

Rethinking Pre-Qualification: Reducing Duplication in Health & Safety Assessment

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One of the recurring themes I see in procurement and compliance is duplication.

As the Managing Director of a Health & Safety Consultancy that undertakes SSIP assessments, I have a thorough understanding of the process from both sides — as an assessor interpreting the standards and core criteria, and from a supplier’s point of view navigating buyer requirements, member schemes and DTS routes. This dual perspective reinforces the value and intent behind SSIP’s mutual recognition framework: reducing duplication, increasing consistency and supporting safer procurement for all parties involved.

The intention behind this repetition is understandable. Buyers want reassurance that the contractors and suppliers they appoint are working safely and meeting their legal obligations. The challenge is that traditional pre-qualification processes can become resource-heavy – for both sides – without necessarily improving outcomes.

A question of efficiency, not standards

The real issue isn’t whether health and safety should be assessed. It absolutely should. The question is how we can do so efficiently, consistently and without unnecessary repetition.

Safety Schemes in Procurement (SSIP) was created to address that duplication. It operates as an umbrella forum for health and safety assessment schemes, agreeing common core criteria aligned with legislation. When a supplier is assessed and certified by an SSIP member scheme, that assessment is recognised by

all other SSIP member schemes.

In practical terms, this means a contractor does not need to undergo multiple near-identical assessments for different buyers. The core health and safety competence check has already been completed against agreed standards.

SSIP continues to promote the benefits of mutual recognition and encourages buyers to use the SSIP Portal to verify a supplier's assessment status. It is important to note, however, that some buyers require suppliers to be registered with a specific SSIP Member Scheme. In these situations, suppliers can use the Mutual Recognition - Deem to Satisfy (DTS) route. DTS allows a supplier who already holds a valid SSIP assessment to register with an additional Member Scheme without completing a new full assessment. This simplifies the process while ensuring all parties meet procurement requirements.

While there is a fee for the DTS route, this is significantly reduced compared to the cost of taking a new assessment - and the administrative effort is minimal. Over £6,300,000 of savings for buyers and clients can be attributed directly to DTS in 2025.

What this means for buyers

From a procurement perspective, recognition through SSIP helps simplify the early stages of due diligence.

Rather than commissioning repeated assessments, buyers can verify a supplier's SSIP certification through a free online portal. This does not remove the need for project-specific checks - competence, experience, technical capability and commercial suitability still matter greatly - but it does mean that baseline health and safety compliance has been independently reviewed.

In a climate where compliance demands are increasing and procurement teams are under pressure to deliver both rigour and efficiency, reducing duplication is not about lowering standards; it is about focusing effort where it adds value.

Raising the baseline across industry

One of the most positive outcomes of a mutual recognition approach is consistency. When assessment criteria are aligned to legislation and applied by trained assessors, it raises the baseline expectation across the supply chain.

Over time, this contributes to a culture where meeting recognised health and safety standards becomes normal practice rather than an administrative hurdle.

For suppliers, it provides clarity about what is expected. For buyers, it provides confidence that a recognised, structured assessment has taken place.

A balanced perspective

It is important to be clear: SSIP certification covers core health and safety management competence. It is not a substitute for evaluating technical expertise, financial stability or project-specific risk. Nor should it be viewed as a guarantee of performance.

What it does provide is a practical, structured way to reduce repetitive assessment and encourage

consistency across procurement.

As the industry continues to evolve, with increasing regulatory scrutiny and greater emphasis on accountability, we need systems that are proportionate, transparent and collaborative.

Reducing duplication while maintaining standards is one of the most straightforward ways to achieve that.

For further information on how SSIP operates and the principles behind mutual recognition, visit SSIP.org.uk.