

SPEC FINISH

FIS

The magazine of FIS
representing the finishes
and interiors sector

www.thefis.org



APPROVED DOCUMENT B: ENSURING FIRE SAFETY IN OFFICE PODS

Sustainability:

The Rise of the
Environmental Product
Declaration (EPD)

Feature:

Looking ahead: Starting
2024 on a brighter note
but challenges remain

Technical:

Celebrating best
practice

THE BEST BUSINESSES FOLLOW FIS BEST PRACTICE GUIDES



FIS

FINISHES & INTERIORS SECTOR

Join FIS for access to all these guides and more!

thefis.org/join-now



THE RESPONSIBLE NO?

The procurement research FIS published in February 2023 coined the expression the “Responsible No”.

“No” is a tiny word, one syllable, but at times, the hardest to say. If we say “No” to a clause in a contract, there always seems to be another firm willing to say “Yes”. If we raise too many issues, or qualify too much in our tender response, we may well lose the job. It is easy to talk about “No”, but in a tight, price-sensitive market, with mouths to feed...

The problem is that if we don’t exercise the option of “No”. If we don’t clarify, qualify and draw the line we take responsibility for issues outside of our control, assume responsibility for compliance and sign up to damages and delays that we can’t cover. Even if we avoid the worst of the financial hit, how often do we find ourselves staring at a detail on a construction site, scratching our heads and working it out on the fly – “the site fix”? The Building Act 1984 means that we are liable for that detail for 10 years from a Building Control enforcement perspective and if it impacts fire or structural safety, it could be a 15-year plus liability (with prison sentences if it can be proved we were negligent).

As a sector we pride ourselves on our ability to get the job done, to adapt the design and make it work, but duties in the Building Regulations are now clearer and more onerous. The regulatory environment has changed, a heart full of hope and a tube of mastic isn’t enough. On higher risk projects we’ve got major and notifiable changes - strict change control processes

that should be in place. On all jobs, the building control officer is under greater pressure to ensure evidence is provided - they want to see (or photos of) as-built details backed by evidence of performance and competence. The principal designer needs to sign the job off on completion too, it is all about evidence, quality control and information management. If the principal designer won’t support or Building Control won’t sign-off, works stops and with it the flow of monies, I refer you back to the cost of delays mentioned above.

The old days of “Bob the Builder, can we fix it?” and a rousing chorus of “Yes... we can” is changing. The retort now needs to be more like:

“Not necessarily Bob, certainly not until Sarah the supervisor has checked with Alan the architect who has reviewed against the design, clarified with Edna the engineer and Mike the M&E designer, and ensured Quinn the quantity surveyor is aware. We also need to consider if we need to advise Barry the building control officer and he may need to liaise to Bertha the building safety regulator before ... We can!”

This is a cultural change that we need to filter through our supervision protocols, into our Tool Box talks, and embed in our daily processes. But it isn’t just a site thing.

Len Bunton always reminds me that dispute resolution begins and most problems could be solved before we sign the contract. There is always risk



IAIN MCILWEE
Chief Executive,
Finishes and
Interiors Sector

in construction, but with new potential for delays and new liabilities, we must understand these risks and cap them appropriately.

This need for risk awareness is the reason that we have introduced an FIS Contract Review Service. We know that 41% of our members never seek legal advice (scarily only 17% never start on site without a contract in hand!). This subsidised service is about helping members understand the risks and how to push back. It is also about FIS isolating unreasonable requests and pushing back as a collective.

Getting your contracts reviewed routinely would be a good New Year’s Resolution.

The “Responsible No” is a big ask, but maybe we can make 2024 the year of the Confident Reasonable “Yes, but...”

To find out more about the FIS Contract Review Service visit:

www.thefis.org/membership-hub/memberbenefits/fis-contract-review-service

Welcome

SPEC FINISH

CONTACT US

EDITORIAL

Editor:

David Crowson

Email:

david.crowson@warnersgroup.co.uk

SpecFinish

Warners Group Publications

West Street

Bourne

Lincs PE10 9PH

ADVERTISING

Advertising enquiries:

Theresa Geeson

Email:

theresag@warnersgroup.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

SpecFinish is distributed to members of FIS and other selected finishes and interiors businesses. If you wish to receive a copy of SpecFinish or would like to amend or cancel your subscription, please contact either info@thefis.org or telephone 0121 707 0077.

FIS

FIS

Tel: 0121 707 0077

www.thefis.org

Email: info@thefis.org

FIS, Unit 4, Olton Bridge

245 Warwick Rd

Solihull, West Midlands

B92 7AH

SpecFinish magazine is published on behalf of FIS by Warners Group Publications plc and the views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those held by FIS or the publishers. The publishers shall not be under any liability in respect of the contents of the contributed articles. The editor reserves the right to edit, abridge or alter articles for publication.

© All editorial contents SpecFinish 2022

Cover image:

Approved Document B: Ensuring fire safety in office pods

SpecFinish magazine wrapper

Please recycle the wrapper this magazine was delivered in. It is recyclable plastic.



WELCOME

TO THE JANUARY ISSUE OF SPECFINISH

As we bid farewell to 2023 following what I trust was a delightful and rejuvenating holiday season, we welcome the dawn of 2024, Happy New Year to all!!!

For me, the year will commence with the creation of both a personal and business plan. However, whenever I utter or contemplate the word "plan," it often evokes memories of Blackadder:

Baldrick: "I have a plan, sir".

Blackadder: "Really, Baldrick? A cunning and subtle one?"

Baldrick: "Yes, sir".

Blackadder: "As cunning as a fox who's just been appointed Professor of Cunning at Oxford University?"



Now that the reminiscing is behind me, I can move on and create my plans (it's happening again, I must stray on track) for an extraordinary story for 2024.

Talking about extraordinary stories on page 16 in this issue we talk to three FIS members who opted to establish an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT). Through this initiative, employees step into ownership roles within their companies. These members share their experiences, detailing their decision-making processes and the implementation of the EOT.

We take a look at the functionality of two software applications, developed by FIS Members. The apps aim to address sector challenges, including adherence to new legislation and enhancing profitability, read more on page 18.

On page 27, we spotlight two outstanding must-read publications. The first, "Show Me the Bodies: How We Let Grenfell Happen", stands as a crucial piece of investigative journalism, shedding light on an important and timely subject. The second, "How to Write Simple and Effective Subcontract Agreements in Just 500 Words", serves as an invaluable guide in subcontracting literature.

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

↓ IN THIS ISSUE

03

Voice of the industry

Iain McIlwee, FIS Chief Executive, discusses exercising the option of "Responsible No" when it comes to a clause in a contract.

06

News round-up

We highlight what's been happening in the finishes and interiors sector.

08

Skills

A look at the important changes affecting Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cardholders specifically if a card is acquired through the Industry Accreditation (IA) route.

10

Technical

A look at the significance of incorporating Approved Document B (ADB) into the design and construction of pods.

12

Sustainability

Three FIS members tell us why it is important to obtain verified Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs).

15

Health and Safety

A report from an FIS member regarding the hierarchy of control about operational tasks that create dust emissions in the workplace, and how controls can be improved.

16

Feature

Did you know in the UK there were more than 1,400 Employee Ownership Trusts (EOTs) as of June 2023? Three FIS members share with us why they decided to implement an EOT.

18

Technology

We talked to two FIS members about their innovative software apps, designed to tackle sector challenges, boost productivity, cut costs, and enhance profitability.

20

Advertorial

A report on Valchromat, a pioneering wood fibre panel sets a new standard in interior design.

22

Feature

A reflection on 2023 and predictions for the year ahead

24

Feature

We explore with two new FIS members why they are 'getting it right' when managing their obligations under the Building Safety Act (BSA).

26

Technical

There are unique challenges with the specification of operable walls. This article aims to offer guidance and solutions to address these challenges.

27

Feature

A review of two must-read publications looking at the Grenfell Tower inquiry and how to write simple and effective subcontracts.

28

Feature

Plan your visit now to the FIS Conference which includes the Innovation Awards at the Workspace Design Show 27 - 28 February.

29

Community news

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS



Beena Nana

Beena is FIS Head of Skills and Training



Peter Long

Peter is Optima Products Divisional Fire and Certification Director



Flavie Lowres

Flavie is FIS Sustainability Champion



Tony Bishop

Tony is The BDL Group HSSQ Manager



Stuart Devoil

Stuart is James Latham Group Head of Marketing



Peter Chesters

Peter is Barbour ABI Group Marketing Manager



Philip Brown

Philip is Meronden Director and FIS President



Angela Mansell

Angela is Mansell Building Solutions Managing Director and FIS North-West chair



James Parlour

James is FIS Technical and Vetting Manager

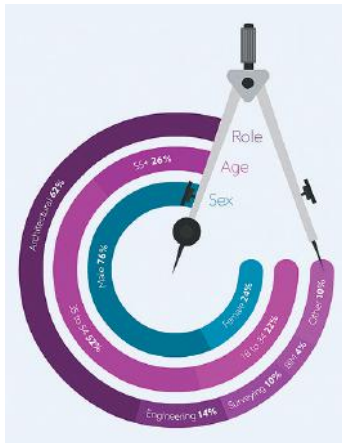
What Specifiers Want Report 2023



NBS has recently published the “What Specifiers Want Report 2023”. This comprehensive report sheds light on the critical factors influencing architects, designers and specifiers in selecting manufacturer products and systems for their construction projects.

The report highlights:

- Insight into where professionals look for product and system information.
- Analysis of views on digital and BIM objects.
- Evaluation of the significance of third-party certification.
- Examination of preferences for supplier collaboration on complex systems.
- Exploration of the importance of sustainability information in decision-making.
- Understanding of the Building Safety Act and the role of the Golden Thread of Information.



Kinga Zadora, Business Development Manager at Ocula Partitions said: “If you’re a supplier or manufacturer in the construction industry, this report is indispensable. It offers crucial insight to better align with the needs and expectations of specifiers, ultimately facilitating more effective partnerships.

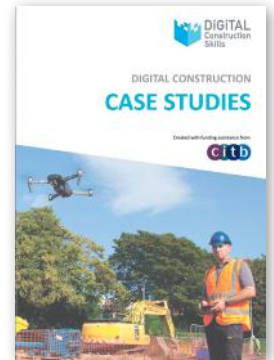
“Make sure to download the full report for an in-depth understanding of specifiers’ preferences and challenges”.

To download the report visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/3tb8xjrs>

www.thenbs.com
www.oculapartitions.co.uk

Examples of digital tools being applied in real-life scenarios

Digital Construction Skills has created an eBook illustrating dozens of real-life examples of digital tools being used by construction companies.



The case studies in the eBook are relevant and relatable with people sharing their stories and examples of the application of the tools, the benefits, the challenges and how they overcame the barriers.

The aim is to help companies take the steps to explore how digital tools can be a benefit and a useful resource for lecturers in Further and Higher Education who are working hard to build awareness of digital tools in the construction curriculum.

To download the eBook visit:
www.digitalconstructionskills.com/#DigitalToolseBook

FIS launch a guide to Digital Information Management

FIS has launched new guidance titled an Introduction to the Golden Thread and Digital Information Plans. This is to help businesses in the finishes and interiors sector get to grips with all the jargon and new regulations associated with the golden thread and digitalisation of construction.

A recent FIS Digitalisation Survey found that 60% of contractors and 44% of product manufacturers and suppliers do not understand what is needed to meet Digital/ Golden Thread Requirements in the Building Safety Act. In light of these findings, this new FIS guide has been designed to help product suppliers and contractors operating in the finishes and interiors sector cut through the complex terminology and begin to form their own digital plan of work. It draws on published information and principles set down in a myriad of technical and information standards

and aligns this to the requirements set down in the Building Safety Act and wider reform of Construction Regulations.

The new guidance provides an overview of the Building Safety Act 2022, the golden thread of information and the new regulatory framework. There is an emphasis on Stage 4 (Technical Design) and Stage 5 (Construction Information) of the RIBA Plan of Work. The guide brings clarity to digitalisation, and the new common data environment (CDE) responsibilities and explains how to manage product data and what is needed in order to create a digital information plan. It also explores BIM, digital twins and the role of artificial intelligence.

Commenting on the guide, Iain McIlwee, FIS Chief Executive said: “At the heart of this document is the principle that no one company and no one solution will or should

deliver the golden thread alone. It is inherently a collaborative process that should ensure essential information is shared effectively and understood thoroughly. This is the responsibility of all in the supply chain”.

We hope that this new FIS guidance brings clarity and provides an understanding of what is required for companies to form their own digital plan of work.”

The guide can be downloaded at:
www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/digital-toolkit



New GIRI guide highlights Insurers' risk management advice

A new guide aimed at bringing the construction and insurance industries closer together has been launched by the Get It Right Initiative (GIRI). Intended as a good practice guide to risk management throughout the life of a construction project, the publication sets out the key considerations that influence how insurers assess the risk profile of a project from concept to end of life, and steps that can be taken to reduce these risks.

