will keep paying for sustainability twice."

www.procore.com/en-gb

The Journey to Being Data-Driven



UPDATE: HILL DICKINSON LEADS GROUP ACTION OVER UNPAID ISG SUPPLIERS

We sought an update on the dispute over unpaid monies following the collapse of ISG, with Hill Dickinson continuing their group action in hopes of getting the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to engage constructively.

In the January issue of SpecFinish we published that FIS CEO **Iain McIlwee** had spoken openly to the BBC about millions of pounds being owed to companies following the collapse of ISG last year.

The BBC investigation concerns the failure of Project Bank Accounts (PBAs) used by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on prison upgrades. Around 40 companies are owed money for work they completed and say PBAs - meant to protect suppliers by holding ring-fenced funds - should have ensured payment. However, administrators EY-Parthenon said the accounts had only "nominal funds," suggesting the MoJ may never have paid the money in. Iain said FIS is helping affected firms coordinate legal action with law firm Hill Dickinson.

Sarah Emerson, Partner at Hill Dickinson, explained they were engaged in pre-action correspondence with the MoJ on behalf of seven firms who worked on the projects.

She said: "Our clients were small companies who felt let down and could not understand what had happened to the money they were owed.

"They were told this was a positive thing because PBAs would protect them from an insolvency event.

"They are set up as a trust mechanism which means funds are ring-fenced. That means money in those PBAs legally belongs to those that are due to be paid."

Sarah also commented that Hill Dickinson could take the MoJ to court over the dispute.

Latest update from Hill Dickinson

We asked Sarah for the latest update on this important issue. She explained that their proposed group action has now been picked up by several major UK publications and is generating significant interest across the construction industry. We hope this growing visibility will continue to apply pressure on both the MoJ (and perhaps Ernst & Young, the administrators of ISG Construction Limited), to engage with us constructively.

She said: "We received a further letter from the MoJ, which reiterates its position that it holds no contractual or fiduciary obligation to make payments directly to ISG's subcontractors, whether under the Partnering Contract, the associated PBAs, or otherwise.

"The MoJ maintains that all sums properly due to ISG prior to the contractor's administration have already been paid into the relevant PBAs, that no further payments are due, and that it continues to assert its right to



Sarah Emerson, Partner at Hill Dickinson

equitable set off arising from the anticipated costs of completing the projects following ISG's insolvency. The MoJ also states that any claims for outstanding sums, whether interim payments, accrued works, or retention, should be directed to the Joint Administrators."

Sarah concluded by saying: "We are now in the process of liaising with our client group regarding the settling of a detailed response to the MoJ's most recent letter rebutting these presumptions and will be providing the MoJ with an update on the increased quantum of the claim which has arisen due the expansion of our client group and subcontractors providing us with details of the sums owed to them."

Iain McIlwee added: "At FIS, we believe it is vital to press this for the group directly involved, but also for the good of the wider supply chain. Promises were made and broken around the protection that PBAs would provide, and ultimately again the wrong people are paying the price. We need to operate in a sector where the specialists are not always left carrying the can for the mistakes and incompetencies of others. This case is about injustice, but it is also about change. Insolvencies have battered this sector, and Government has done little to protect us. If they want a productive, forward thinking and collaborative sector, it is vital that they lead by example when operating as a client. This is not that!"

You can read the full article on the BBC website by visiting: www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gwz8gg6plo



CLARIFYING INFORMATION ORDERS UNDER THE BUILDING SAFETY ACT 2022

David Rintoul, Partner Construction and Engineering at Hill Dickinson, shares with us what is the first judicial consideration of the circumstances in which an Information Order (IO) may be granted under section 132 of the Building Safety Act 2022 ("BSA")



David Rintoul, Partner Construction and Engineering at Hill Dickinson

The recent High Court decision in *BDW Trading Ltd v Ardmore Construction Ltd* marks the first judicial consideration of the circumstances in which an Information Order (IO) may be granted under section 132 of the Building Safety Act 2022 ("BSA"). The judgment offers valuable clarity on how the courts are likely to approach information orders and building liability orders ("BLOs"), emphasising that these measures are not intended to provide claimants with a shortcut to establishing underlying liability and that information orders will not be easily granted. It also suggests that courts will take a cautious approach should parties seek commercially sensitive information.

Background: The BSA and the Part 5 Toolkit

Post Grenfell, the BSA introduced a wide-ranging regime to improve building safety and to create legal avenues for parties (including building owners, landlords, homeowners, and leaseholders) to recover the cost of remediating defective buildings.

