

Delivering Culture Change and a Competent Workforce across the Built Environment

A cross Government, Regulator and
Industry approach

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1. Introduction and purpose

The importance of a competent workforce across the built environment is undeniable. Reading the Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase 2 report, one cannot fail to notice the impact that a lack of competence had and how this contributed to the tragic loss of 72 lives.

As well as saving lives, a competent workforce is also financially beneficial. The Get It Right Initiative research has shown that the construction industry could save between £10bn–£25bn per annum by reducing errors and improving project delivery¹.

In developing a competent workforce, there is also the need to recognise the current skills shortage across industry, not only in the trades, but also across professions. For example, in the UK, more than half of businesses reported challenges in finding the right project management skills in 2024, compared to one in three in 2019². Skills deficits are further exacerbated across industry, by an ageing workforce as well as difficulty in attracting people to industry³. There are wider culture challenges too, including mental health challenges and the culture of the 'race to the bottom'⁴ that need to be addressed.

All these factors have been recognised by Government, regulators and industry and there is a huge amount of work going on in this space: responding to the Grenfell recommendations, implementing the Building Safety Act, addressing skills shortages and looking at culture change. The issue is that these pieces of work are happening in isolation of each other, with different, and sometimes competing aims and in an environment where there are competing Government priorities. These priorities include building 1.5 million new homes in England, cladding remediation, privately rented homes in England and Wales to meet an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of at least C by 2030, and delivering the infrastructure strategy.

To deliver culture change and a more competent workforce, all the different areas of work have to work together, as an integrated system. Isolated pieces of work will generate isolated areas of change and improvement, but the underlying issues will not be addressed. In addition, a large number of uncoordinated change risks confusion and change fatigue across industry.

The purpose of this paper is to set out an approach that supports organisations operating in the built environment to deliver against the priorities whilst also implementing the changes necessary to deliver culture change and a competent workforce, building on existing good practice, to meet industry needs. This approach takes into account the change in culture that avoids a 'race to the bottom'⁵ whilst encouraging people to stay in the industry

2. Multitude of groups

There are many groups/organisations that are looking at the issue of competence and culture change in the built environment, along with many strands of work, all with a slightly different focus. These groups include, but are not limited to:

- Building Safety Regulator
- Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS)
- Social Housing Regulator
- Industry Competence Committee

¹ Get It Right Initiative - <https://getitright.uk.com/>

² PWC (2024) [The Golden Thread: A Study of the Contribution of the Project Profession to the UK's Economy](#). Association for Project Management.

³ Trustmark 2025: Skilled to Build: Empowering the UK's Repair, Maintenance and Improvement sector for a better future.

⁴ Dame Judith Hackitt 2018 Building a Safer Future Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report

⁵ Dame Judith Hackitt 2018 Building a Safer Future Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report

- Industry Competence Steering Group and the constituent Sector Led Groups
- Industry Oversight Group
- Construction Leadership Council (CLC)
- CLC People and Skills Group
- Industry Consultative Group (previously Industry Response Group)
- Construction Skills Delivery Group
- Work responding to the Grenfell Inquiry recommendations, including regulating the professions and licencing of principal contractors
- Skills Mission Board
- Work of Skills England
- Mandatory Technical Competence review board
- CSCS cards
- Industry Training Boards
- Construction Industry Council Committees as well as individual initiatives through Professional Bodies
- Potentially others

Each of these groups and organisations are trying to answer a different part of the puzzle, but have different objectives, cover different parts of the industry and are inconsistent in their definitions and approaches using similar terms to mean different things, for example 'construction' and 'built environment', which adds to the confusion as to what is being addressed. Many groups also have different geographical remits, with some covering England, whilst others focus on the UK or even internationally.

The purpose of this paper is not to highlight all the work that has been and is being done, of which there is a significant amount, but to set the scene and focus on the co-ordination of the various workstreams into a coherent approach, whilst highlighting some suggested ways to address certain issues. This paper focuses primarily on the area of building safety but recognises that similar approaches can be taken in other areas, such as green skills and infrastructure. Indeed, the formation of the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) offers a perfect opportunity to embed a project management approach across the civil service.

3. Portfolio management

Portfolio management is defined by APM as "the selection, prioritisation and control of an organisation's projects and programmes in line with its strategic objectives and capacity to deliver."

The *Teal Book* on project delivery in government defines the purpose of portfolio management as a way "to provide a coordinated collection of practices and decisions that together enable an effective balance of organisational change and business as usual while remaining within a specified funding envelope and constraints."

Whilst it may not be possible to run all the work in the built environment as one portfolio, there are some key principles from the portfolio management approach that can be adopted. These include:

- Setting a shared vision and objectives
- Prioritisation of work

- Management of resources
- Understanding dependencies
- Aggregated risk
- Effective governance/oversight, including who is accountable for what
- Teams working together and where needed recognising the need to include each other as stakeholders in the work that is being carried out

4. Management and Delivery

In setting out the areas below, it has been highlighted whether these need to be new areas of work or are existing pieces that need to be brought into the wider discussion

4.1 Vision and objectives for culture change and a competent workforce (new)

Whilst accepting all the groups outlined above are working to different priorities, scopes and timeframes, to deliver culture change and a competent workforce across the built environment there needs to be a common vision that key stakeholders can sign up to and commit to delivering. This will require commitment at executive leadership level from these key stakeholders including Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Department for Business and Trade (DBT), Building Safety Regulator (BSR)/Industry Competence Committee (ICC), Industry Competence Steering Group (ICSG), Construction Leadership Council (CLC), Department for Education (DfE)/Skills England.

