

# The golden thread of building safety

Andrew Hill CQP MCQI takes a closer look at how quality professionals can drive compliance and culture change in construction by developing their ‘golden thread of information’.

The construction industry has undergone a seismic shift in recent years, catalysed by the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. The subsequent Grenfell inquiry report and the introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022 have placed building safety and regulatory compliance at the forefront of industry priorities.

The *Grenfell Inquiry Phase 2 Report*, published in 2024, exposed systemic failures across the construction ecosystem, from design and materials testing to regulatory oversight and accountability.

The report highlighted a ‘merry-go-round of buck passing’, where no single party took responsibility for safety-critical decisions. The report’s 58 recommendations called for sweeping reforms, including clearer accountability, improved competence, and a more robust regulatory framework.

In response to the Grenfell report, the Building Safety Act 2022 introduced a new era of regulation, including the creation of the Building Safety Regulator, the concept of duty holders, and the requirement for a ‘golden thread of information’. These changes were not just necessary, they were urgent. They aim to restore public trust, prevent future tragedies, and ensure that safety is embedded within the lifecycle of a building.

For SMEs, these reforms have

presented both challenges and opportunities. While larger firms may have more resources to adapt, SMEs often benefit from agility and closer-knit teams, which can make cultural and procedural changes more quickly. However, the burden of compliance, documentation and digital transformation can be significant and stretch many of these smaller teams.

## Importance of the ‘golden thread of information’

The golden thread is a central concept, introduced by Dame Judith Hackitt in her post-Grenfell review. It refers to a digitally stored, accurate and up-to-date record of building information that spans the entire lifecycle, from design and construction to occupation and maintenance.

Its purpose is to ensure that the right people have access to the right information at the right time. This includes details about materials used, fire safety systems, design intent and any changes made during construction. The golden thread promotes transparency, accountability and safety, enabling better decision-making and faster responses to risks.

For quality managers, this legislation change will help mould the wider company quality mindset as processes and procedures are implemented to incorporate the ‘golden thread’.

## Implementation in action

The golden thread is not just a compliance requirement; it is an

opportunity to lead by example and embed an enhanced positive culture of safety and quality.

To implement this, begin by conducting a gap analysis to assess your organisation’s existing documentation and information management processes. This will help to identify areas where data is siloed, incomplete, or not easily accessible.

From there, you can develop a digital-first strategy, focusing on:

- centralised data storage using cloud-based platforms;
- standardised templates for design, inspection, and handover documentation;

- clear role definitions for who owns and updates each part of the golden thread;
- training programmes to upskill staff on digital tools as well as compliance requirements;
- end-to-end project journey highlighting key milestones and golden thread inputs.

## Process development and implementation

After this, the next step is to develop a Golden Thread Framework, aligned with the three gateways of the Building Safety Act guidance:

- 1. Gateway One – Planning stage:** we introduced checklists and processes to ensure early-stage compliance with client and regulatory requirements.
- 2. Gateway Two – Pre-construction:** we developed a digital checklist and approval workflow to ensure all safety-critical information was validated before work began.
- 3. Gateway Three – Completion:** we implemented a structured handover process, including digital operation and maintenance manuals, fire strategy documents and as-built drawings. This allows the HSEQ team to carry out monthly audits against projects to ensure that the golden thread of

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information is being collated, shared and stored at the right time and by the right people and is ready for review on request.

## Impact on the organisation

In my experience of implementing these steps, the results were transformative, resulting in:

- Improved collaboration across departments and with external stakeholders.
- Faster decision-making due to better access to accurate information.
- Reduced risk of non-compliance and rework.
- Enhanced client confidence in our processes and deliverables.

Most importantly, it will build a culture of accountability and continual improvement. However, if your organisation is an SME, implementing the golden thread can come with its own set of challenges, including:

- **Resource constraints:** there may not be a dedicated team to address this, so it can fall under the HSEQ team. This may require existing

staff to upskill and integrate responsibilities into existing roles.

- **Digital transformation:** moving from paper-based or fragmented systems to a unified digital platform required investment in technology and training.
- **Regulatory ambiguity:** early on, there could be limited guidance on implementing the golden thread in practice, so the team may need to interpret the legislation and develop its own best practices.

On the flip side, being an SME also has advantages:

- **Agility:** changes can be implemented without layers of bureaucracy.
- **Close-knit teams:** communication and collaboration are easier, which helps in embedding new processes.
- **Leadership visibility:** senior leaders can be directly involved, which helps drive cultural change from the top.

## Conclusion

The Grenfell Tower tragedy was a wake-up call for the entire construction industry. The Grenfell inquiry report and the Building Safety Act have reshaped the regulatory landscape, placing safety, transparency, and accountability at the heart of construction.

For quality professionals, this is a pivotal moment. We are not just compliance officers – we are change agents. By embracing the golden thread, leading digital transformation and building a culture of safety, we can ensure that our organisations not only meet but exceed regulatory expectations. With the right mindset, tools, and commitment, we can build a safer, more responsible industry, one project at a time. ■

## Lessons learned

- Start early: don’t wait for enforcement deadlines. Begin building your golden thread now.
- Invest in people: training and upskilling are just as important as technology.
- Embed accountability: make safety everyone’s responsibility, not just that of the compliance team.
- Stay adaptable: regulations will evolve so your systems and culture should too.



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