Part 5 (sections 116-160) provides a "toolkit" designed to strengthen accountability and enable claims arising from defective work or unsafe construction products. Sections 130-132 specifically deal with BLOs and Building Information Orders, which was the focus of the *BDW v Ardmore* judgment.

BLOs and IOs

BLOs were introduced to prevent developers from avoiding responsibility for safety defects by using subsidiaries, special purpose vehicles or asset-light entities. Once a development is complete, such companies are often dissolved or rendered dormant, leaving no meaningful recourse for claimants.

To address this, the High Court has discretion to extend liability to "associated companies" on a joint and several basis.

The key requirements for a BLO are:

- 1. Associated company:** A BLO can only be made against an "associated" company, and includes parents or siblings of the primarily liable company "at any time" since the commencement of the works.
- 2. Relevant liability:** The order must relate to a "relevant liability", meaning liability arising under:
 - the Defective Premises Act 1972;
 - section 38 of the Building Act 1984; or
 - any claim involving a "building safety risk".
- 3. Just and equitable:** The Court must consider whether it is "just and equitable" to impose liability on an associated company.

The aim is to ensure that the original developer funds remediation work but the intentionally open criteria make this an incredibly powerful and potentially far-reaching tool, of which all parties connected to residential developments should be aware.

Related to this, the High Court may also make an Information Order. Information orders have been introduced to enable a party to determine the corporate structure in circumstances where a claimant is unsure or unaware of whom the building liability order should be made against. If granted, the order requires a specified company to provide specific information or documents about persons who are, or have been during a specified period, associated with that company.

An information order can only be made if the Court believes:

- 4.** The company is subject to a "relevant liability"; and
- 5.** It is appropriate to require the information or documents to enable the applicant to make, or consider whether to make, an application for a BLO.

Given the nature of UK construction projects and property development, these orders are an extremely useful tool to claimants (and other parties), especially when dealing with historic corporate structures and dispositions. However, *BDW v Ardmore* indicates that the threshold for obtaining such orders is far higher than anticipated.

BDW v Ardmore - The Application

BDW sought information orders against *Ardmore* and several associated companies in relation to five developments completed between 1999 and 2005. The information sought included details of the companies' corporate structure, financial resources and contractual relationships, which *BDW* argued were relevant to potential BLO applications.

The High Court refused the applications, holding that the statutory criteria were not met - particularly the requirement that *Ardmore* be "subject to" a relevant liability.

Why the Court refused the application

The Court's reasoning for refusing the application included as follows:

- 1. No established relevant liability:** For four developments, liability had not been determined because proceedings were ongoing. For the fifth, an adjudication award had been discharged by payment, meaning no liability remained. Therefore, *Ardmore* was not currently subject to a relevant liability.
- 2. The statutory test cannot be softened:** The court rejected *BDW's* interpretation that a company that might have a relevant liability should suffice. The statutory wording

requires that the company is subject to such liability – not that proceedings are underway or that liability is anticipated.

3. Information orders can only target the primary liable company:

On a strict reading of the Act, the court concluded it had no jurisdiction to issue an information order against an associated company. This contradicts the explanatory notes to the BSA, but the judge held that the court must follow the statutory language.

4. Requested information was disproportionate:

BDW sought extensive, highly sensitive information about Ardmore and its group. The court held that:

- much of it was not necessary to consider a BLO;
- some was publicly available (e.g., via Companies House);
- other material was outside Ardmore's control; and
- the scope of an information order should be narrow.

5. Timing considerations: The judge commented that the timing of BDW's applications was premature given the unresolved liability position.

Significance and practical Implications

This decision represents the first major judicial examination of how the courts will apply the BSA's building safety "toolkit", and it suggests that information orders will be available in far fewer situations (and for a narrower range of information) than many had expected. Although the legislation and its explanatory notes adopt intentionally broad language, the court in *BDW v Ardmore* took a strict and cautious approach.

Crucially, the judgment confirms that an information order can only be made in circumstances where the company is already subject to a relevant liability. A mere possibility of liability, ongoing proceedings, or an unresolved dispute is not sufficient. Claimants therefore need to establish, rather than simply infer, the existence of a relevant liability before seeking disclosure. The court also emphasised that it will not allow information orders to become fishing expeditions for group-wide financial or operational data, particularly where the information is commercially sensitive or falls outside the target company's control.