A suggestion for such a vision is below:

'To deliver culture change that enables safe outcomes and develops a competent, motivated, engaged and sustainable workforce that meets the needs of the industry, ensuring that the assessment and continuing professional development infrastructure, to manage and maintain this is, also is in place and able to respond to changing industry needs'

A vision needs to be translated into objectives in order to be delivered. This requires:

- the objectives from each key stakeholder are aligned and priorities identified which relate to the joined-up approach
- the long-term strategic objectives are clear
- there is summary information on the outcomes and benefits
- key success factors are agreed, along with collated risk and resource information.

Underpinning all of this is a need for consistency. There are already clear definitions and expectations detailed in the Building Safety Act, including a definition of competence, which is '*possessing the appropriate skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours*', the focus needs to be on ensuring these are adopted and implemented across the piece as well as implementing the wider changes needed and addressing the skills shortages.

Prosci's ADKAR (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement) model (adapted below) can provide a useful structure for underpinning this.

Awareness of the change. This starts by people being aware of the requirements under the Building Safety Act and changes required.

Desire to change – there has to be a clear benefit, including a 'what's in it for me', so individuals make a conscious effort to buy into supporting the change. There needs to be incentives to be competent, demonstrate competence and/or sanctions for not demonstrating competence as well as allowing sufficient time and resource to manage projects that deliver safe outcomes, for example.

Knowledge – this relates to having a clear definition of competence and knowing and understanding expectations

Ability – this relates to being able to demonstrate competence. That there are accessible ways to demonstrate and record competence and for other people to check competence before recruiting or awarding contracts, for example.

Reinforcement - this relates to consistent messaging and communications across government, the regulator and industry

4.2 Understanding the issue in relation to the shortages in competent people across the built environment (new – building on existing)

Whilst there has been significant work completed by Skills England to understand current skills shortages, there are concerns that this does not capture the whole picture across the built environment

Current approaches to understanding skills shortages, such as the Employer Skills Survey and Local Skills Improvement Plans, are informed by labour market data based on Standard Occupation Codes (SOC). Whilst these approaches grant a general overview, they provide little detail as illustrated by the discrepancy between the 2022 Employer Skills Survey's use of three broad SOC groups, contrasted with APM's Salary Survey list of over 31 occupation types⁶.

Examining the project management sector of Construction emphasises the knowledge gaps that exist: the Golden Thread indicated there were 258,888 project professionals employed in 2019 and 299,798 employed in the Construction sector in the UK in 2024, whilst the Annual Population Survey recorded 107,500 Construction project managers and related professionals in 2021⁷, indicating a range of 151,388 – 192,298 professionals were unaccounted due to disparities between definitions of project professionals.

Understanding the size of the issue, not only in terms of vacancies, but also those who are underqualified or cannot demonstrate their competence as currently required in the Building Safety Act, as well as the pipeline of work and understanding future requirements, is vital. This then feeds into the objectives, outcomes and benefits.

4.3 Understanding and dealing with current/immediate issues

Whilst there are a number of issues that need to be addressed, there are two immediate issues that warrant specific mention:

1) Gateway 2 (existing)

Delays in approval at Gateway 2 are well documented. Whilst the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) and the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) continue to meet, in the form of a task and finish group to address this issue, the impact on project timelines, costs, and the ability to meet contractual obligations should not be underestimated. In this context it also has a knock-on effect to resource planning and the ability to have competent people available when needed. Work needs to continue on this to resolve this blockage as quickly as possible

It should also be noted that part of the Gateway 2 process, requires a competence declaration, which links into point below.

2) How do individuals currently demonstrate competence? (new – building on existing)

Since October 2023, there has been a requirement under the Building Safety Act for:

⁶ APM (2023) [APM Salary and Market Trends Survey 2023](#). (survey of 2,806 project professionals from across the UK)

⁷ PWC (2024) [The Golden Thread: A Study of the Contribution of the Project Profession to the UK's Economy](#). Association for Project

⁸ ONS Crown Copyright. 2021. [Annual population survey – regional – employment by occupation \(SOC2010\) from January – December 2021](#). Accessed via Nomis

- all individuals carrying out design, construction and refurbishment work to be competent in their roles and not carry out work they are not competent to do,
- anyone who appoints an individual or organisation to ensure they are competent in their role and
- organisations to ensure those employed by them are competent or are supervised by someone who is competent.

Whilst this makes sense, there is the unanswered question of what does competence look like? There is a huge portfolio of work that is currently being completed, by the Industry Competence Steering Group to define competence across the built environment (see [here](#) for an overview). This portfolio needs to work closely with others, as detailed in the sections below to make sure this has the required impact on the culture change and competent workforce needed. However, in the meantime, the legal requirements around competence still exist.