The GIRI Insurance Guide was conceived and its creation led by Kennedys partner

Paul Lowe, a member of the Get It Right Initiative's strategic leadership group, in response to a perceived need to boost collaboration between the two sectors. It brings together the expertise of a wide range of construction insurance specialists into a no-nonsense explainer of the specific risks that may arise, how insurers expect these to be managed, and the assistance and advice that project teams can call on them to provide.

The guide has been endorsed by the International Underwriting Association.

The 20-page guide has six main chapters, five covering risks during specific stages in the RIBA plan of work, and a sixth focusing on environmental, social and corporate governance. Written in non-technical language and with a helpful glossary, it is aimed at de-mystifying risk management, types of cover and the claims process for those in construction who may only come into contact with insurers when something goes wrong.

The guide can be downloaded free of charge at: www.getitright.uk.com/reports/giri-insurance-guide

CITB's Into Work grant: Bridging the construction skills gap

Nathan Wilkins, CITB's Customer Engagement Manager, explains how employers can benefit from the new 'Into Work' grant.

A new grant is being piloted by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) called the Into Work grant. This grant aims to bridge the skills gap in the construction industry while offering substantial support to employers.

Empowering the construction workforce:

The Into Work grant offers financial support to employers who provide an initial work experience placement linked to a specific qualification, as well as direct employment. This is expected to help with the costs of hiring and mentoring new entrants and increase the number of new entrants progressing from Further Education (FE) through to employment.

Two essential components:

The Into Work grant is available to all CITB-registered employers and consists of two components:

1. Work experience completion: You can secure a £500 grant when students successfully complete the work experience segment of an approved further education course.

2. Direct employment: A second payment of £1,000 is available to you, following a three-month period of direct employment with the individual, which includes either full time employment or an apprenticeship. This is to support employers in the first few months of training in a new role.

Eligibility requirements:

To access these grants, employers must meet specific criteria, including CITB registration, up-to-date Levy Returns, and adherence to the grant policies. This ensures that the initiative aligns with industry standards and goals.

Supporting relevant courses:

The grants are dedicated to further education construction courses where work experience plays a pivotal role. This includes:

- T Levels in Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction
- T Level in Onsite Construction
- And select Diploma courses.

The financial incentive:

The two-stage support approach aims to encourage employers to further commit to learners, providing vital mentoring and guidance, following completion of work experience placements. This not only helps to bridge the skills gap but also contributes to the industry's sustainability.

Application and evidence:

Employers can apply for the work experience grant immediately after completion, and following the three months of direct employment. Both applications must be submitted within 52 weeks of the respective milestones. Evidence includes documentation from the educational institution and PAYE records for direct employment.

Limitations and additional grants:

Each employer can receive a maximum of five work experience grants and five employment grants per year, allowing

for a total potential of £7,500 annually. Additionally, you may be eligible for separate apprenticeship grants if the student completing direct employment is on an apprenticeship track.

Conclusion:

The construction industry is experiencing a severe shortage of skills, with CITB's latest Construction Skills Network (CSN) report¹ stating that an additional 225,000 workers will be needed to meet UK demand by 2027. Research also shows poor progression from further education to employment, meaning industry is losing out on vast untapped potential and employers are struggling to find the talent needed for their businesses to thrive. Initiatives like the Into Work grant are essential for the continued growth and success of the construction industry, and this pilot will play a key role in tackling the skills shortage, while improving construction's people pipeline.

For more information visit:
<http://tinyurl.com/57x4kf7v>

www.citb.co.uk



Source

1. www.citb.co.uk/about-citb/construction-industry-research-reports/construction-skills-network-csn/

ARE YOU READY FOR THE CHANGES TO INDUSTRY ACCREDITATION CONSTRUCTION SKILLS CERTIFICATION SCHEME (CSCS) CARDS?

Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training explains the important changes affecting Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cardholders, specifically if a card is acquired through the Industry Accreditation (IA) route. These changes have been implemented by the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) to ensure the industry has a fully trained and competent workforce.



Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training

Being a CSCS cardholder provides many benefits including a personalised CSCS card, providing proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they do.

By ensuring the workforce is appropriately qualified the card plays its part in improving standards and safety on UK construction sites.

Holding a card is not a legislative requirement and it is entirely up to the principal contractor or client whether workers are required to hold a valid card before they are allowed on site. However, most principal contractors and major housebuilders require workers on their sites to hold a valid CSCS card.

CSCS cards differ depending on the individual's job, and each card is a different colour. There are 13 in total and four that are impacted by the withdrawal of IA. These are:

- Skilled worker cards, which are blue,
- Manager cards, which are black,
- Supervisor and advanced craft cards, which are both gold.

Workers could previously acquire CSCS cards through IA, also known as "Grandfather Rights", which is a practice that recognises the skills and experience of individuals who have been working in a particular industry for a significant period. This concept allows experienced workers to secure CSCS cards and formal qualifications based on employer recommendations without undergoing the standard assessment process. Essentially, it acknowledges the expertise and knowledge gained through years of practical work, offering a pathway to accreditation based on an individual's extensive experience rather than formal training or examination.

Currently, there are 35,000 construction workers who hold cards that have been issued through this route. For years, CSCS



has required applicants to demonstrate the attainment of a nationally recognised construction-related qualification. Although closed to new applicants since 2010, those already possessing a card could renew it on the same basis - until now.

So what is changing?

A cross-industry taskforce is working to gradually phase out cards issued under IA and confirmed a range of support and guidance for those impacted earlier this year. Starting from 1 January 2020, all cards renewed under IA will expire on 31 December 2024, and CSCS will stop renewing existing IA cards from 30 June 2024.

To meet industry requirements, in 2019 it was announced that from 1 January 2020, all cards renewed under the IA would expire on 31 December 2024 and it would not be possible to replace them under IA. Instead, workers will need to have completed the relevant qualification in order to gain their CSCS card.

These changes are in line with the Construction Leadership Council's (CLC) decision to ensure a fully trained and competent workforce.

The CLC issued a statement in January 2023, encouraging all IA cardholders to take action to retain their cards.

Construction Leadership Council's statement on IA cards

Building safety and competence are two of the CLC's priorities. As an industry, and in accordance with various sets of legislation including the Construction Design and Management Regulations (CDM) and the Building Safety Act (BSA), we must demonstrate to the regulator, our clients, building occupiers and the wider public that those designing, building and maintaining the built environment are competent to do so. The CLC recommendation introduced in 2015 and updated in 2017 and 2020 set an expectation of all CSCS cards being achieved via qualification by the end of 2024.

The different ways in which those individuals who hold a blue, gold or black industry accreditation card (issued by CSCS, via IA) can move to an appropriate card has been set out. This may be by:

- Recognising a qualification they already have.
- Assessing their competence against the relevant qualification for their occupation.
- Undertaking any additional training required.
- For a minority, it may require more extensive training.

Members of the CSCS Alliance will be issuing guidance relevant to their individual card scheme. Whilst all IA cardholders are required to take action to retain their card from January 2025, it should not be overly onerous for those able to demonstrate their competence and there may be grants available for employers.

The "Grandfather Rights" scheme will see workers lose their CSCS cards by December 2024 so a plan needs to be put in place soon. Many may already have the requisite qualifications or professional body memberships to renew while those who do need to pass an NVQ can do so via an on-site



assessments or professional discussions and won't need to attend college. IA will affect certain individuals across manager, supervisor, blue skilled and gold skilled cards.

The reason behind these changes is to ensure all construction workers are fully trained and competent. The CLC aims to ensure cards are only issued to those who have achieved, or are in the process of achieving, a nationally recognised construction related qualification.

CSCS has advised there were 60,000 when the package of support was introduced in January 2023 and the numbers are now at 35,000, with just over a year to go.

To prepare the industry for the discontinuation of IA, an industry task group, including CSCS representation, was established. The task group has released updated guidance on the CSCS website, outlining the specific actions CSCS IA cardholders need to take before the deadline. Additionally, Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) has affirmed that several achievement grants will receive increased funding to assist the industry in covering the assessment costs for obtaining an S/NVQ.

Following the announcement of the range of support and guidance in January 2023, **Sean Kearns**, Chief Executive at CSCS said: "IA cardholders will not need to attend college as much of the assessment can be delivered remotely. Many IA cardholders will find it a straightforward process to replace their cards, such as moving across to the Academically or Professionally Qualified Persons cards. In addition, those who no longer attend site or are in non-construction related occupations will not require a card".

What do these changes mean for the construction industry?

Although it may appear as a significant transformation, the primary objective is to enhance the industry's consistency. The purposes of CSCS have always been consistent, CSCS cards provide proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the jobs they do on site.

As mentioned, whilst this is not a legislative requirement, most principal contractors and major housebuilders require workers on their sites to hold a valid CSCS card.

The potential outcome of this change is increased stability, trust, and equality within our industry. Nevertheless, it is likely that some experienced older workers may opt for early retirement instead of embracing the changes and pursuing a new qualification.

From the workers' perspective, these changes don't have to be a significant upheaval. There's ample time and support available to prepare for December 2024.



FIND OUT MORE

For further information on the changes that have been discussed visit:

www.cscs.uk.com/IA

To apply for a CSCS card visit:

www.cscs.uk.com/apply

THE FUTURE OF SPECFINISH

What's your preference?

As environmental awareness rises, an increasing number of subscribers opt to receive a digital version of the magazine.

From 2025, unless you work for an FIS member, you will no longer receive a printed copy **unless** you confirm your preference for print, digital or both.

Scan to register



thefis.org/sfpref



APPROVED DOCUMENT B: ENSURING FIRE SAFETY IN OFFICE PODS

Fire safety standards for wall linings in office pods are essential to protect occupants and prevent the spread of fire. **Peter Long**, Divisional Fire and Certification Director at Optima Products discusses the significance of incorporating Approved Document B (ADB) into the design and construction of these pods.



Peter Long, Divisional Fire and Certification Director at Optima Products

In the design and construction of office pods, fire safety is of utmost importance. One essential component that architects, designers, and contractors need to consider is Approved Document B (ADB). ADB is an integral part of the Building Regulations in the United Kingdom and provides guidance on fire safety standards for various aspects of building design and construction.

The Role of ADB in ensuring fire resistance in wall linings

Wall linings, which refer to the materials used to cover the interior surfaces of walls, can significantly impact the spread of fire, heat, and smoke within a building. ADB sets out specific requirements and recommendations for wall lining materials to minimise the risk of fire and enhance overall fire safety.

ADB provides guidance on the fire performance of wall linings, including their

reaction to fire, resistance to fire, and the classification of their surface spread of flame. It specifies the fire rating required for different areas of a building and the types of wall linings that can be used in each area. Adhering to ADB's guidelines ensures that the materials used in building interiors meet necessary fire safety standards, protecting occupants and allowing for safe evacuation.

Understanding the reaction to fire of surface finishes

The reaction to fire is a crucial factor in assessing the fire performance of building materials, including wall linings. It refers to the way materials react to an ignition source. Standardised tests are used to measure this behaviour. ADB describes classifications derived from testing in accordance with EN 13501 part one and BS476 parts six and seven. It needs to be understood that while each of these classification regimes

subjects a sample of the material to a controlled ignition source and observes and measures the progression of the flame across the surface, the classifications themselves represent rather different overall outcomes.

EN 13501 part one tests measure flame spread over a much larger, more representative sample, including the critical effects of joints in the system. It also measures the fire growth rate, total heat release, smoke generation and the release of flaming droplets or particles. BS 476 parts six and seven do not measure all of these behaviours and use smaller samples and would be arguably less representative of real-world scenarios.

By considering a material's reaction to fire, including the surface spread of flame, architects, designers, and contractors can select appropriate wall lining materials that meet required fire safety standards. Materials with a lower fire growth rate help limit the spread of fire within a building, allowing occupants more time to evacuate safely.

Limitations of current testing methods

Currently, fabric manufacturers often rely on calcium silicate as a reference substrate for the spread of flame testing. However, this approach has its limitations.

One limitation is the limited realism of using calcium silicate as a standardised material. While it possesses consistent properties, it fails to replicate the complex interactions textiles experience in real-world applications. Fabrics encounter various substrates, ranging from wood to steel, and exhibit different behaviours under these conditions.



Another limitation is the variability in fire risk associated with different substrates. Textiles that perform well on calcium silicate may not provide the same level of protection when exposed to substrates with different flammability characteristics. This mismatch can result in a false sense of security.

Additionally, relying solely on calcium silicate-based tests provides a limited understanding of a fabric's fire performance. It doesn't account for how textiles might interact with other materials, coatings, or finishes commonly used in construction and industry.

