

## BESA calls for swift resolution to planning turmoil

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The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has welcomed the government's decision to head off a potential collapse of the country's planning system but warned that the ongoing uncertainty was undermining progress towards making buildings safer.

Building control officers (BCOs) in England have been granted a three-month extension to complete their competence assessments so they can continue to work under the new building safety regime. They must still register by the original April 6 deadline but now have until July 6 to complete the process.

The Association said an extension was sensible but pointed out that many of the country's estimated 4,500 inspectors had still not started the registration process and the "clock is ticking".

Inspectors must be in the process of having their competence assessed by one of the government's approved schemes and register as a Class 1 Registered Building Inspector (RBI) by April 6 – they will then have to progress to Class 2,3, or 4 by July 6.

The Welsh government had already extended the period for building inspectors in Wales to complete their registrations to September 30.

"The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) has listened to the concerns raised by the profession," wrote the Health & Safety Executive's Philip White in an open letter to the industry. "It is crucial these concerns are balanced with the requirement to implement the Building Safety Act and the need to raise standards in the profession."

Tragedy

White, who is the director of building safety, also reminded the industry that the regime was introduced “in the wake of the Grenfell Tragedy” and stressed that the competence assessment extension period of 13 weeks was “not an opportunity to delay completing registration and there will be no extension to these arrangements”.

BESA’s director of specialist knowledge Rachel Davidson said the Regulator had done well to find a balance between ensuring the building control profession could continue to meet current demands by keeping inspectors working while not compromising the need to raise professional standards.

“The industry must have confidence in the planning process otherwise we will have further project delays and cost overruns,” she added. “But we also need to be progressing as quickly as possible towards a robust safety regime and that depends on having a well-resourced, verifiably competent pool of building control officers and planning officials.

“13 weeks is not long so it is important to keep up the pressure and make sure everyone is registered and assessed as quickly as possible.”

BESA’s Building Safety Act Advisory Group (BSAAG) also warned that progress through the new planning ‘gateways’ introduced under the Act was already very slow with only small-scale refurbishment projects on existing high risk buildings (HRBs) currently passing through Gateway One.

No new build projects have reached Gateway Two and there have been no projects presented at gateway Three so far.

The group warned that many architects and consultants were not quoting for contracts due to nervousness about their potential design liabilities as designated ‘principal designers’ under the Act. There is also a lot of confusion around different interpretations of competence for ‘duty holders’.

“The transition to the new regime was always going to hit bumps in the road, but that only makes it even more important that we address the current planning issue quickly,” said Davidson.

“We are continually reminded that the government expects the industry to step up and work with the BSR to deliver the culture change needed to transform construction, but any progress on that front could be undermined if the planning process is not fit for purpose.”

For all the latest developments on the Building Safety Act visit [the BESA HUB](#).