Guidance needs to be given to industry regarding this. It could be as straightforward as making it clear to people that those they employ need to have the right skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours to do the job that is being asked of them. Whilst this cannot be defined yet for a number of areas, pointing people to existing qualifications and professional memberships/professional qualifications can help provide some context, or additional guidance such as asking for examples of previous work can also be helpful

This guidance on existing qualifications and professional memberships/professional qualifications could be structured around the scope of the Industry Competence Steering Group, but would also need to point to the work that is taking place on developing competence (see sections below).

There are already some competence frameworks that have been developed by the Industry Competence Steering Group, with plans to develop assessments against these. The guidance could also point to these and outline next steps. For example, the competence framework for project managers in the built environment has been developed and published and provides a consistent framework for people to understand the competence requirements. Whilst further development is taking place around specific assessments against this framework, the Chartered Project Professional Standard already allows people to demonstrate competence against 11 of the 19 competences in full and partial demonstration of a further 6 competences, providing assurance to end users whilst additional work progresses.

In its statutory role, this guidance piece would sit naturally with the Industry Competence Committee, working with ICSG.

Whilst competence is not defined, this approach does carry risks that people might look purely to qualifications and memberships to demonstrate competence, so it would need to be clear that these only form part of the picture, but can be a helpful part of the process. This should also only be done if there is a clear path to moving to a new understanding of the competence requirements, as they are developed, and clear expectations of when these new requirements should be adopted by – see detail in the sections below.

4.4 Defining and demonstrating competence

There are many programmes/portfolios of work taking place that need to be joined together. The sections below outline the main elements of the work that are taking place, as well as highlighting additional areas of work needed, before proposing an approach that brings them all together.

4.4.1 The work of the Industry Competence Steering Group (existing)

ICSG was set up to enable culture change in relation to competence across the built environment. It does this by providing the UK built environment industry access to appropriate competences, so they

may safely contribute to the creation and use of built environments and can demonstrate their competence to others.

The Industry Competence Steering Group is embarked on a portfolio of work defining competence and looking at how this can be implemented. The intention is that all the competence frameworks that are developed by the Industry Competence Steering Group, which are all aligned to BS8670 part 1, become the underpinning frameworks for the built environment industry. This includes, but is not limited to underpinning:

- Apprenticeships
- Technical training
- Technical qualifications
- Professional education
- Professional assessments of competence
- Relevant university degrees (through professional body accreditation)
- Relevant carding schemes
- MTCs/Competence Persons Schemes
- Continuing Professional Development

This cannot be achieved without a co-ordinated effort across the board, including, but not limited to, professional and trade bodies, industry representatives, DfE/Skills England, BSR

By having central competence frameworks that underpin other developments, the competence needed is embedded across the sector and the requirements for building safety become a natural part of working. An advantage of the ICSG Competence Frameworks include the fact that they are written by industry, for industry. They are consensus written and aligned to industry standards on competence and respond directly to the requirements of the Building Safety Act. The ICSG work has engaged over 60 professional and trade bodies to date as well as wider industry representation and operates as an industry forum and working group of the Industry Competence Committee.

This work needs to continue and to join up with and underpin other initiatives

4.4.2 Responding the Grenfell Inquiry phase 2 report around professions (existing)

Paragraph 90 of the Government response to the Grenfell Inquiry phase 2 report clearly states:

“Poor culture, a lack of integrity and malpractice jeopardise public safety. The Inquiry set out a range of findings that point to lack of adequate training across a number of professions, with multiple institutions identified as having insufficient procedures that were not always rigorous, technically accurate or aligned to their own policies. This cannot continue. We must create and nurture a thriving, professional and skilled workforce that upholds high standards of performance, competence and integrity across all professions involved in designing, constructing and maintaining buildings and those providing services to residents, including fire services.”

Whilst not all institutions have acted with integrity, there are many professional institutions that are taking the lead in developing competence requirements, through the ICSG, and representing and working with industry to ensure the standards of performance, competence and integrity continue to be defined, implemented and upheld.

Since the enactment of the Building Safety Act, the Building Control Profession has become regulated and it is accepted in the Government response to the Grenfell Inquiry phase 2 report recommendations that Fire Engineers and Fire Risk Assessors should also be subject to additional regulatory requirements.

There are lessons to be learnt from the regulation of the Building Control Profession, including clarity of requirements, sufficient time for the assessment infrastructure to be developed and accredited, sufficient time for individuals to prepare and go through the assessment process as well as a staggered assessment process to avoid 'cliff edge' points at re-validation, where it is possible for large numbers of the profession to leave at one point in time. To enable ease of use for the end user, and an economically viable model, it is suggested that the registers of the regulated professionals sit with one regulator.