The case for real-world spread of flame testing

To address the limitations of current testing methods, there is a need for real-world spread of flame testing. This approach would involve exposing textiles to actual substrates and conditions they would encounter in buildings, vehicles, and other applications. Real-world testing would provide a more accurate assessment of a fabric's fire resistance in practical scenarios.

Real-world spread of flame testing can lead to enhanced realism, improved safety, and informed decision-making. It would enable architects, engineers, and safety regulators to make better choices in material selection, aligning with specific fire safety requirements and potentially saving lives and property. Mandating real-world spread of flame testing would also promote industry accountability, encouraging fabric manufacturers to invest in research and development for safer products.

The importance of specifying fabrics based on ADB guidance

In the context of office pods, it is crucial for manufacturers to correctly specify fabrics based on the guidance of ADB. Office pods are considered occupiable enclosures and must conform to the classifications specified in ADB. This includes considering the classification of wall linings within the pods.

Manufacturers of office pods should carefully consider the available evidence of reaction to fire testing for the desired fabric products. Test reports provided by fabric manufacturers may not always be representative of the fabric's performance in a composite wall construction. It is important to ensure that the fabric has achieved the necessary Euro classification for reaction to fire when mounted in the end-use configuration to the appropriate substrate.

Specifiers should seek assurances from fabric manufacturers regarding the classification of the finish being proposed for use. They should consider the relevant Euro classifications and ensure that the



finish has been tested in its intended end-use configuration and mounted on the appropriate substrate. This includes verifying that the fabric meets the necessary Euro classification when used as a wall lining in office pods.

Combating misrepresentations and misunderstandings

Misrepresentations and misunderstandings regarding fire safety standards for wall linings in office pods are prevalent. Manufacturers may provide test evidence data that is not representative of end-use applications in composite wall systems. Specifiers may rely on misleading statements or incomplete test data when selecting wall lining materials.

To address these issues, there needs to be a collective effort to ensure accurate representation and interpretation of test data. Manufacturers should provide comprehensive and contextual test evidence, specifically related to the use of their products as wall linings in office pods. Specifiers should carefully evaluate the available evidence and seek clarification when necessary.

The importance of compliance with ADB and testing standards

Compliance with ADB and the relevant testing standards, such as EN 13501-1, is crucial in ensuring fire safety in office pods. It is essential to understand and adhere to the definitions and requirements outlined in ADB when classifying wall linings and selecting appropriate materials.

Specifiers should avoid assumptions or shortcuts in meeting fire safety standards. Simply relying on the presence of a sprinkler system or using nonqualifying test evidence is not sufficient. The guidance provided in ADB should be followed, and

any deviations from the standard should be properly documented and supported by an engineered approach.

By prioritising fire safety in office pods and ensuring compliance with ADB, designers, manufacturers, and specifiers can create safer environments for occupants. This includes selecting wall lining materials that have been appropriately tested and classified for their intended use, contributing to the overall fire safety of office pods.

Conclusion

Fire safety standards for wall linings in office pods are essential to protect occupants and prevent the spread of fire. ADB provides guidance on the selection and classification of wall lining materials to ensure adequate fire resistance. However, there are limitations to current testing methods, particularly in relation to fabric spread of flame testing.

Real-world spread of flame testing is necessary to address these limitations and provide a more accurate assessment of fabric fire resistance in practical scenarios. Manufacturers of office pods should correctly specify fabrics based on ADB guidance, considering the relevant Euro classifications and ensuring testing is conducted in the intended end-use configuration.

Combating misrepresentations and misunderstandings requires accurate representation and interpretation of test data. Compliance with ADB and testing standards is crucial to ensure fire safety in office pods. By prioritising fire safety and following the guidance provided, designers, manufacturers, and specifiers can create safer environments and protect occupants from the risk of fire.

www.optimasystems.com

THE RISE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCT DECLARATION (EPD)

An Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) offers a detailed insight into a product's environmental performance by analysing various aspects, including raw material choice, production, use, and disposal. **Flavie Lowres**, FIS Sustainability Champion explains how and why an EPD is created and speaks to four FIS members who recognise the importance of obtaining verified EPDs.



Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion

In the last couple of years, there has been a real turn in the way the construction industry addresses sustainability. One of the biggest topics of discussion is around net zero. The need to reduce the energy demand of buildings is not new.

Part L has been in place for a while and buildings that have lower energy demand are attractive to tenants/occupiers. This has been particularly true since the spike in energy prices that was seen in 2022. However, the biggest changes

that have taken place is with regards to carbon emissions associated with the manufacturing, transportation, installation and disposal of construction products, so the embodied carbon impact. Manufacturers are therefore asked to provide information on the carbon impact of their products which can in turn inform construction projects. The construction sector has been working on the development of standards to measure the carbon impact of construction products and projects for many years and they are well established as the measurement and

reporting standards. Those standards are: BS EN 15978 at project/building level and BS EN 15804 at product level.

Manufacturers are often asked to provide an EPD. An EPD is created from a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) study during which manufacturers are asked to provide a lot of information related to the manufacturing of their products: energy, water, raw materials quantities and transport, waste, etc. The data collected from the factory are analysed and reported against a set of indicators which are set out in BS EN 15804. The



results together with some information on the products are transposed into an EPD template. The LCA report, evidence to support the information in the LCA study and the unverified EPD templates are submitted to a company (a programme operator) who then verifies the information provided and issues the verified EPD. Only a verified EPD published on the programme operators' websites are valid.

Instead of searching an individual EPD programme operators' website, it is possible to find an EPD on eco-platform by visiting: www.eco-platform.org/epd-data.html

Product manufacturers and FIS members Etex, Saint-Gobain Ecophon and Trolldtekt have shared with us their company's processes to obtain EPDs and shed light on the significance they place on obtaining verified EPDs.

Etex publishes updated EPDs for 10 Siniat products

Oliver Cripps, Head of Sustainability at Etex, explained that a modern manufacturer must be transparent about the impacts of its products and LCA is one of the key tools to use. The results of a LCA are published in an EPD.

Oliver said: "Etex, has recently updated EPDs for our bestselling Siniat products. EPDs are 'Type III' environmental declarations, meaning that they are independently verified and compliant to ISO14025/ISO21930 and the new European EN15804 A2 standard.

"It can be difficult to compare the results of LCA across manufacturers and products. Because we are using the new standard, we declare the production (A1-A3) phase plus the end of life (C). Those published before July 2022 are only likely to show the production phase, or a selection of modules. Additionally, other factors such as the unit of measurement, inclusion of biobased content and emissions factors may vary.

"To help a non-technical audience, we are publishing an EPD summary sheet alongside our EPDs. These contain brief descriptions of the methodology and key results such as Global Warming Potential (embodied carbon) and recycled content".

www.etexgroup.com

Advocating an industry-wide move to standardised EPDs for every product

"Ecophon currently has EPDs covering 85% of our product sales (March 2023), as part of our sustainability efforts we are aiming to have 89% of products sold to have their own specific EPD by 2025", says **Martin Keogh**, Business Development Director at Saint-Gobain Ecophon.

Martin explained that in their experience, product specific EPDs are a way to avoid exposing poor sustainability results for particular products - averaging across the family range can help obscure results that would be hard to explain or call "sustainable". He said: "This is why we are advocating for an industry-wide move to standardised EPDs for every product. Until we can achieve that standard, we strive to empower customers with ways to separate good sources of information from ones that aren't.

"As sustainable product selection continues to play a pivotal role in the construction industry, and to further support you in understanding the importance of EPDs, Ecophon has created an interactive game emphasising the ongoing journey towards net zero in construction. The game allows players to navigate through each section with an intuitive design that follows the EPD format, tackling questions relevant to various metrics. Three EPDs provided to participants allow players to delve into comparisons and information searches,

mimicking the process of selecting the most sustainable products for projects".

Martin concluded by saying: "Keep an eye out for sessions near you as we launch workshops in early 2024 or contact us to host one from the comfort of your office".

To book a workshop contact marketing@ecophon.co.uk

Read more about Ecophon's sustainability efforts by visiting:

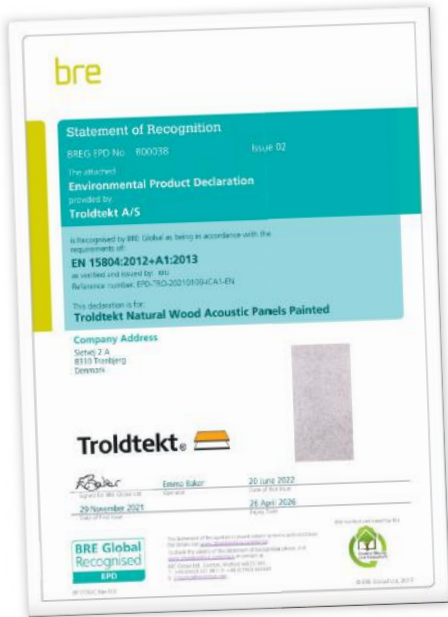
www.ecophon.com/uk/about-ecophon/sustainability

EPD transparency is crucial

Steve Mansell, Country Manager at Trolldtekt, said: "We manufacture our Acoustic wood wool ceiling and wall panels using danish wood sourced from Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®C115450) or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) forestry and portland cement as the bonding agent.

"It is crucial for us to be completely transparent about our impact on the planet when publishing data within our EPDs. Therefore, we have launched 20 separate EPDs for our various acoustic panels rather

The image shows the front cover of an Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) document. At the top left is the 'ECO PLATFORM EPD VERIFIED' logo. At the top right is the 'EPD® THE GREEN YARDSTICK' logo. The central image is a photograph of a modern office or meeting room with several people sitting around a table, working on laptops. Below the photo, the text reads 'ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCT DECLARATION' in large, bold letters, followed by 'In accordance with EN 15804 and ISO 14025'. The product name 'Ecophon Akusto™ Wall C Extra Bass' is prominently displayed. To the right of the product name is a small image of the acoustic panel. At the bottom left, there is a block of technical information: 'Programme: The International EPD® System, www.emtrondec.com', 'Programme operator: EPD International AB', 'Version: 1.0', 'Registration number: S-P-05115', 'Date of publication (issue): 09/12/2021', 'Date of revision: 07/03/2022', 'Date of validity: 09/12/2026', and 'In accordance with ISO 14025, ISO 21930 and EN 15804'. At the bottom right is the 'ecophon SAINT-GOBAIN' logo. A small 'EPD VERIFIED' logo is also present at the bottom right.



- whether the panels are painted or unpainted
- whether or not the panels are certified as b-s1-d0 or A2-s1d0
- whether the panels are based on FUTURECEM or traditional cement

reducing our own Scope 3 impact as a result of the products we procure".
www.overbury.com

To book a lunch & learn session contact: sales@trolldtekt.co.uk

To review or download our documented sustainability initiatives visit: www.trolldtekt.com/product-advantages/documented-sustainability-initiatives
www.trolldtekt.com

In summary, it is becoming more and more important for manufacturers to consider obtaining verified EPDs. Not only do they provide a project with a more accurate measurement of the embodied carbon emissions, but they also provide a robust source of data on the products.

An EPD will also help manufacturers support claims of greenwashing. In some countries, such as France, it has been mandatory for manufacturers making green claims to obtain an EPD (called FDES in France) to prove their claims. Several countries in Europe are starting to regulate the embodied carbon of construction projects with targets to be met over time. While there is no regulation in the UK, the market is starting to drive the need for EPDs. FIS has worked with its members to publish documents providing more information on EPDs and how they fit in the net zero agenda.

To find out more visit: <https://tinyurl.com/4dnfmj86>

than just working with average values. This attention to detail is invaluable for developers, architects and or designers wanting to document the carbon footprint of a building to achieve certification under Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or WELL Building Standard within the UK.

"Since 2022, our clients have had the opportunity to choose acoustic panels based on a new bonding agent, FUTURECEM™.

"FutureCEM EPDs evidence that, over the entire product life cycle, the carbon footprint of Trolldtekt acoustic panels based on this new hybrid bonding agent are 38 percent lower than that of Trolldtekt panels based on traditional white cement.

In summary

Our 20 different EPDs take into account:

- the thickness of the Trolldtekt acoustic panels (25 mm or 35 mm)

Zoë Glander, Environmental and Sustainability Manager for Overbury, says: "EPDs allow for the impact of a product to be quantified and compared across a range of environmental indicators. They serve as a valuable tool both for manufacturers wishing to understand their product's environmental impact and for specifiers and purchasers when comparing products.

"We are huge supporters of our supply chain providing these as more and more of our clients are requesting project-level LCAs for which EPDs are a valuable component. EPDs also assist us in understanding and

Five questions you should ask when looking at an EPD

1. Is it verified or not?

An EPD should be third-party verified to relevant standards.

2. Is the EPD current?

Check the publication date and expiry date. EPDs must be updated every 5 years.

