

BESA guide cuts through principal contractor confusion

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New guidance from the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has been widely welcomed for addressing a source of growing confusion in the new building safety regime.

Currently, there is no standard approach to assessing the competence of principal contractors (PCs) – one of the key professions charged with delivering the requirements of the Building Safety Act (BSA). Clients have, therefore, been approaching the appointment of PCs in a piecemeal way which has led to further complication, confusion and project delays.

PCs themselves are also coming under increasing pressure to provide evidence of competence throughout their supply chains but lacked a recognised and standard format for doing this.

Therefore, following months of research and cross-industry collaboration, BESA has produced a [Guidance Framework for Principal Contractor Competence](#) which provides a considerably simplified and standardised method for meeting PAS 8672 – the standard used to assess PC competence.

The new framework is aligned with BSI standards and cross-mapped to relevant ISO standards along with the Build UK Common Assessment Standard to help all members of a supply chain prove compliance once and avoid having to continually repeat the process for every project.

It can be used by both organisations and individuals to define and provide evidence of the Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviours (SKEB) and core functions of this key role – supported by practical guidance and examples of the proof they must provide to clients including existing qualifications and accreditations.

Recognition

The need for such a guide has been growing in recent months as more potential PCs reported having to provide overly prescriptive and repetitive pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) evidence and that existing certifications were only receiving limited recognition.

“Providing clear and practical guidance like this is a priority for BESA to help the industry adapt to the new demands placed on it by the building safety regime,” said the Association’s director of specialist knowledge Rachel Davidson.

“We carry out regular research to understand what the main barriers to wider adoption of the safety legislation are and use that information to produce sector-specific, targeted support.”

A regular concern is PCs being asked to comply with every element of PAS8672 – not just those relevant to the project size, nature and complexity – and the difficulty of breaking down SKEB and core functions into a practical solution for self-assessment and selection.

BESA’s guidance, therefore, provides a structured approach to proving compliance with SKEB criteria related to the core minimum functions and competency requirements set out in the PAS. It also clearly sets out how evidence can be mapped against industry standards and accreditations to avoid duplication of effort.

The guide also covers core themes and competence categories across the six major areas relevant to the PC role: Legal and contractual requirements; managing building work, planning and organising work, construction supervision and quality, leadership and competence culture, and stakeholder and information management.

As well as being useful for PCs seeking to prove competence and their ability to carry out the role, the BESA guidance also gives clients and duty holders a structured and clearly defined route to appointing suitably qualified and competent firms and individuals.

Consultants, construction managers, and compliance professionals will also find the framework document useful as it defines a standardised approach to the appointment of PCs and it will also provide welcome reassurance to regulators, insurers, and public sector bodies because it provides transparent, evidence-based criteria.

The [BESA framework](#) is designed to help all specialist contractors align with their clients and prove competence using a standard, recognisable method.

Evidence

Another key benefit for framework users is being able to identify what relevant evidence they already have as it provides practical examples of evidence that can be used from CVs and training records to witness statements, inspection logs, test reports etc.

“It helps you understand what’s expected of you, identify any skills gaps, and collect documentation that supports your professional profile,” said Davidson. “Demonstrating your competence in this format strengthens your position in tendering and compliance reviews and ensures legal obligations are fulfilled not just in principle, but in practice.

“By providing evidence of your competence in line with national standards, you strengthen both your

employability and your company's compliance credentials," she added.

The new framework document is free to [download here](#).