This narrower interpretation significantly curtails the anticipated scope of information orders and may restrict how claimants use them to interrogate complex corporate

structures. At the same time, the broader BLO and BIO landscape under the BSA remains unsettled and continues to evolve. Future cases will likely bring further judicial clarification and, potentially, a more consistent approach.

While BLOs may still prove to be powerful tools in the right circumstances, this judgment underscores that courts will intervene in corporate structures or compel disclosure only where there is a solid evidential foundation. For now, claimants should adopt a strategic and evidence-led approach when considering whether and when to seek BLOs or information orders.

The decision highlights that careful litigation planning is essential, especially given the likelihood of further judicial development and clarification as more cases come before the courts.

Should you require further guidance on the implications of this case or assistance navigating the BSA regime, please do not hesitate to contact the Hill Dickinson Construction Team or get in touch with me directly via David.Rintoul@hildickinson.com or with my colleague Chloe, who co-authored this article, at chloe.harrison@hildickinson.com

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FIS Awards Lunch

Royal Lancaster Hotel, London
4 June



FIS Awards Lunch guest speaker,
Reverend Richard Coles –
former pop star, vicar, broadcaster,
and best-selling author.

Pc Matt Crockett

FIS Sottish Awards Lunch

voco Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow
18 September

FIS Conference and AGM

Whittlebury Park, Northamptonshire
22 October

FIS Golf Competition

Whittlebury Park, Northamptonshire
23 October

FIS Training Awards Lunch

Plasterers Hall, One London Wall, London
24 November

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

FIS welcome Davinder Jhamat to the team as Chief Operating Officer

FIS announced in January the appointment of **Davinder Jhamat** to the newly created role of Chief Operating Officer. Davinder is a dynamic and commercial minded leader and joins FIS during an exciting time of transformation.

This role is key to helping lead the organisation and members into an increasingly digitally enabled future. Davinder will play a pivotal role in reimagining how FIS serve the industry, and its members, championing the adoption of emerging technologies, developing its digital offering and the commercial performance of FIS.

With a career built in real estate and the built environment, Davinder has worked at the intersection of policy, strategy and leadership, driving organisations to deliver meaningful impact.

Commenting on her new role Davinder said: "It is a pleasure to be joining the FIS at this exciting time where the construction sector, like many other sectors, is not immune to technological change that we all must stay abreast of. Indeed, in how we can ensure the finishes and interiors industry – a fundamental part of the construction sector



Davinder Jhamat the new Chief Operating Officer at FIS

– can effectively respond to this change, taking a proactive step to futureproof. And how we do this? Through investing in our skills and our future talent pipeline, challenging the negative perceptions the wider construction sector perhaps does battle with, and showcasing the wealth of rewarding opportunities and careers this sector has to offer. And FIS is here to collaborate and work with you as we jointly embark on this journey.

"I am fervently looking forward to meeting and working with our members and the wider sector, of how we can collectively come together and build a better and resilient finishes and interiors industry, ensuring that it prospers and thrives for both the now, and for future generations to enjoy".

To read the announcement in full visit: <https://specfinish.co.uk/fis-welcome-davinder-jhamat-to-the-team-as-chief-operating-officer/>

Angela Mansell celebrates Leadership Award win

Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions, was shortlisted in two categories at TheBusinessDesk.com¹ North West Leadership Awards 2026 – and won Property Leader of the Year.

A spokesperson for Mansell Building Solutions said: "We are incredibly proud to celebrate Angela's achievement.

"Angela leads Mansell with authenticity, innovation, and purpose. From championing modern methods of construction to advocating for inclusive workplaces as a neurodivergent leader, she continues to drive positive change across our business and the wider sector.

"Angela took her son, Ben, as her guest for the evening – a brilliant reminder of how powerful visible leadership and positive role models can be for the next generation. Moments like this show young people what's possible.

"This recognition is richly deserved and perfectly timed as we celebrate the women shaping the future of construction. Congratulations, Angela!"

www.mansellbuild.co.uk

Source

1. www.thebusinessdesk.com/



Angela pictured with her son Ben at the awards

James Parlour promoted to FIS Technical Director

FIS has announced the promotion of **James Parlour** into the role of Technical Director. This key development underpins FIS's efforts to enhance its technical support and resources for its members and the wider community.

Speaking of the promotion, FIS President and Specialist Subcontractor Member of FIS, **Ian Strangward** said: "As an FIS Specialist Subcontractor member, it's encouraging to see technical expertise recognised at this level. Technical leadership sits at the heart of our sector's progress, and this signals that FIS continues to prioritise its commitment to integrity and delivering value to every member and partner we serve.