3. Which Life Cycle Stages are included?

New EPDs should declare the production (A1-A3) phase plus the end of life (C)

4. Which manufacturing locations are included?

An EPD can cover one product produced in a single location, or those sourced from several locations.

5. What is covered?

An EPD can be product specific, cover a range of products or be generic to the product sector. The results can be reported against a declared unit eg: m2, m, m3 or a functional unit eg: 1 m2 of insulation with a U-value of x depending on the product and its function.

THE FUTURE OF SPECFINISH

Subscribe now. Print, digital or both?

From 2025, unless you work for an FIS member, you will no longer receive a printed copy **unless** you confirm your preference.

Scan to register

thefis.org/sfpref

LET'S BUST THAT DUST

Tony Bishop, HSSQ Manager at The BDL Group, recently attended a Build UK Respiratory Solutions Roundtable event. He shares with us his insight from the event, focusing on the important discussion regarding the hierarchy of control about operational tasks that create dust emissions in the workplace, and how controls can be improved.



Tony Bishop, HSSQ Manager at The BDL Group

The Respiratory Solutions Roundtable event was chaired by Kari Sprostranova, Health, Safety & Wellbeing Director at Mace Construct. Key areas discussed were:

- Storage and cleaning solutions for Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE).
- Education: both before people enter the industry and the tools and resources available through the Health in Construction Leadership Group (HCLG);
- Design: what are the quick-win ideas and putting case studies together as a learning tool.

Tony noted the impressive attendance at the meeting, showcasing a diverse presence from main contractors and trade experts. The session began with a focus on RPE storage and cleaning solutions but quickly shifted towards discussing the hierarchy of control about operational tasks that create dust emissions in the workplace, and how controls can be improved.

He said: "As the FIS representative I was able to share with the attendees what BDL has implemented and what other drylining

contractors can do in terms of reducing dust emission from drylining processes. When working together and accepting there could be cost implications the following controls can be implemented through good planning and collaboration with main contractors".

- **Elimination:** The design team ordering bespoke size plasterboards will reduce cutting and also Core and Glasroc board's being cut into strips off-site in a controlled environment, and premixed jointing materials.
- **Isolate:** The handover of the areas for jointing and sanding operations and cutting stations for timber setup should only be accessed by drylining operatives who are carrying out the tasks and wearing the correct equipment.
- **Engineering controls:** Install local exhaust ventilation (on tool extraction) systems where there is high speed sanding, drilling and cutting tools. Pre-user inspections should take place and the statutory examination testing should take place every 14 months. Also using direct fixings where possible which will reduce drilling into concrete soffits and slabs.
- **Administrative control work methods or procedures which are designed to minimise exposure to a hazard:** Implement suitable and sufficient risk assessments and method statements, ensuring effective communication and continual monitoring for compliance. Provide comprehensive training to relevant personnel on the dangers of dust related hazards and occupational diseases that can be contracted and or made worse by not following control measures and procedures in the workplace.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or RPE regarding dust prevention:** Positive or negative pressure respirators should be worn at all times when conducting a task where identified in Risk and COSHH assessments. Where

required face fit testing should be completed and specific training provided on the mask, filter use, filter use life, inspections, why there is a necessity for the user to be clean shaven when wearing the tight fitting negative pressure respirator and again provide comprehensive training to relevant personnel on the dangers of dust related hazards and occupational diseases that can be contracted and or made worse by not complying with control measures and procedures identified in the task safe system of work.

Tony concluded by saying: "Although the focus of the meeting was to address occupational dust issues across various trades, there was consensus that the industry must focus on the hierarchy of control to effectively make an impact on controlling dust emission and significantly improve the health of workers and the overall working environment".

www.bdl.co



SUCCESSION PLANNING STRATEGY, EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP TRUST

Exploring Employee Ownership Trusts (EOT) and the advantages and disadvantages for a company and its employees.

SpecFinish Editor David Crowson spoke to three FIS members, Galaxy Insulation and Drylining, Paramount and Claremont Group Interiors who opted to establish an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT). This enables their employees to become owners of their respective companies. They tell us about their journeys, spanning their decision-making phase to the actual implementation of the EOT.

According to the Employee Ownership Association (EOA)[†], 2022 was a record year for the growth of Employee Ownership Trusts. 332 new companies became employee-owned during 2022, with the number of EOTs standing at more than 1,400 in June 2023 which is an increase of 37 percent in 12 months. According to the EOAs stats, 90 percent of companies that are currently employee-owned moved to this ownership model following EOTs being enshrined in legislation.

From a small company to Galaxy Employee Trust (GET)

Richard Walker, Group Operations Director and Trustee at Galaxy Insulation and Drylining explained that the company was formed in 2009 with sites in Leeds and Sheffield but fast forward to 2023 and they now have 14 branches nationwide, along with acoustic material manufacturers Hush Acoustics who joined the Group in 2021. During that time, they expanded their talent base in different

sectors across interiors, facades, HVAC, fire protection and technical services, along with the launch of the Galaxy Technical Services (GTS) app to support their customers with their compliance needs.

Richard said: "Our company has grown naturally around the best people being available in the right locations for us to expand. People are at the heart of what we do and it's the culture that makes the Galaxy family what it is today.

"When we were considering our future succession plans there were various options to explore but having completed the sale of a previous company to a large plc, who I feel didn't see its true value, protecting our culture and our identity was very important to us. We want to create a legacy to ensure deliveries on our Galaxy fleet and the Galaxy name we've built together will continue to live on."

Richard passionately shared with us that through the Galaxy Employee Trust (GET), they believe that everyone has a vested interest in the success of the company. He said: "We all work in partnership with a common goal to ensure our company thrives and everyone can reap rewards from the power of working together".

The journey to implementing the companies GET

To start the journey, Galaxy joined the EOA in June 2022. Richard said: "The advice

and experience we gained from them was invaluable. From training for our trustees and council representatives to being linked with other like minded employee-owned companies in their network.

"We officially announced our transition to the GET on 1 September 2022, with a celebration across the group for our trust members (employees) with launch packs including a bar of Galaxy chocolate of course! The focus was 'everything changes' for employees around ownership but 'nothing changes' in terms of our culture and values. Our values are integral to our success and underpin the way we run our business".

Richard explained that a year and a half later, the company has now elected their employee council and trustees. Everyone in the company is represented by the employee council and they act as a channel of communication between employees and senior management. This allows the employees to think like owners and be involved in decision-making around the direction the company will take. The employees have a real voice and the chance to influence how the company can improve the way it does things.

Conclusion

Richard concluded by saying: "We believe that employee ownership is the right thing for our company to take us into the future. It will be an evolving process as it is still new to all of us, but together, as partners, we continue to work hard to ensure that it is successful and rewarding.

"Our goal is to create the best long-term experience for everyone who orbits our group from the GET members, customers, and suppliers to other stakeholders. So, whether it's being carbon neutral for a second year running, our Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme accreditation, or our charity partnership with The Children's Hospital Charity everything we do is driven by our trust members".



Staff at Galaxy Insulation and Drylining celebrating their first anniversary of the GET

www.hushacoustics.co.uk
www.galaxyinsulation.co.uk



People are always at the heart of everything Paramount do

Paramount reaps rewards of EOT

Paramount Chief Executive Officer **Richard Jones** explained that following a period of exceptionally strong year-on-year growth, Paramount embarked on a major company milestone which led to the completion of an EOT scheme in May 2021.

This allowed employees to take control of 51 percent of the high-growth company, creating a new structure which enabled Paramount to go from strength to strength and now 61 people own a majority shareholding of the business.

Richard commented: "Paramount has many long-standing staff members, and the people here are always at the heart of everything we do.

"The EOT offered an opportunity to reward our talented team with a stake in the business for the outstanding contribution and commitment they have shown throughout our growth journey, particularly through more challenging times.

"Our focus for the future is to continue to set the standard in our industry, transforming working environments into places where people want to be".

Richard went on to explain the EOT scheme saw the company move to a business model that empowers staff and in turn profits the business as a whole. The appointment of a dedicated trust board ensures the EOT acts in the best interests of all employees, with key support from an external EOT expert.

Paul Doherty, one of Paramount's EOT Trustee Directors, commented: "Not only are employees of Paramount already seeing the benefits of the EOT, but it also provides further recognition that you get out what you put in.

"The business has always had a strong team ethic, and an EOT was the perfect opportunity to benefit the team with an

employee-centric business structure, one which has powered Paramount forward and has ensured the company's future is bright."

www.paramountdb.com

Becoming an EOT: When people are your business

Three years ago, Claremont started a new era by turning its limited company into an EOT. Since then, the business has become wholly people-centric and is thriving on providing a culture of support, fun, and opportunity for its now 122-strong team.

Managing Director **Tim Frankland** led the transition for Claremont. He said: "Throughout our history, we've always been a people-orientated business, so becoming an EOT seemed the perfect way to embody our values and recognise the contribution of our talented team.

"The decision was also borne out of considering how to protect the stability

and longevity of the business as some directors plan their exits, so without the need for a Management Buy Out (MBO) or the possibility of being acquired by a bigger player. This way, Claremont remains in the hands of the people that have helped make it what it is today."

Tim added: "Under Claremont's EOT arrangement, 50.1% of the company's shares are held in an EOT, which provides the flexibility to reward staff with more than a year of service. The remaining 49.9% sits with the board. Claremont has appointed a separate governance board to ensure the EOT acts in employees' best interests.

"We transitioned at a seminal time for the business. We'd just increased turnover on the previous year and secured several new projects. This, combined with being the first of our peers to assume this ownership model, sent a strong message to the market. Our people are our business; we want them to share in our success.

"There have been no regrets in the three years since we became an EOT, and the business's growth has continued apace".

Tim concluded by saying: "We have a diverse and dynamic team who are passionate about what they do. They know their efforts and actions directly impact the business and are invested in our success. That energy has reinvigorated our business, helping us attract and retain the best talent, win bigger and better projects, and keep us on a trajectory of continued growth. Becoming an EOT was an investment in our people and our future. The power of that can't be overstated".

www.claremontgi.com

Source

1. www.employeeownership.co.uk



The team at Claremont

DIGITALISING THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

When reviewing technology such as software apps, the question is which ones to choose, how to link them together in a coherent way, and whether a company can use them effectively.



This article delves into the functionality of two software applications, SitePro UK and Trappco, developed by FIS members. These tools aim to address sector challenges, including adherence to the guidance in Approved Document L, the Building Safety Act (BSA) and Golden Thread requirements, while simultaneously increasing productivity, reducing costs and enhancing profitability.

'How can we be better' to comply with the guidance in Approved Document L and the Building Safety Act

Karl Hodgkiss Group Managing Director at MSC Contractors, told us that he had been in the construction industry since he was 16 years old undertaking an apprenticeship in engineering and then moving to plastering in his late teens.

He then went on to work for several subcontractors during his early years. Karl said: "I've seen firsthand how our industry has changed over the past 20 plus years, some for the better and some for the worse. I originally started MSC Contractors back in 2010, unfortunately, it was subject to many trials and tribulations during some difficult trading periods. We have since evolved into a new group of companies operating in a much more diverse spread of sectors with the aim of reducing risk to our supply chain and building on strong client relationships using our deep breadth of experience".

The challenge

Karl explained that the North West can be a peculiar place for drywall subcontractors and over the last few years with the large-scale foreign investments being at the forefront of the residential and buy-to-rent markets vs cost uncertainty (mainly caused by Brexit) it has opened up a world of cost cutting by developers/main contractors. These uncertainties turn some developers and main contractors to delve into some lesser regulated subcontractors however, with the new BSA now in force hopefully this will regulate our industry and drive a more controlled standardisation approach of processes and control measures.

The solution

"To ensure that we complied with the guidance in the Approved Document of Part L of the Building Regulations we asked ourselves the question 'how can we be better'. A lot of the answers led us to control measures on quality, communication and visibility of information upstream and downstream. This then led to the creation of SitePro UK which is a complete construction project management software app that streamlines onsite activity and uploads all information to the company's dashboard.