The work being carried out by MHCLG has an impact on the wider piece around competence and should join up with the other initiatives, as, for example, professional bodies are unlikely to develop any specific assessments against the ICSG competence frameworks until there is a greater understanding of any additional requirements from the work being carried out by MHCLG, or at least an understanding of timeframes. This is not because industry does not want to take the lead, but if new products are being developed, then this should be done in an environment where all the requirements are known, so the products and assessments developed meet these requirements. This prevents individuals undertaking an assessment and then shortly afterwards have to be assessed in a different way because additional requirements have become clear. See also section 4.4.4b below.

4.4.3 Work of Skills England (existing)

The Skills England report, Driving Growth and widening opportunities, September 2024 goes into detail regarding skills shortages and work that will be carried out to address this. The report states that:

"Working with the Department for Education, Skills England will ensure that there is a comprehensive suite of apprenticeships, training and technical qualifications for individuals and employers to access that are aligned with skills needs, building on the progress made by IfATE. This will include linking the national picture of skills needs with occupational standards, working closely with employers and other partners. Skills England will also work with the higher education sector to ensure graduates are well prepared for employment opportunities."

and

"Over the coming months, Skills England will work with government departments and relevant stakeholders to expand on the initial assessments of skills needs within sectors. As part of this, Skills England will develop consistent workforce definitions and supporting departments to employ these definitions when undertaking new analysis or collating existing data and evidence, alongside work to develop a detailed, consistent approach to skills measurement across the UK."

To provide the culture change needed, the focus needs to go beyond skills and cover all areas required by the Building Safety Act of skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours, and Skills England and industry need to work together to ensure the opportunities to develop competence and have this assessed are available.

Within the picture of competence and culture change, there is also the need to recognise the benefit that professional bodies bring and the role played by professional education and assessments of competence, such as Chartered Standards. Not only do professional bodies have the assessment infrastructure in place to deliver, but they also play a significant role in career and competence development, including industry research, CPD opportunities, mentoring and recognised industry standards.

In addition, the work being led by industry in defining competence needs to be taken into consideration, and the work of Skills England should join up with other initiatives. See the suggested combined approach, below

4.4.4 Validating and demonstrating competence

The built environment industry cannot be seen as a homogenous group when it comes to identifying relevant competences, demonstrating competence and undertaking relevant competence assessments. As a minimum, a different approach needs to be taken for trades and professions. Mention is also made below in regard to construction products and the work identified in the Government response to the Grenfell recommendations in relation to the Social Housing Regulator.

There needs to be clarity on who is checking competence. It is clear in the Building Safety Act that there are specific responsibilities for duty holders and there is the additional check for HRBS via the competence declaration at Gateway 2. However, unless the competence information is easily accessible to people and they know that there will be additional scrutiny made by external parties to ensure competence has been checked and considered, behaviour is unlikely to change.

a. Trades (new)

Challenges

There are currently multiple ways of providing assurance regarding an individual's ability to carry out a job/role. These include a variety of card schemes, Competent Person schemes, Trustmark and the Gas Safe register, amongst others

Not all these schemes measure all the requirements for competence. For example, CSCS cards currently 'provide proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications'⁹, which does not cover all aspects of competence required by the Building Safety Act. Likewise, the Competence Persons Scheme, for example, has a focus on organisations and not individuals.

As there is a requirement under the Building Safety Act to ensure anyone appointed to carry out work is competent, there also needs to be an ability to easily monitor the competence of the supply chain.

This can be challenging in an environment where there is a significant proportion of the workforce who are self-employed.

Proposed approach

It is proposed that a review of the existing ways of providing assurance is undertaken to ensure they meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act, that ongoing CPD and context specific competence can be captured, that competence of the supply chain can be captured and that the competence assessments required are aligned to the ICSG competence frameworks. This includes the need for re-validation and ease of access for the end user to check competence.

Any approach taken needs to factor in new entrants as well as experienced workers and ensure the aims of demonstrating competence are achieved, without a significantly increased loss of people from industry.

Whatever approach is taken, this needs to be planned and co-ordinated, to allow time for the necessary training and assessment infrastructure to be in place and industry to adapt. Further details on this are detailed in section 4.4.5 the combined approach.

b) Professions (new)

Challenges

Across the professions, there are multiple ways for people to demonstrate competence, primarily led by professional bodies and Chartered Standards. There is a recognition by many professional bodies that there are specific requirements around building safety and they have engaged with (and often taking a leading role in) the work of the Industry Competence Steering Group.

Whilst there are some professions that have been highlighted through the Building Safety Act and the Grenfell Inquiry phase 2 report, and subsequent Government response, that require further regulation, there are a significant number of professions in the built environment that are supported by professional bodies. For those individuals in these professions that engage with the professional bodies, there are ways of demonstrating competence and leading the professions, and this will also be informed by the industry led work through the ICSG.

⁹ CSCS card website

However, it was clear in the Grenfell Tower disaster that not all those involved in the work had the relevant competence or engaged with the relevant professional bodies. For example, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry report highlighted that, the Grenfell Tower refurbishment was the first project Simon O'Connor had taken on with the role of project manager, and Ben Bailey was employed by Harley as project manager for the Grenfell Tower refurbishment but had not been involved in that capacity on any previous project.