"James is exceptionally well positioned to guide our technical team into its next chapter of growth. His leadership will not only sustain the momentum we've built but also open new opportunities for advancement and excellence across the organisation"

James commented, "It's been a joy to contribute to the legacy of positive change that the FIS has led in this industry over the last five years. My own technical development is owed to the inclusive network of support offered by FIS under previous Technical Director Joe Cilia, and to step into his shoes and represent the sector going forward is the great privilege of my career."

To read the announcement in full visit: <https://specfinish.co.uk/james-parlour-promoted-to-fis-technical-director/>



James Parlour, Technical Director at FIS

Rockfon OneFrame

Rockfon has launched OneFrame, its modular framing solution designed to create acoustic ceiling islands and standalone features in commercial interiors.

Manufactured by Rockfon, the system provides a defined perimeter detail for compatible Rockfon acoustic ceiling tiles. It allows specifiers and contractors to form floating ceiling islands, corridor features and bespoke layouts without the need for a full suspended ceiling grid.

The framing solution is suited to offices, education, retail and hospitality projects where acoustic control is required but a full



OneFrame in black featuring Rockfon Color-all 600x600mm ceiling tiles in Coral

suspended ceiling is not desired. The system supports the growing demand for exposed soffits and open-plenum designs, while maintaining a clean, defined ceiling edge.

By combining perimeter detailing with acoustic performance, OneFrame offers

a practical option for projects where both appearance and function are priorities.

For full technical information, specification data and installation guidance, visit: www.rockfon.co.uk/products/rockfon-oneframe/

OWA hemp canopies tick all the boxes at Cundall's new Belfast office

Cundall recently selected OWA's new hemp canopies for the refurbishment of its Belfast office, reflecting the firm's commitment to sustainability and acoustic performance.

Cundall has pledged that by 2030 every project will meet zero carbon design criteria aligned with science-based targets, and the company's refurbished office is one of the first completed contracts for OWA's new hemp canopies.

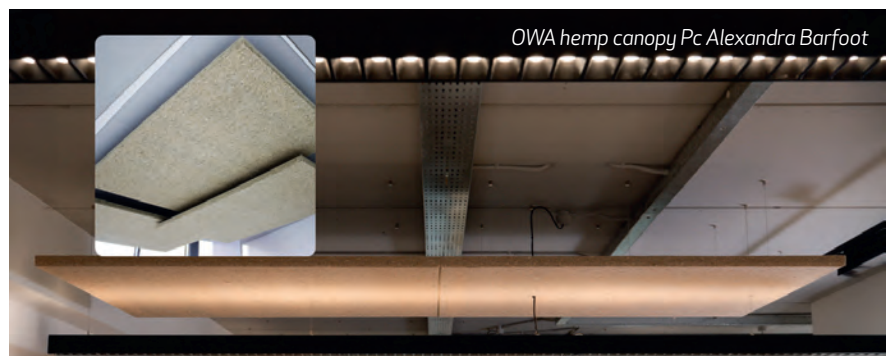
OWA's hemp canopies combine natural aesthetics with high acoustic performance. Hemp is a fast-growing fibrous material that absorbs more carbon during growth than is consumed in manufacture or installation, resulting in negative carbon usage. It also produces biomass faster than wood, locking away CO₂ more efficiently.

The hemp canopies are available in natural straw colour or in a palette of twenty shades to suit a variety of interior design schemes. The standard format is a rectangular canopy measuring 1880 x 1200 x 45 mm,

suspended by six discreet wire ropes.

To read the full story visit:

<https://specfinish.co.uk/owa-hemp-canopies-tick-all-the-boxes-at-cundalls-new-belfast-office/>



OWA hemp canopy Pc Alexandra Barfoot

Knauf named one of the UK's Best Employers 2026



Knauf has been included in the Financial Times Statista UK's Best Employers 2026 list. The award recognises the company's peoplefirst culture, an approach that underpins the product innovation and service support essential in building safer, sustainable spaces where we live, learn and care.

Emma Delany, People Director, Knauf UK & Ireland, said: "We are delighted to be included in this prestigious award list. Being named one of the UK's Best Employers by the Financial Times and Statista is a powerful endorsement of the culture we're building at Knauf, and

a reflection of the specialist expertise and partnership approach our people bring to customers across the country!"

<https://knauf.com/en-GB>

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