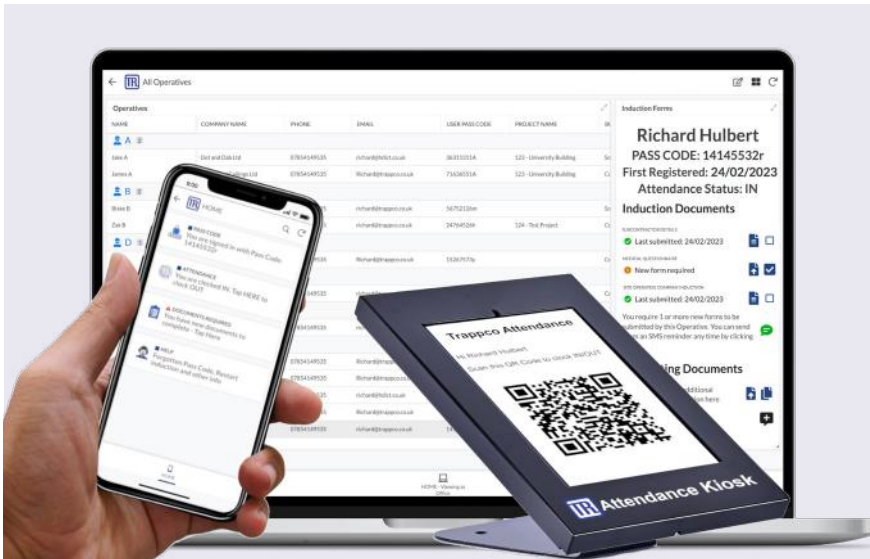
"Since we adopted the app technology our quality on-site and record keeping has improved massively. The data is visible for all operatives on their Apple and Android mobile devices for all build details as

they construct and is available to our site managers as they undertake Geo located QAs. This is all visible in real time to our clients when they log into their account. All reports are automatically generated in PDF and Excel format which are stored on our cloud based server and hosted by Amazon AWS encrypted servers so your information is safe at all times!

"The app has improved our productivity through the controversially named 'Blockers' as these sequence issues are dealt with in real time and enable a much smoother interface from the subcontractor to the main contractor, again all completely visible on the dashboard", said Karl.

Karl explained that originally, he was apprehensive that the older generation of MSC Contractors staff would dismiss the new app technology however, what they experienced was completely the opposite as they actually contributed to the streamlining of the processes. Karl said: "As we bring through more apprentices who are naturally more technology savvy, SitePro UK will continue to evolve. I designed the system to be very user friendly as I am not very good with technology such as apps and computers.

"We have become reliant on the app to protect our company, with operations and commercial teams internally checking on progress and quality vs handovers. It's delivering speed and quality with a frugal approach to our clients".



In conclusion

Karl said: "I would advise other companies in the sector looking to invest in digital solutions to first, look at your standard processes and how you physically record information. Secondly, look at SitePro UK and see where it fits. For many, it will reduce paperwork and streamline processes or may introduce new processes you never had."

"As our industry continues to evolve, I intend to keep the software affordable for all users and I strongly believe this will only help to improve quality and processes to adhere to the new Building Safety Act and keep your operational costs to a minimum".

www.site-pro.app

Out with the paper documents, in with the digital revolution!

Following a chance conversation with a close friend in 2016, what is now Trappco's focus has been on providing productivity solutions that tackle the enormous problem of manually managed paper documents that still plague construction sites today, explained **Richard Hulbert**, Director at Trappco.

Richard said: "Slowly but surely since the incorporation of the company, we have developed a series of modules including Quality Assurance (QA), Health and Safety, and more recently Induction."

"All of this is done whilst sticking to our core unique proposition of using our customer's own documents, maintaining the integrity and familiarity of their paper system".

The simple concept

Richard explained that the product is very simple in its concept, taking a customer's own documents such as handovers, QA check sheets and snagging forms etc, extracting those important and familiar

questions and then presenting them as a series of buttons and form fill fields with the ability to embed photos and signatures captured in real time.

He said: "In the case of the Induction module, we are now capturing personal details from contractors, subcontractors, sole traders etc in a secure and passcode protected environment."

"Again, driven by our customer's own documents, this can be anything from contact and medical details to training and competency data to site specific Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS), in fact, all you would expect from an induction

but instantly available from site and vital for maintaining that 'Golden Thread'.

C G Reynolds is a specialist contractor using the Trappco software apps. **Steve Upton**, its Operations Director said: "Our old method of paper documentation was time consuming and inaccurate with things often getting missed. By introducing the Trappco software apps we have reduced our time recording QA, by as much as 50%. With the automatic distribution of the information our clients receive accurate quality inspections in real time. In addition, without the need to photocopy or scan anything, the site management team has more time to focus on other responsibilities of the day to day running of a project".

In conclusion

Richard said: "Making the transition from paper systems to digital solutions can be very daunting. They are perceived to come with a heavy financial and disruptive cost, companies will all too often decide it is easier to stick with what they know. My advice to companies would be to take a look at small areas of their business where a low cost tailored solution could have a big impact on the bottom line."

"Over the years I have learned to listen carefully to our customers to really understand how their current system works so we can deliver a solution that meets their specific requirements. Also, to believe in our product because it works!"

www.trappco.co.uk

The potential of technology to reduce error

The Get It Right Initiative (GIRI) has created a report that considers ways in which technology can help reduce errors in design and construction; to suggest some of the solutions that can have the most impact; and to address some of the barriers to their adoption.

The report assesses a wealth of new tools being adopted by the construction industry, identifying those with the greatest potential to reduce the errors that are estimated to collectively cost the UK construction industry up to £25 billion per year in lost time, wasted materials and rework.

The report singles out 10 types of construction technologies which, if implemented properly, GIRI argues can directly mitigate the root causes of error identified in GIRI's wider research.

These include:

- 'Checking' technology
- Automated generation

- technology
- Workflow engines
- Visualisation software
- Collaboration and communication tools
- Computer vision
- IOT sensors
- Digital setting out
- Document management systems.

The research is based on in-depth interviews with contractors, consultants and technology providers. Full details on the technologies are available by visiting: <https://tinyurl.com/mr2tt559>



INTRODUCING VALCHROMAT: A SYMPHONY OF CREATIVITY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

Stuart Devoil, Group Head of Marketing at James Latham introduces readers to Valchromat, a pioneering wood fibre panel which sets a new standard in interior design.

Since its invention in the early 1970s, Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) has grown in popularity to become a go-to material for fit out professionals.

Highly versatile, used for both structural and finishing purposes, MDF manufacturers are constantly looking for ways to enhance the category to maintain its appeal in the increasingly competitive engineered timber market.

Valchromat, is one such brand taking the material to the next level. A revolutionary wood fibre panel, it's a game-changer in interior design that seamlessly blends aesthetics, durability, and unparalleled versatility. It not only meets the requirements of most interior applications, but consistently surpasses them too.

So, let's take this opportunity to dive deeper into its distinctive features, exploring what sets it apart from the competition and the reasons behind its surging popularity.

MDF's evolution to Valchromat

Consider this for starters: Valchromat isn't just your run-of-the-mill MDF, distinguishing itself with a higher density compared to competitor products. Putting this in context, standard MDF is ave. 650kg/m³ compared to ave. 745kg/m³ of a Valchromat panel.

This may seem like a small difference, however it's a massive breakthrough, making it up to 30% stronger compared to other MDF. Not only that, but the additional density leads to excellent machining properties, meaning crisp edges and defined details. Swift and straightforward to finish, it is particularly robust, with high levels of moisture and UV-resistance, a non-toxic composition, fire retardance (by request) and substantial load-bearing capacity.

This makes it sought-after for high footfall or heavy impact environments. Whether the residential, retail, hospitality, or education sectors, this material is well-suited to kitchen and bathroom settings where higher-resistance materials are

required to withstand consistent use.

Its composition also results in a more stable panel, making it easier to fabricate. Inviting the skilful touch of an artisan, it can be cut to a minute size for parquetry purposes, or carved for larger items. Not only that, it can also be effortlessly sanded to achieve perfect curves as well as polished with a wax or oil for an ultra-smooth surface. This unrivalled workability is a resounding testament to its unparalleled flexibility.

Crucially, it offers fit-out professionals the opportunity to move away from the constraints of linear design, unlocking new dimensions of creativity.

A Kaleidoscope of colour

That's not all. What truly sets it apart is its expansive range of full-body colours. From bold blacks, chocolate browns, vibrant reds and blues to more muted, on-trend hues of mint green, khaki, ochre yellow, orange, and an array of grey shades, the selection allows a host of design options.

Proving the creative potential, clever use of Valchromat was central to creating a unique identity for the recently completed Catford Mews, a vibrant South London-based cinema and events space. The venue's stunning 12.5m bar, by Cre8ive Joinery, steals the spotlight incorporating 80 bright Red Valchromat strips into a Black Valchromat carcass.

It was also used for the destination's toilet cubicles, colour-coded in vivid red, blue, and yellow, delivering both visual appeal and robustness. Not only that, its use in a washroom setting also emphasises the material's inherent moisture resistance, achieved through the proprietary resins used to bind the wood fibres. Furthermore, the even colour distribution means any scratches and marks, should they occur, are almost invisible, reducing repair requirements.

It's this combination of style and substance which makes this material stand out. Not only can it be sculpted into almost any



Stuart Devoil, Group Head of Marketing at James Latham



Opus in Valchromat by student Benjamin Scott

shape, its colour is preserved throughout the entire process. This results in furnishings and finishes that push the limits of the imagination, offering the freedom to achieve the individual, original and even unusual.

Shaping the future of interior design

This year's edition of Rycotewood College's annual furniture competition demonstrated Valchromat's creative credentials. Partnering with James Latham for the



second consecutive year, it focused on colour and curve, encouraging students to explore the limitless potential of this innovative material.

Enter Benjamin Scott, a student whose winning entry in the competition was nothing short of an opus in Valchromat. An Art Deco-inspired storage cabinet, it was both visually captivating and technically demanding. Painstakingly crafted, his submission incorporated over 1,000 accurately cut, delicately sanded, and finely polished yellow and grey Valchromat 'tiles', arranged in a precise, herringbone-patterned inlay, which wrapped smoothly and sensuously around the main polished-oak body of the piece.

Not only did this showcase Scott's proficiency with this material, but it also highlighted the student's impressive parquetry skills and his attention to detail. The judges unanimously praised the piece as a massive leap forward in Valchromat's use compared to applications in previous years, recognising Rycotewood's growing proficiency in working with this exceptional material.

So much potential

Other notable examples of the material's use in contemporary fit-out include its extensive use within The Science Museum, London. Here, it was chosen for its wide range of colours and ability to be sculpted

into a highly specific 'rainbow' installation to feature in its new 'Wonderlab' gallery.

What's more, the fact that it has been certified by the British Standards Association as 'child-safe', suitable for making toys, strengthened its appeal when appropriate products were being selected for the project.

It was also used in a decidedly more adult setting, for a brace of cool and contemporary residential projects. Here two brothers realised their vision of building their dream homes on a former, derelict industrial site.

Valchromat was specified for the kitchen furniture and cabinetry with 58 sheets of Dark Grey, Black and Yellow installed and lacquered to achieve a simultaneously beautiful but hard-wearing finish.

The results were so outstanding, the project **won a top design award** and featured on **Channel 4's Grand Designs**.

Eco-friendly brilliance

Finally, let's not forget that Valchromat is a sustainable material too. The wood used in every panel is FSC® certified, sourced from forest waste, timber mill residue, pine, and recycled pine. In a world increasingly conscious of sustainability, it is a shining example of responsible material use.

Valchromat is more than it appears to be, standing out from the crowd due to a range of features that not only enhance its appearance but also achieve considerable time and cost efficiency when specified.



FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about this material visit:
www.lathamdigitalshowroom.co.uk



THE FUTURE OF SPECFINISH

Print, digital or both?
What's your preference?

From 2025, unless you work for an FIS member, you will no longer receive a printed copy **unless** you confirm your preference.

Scan to register



thefis.org/sfpref



LOOKING AHEAD: STARTING 2024 ON A BRIGHTER NOTE BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

Peter Chesters, Group Marketing Manager at Barbour ABI reflects on 2023 and offers his predictions for the year ahead.

Commercial property developers have faced exceptional challenges over the past few years. From unprecedented changes in what occupiers need spaces to deliver, fragile consumer confidence and a rapidly shifting policy environment, to financial pressures from high borrowing costs and rapid construction cost inflation, overcoming the viability hurdle has been quite a challenge, explained Peter.

Peter said: "At Barbour ABI, our white papers, snap analysis, and reports are to help transform a company's strategic planning and make data-driven decisions with reliable, external construction industry data. The data I have used in this article spans from January to October 2023.

"We tracked a 14% contraction in the overall value of contracts awarded, with commercial and retail awards down 12% and hotels, leisure, and sport suffering a sharper 30% contraction. This paints a subdued picture for output in 2024 and further declines are likely in the first half of this year. On a much brighter note, our planning approvals data offers some optimism as 2024 gets underway. Approvals across all sectors dipped by just 1% compared with 2022 suggesting that the decline in activity may be close to its nadir. Especially encouraging is the resurgence in the hotel, leisure and sports sectors after 2023's weak performance. Project approvals in this sector jumped 17% while commercial and retail approvals broadly remained on par with 2022 at the national level.