Tying this in with the work of MHCLG as outlined in section 4.4.2 and recognising that not all professional bodies have performed as they should, it is important that the value of professional education and assessment, as a whole, is not disregarded. As well as providing recognised qualifications and assessments that demonstrate competence, professional bodies bring value in relation to communities of practice, research, CPD, mentoring and growing the professions, for example. It is vital that the impact this has on competence is not overlooked.

Additionally, those that operate professionally and have had their competence assessed, often appear on professional registers held by the relevant professional body. Whilst this can be checked by individuals and organisations before awarding contracts, making these registers more centrally available will add to the consistency of message around the need for competence.

Proposed approach

Without wishing to pre-empt the work taking place at MHCLG regarding regulated professions, the following approach is proposed as an option that will help provide oversight as well as a central point for people to check competence. To promote and ensure consistency and confidence, it is suggested that there is approach of registered and regulated professions, with the following characteristics.

Registered professions	Regulated professions
Competences are industry defined, through the Industry Competence Steering Group (which includes professional bodies and industry representation), ensuring a consensus written, peer reviewed approach	Competences are determined by the Regulator, but informed by industry, for example the Industry Competence Steering Group.
It is not a requirement to have an external assessment of competence, but an incentive as it is a straight forward way to demonstrate competence, noting that every project is unique and there may be specific competences over and above those identified in the frameworks that are required. Being on an approved register, for example, could provide evidence for competence requirements at Gateway 2, or carry additional benefits in relation to insurance, for example	Individuals need a licence to practice
Assessments are defined and carried out through professional bodies and successful applicants are added to the relevant professional body register. A central list of these registers is held by the Regulator and made publicly available. This would signpost out to the relevant professional body.	Assessments are defined and carried out through organisations accredited by the Regulator. The register is owned and operated by the Regulator

<p>To have a register included in central list, there would need to be an assurance process that checks that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment covers the requirements of the competence frameworks developed through ICSG, including revalidation requirements • The assessment includes an assessment of skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours and there is a process of ongoing validation • There is a way of removing individuals from the register if needed • The professional body agrees to a code of conduct in relation to the delivery of assessments, including ensuring valid, reliable, authentic, current and sufficient assessments <p>Note- there is no requirement for the Regulator to hold all the data of each of the individuals on the registers, or keep the registers up to date. This would sit with the professional bodies</p>	
<p>Individuals need to sign up to a code of conduct with the relevant professional body and a misconduct process is in place</p>	<p>All individuals need to sign up to code of conduct for the profession which is managed by the regulator</p>
<p>If professional bodies are not performing their registers can be 'frozen' with no new assessments able to be carried out. Individuals already on the register would still be recognised until their next revalidation point. At which point they would need to find an alternative assessment body. Alternatively, if the professional body addressed issues identified, their registers could be 'unfrozen'</p>	<p>Accreditation can be withdrawn from assessment organisations if the organisation does not meet the Regulator's requirements</p>

Benefits of the proposed approach include:

- The proposed approach uses existing good infrastructure whilst putting in checks and balances to ensure consistency
- Competence frameworks developed by ICSG provide a consensus view of the competence required, rather than individual professional bodies defining their own competences
- Encourages professional bodies to engage in the wider competence discussion
- Provides assurance around the approach taken by professional bodies, without being too costly or onerous to administer
- Centralising the registers for the professions provides one route for end users to check competence
- Demand for the consistent approach can be driven by providing incentives for individuals to go through external assessments of competence, for example, meeting Gateway 2 requirements. There could also be work carried out with insurance companies to reduce costs if individuals are registered
- The above structure would also enable consistency of message across the professions regarding the requirements to be competent and demonstrate competence.

There are other options with regards to a central register, for example ICSG are developing a central competence hub with BSi, which will be a central point for competence information. Discussions could take place as to whether an area of this could, potentially, be made

available to house a central list of registers, or direct people to relevant organisations. However this would be a central repository rather than any specific checking mechanism and would not provide any oversight.

As with the proposed approaches for trades, above, whatever approach is taken, this needs to be planned, co-ordinated, allow time for the necessary training and assessment infrastructure to be in place and industry to adapt, further details on this are detailed in section 4.4.5 the combined approach.

c) Construction products (new)

The Construction Products Green Paper was launched for consultation alongside the government response to the Grenfell Inquiry phase 2 report, with a deadline of 21 May for responses.

There will be further work that comes out of this, but to note that there are specific areas of the green paper that relate to competence. Whatever the work packages are that develop as a result of the green paper, they need to be incorporated into the wider competence work.

d) Social Housing Regulator

In the Government response to the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 2 report, paragraph 91 states

‘We will direct the Regulator of Social Housing to set standards for the competence and conduct of staff, to raise the bar and professionalise the social housing sector so that all residents are always treated with respect and given the support and services they need. This standard will require senior managers and executives to have, or be working towards, a relevant qualification.’

With paragraph 92 going into further detail. This work on competence needs to join up with the wider approach detailed in this paper, so competence expectations align.

4.4.5 Combined approach to developing and implementing minimum competences (new – building on existing)

The work outlined above, can be combined into an approach to individual competence, one which assumes that the review of the current systems for validating competence and the above suggestions have been adopted. This approach to developing and implementing minimum competences for individuals is summarised below. Taking this project approach ensures that this is managed effectively and delivers what is intended.

