Flooring and Floor Build-Ups

Choosing the right floor build-up is one of the most important parts of any building or renovation project. It affects finished floor height, drying times, thermal performance, acoustic performance, structural suitability, and the type of floor finish that can be installed on top. Get it right and the whole project runs more smoothly. Get it wrong and you can create delays, costly rework, or performance issues that are difficult to put right later.

A floor build-up is made up of several layers working together. These may include the structural base, insulation, vapour control or damp proof layers, acoustic layers, underfloor heating, screed, overlay boards, adhesives, and the final floor finish. The exact combination depends on the application, the condition of the existing substrate, the performance targets, and how much build-up height is available.

In many projects, one of the first decisions is whether to use a traditional screed build-up or a dry overlay solution. Screed systems can offer strength, good load distribution, and a solid base for tiles, vinyl, timber, or resin finishes. They can also work well with underfloor heating. However, they usually require drying or curing time, and thicker applications can increase programme length and floor height. Overlay systems can be quicker to install and may suit refurbishment projects where speed and low build-up are a priority, but they still need to be matched carefully to the substrate, loading, and intended floor finish.

Insulation and acoustic requirements also play a major role. In new-build and refurbishment work alike, floors often need to contribute to thermal performance and sound reduction. This means the build-up must be looked at as a complete system rather than as a list of separate products. A strong product on its own does not guarantee a strong result if the rest of the floor build-up is poorly considered.

When reviewing floor build-up options, it helps to focus on a few key questions.
How much build-up height is available?
Is speed of installation more important than drying time?
Will the floor include underfloor heating?
Does the project require acoustic performance, thermal upgrades, or both?
What final floor finish will be used?
Is the substrate suitable, level, dry, and structurally sound?

A good floor build-up balances performance, practicality, and cost. The best option is rarely the one with the flashiest brochure. It is the one that suits the actual job.