"Regionally winners and losers are beginning to emerge as appetite for commercial projects starts to return. Eastern regions were the first to see commercial demand strengthen. Awards for commercial and retail contracts recorded modest growth in London and the East of England, while activity in the East Midlands steamed ahead. Approvals data suggests this trend is set to continue, posting growth of 15% and 25% in London and the East of England respectively in the first ten months of the year and Yorkshire and the Humber is

poised to join its easterly neighbours in the commercial revival. Awards and approvals data for hotels, leisure and sports projects are prone to significant swings as large projects with long delivery programmes hit the numbers. The North East, North West and Wales currently top the growth league table in this sector. This is better news on the approvals front which is encouraging but developer decisions to progress schemes will take wider economic, demand and financial factors into consideration.

"2023 ended with an economic whimper and geopolitical tensions were elevated, but there are a few reasons to be positive. Consumer price inflation has moderated, business and consumer confidence has improved and the consensus view among independent forecasters provided hope that the base rate has peaked. Furthermore, behavioural changes triggered by the pandemic to how we work, shop and play have largely normalised, strengthening our understanding of current market requirements.

"We're not out of the woods but 2024 is definitely starting on a brighter note than 2023".

So what might 2024 have in store for commercial development?

Peter went on to explain that work to upgrade existing stock to meet future minimum energy efficiency standards for rented commercial space will increase. From April 2027, it will become unlawful to let commercial space of less than Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C, rising to EPC B from April 2030. It's a significant task and owners of large commercial property portfolios are stepping up to meet the challenge. The clock is ticking and estimates suggest that around 77% of the UK office stock and over 75% of London's office and retail space will fall short of minimum regulations by 2030.

Refurbishment of existing commercial space will continue to be prioritised over demolition and new build in city centre locations. 2023 witnessed a major uplift in refurbishment activity due to corporate



Peter Chesters, Group Marketing Manager at Barbour ABI

ESG commitments and a strengthening focus on lower carbon development through the planning system. Going forward refurbishment is likely to be prioritised unless compelling reasons exist to make this unfeasible. In addition to carbon benefits, refurbishment can shorten the development cycle, delivering programme savings relative to new builds and generating a meaningful output stream more quickly.

Market pressures will, however, continue to weigh on viability across all asset types. Commercial property yields continue to face negative pressure amid softening capital values and subdued occupier demand, as construction costs stabilise at historic highs.

A wish for 2024

Peter concluded by saying: "The construction industry's value extends well beyond its direct contribution to GDP. Buildings and infrastructure influence our health, wellbeing, productivity, and ultimately prosperity. 2024 may have started with a hint of cautious optimism but project viability remains on a knife edge. Risks are numerous and wide-ranging and green shoots can easily wilt.

"Many of the exceptional challenges the industry has faced in recent years had external origins falling well outside the control of the UK government. Many but not all as some were homegrown.

"Homegrown issues were created by political indecisiveness, surprise policy decisions and policy inconsistency that all made development that little bit harder at a

time when the challenge was already immense. Government U-turns on planning reform, product standards testing and aspects of the green agenda did little to create the solid, stable, certain backdrop that developers and contractors need to allow them to press ahead with planned investment.

"My wish is that 2024 brings the policy certainty the construction sector craves.

Big policy changes are necessary but let's hope that the Government gives the industry the best chance at managing the transformation calmly and intelligently rather than making what is already pretty far from easy even more difficult".

www.barbour-abi.com

Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions and FIS North-West chair said: "I have to say I am going into 2024 somewhat disappointed. We operate mainly in the North-West and I feel let down by our political leaders. The promised levelling up is falling woefully short and the HS2 cancellation is a disgrace. People need homes, but housebuilding is in steep decline so it simply isn't good enough.

"Despite this, I am proud of the way our region is getting ahead on sustainability, boldly looking to hit net zero by 2038 which is 12 years before the national target. This is going to put pressure on us to reduce waste, encourage re-use and rethink the way we build. Modern methods of construction and procurement will be essential to this. Bring it on I say! From where I stand things look pretty good up North and devolution is

ultimately working, we just need to make sure that central Government recognise and supports this.

"So the earlier the better for me in terms of a general election, we need to move past political posturing and ensure the next Government sets down a realistic long-term strategy, one that I believe has to reflect more effectively the needs of the North.

"From a business perspective commercial construction remains pretty buoyant in the city centre and across Greater Manchester as a conurbation as a whole. I also believe the Building Safety Act is an opportunity, one that should allow responsible businesses to flourish.

My New Year's Resolution?

Angela finished by saying: "I was recently voted one of the top 100 influential females in the construction sector by the



Angela Mansell,
Managing
Director at
Mansell Building
Solutions and FIS
North-West Chair

National Federation of Builders. My New Year's resolution is to use this as a platform, lead by example and show that construction isn't just a man's game. There is much to be done here, we are failing to attract women into our sector in the numbers that we need and in that failing to change the culture of the sector as a whole".

www.mansellbuild.co.uk

Philip Brown, Director at Meronden and FIS President said: "I am looking into 2024 with confidence. The market will be challenging, it inevitably will be another roller coaster year with work slowing and flooding, but we are all battle hardened now and resilient to the ever-changing market. Let us face it we are emerging from a tough year, which was preceded by a tough year that followed a tough year!

"If we look at the key sectors for our members, Housebuilding has been brutal this year, but there are signs that things are picking up in terms of transactions, interest rates have hopefully peaked so the indications are that we are at the bottom. Our concern here going in to 2024 is less about the volume of work and more that the Majors are looking to ride the storm by hammering the supply chain with onerous terms. This is something FIS have raised as a concern at the highest level in Government.

"Commercial activity for fit-out and refurbishment has remained buoyant as landlords and developers seek to optimise the value of space and the workplace is re-imagined encouraging people back to their offices. Conversions to residential in

urban centres and industrial and logistics activity on the edge of cities also remain a strong part of the market. There is certainly risk around new commercial tower projects where the main work is not already underway, but even here projects are coming through. Even here though the news is not all bad with the recent Deloitte Crane Survey¹ suggesting that the "London office development market has again shown "renewed activity and optimism among developers."

"The forthcoming election means yet again more uncertainty, but uncertainty is the norm now. Encouragingly building homes and the necessary infrastructure is on the agenda and all parties are making noises to tackle the continual under-investment in new housing stock.

"From a Regulatory perspective, we see the full weight of the Building Safety Act starting to hit. Again, I am optimistic about this - it should, if effectively enforced, drive better behaviours. I think and hope that sustainability will also push us in the right direction - to deliver against net zero targets we all need to be engaging the supply chain earlier.



Philip Brown,
Director at
Meronden and
FIS President

My New Year's Resolution?

"It is my last year as FIS President, so for me, it is about delivering on promises, I am encouraged that the Sustainability activity within our Trade Body has grown exponentially, but there is still a lot to do to support inclusivity and improve recruitment and engagement in schools".

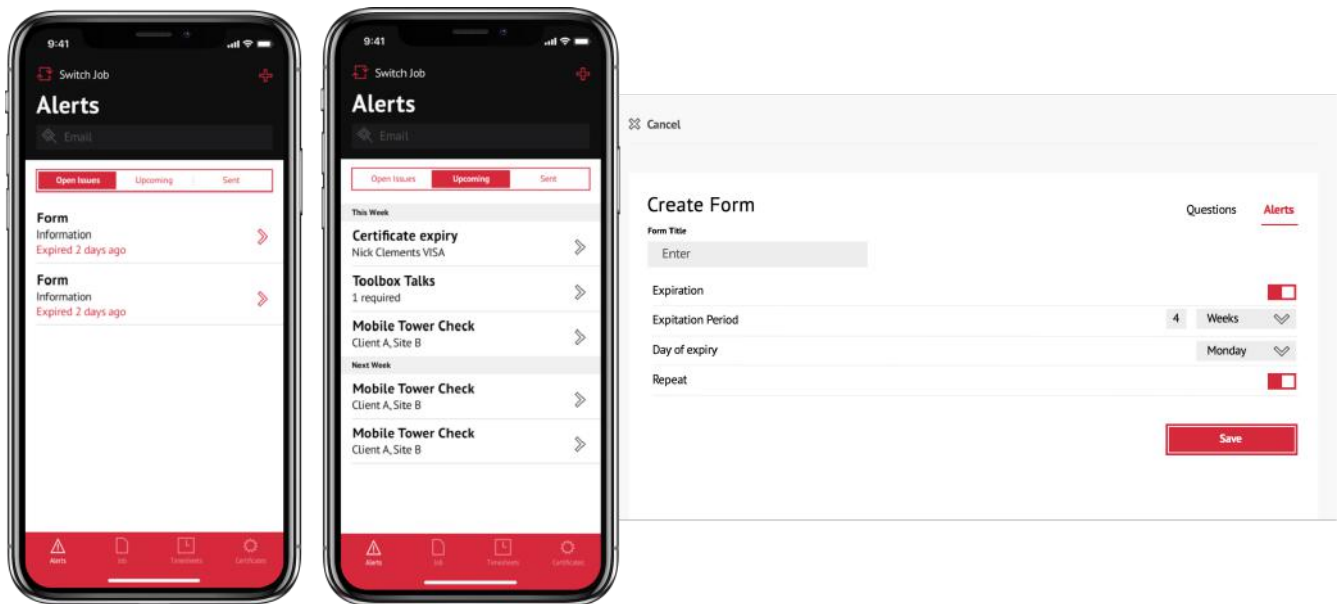
www.meronden.co.uk

Source

1. www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/real-estate/articles/crane-survey.html

CELEBRATING BEST PRACTICE

According to **Nigel Higgins**, FIS Technical Engagement Manager two new FIS members are 'getting it right' when managing their obligations under the Building Safety Act (BSA). Editor David Crowson explores further why Nigel made this confident statement.



Gridlocked software app

Prior to becoming an FIS member both Gridlocked and B&K Systems were visited by Nigel who carried out the on-site vetting part of the membership application process.

Nigel explained that this is the most enjoyable part of his role as he gets to meet the people who make the company tick and visiting their site is a great way to assess the ethos of a company and how they deliver a project.

He said: "As part of the vetting process, in conjunction with our FIS Quality Framework tool PPP (Product Process People) and based on what we have learned from our FIS members and best practice guides, my role is to recommend improvements to their processes and procedures.

"One of the key areas I focus on is the Building Safety Act (BSA) and the requirements for a business to record what was built and to demonstrate compliance and competence.

"When witnessing their processes firsthand, I was blown away at the quality

and detail that both Gridlocked and B&K Systems were recording at each stage on their bespoke software app tools.

"Each app started at the tender stage and at each stage in the project their staff are required to record the completed tasks and the installer's name. This has given them complete control and oversight of a project".

Nigel explained that to test the validity of the software apps he asked both companies to produce the name and qualifications of the installer and photographic evidence of the compliance on each element during the build on completed large and complex projects. He said: "I was very impressed with the data they provided and the overall way they are managing their obligations under the BSA".

He concluded by saying: "We often ask the question what does 'getting it right' look like and I commend both companies for delivering best practice with industry leading tools and processes to futureproof their companies".

Simon Heath, Commercial Director at Gridlocked explained that at the start of

2017 the company moved into the supply and fit-out market. Simon said: "We started with a clear company ethos, "let's be the best we can". This was deliberately simple as it is an easily applied attitude to everything we do and is also effortlessly explained to all existing and new employees.

"By the middle of 2017 we were ISO 9001, 14001 & 18001 (since 45001) certified which allowed us to further demonstrate our ethos to our client base.

"As part of the ISO accreditation we introduced an Integrated Management System. This system enabled us to break the company down into manageable pieces which allowed regular reviews, updates, and integration.

"Whilst conducting one of our first regular reviews it became very clear that we needed to address some of our processes and practices. A good example is our site supervisors who spent as much time in a cabin completing forms as they did on the site. We were left asking ourselves that despite a tick and signature on a paper how do we know for sure the towers have been signed off

by the correct PASMA qualified operative? How do we know for sure if the fixing centres are correct? How do we know for sure that firestrip was added to the deflection?"

There must be another way?

Simon went on to explain that this was the spark that made them realise there must be another way. He said: "By the middle of 2018, we developed and implemented a bespoke software app called Under Construction¹. The app facilitated our capability to view time-stamped photos, digital signatures, and pinpoint locations on a DWG or PDF file, offering precise insights into where reports were being filed. Our questions were now easily answered.

The inevitable question: What else can this app do to make us better?

"As with all technology the app continues to evolve and today, our site supervisors require little more than a tablet to run our projects. From day one on-site, they can now, to name but a few:

- Access RAMS & SSOW. Induct, photograph cards, log attendance of operatives with digital signatures, and record deliveries.
- Access drawings, specifications, raise RFI's, EWN's, carry out compliance checks on equipment and evidence this with time-stamped photos.
- Record QA checks evidenced with photos and logged against a specific item of work.
- Raise internal NCR's which get emailed directly to the responsible operative with a deadline for correction.
- Complete sign-off for areas ready for passing on to the next contractor.