- 1) Identify the competence that needs to be developed. This should be led by the ICSG portfolio, however if there are other groups that have pressing needs then this can be raised and discussed with the ICSG Chairs and the Chair of the relevant Sector Led Group.
- 2) Identify if this is a trade, regulated profession or registered profession (if the approach detailed above is adopted).
- 3) Bring together a combined team that includes the ICSG Sector Led Group (which includes relevant professional and trade bodies, employers and industry representatives), DfE/Skills England, MHCLG (where relevant), BSR/ICC, assessment bodies.
- 4) Conduct a review of the current situation, what currently exists as routes of competence? Do new assessments need to be developed? what needs to be updated once minimum levels of competence are defined?
- 5) Understand the work involved and timeframes needed to develop the competence framework, including public consultation, response to and resolution of comments, peer review and publication, understand the timeframes needed to update apprenticeships, technical qualifications, professional training and education, professional assessments, vocational

assessments or create new assessments, based on the ICSG framework. This includes the time and work needed to put the relevant assessment infrastructure into place.

If this is a regulated profession, then the work needed and timeframes around the implementation of the regulation also need to be agreed, including how long people need to have to go through the assessments once they are available, entry onto the required register, codes of conduct and any other aspects needed to support the regulated profession.

If it is a registered profession then the work needed and timeframes around this implementation also need to be understood, as well as clarity on messaging and ensuring that if there is agreement, that being on a recognised register supports aspects such as the Gateway 2 approval process.

If it is a trade then the work needed and timeframes for relevant carding journeys, competence persons schemes, etc need to be understood and factored in, as well as ways of assessing experienced workers.

- 6) Agree an outline communications plan for industry, based on all the above considerations that will get honed and delivered as part of the implementation. This includes giving industry advanced notice of what is coming and the timeframes/expectations.
- 7) Agree a plan for development and implementation and deliver against the plan, holding regular combined update meetings, managing dependencies, risks and comms. These meetings need to include all the original stakeholders and relevant teams identified in points 3 and 5 above.
- 8) Ensure there is consistent communications to industry as to the timeframes, benefits, where they can access information and prepare for any necessary changes. These communications need to be consistent and go out through multiple channels including BSR, DfE/Skills England, Industry Competence Committee, Industry Competence Steering Group, Professional and Trade bodies, Assessment organisations. The impact and effectiveness of the joint communications should be monitored.
- 9) Once the initial developments have been delivered then the implementation of the frameworks can be monitored through the ICSG Sector Led Groups, using data provided by stakeholders involved, but also anecdotal feedback from industry.
- 10) An ongoing monitoring and review cycle should be agreed and implemented accordingly.

The aim would be that this would become a recognised way of working and essentially a 'rinse and repeat' model, considering any specific requirements for a particular section of industry.

Note 1 that this would not include the ongoing continuing professional development but would be focussed on the underpinning minimum competences defined through the ICSG. CPD would be developed by professional bodies, trade bodies, training boards, assessment bodies, manufactures etc and would need to be tracked, either through the relevant recording system or through professional body systems and form a part of re-validation.

Note 2 For areas of industry where a competence framework has already been developed through the ICSG, then all the above points are still valid, but the timeframes for developing the framework would not need to be included. A review of what needs to be updated and developed still needs to take place and a joint plan for implementation and communications needs to be developed.

4.4.6 Organisational Capability

In addition to the need for individual competence, guidance and potentially standards/frameworks are needed for organisational capability.

BSi are leading the development of a British Standard for this, supported by ICSG and others, however guidance is needed in the interim, which should be led by ICC.

This does need to take account of all the other work taking place in regards to competence.

Once the British Standard is developed, this can be picked up by ICSG and further supporting materials/frameworks developed if needed. This would need to be planned out in the same level of detail as individual competence.

4.4.7 Addressing the skills shortage (new)

The skills shortage across the built environment is well documented in many places. However, as highlighted in section 4.2, having a clear understanding of the shortage, the pipeline of work and future aspirations needs to go hand in hand.

There is also evidence that shows that high levels of people take opportunities but then do not enter industry. For example, there are currently approximately 23000 classroom-based college courses in electrical¹⁰. These courses are sold to learners and government as contributing to building up electrical work force, however less than 10% of all electrical learners then progress into apprenticeship – an example that is similarly reflected in many other trades. Just delivering new opportunities is not sufficient without also addressing the reasons for people leaving the industry so early in their careers.

New initiatives, such as foundation and short form apprenticeships, whilst attracting people to industry, also need to ensure that there is the support from employers and there is sufficient time in these apprenticeships for people to be competent and work ready.

The Skills Missions Board will be addressing many of these issues, however this work needs to be joined up with the other competence initiatives to ensure that industry is attracting, training and delivering not just opportunities, but supporting a competent workforce and the culture change that is needed. There needs to be clarity on the coverage of the Mission Board and whether this is focussed on trades, or will also encompass professions and/or wider areas of competence addressed in this paper. Ensuring the Mission Board engages will all relevant organisations, works with and builds on existing infrastructure, including professional and trade bodies, awarding organisations, colleges, apprenticeship providers and links in with the other competence work is critical.