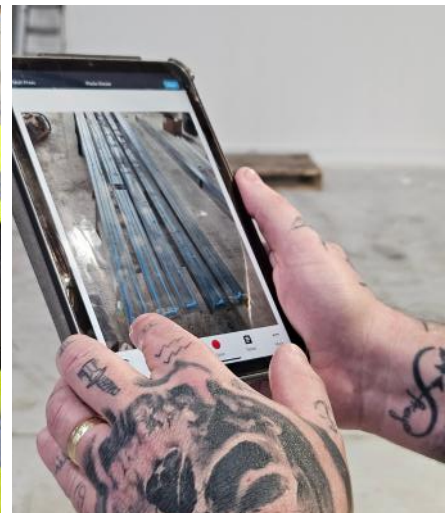
"The Gridlocked management team has reduced significantly the amount of time required to travel to sites as full access to the app via a web-based link allows us to monitor, make amendments, set alerts and upload relevant information.

"We also allow our clients access to the information which we choose to share so they can also monitor progress and QA from afar which they love!"

Simon concluded by saying: "We were proud to hear that Nigel was impressed with our ethos and practices and sought insights to share with you, the readers. What initially began as an idea to allow our site supervisors more time on-site, become a bespoke app, now forming the cornerstone of our company's entire compliance management strategy.

"Embracing the regulatory changes such as the BSA and Golden Thread, we find ourselves on the front foot and in a position where we can make swift and seamless adaptations. We're not just meeting compliance, but exceeding client expectations."

www.gridlocked-ltd.co.uk



Lee Ranby, Senior project manager at B&K Systems working on the QA app

"B&K Systems are a group of companies that operate out of Leeds in West Yorkshire. Our internal division specialises in steel framing systems to partitions and ceilings to floor screeds and finishes. We are proud to have over 35 years of experience in the industry serving our clients in all our specialised areas of construction. During this period, we have built up an exceptional reputation for quality, and reliability and are extremely customer focused. Our experience and foresight have enabled our company to continue to evolve in an ever-changing environment and has gone on to be a leader that is at the forefront of change says, **Chris Kerfoot**, Partitions Director at B&K Systems.

Investing in the future

Chris explained that when Nigel visited, he witnessed the significant investment the company has made to perfect stringent measures that allow them to provide a quality service to their clients and make the company a safe and rewarding place in which to work. He said: "Our investment comes in various forms to complement our company structures.

Product

"This includes testing fire solutions for abutments between screeds and partitions for example, we have also developed site-specific fire tests based on clients' needs.

People

"We recognise future-proofing the company is vital to our success. We have implemented internal staff and management training programmes and amongst other things, these will ensure our processes and procedures are passed on to the next generation of our staff. We also take health and safety very seriously as without our labour we do not have a company. We strongly believe it is our duty as a

responsible employer to take care of our dedicated workforce.

Process

"As legislation landscapes continue to evolve, we are continuously reviewing our internal procedures so we remain ahead of the curve. A good example of this is our procurement and build processes which have gone through a transformation through the creation and integration of bespoke software apps. These are aligned with our company's needs and regulatory obligations.

"As a company, we acknowledge the importance of adhering to regulatory compliance, notably the BSA and Golden Thread, recognising the importance of documents like Quality Assurance (QA). As this is the case, we implemented an exceptionally in-depth QA process which is managed by using our bespoke app tool. The app records in real time every aspect of a build through photography and write-ups with all design details incorporated into one platform.

"We believe this is one of many areas that sets us apart from other companies and why we were pleased to hear that our processes impressed Nigel.

"These processes have evolved to ensure we can guide our clients through challenging and at times confusing areas such as the Building Safety Act. The information that we collate throughout the process is accessible to both our clients and the end user.

"In conclusion, throughout our many ever-evolving processes we believe that this puts us at the forefront of our client's mind, and we feel privileged to have continued success with new clients and repeat business alike."

www.bksystems.co.uk

Source

1. www.underconstruction.co.uk

SPECIFYING OPERABLE WALLS

James Parlour, FIS Technical and Vetting Manager, looks into the specification of operable walls, the unique challenges, and the guidance provided by FIS and its members.

The specification of operable walls unlike other static non-loadbearing partitions can offer some unique challenges that are often not well communicated by published standards and norms. Whilst individual manufacturers within FIS membership can and should be referred to for assistance in ensuring accuracy in detailing and representing the performance capabilities of a product, there will always be a place for independent guidance that advises on the generic requirements of a product and the pitfalls involved in producing a robust specification.

What is missing?

Operable walls lack a single dedicated product standard that can easily be referred to for all relevant performance criteria or descriptions of best practice, including references to purpose-designed test methodologies. They also lack a product standard that carries UK

designated status that would mandate a Declaration of Performance (DoP) with defined essential performance characteristics and metrics.

Where they sit: BS 5234-1:1992 Partitions (including matching linings)

Instead, operable walls sit within the scope of BS 5234-1 which covers all non-load bearing partition types. In this standard, operable walls are only briefly referred to as one type amongst many and whilst some typical performance characteristics of an internal wall still apply, others such as fire and smoke resistance apply only under very specific circumstances. In other regards the inverse is true, and operable walls have considerations that do not apply to other non-loadbearing internal walls. The most significant is the need for an operable wall to load its supporting structure (usually by suspension).



James Parlour, FIS Technical and Vetting Manager

A unique challenge

The suspension method for an operable wall represents a fairly unique challenge as, unlike some other suspended elements of construction, the load to the supporting structure is mobile. Perhaps more importantly, the product can allow for stacking of panels during operation such that the weight of almost the entire system can load a single point anywhere along the head track at one time (not just the designated parking areas). Early engagement here is critical because these design loads could be significantly higher than anticipated. In addition to contacting the manufacturer for assistance with weights and compatible detailing, the loading to the structure will need to be properly assessed and calculated by the “designer” or “principal designer” with appropriate demonstrated competency before appropriate suspension methods and top fixings are selected to suit the application.

FIS, in conjunction with its membership, is currently developing a new Specifiers Guide to operable walls that will sit alongside a suite of others that already cover the specification of drylining, demountable partitioning, suspended ceilings and steel framing system.

The new guide will be published early in 2024 and will be downloadable by visiting: www.thefis.org/membership-hub/publications/specifiers-guides



Veneered top hung operable wall separating open plan and mezzanine areas



Panels stacked in offset parking bays

“READ ALL ABOUT IT!”

We speak to the authors of two exceptional must-read publications. “Show Me The Bodies: How We Let Grenfell Happen” is an essential and timely piece of investigative journalism and “How to Write Simple and Effective Subcontract Agreements in Just 500 Words” is a go-to guide in subcontracting literature.

Show me the bodies: How we let Grenfell happen

Author **Peter Apps**, explained that when covering the Grenfell Tower Inquiry - spending every day logging in to the YouTube stream or trudging through the rush hour crowds in Paddington - it was hard to remember that it wasn't the centre of everyone else's universe as well.

Peter said: “I used to feel genuine surprise when people didn't know the name ‘Arconic’ or still asked basic questions about what went wrong on the night.

“Of course, what I was forgetting is that the rest of the world had quite a lot of other things going on at the time.

“Three weeks into the inquiry's second phase - for example - it paused due to the new virus sweeping through the country.

“On the day the shocking evidence about the companies involved was revealed for the first time most news websites were understandably more interested in the sitting president of the United States publicly calling its election results fraudulent.

“And when the first government ministers arrived - an event I felt sure would grab media attention - people were (again understandably) more worried that Vladimir Putin had just invaded Ukraine.

“The result was that what happened was a generationally unique inquiry which shone a light into the darkest corners of the construction, politics, social housing and firefighting played out to a tiny audience - mostly of people who were directly impacted anyway.

“I felt this was wrong, that there were lessons in this evidence that needed to be heard and understood if we were to move forward and deliver the change that was promised after the terrible events of June 2017.

“This is why I embarked on writing Show Me The Bodies - the intention was to give people an accessible, clear and

human summary of what led us to the position where a fire which was globally unique in its consequences could be allowed to happen in one of the richest cities in human history”.

Peter concluded by saying: “My hope is that it's a book which anyone from the director of a facade company to a sixth form student could pick up, read easily and take something important from.

“Wherever it comes from, everyone in the profession must educate themselves about Grenfell. There is an old and wise saying about what happens to those who fail to learn from history”.

Peter is available to speak at industry events. Contact monica@aitkenalexander.co.uk to discuss. Show Me The Bodies can be purchased from Amazon: www.amazon.co.uk/Show-Me-Bodies-Grenfell-Happen/dp/0861546156

How to write simple and effective subcontract agreements in just 500 words

Author **Sarah JV Fox**, told SpecFinish that after decades in the construction sector, she has yet to read or review a subcontract that is fair, balanced and designed to help the specialists who are sharing their expertise to benefit the main contractor on a project.

Sarah said: “Main contractors seem to take pleasure in three contract sins: dumping risks, dumping reams of paper and dumping extraneous terms on their subcontractors. In fact, the very worst contracts I read were subcontracts - Frankenstein creations mixing standard forms, amendments from the client and extra nasty contractor changes too.

“Not only were the legal terms complex, but trust, cooperation, balance and fairness were missing... despite government reports consistently showing that these are the very things that will avoid disputes, create good relationships and set the project up for success.



“My main aim in writing this book is to challenge the narrative that complex one-sided subcontracts are the only option. I am leading a one-woman revolution to give the construction sector contracts that everyone can (and will) read, understand and then use.

“But I didn't want to publish yet another subcontract without explaining my reasoning. The book starts by explaining why you should write a simple subcontract: it starts a conversation between the parties on how they will work together.

“The book is your guide to my 11 essentials for a subcontract. Each of those chapters sets out sample text and what happens if you say nothing to give subcontractors more confidence to negotiate. By following the logic set out in each of the chapters and adapting the sample text, subcontractors can write their own crystal-clear and robust subcontract. You can write your own in just a couple of hours and the book includes tips on how to use it successfully.

“The book also challenges the notions that every subcontract needs to: annex the main contract in full, include indemnities instead of delay damages and have unlimited subcontractor liability. It doesn't cover everything to do with subcontracts, so there are extra resources on my website.

“Of course if you need someone to review a subcontract you've been sent or one you write using the book, just send me an email and I'll see what I can do.”

Sarah is available to speak at industry events. Contact sarah@500words.co.uk

The book is only available on Amazon in paperback and kindle. Visit: <https://tinyurl.com/59s42k8u>

FIS AT THE WORKSPACE DESIGN SHOW

FIS has partnered with the UK's leading workspace interiors exhibition, which is returning to the Business Design Centre in London from 27 – 28 February. At the event, the FIS Conference will take place over two days and will include the announcement of the winners of the FIS Innovation Awards.

The Workspace Design Show provides an excellent platform for professionals and businesses to explore a variety of innovative products and solutions offered by manufacturers and suppliers. The show provides an opportunity to learn about the latest trends and best practices in workspace design, gain valuable insights, exchange ideas, and network with like-minded individuals. Whether you are a designer, architect or a business owner, you can connect with others who share your passion for creating inspiring workspaces.

What to look out for at the show

Workspace Design Show will feature four different talks programmes, featuring 120 speakers. The **Workspace Design Talks** will be exploring the latest trends and insights in workplace design, strategy and culture, while the **Sustainability Works** programme will again bring together a selection of key figures behind the workplace market's leading sustainable initiatives, projects and product developments.

A selection of the inspirational speakers at the FIS Conference



Vanessa Brady OBE,
Founder and CEO
Society of British
and International
Interior Design



Professor Noble
Francis, Economics
Director at
Construction
Products Association



Ana Rita Martins,
Sustainability Lead
at MCM



Professor Stuart Green,
University of Reading

The **FIS Conference** will bring together speakers from across the commercial interiors industry to discuss key issues and current trends that are shaping the future of workspaces.

Meanwhile the **Occupiers Forum** will provide 'The View from HQ', giving that crucial perspective from the occupier side of the workplace design equation, as well as providing insights into what employers are doing to create an engaging workplace experience.

FIS Innovation Awards

There remains a perception that construction is not an innovative sector, and these awards aim to debunk this myth and celebrate innovation in our sector. The FIS Innovation Awards recognise outstanding innovation in the finishes and interiors sector across four categories, Product – Fit-Out, Product – FF&E, Sustainability and Digital. Winners will be announced on 27 February, join us to see the winners and vote live for your overall Innovation of the Year.

This event is a must-attend for anyone in the sector and it is free to attend!