The need identified earlier in relation to understanding the issue of skills shortages, under qualified people within industry, retention rates and the pipeline of work is crucial to successful outcomes in addressing skills shortages. This coupled with the identification of current routes to entry and how these link to competence is also fundamental. If there is a joined approach in understanding how people are currently joining industry and the routes that are being promoted, this also helps quantify the amount of change that will be needed as the new competence frameworks are developed and implemented, as those who are entering the industry now and over the next few years, will then have to upskill and ensure they can meet the revised industry competence standards. This will also apply to those who have been in industry for longer.

In relation to trades, specifically, enabling an understanding of how individuals can either be competent in multi trades or move from one trade to another and still be competent would also be beneficial.

As well as existing methods of recruitment, there are options and possibilities of co-ordinated campaigns with professional and trade bodies in terms of attracting new people, attracting people from other industries attracting others to return to industry who have already left.

This is easier to do if there are clear career and competence pathways, consistent messaging and a positive change in industry culture.

Targeting the growth and skills levy to support the wider work outlined in this paper will also provide clarity for industry.

4.5 Culture change

The focus so far has been around competence and skills shortages, however there are other factors that contribute to the wider culture change.

¹⁰ Source – Enrolment and outcome statistics published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

4.5.1 Increasing awareness of the Building Safety Act and educating clients (new – building on existing)

The Building Safety Act is not currently understood by industry, with large parts of industry not knowing or appreciating their need to comply. BESA research reported in May 2024 that only 9% of respondents say their business has made a significant change in response to the legislation¹¹. Following this up in January 2025, BESA Members highlighted that engagement from clients in relation to the Building Safety Act is slim, and rather than seeing evidence of culture change, "the pressure to deliver projects faster and more cheaply was increasing at the expense of quality and safety."¹²

There is a great deal of work taking place through different organisations to get the message around the Building Safety Act requirements, some at a co-ordinated level and some individual institutions, however the message does not appear to be landing with large parts of industry. Co-ordinated communications across all the stakeholder groups identified in this paper, as well as solutions for people to be able to comply with the requirements, would be beneficial.

In addition to educating clients with regards to the Building Safety Act, there is also work that can be done with regards to helping clients understand the way they procure work and projects and manage these has a significant impact on behaviour and delivery.

4.5.2 Response to Grenfell recommendations in relation to licencing of Principal Contractors and the review of the duty holder regime(new)

Both these areas were identified in the Government response to Grenfell and whilst not wishing to pre-empt the outcome of reviews and discussions, it is worth noting that these will have an impact on the competence work as well as potentially the ability of industry to deliver. Dependencies should be identified once this work begins, as well as lessons learnt from the implementation of the Gateway process

4.6 Combined plan including dependencies

A combined high-level plan setting out the areas of work, suggested lead organisations, stakeholders and high level dependencies is included in Appendix A. Further work is needed to plan these in detail and identify all the dependencies and risks, however, this highlights who needs to be involved in at least the initial discussions and the dependencies between the strands of work.

4.7 Conclusion

Changing the culture of the built environment industry and building on the existing competent workforce to ensure competence is demonstrated across the built environment are complex challenges. To achieve meaningful change, the relevant bodies and organisations need to work collaboratively and towards a joint vision. The work of competence and culture change is never finished and the infrastructure that is put in place through this process needs to incorporate ongoing review and continuous improvement.

There is already a legal requirement to be competent and demonstrate competence, the work now needs to join up to ensure this is embedded and the changes that need to happen do actually take place, as well as respond to the current skills shortage and embed the wider cultural change needed.

This is not a short journey and the implementation of this will take time. However, the journey will be quicker, smoother and more effective if it is heading in one direction and managed as an integrated whole.

¹¹ BESA research <https://www.thebesa.com/building-safety-act/industry-report>

¹² BESA research <https://www.thebesa.com/besa-latest-news/clients-neglect-building-safety-act>

Appendix A high level plan and dependencies

This is a high-level plan that identifies the streams of work, suggested leads, other stakeholders who need to be involved, high level dependencies and assumptions. Its purpose is to provide an indicative structure, whilst highlighting the links between areas of work. It is not exhaustive and does not provide dates for delivery as further detailed planning is needed.

There is a general assumption that each of the projects/programmes/portfolios would be set up in line with industry good practice as defined by APM and the Government Teal Book on project delivery, and industry consultation will take place beyond the immediate stakeholders identified in all areas where this is required. There is also the assumption that these projects will be managed by suitably qualified project professionals.

The Construction Industry Council (CIC) is also a stakeholder in this space, however, as the CIC has a seat on the Construction Leadership Council, the CIC has not been identified separately.