FIS Conference Programme

27 February

Day 1: Delivering Productivity, Quality and Compliance in the fit-out sector

10:30 – 11:30:	Conflicting Trends: What to expect for the fit-out market in 2024
11:50 – 12:50:	Transformation through information
14:00 – 15:10:	Improving the fit-out process: A partnership approach
15:30 – 16:30:	Reimagining space: The essentials of a modern fit-out
16:45:	Innovation Awards

28 February

Day 2: Putting Net Zero and sustainability first in a practical way

10:15 – 11:15:	Making reuse happen in fit-out
11:35 – 12:35:	The importance of collaboration to deliver a sustainable fit-out
13:40 – 14:40:	Measuring and understanding sustainability within the project
15:00 – 16:00:	Delivering Wellbeing through fit-out

The FIS Conference will be held in
Rooms D and E on the second floor.

For further information about FIS Conference, Innovation Awards and to book your session/s visit:
www.thefis.org/conference2024

DIY SOS in Corby



Jon Jacznik, Director at DCL, and the team at DIY SOS

DCL provided 52 operatives over two days on the DIY SOS Big Build in Corby, Northamptonshire to help rebuild a house for a family of five.

The Hutchinson family had used a £60,000 loan to modify the home for their 16-year-old son Jordan, who has cerebral palsy and epilepsy. But their builders let them down and Mr Hutchison said they were left with "a complete mess".

Mrs Hutchison said: "We needed a toilet that works for him, a wet room and hand rails.

"Jordan loves pool, so we are going to have a pool table hopefully. That was our plan".

What the family was left with was a shell without a roof, and the couple and their three children moved into Mrs Hutchison's mother's house.

The DIY SOS team began work with the help of volunteers and tradespeople.

Presenter Nick Knowles said: "To have a youngster with a disability and not be able to go into an environment to try to make life better is really frustrating.

"With more than 100 people working on the house you get this extraordinary sense of well-being and everybody helping each other out. We are going from a shell to a family home in nine days".

Mrs Hutchison commented: "A completed house would have a dramatic effect on their lives.

"It would mean the world, especially to Jordan and for us as parents to watch him grow into a young man and just have that little bit of independence".

Jon Jacznik, Director at DCL said: "I'm pleased that DCL is in a position to help out an amazing cause. I'm very proud that we managed to complete our workings in record time ensuring the following trades have the time to provide an amazing finish for an amazing family".

www.drywallcontracts.co.uk

"Let's give a big round of applause to the winners of the 2023 Training Awards!"

In front of a packed audience, FIS and the Worshipful Company of Plasterers announced the winners of the 2023 Training Awards at its gala lunch held at Plasterers' Hall in London in November. The winners were presented with their prestigious awards by Lord Mayor Michael Mainelli.

The Awards are a collaboration between FIS and the Worshipful Company of Plasterers to recognise outstanding



A warm welcome from Philip Brown, FIS President

apprentices and students, and individuals and organisations that have made a lasting contribution to training and development in plastering and interior trades.

For further details about the gala event and the deserving winners, visit:

www.thefis.org/training-award-winners-2023

FIS launches contract review service

As part of our service offering, FIS provides a contract, QS and legal helpline service. Demand for this helpline has increased in recent months and concerns have been highlighted related to the level of risk (particularly around design and delay associated with the new regulatory environment) being passed through the supply chain. In response to this, we have identified the need to introduce a new FIS Contract Review Service.

Unlike the helpline, which reacts to member inquiries once a problem has been identified, the Contract Review Service provides pro-active support that will seek to identify onerous contract clauses before work starts, thus seeking to avoid contract issues further down the line.

The subsidised service will be staffed by a panel of four experts, and it will be the

member's choice as to which panel member they choose. The starting price will be £450 for an initial review and written summary and an additional £150 if a virtual meeting is required to go through the contract in more detail. Prices will be tiered around the size of contract.

The panel will use the collective wisdom generated through this work to isolate trends, identify onerous clauses and update on the state of the contractual market for regular reporting purposes. They will offer guidance to FIS and its membership, through a series of advisory articles. This work builds on our ongoing commitment to support the RICS Conflict Avoidance Process (more details in our Legal and Contractual Toolkit).

To read more visit: www.thefis.org/membership-hub/memberbenefits/fis-contract-review-service

Prestigious Old War Office development specifies Style for adaptable room space

The OWO hotel, previously the Old War Offices in London, opened for the first time to the public in Summer 2023 as the UK's first Raffles Hotel offering 85 unique private residences, nine exciting restaurants, three iconic bars, Guerlain's first London Spa and an active wellness by Pillar Wellbeing.

Working with EPR Architects and Ardmore Construction, partitioning business Style was specified to sub-divide the impressive main ballroom with a 6.5 metre high Dorma Huppe Variflex semi-automatic moveable wall.

With an incredible 60dB acoustic rating, noisy events can take place either side of the wall without sound interference, and the operable wall has a chic fabric finish to perfectly complement the interior design of the room.

Style also installed Dorma Huppe's unique i-Track system, designed to make the moving of tall moveable walls both simple and safe for the operator. Harnessing the kinetic

energy created by panel movement, i-Track utilises that momentum to effortlessly facilitate a change in direction as each panel passes through the curves, into and out of the parking pocket. Track diverters are also used to manually program the carriers to automatically move each panel to the correct parking location.

"It was a genuine privilege to have been chosen for one of the most iconic buildings in London," said Style's group managing director, Julian Sargent, "and it is testimony to the quality of our people, products and craftsmanship that we were entrusted to work on this famous landmark."

www.style-partitions.co.uk



Dorma Huppe's unique i-Track system

CCF'S carbon reporting tool recognised with Google Award

The new carbon reporting tool that is currently being trialled by CCF is one of the key initiatives that has helped parent company Travis Perkins secure a prestigious award win.

The Group has been presented with the 2023 Google Cloud Customer of the Year Award - Cross Industry, in recognition of its commitment to net zero and its data-driven approach to improving fleet efficiency and reducing carbon emissions for deliveries to customers.

CCF's carbon reporting tool provides information on the carbon emissions relating to the delivery of products to site for CCF customers. The tool is currently in its trial phase, and CCF is looking forward to expanding its capabilities to also include the embodied carbon of the products, which will enhance insight and transparency for tangible carbon savings.

Stefano Quatrini, Regional Sales Director at CCF said: "Such a respected award recognises the commitment we all have to achieving net zero. We're proud to be part of a Group that is paving the way for improved services to our customers and the rest of the industry when it comes to sustainability, and we're thrilled that CCF's new carbon reporting tool has helped achieve this recognition.

"We have developed our new carbon reporting tool to specifically meet the needs of our customers and this insight has only been possible by working

closely with a sample group to test the technology on real-life projects. With the first trial now underway, the potential benefits and advantages of being able to track carbon emissions through the distribution phase of a project are clear and we are excited to progress to the next stage."

Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions, one of CCF's customers participating in the trial, added: "Our aim in everything we do is to challenge the norms to drive the future in specialist construction, and aligning ourselves with innovative supply partners like CCF is a key part of this process.

"Seeing the investment that CCF is making into getting this tool right and making sure it will work in the way we as customers need it to, is impressive. It's been great to be involved and have the opportunity to put our opinions forward as part of this process to ensure the finished tool will not only be useful to other customers, but will go above and beyond other available tools and programmes."

CCF has also collaborated with several other customers on the first-phase development of its carbon reporting tool, including Errigal, Linear Projects, CCG and Platt & Reilly.

www.ccfstd.co.uk
www.mansellbuild.co.uk



(L-R) CCF's Colin Porterfield, National Sales Director and Stefano Quatrini Regional Sales Director

Doug Kerr retires



Doug Kerr retired as Joint Managing Director at Scotwood Interiors

Doug Kerr of Scotwood Interiors retired after 34 fulfilling and enjoyable years with Scotwood.

Doug said: "I'm hugely grateful for the relationships I have formed with colleagues, clients and contractors over these years and proud of the amazing things we have achieved together. I am also hugely happy to be handing over to a team that will maintain and grow Scotwood's leading position in interior fit-outs.

"After 34 years grinding at the coalface, I retired on (4 December 23). Scotwood Interiors has been my life and it was a wrench to leave, but I know this was the right time and I leave the business in the capable hands of Managing Director, Chris Nugent and Directors, Jim Scott and John Taylor.

"My Scotwood journey has been shared with Jim Scott and following Jim's dad's retiral in 2000, Jim and I took on the Joint MD's role and it has been a wonderful and rewarding partnership. We saw through recessions (two at least) and pandemics but it was a fantastic last couple of years, taking the business to its current position as an award-winning company and a market leader.

"I am very grateful to all those who have trusted me in refurbishing their offices. It was a privilege to work with you all and you can rest assured you will continue to be looked after by the Scotwood family".

To read the full story visit:

www.specfinish.co.uk/doug-kerr

www.scotwood.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FIS Conference at Workspace Design Show

Business Design Centre, London
27 - 28 February

FIS Awards Lunch

Royal Lancaster Hotel, London
6 June

FIS Scottish Awards Lunch

voco Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow
20 September

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



Voco Grand Central Glasgow Hotel

DRYWALL PRO-CUT

Offsite Drywall Solutions

Saves
Time &
Waste

BESPOKE DRYWALL COMPONENTS NOW MADE OFF SITE BY DRYWALL PRO-CUT, THE EXPERT DRYWALL DISTRIBUTOR

- ✓ FAST & EASY INSTALLATION
- ✓ CUT TO ANY SIZE
- ✓ PRE-MADE CURVES & SHAPES
- ✓ CONSISTANT QUALITY
- ✓ REDUCES ON SITE LABOUR & COSTS
- ✓ MADE & DELIVERED TO YOU

www.drywallpro-cut.co.uk

BIGFOOT PLATFORMS



- Lightweight sturdy work platform
- EN131 compliant SWL 150kg for site use
- Trigger lock hinges for increased safety
- Stabiliser feet for added safety

600mm wide
800mm long
500mm or 600mm high

The only 600mm high x 600mm wide platform in the UK

FOLDING SCAFFOLDS



- EN1004 Standard for site use
- UK quality manufacture
- Height adjustable
- Platform on any rung
- Trapdoor platform 1.8m x 0.6m
- Double guardrails included
- Locking castor wheels
- Stabilisers & toeboards if required
- 0.8m to 6.0m platform heights

ALL
PRODUCTS
IN STOCK
FOR NEXT DAY
DELIVERY

PLASTERBOARD TROLLEY



- Strong tubular steel construction
- Two swivel wheels
- Two fixed wheels
- Excellent manoeuvrability
- Solid rubber tyres – no punctures
- Removeable side rails



DELTA DECK



- A one piece access platform
- Takes less than 1 minute to assemble
- Built in guardrails for increased safety
- Larger working platform than a podium
- Variable platform height up to 870mm
- Working height up to 3.0m
- One piece – no items to lose
- Built in castors for ease of movement
- Folds for easy storage and transportation

www.safetyplatforms.co.uk

PRODUCTS IN STOCK - Call 01924 420820 for Next Day Delivery

workspace design show

27 – 28 FEBRUARY 2024

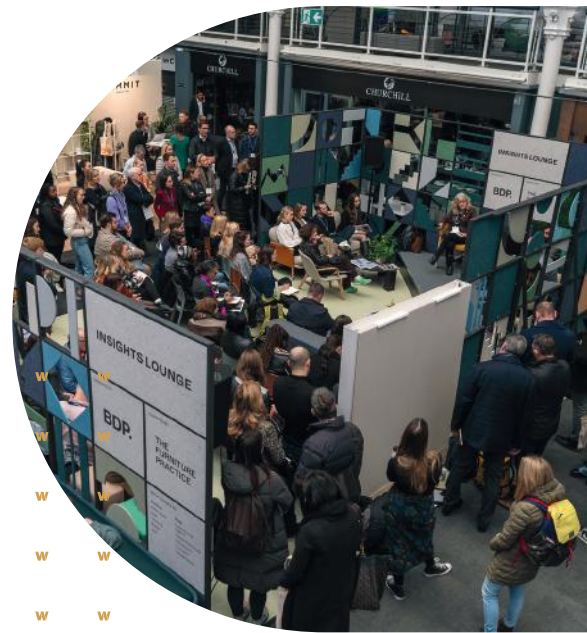
BUSINESS DESIGN CENTRE, LONDON

Bringing together the UK workplace design community

Taking place at Business Design Centre, Workspace Design Show gathers the most creative businesses, architects, designers and end-user occupiers from around the world. Hosted in the heart of London, Workspace Design Show is the ultimate workplace interiors hub, attracting both local and international manufacturers, brands, and suppliers. For two exciting days, industry professionals and enthusiasts converge upon this remarkable showcase, immersing themselves in a world of cutting-edge design.

At the event the FIS Conference will take place over two days and will include the FIS Innovation Awards. This event is a must-attend for anyone in the sector and is free to attend.

- **Unparalleled networking opportunities**
- **Drinks party**
- **FIS Conference, 27 - 28 February**
- **FIS Innovation Awards, 27 February**
- **Immersive, experiential features**
- **300+ interior products**



workspaceshow.co.uk