Area of work	Start date	End date/duration	Lead	Stakeholders to deliver and be aware of the work	Dependencies	Assumptions
Governance/oversight						
Establish governance/oversight group	asap	asap	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG/Skills England	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Agree terms of reference	asap	asap	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG/Skills England	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Agree reporting requirements	asap	asap	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG/Skills England	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Agree membership of governance/oversight group	asap	asap	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG/Skills England	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Agree membership and terms of reference for joint comms group	asap	asap	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG/Skills England	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Communications						
Establish comms group	asap	asap	Governance/oversight group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	Agreeing membership and terms of reference for comms group	
Identify areas needed for joint communications and protocols for sign off in a timely manner	asap	asap	Comms group			
Strategy and vision						
Agree vision	asap	asap	Governance/oversight group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	establishing the governance/oversight group	
Agree objectives, outcomes and benefits	asap	asap	Governance/oversight group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	establishing the governance/oversight group	
Agree key success factors	asap	asap	Governance/oversight group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	establishing the governance/oversight group	
Ongoing review of risks and resources	asap	asap	Governance/oversight group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	establishing the governance/oversight group	
Understanding the issue in relation to the shortages in competent people across the built environment						
Build on current Skills England work	asap	asap	Skills England	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Agree baseline figures and realistic targets	asap	asap	Governance/oversight group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /DBT/Mission Board		
Understanding and dealing with current/immediate issues						
Gateway 2	underway	asap	CLC/BSR task and finish group	ICC/ICSG		
How do individuals currently demonstrate competence?	asap	asap	ICC	ICSG/CLC/DBT/Mission Board		
Validating and demonstrating competence						
review of the existing ways of providing assurance of people's ability to complete work is undertaken and redevelopment to ensure they meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act and industry needs, including tracking competence of the supply chain - focussing on trades	asap	?	tbc	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Developing a way of holding central registers for professions, distinguishing between regulated and registered professions	asap/build on potential MHCLG work	?	MHCLG/BSR	CLC/ICC/ICSG/Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	Regulating the professions work	Regulating the professions work will include looking at oversight of the professional bodies
Regulating the professions						
Regulation of fire engineers	already started	?	MHCLG	ICSG/ICC/BSR		MHCLG will work closely with the ICSG in developing the required competences
Regulation of fire risk assessors	already started	?	MHCLG	ICSG/ICC/BSR		MHCLG will work closely with the ICSG in developing the required competences
Review of approach to other professions	?	?	MHCLG	ICSG/IC/BSR	Work looking at demonstrating and validating competence	MHCLG will work closely with the ICSG in developing the required competences
Combined approach to developing and implementing minimum competences						
Identify competence frameworks to be developed	already started	ongoing	ICSG	Mission Board/CLC/Skills England/MHCLG		This will continue the work started and under development in the ICSG
Bring together combined teams to look at work that needs to be carried out for development and implementation	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)/Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams	identification of frameworks to be developed	
Review current routes to competence and determine work that would be needed once competences are defined, in terms of updates to existing assessments, qualifications etc, or if new assessments are needed	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)/Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams	Guidance on how individuals currently demonstrate competence/regulating the professions work/agreement on central registers	
Develop a detailed plan for development and implementation including risks	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)/Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams		
Develop joint communications plan	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)/Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams		
Deliver against plan with regular update meetings, managing dependencies, risks and communications	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)/Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams	development and agreement of plan	
Once delivered ensure there is a regular plan for monitoring and review	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams, Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	delivery of initial plan	
Repeat across all ICSG competence frameworks (multiple 100s). This could be done at a Sector Led Group Level rather than a separate group for each framework	tbc	ongoing	ICSG (Sector led groups)/Skills England/regulator (if regulated profession)	Competence validation teams (carding schemes and registers), assessment bodies, comms teams		
Organisational capability						
Development of British Standard	already started	tbc	BSI/CPB1	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		
Development and publication of interim guidance	tbc	tbc	ICC	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICSG/DBT/Mission Board		
Aligning Common Assessment Standard to organisational capability guidance and standard	tbc	tbc	Build UK	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /DBT/Mission Board	development of ICC guidance and then British Standard	
Additional guidance and frameworks in relation to organisational capability once the British Standard is developed	tbc	tbc	ICSG/BSI	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		development of British Standard
Addressing the skills shortage						
Set up the Skills Mission Board	already started	asap	CLC/Skills England	BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG		
Develop Programme of work for Missions Board, taking into account all dependencies	asap	asap	Mission Board	BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG	setting up the Mission Board/identifying all the dependencies/agreeing the baseline figures and realistic targets	
Possible campaigns with professional bodies	?	?	Mission Board/ICSG	Specific Professional Bodies	Plan of work for the Mission Board	
Possible multi trade approach	?	?		Skills England/CLC		
Targeting the growth and skills levy to support the wider competence developments	?	?	Skills England	BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG	Plan of work for the Mission Board	
Review if short form and foundation apprenticeships meet industry needs in terms of competence requirements	?	?	Skills England	ICC/ICSG		
Culture change						
Growing awareness of the Building Safety Act and educating clients	?	?	joint comms group	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board	Joint comms group established	
Response to Grenfell recommendations in relation to licensing of Principal Contractors and the review of the duty holder regime	?	?	MHCLG	CLC/BSR/MHCLG/ICC/ICSG /Skills England/DBT/Mission Board		