

Increasing Awareness of Third-party Certification Put at Risk by Gaps in Specification and Competence

3 hours ago



New [British Woodworking Federation \(BWF\) Fire Door Alliance research](#) reveals that more professionals responsible for specifying, installing and maintaining fire doors recognise the value of third-party-certified fire doors and traceability, but gaps in specification and understanding of legal competence risk holding back progress.

Four years on from the introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022, the BWF's new Fire Door Alliance (FDA) report, *'Competence, certification and compliance: How the Building Safety Act 2022 is reshaping fire door safety'*, shows that awareness of third-party certification and the importance of traceability is rising, but specification and competency understanding still have some way to go. The findings suggest the sector is embracing the changes and direction set by the Building Safety Act 2022, but stronger awareness must now be matched by more consistent action in practice.

On average, survey respondents said that 54% of the fire doors they specify or are responsible for are third-party certified (TPC). While this is positive, it also highlights that there is still plenty of room for improvement. More than half of respondents said they specify or use TPC fire doors to fulfil their responsibilities and comply with fire safety rules and guidelines (54%). Others cited evidence of performance (46%) and a commitment to high standards and best practice (40%) as key reasons for choosing certified fire doors.

The research also found that people are relying more on evidence in response to the Building Safety Act 2022. Almost half (47%) now look for more proof of performance, such as certificates and data sheets, an increase from 35% in 2023. Forty-two per cent said the legislation has made them more likely to seek out

TPC fire doors. Traceability is also a major priority, with 93% saying that the ability to trace a complete fire door assembly matters to their organisation or clients.

Despite this progress, there is still a gap between awareness of TPC and its actual implementation, with nearly half of fire doors not currently third-party certified. Some sectors and building types also lag behind: hospitals and university halls of residence are cited by only 7% as having TPC doors specified, compared with higher rates in social housing and hotels. This is worrying given that hospitals and universities are often high-occupancy settings with vulnerable occupants, where the consequences of fire safety failures can be severe.

Cost continues to be the most cited barrier to specifying TPC fire doors, with 29% of respondents identifying it as a challenge. Positively, this has decreased from 42% in 2023 and 35% in 2022, suggesting that the value and benefits of third-party certification is becoming better understood.

Beyond cost, respondents also point to the availability of certified and competent installers (28%) and uncertainty over the data needed to evidence performance (27%) as key obstacles. A further one in four (25%) cite a lack of client demand, indicating that greater awareness and education is needed to help end clients fully understand the role that third-party certification can play in evidencing compliance, traceability and performance under the Building Safety Act 2022.

Helen Hewitt, Chief Executive of the BWF Fire Door Alliance (FDA), said: “Since the Building Safety Act 2022 came into force, there has been a clear, positive shift towards more evidenced and accountable decision-making on fire doors. It is encouraging to see more professionals recognising the value of TPC and traceability, but awareness alone is not enough. We now need that understanding to translate into more consistent specification, particularly in higher-risk and higher-occupancy environments, where getting it wrong can really mean the difference between life and death.”

The report also explores how competence is assessed for fire door professionals for the first time. In the postGrenfell regulatory environment, competence sits at the heart of the Building Safety Act 2022 and the duties of the Accountable Person. Incorrect installation or maintenance can compromise even robustly tested, TPC fire doors, undermining their performance and putting building users at risk.

However, the findings show that many organisations are still relying on misleading or incomplete indicators of competence: while 51% of respondents review installer qualifications against the ICSG (SLG10) Specialist Timber Fire Door Installer Competence Framework and 45% look for an NVQ or apprenticeship, 42% would accept a diploma or certificate of achievement and 29% an online or e-learning course as sufficient evidence on their own. With the over-reliance on short courses and attendance certificates, there is ongoing confusion about what individual competence looks like in practice.

Helen Hewitt added: “Fire doors are life-safety-critical products, so competence should never be assumed. It must be evidenced through clear demonstration of skills, knowledge and behaviours (SKEB) aligned to robust frameworks developed by the Industry Competence Steering Group (ICSG) Sector-Led Group (SLG) 10 Installers and Trades.

“Our research highlights a clear need to distinguish more effectively between education and training, and evidence with competence. While training programmes such as e-learning courses or certificates of

achievement play an important role in building knowledge and supporting professional development, they do not in themselves demonstrate occupational competence.

“Currently, these terms are often used interchangeably, which can lead to confusion. Education provides learners with understanding and skills, but true competence is evidenced through practical application and assessment in real work settings. Qualifications such as apprenticeships and NVQs are designed to measure this, as they require individuals to demonstrate their ability to perform consistently and effectively in their role. Greater clarity is needed to ensure that education, while valuable, is not mistaken for verified competence.

“The correct installation and maintenance of a fire door is fundamental to it performing its life-saving role, so we must treat competence as a measurable requirement. Through our ongoing work with the Sector-Led Group 10 we’re committed to raising competency standards across the fire door supply chain.”

The findings reinforce the BWF Fire Door Alliance’s (FDA) longstanding mission that every fire door and door set in the UK should meet required standards throughout its service life and be supported by competent individuals with properly evidenced practice.

The BWF Fire Door Alliance (FDA) plays a crucial role in developing competence frameworks, promoting campaigns such as Be Certain, Be Certified, and helping specifiers and duty holders identify trusted manufacturers and providers through its Find a Member directory.

For more information, visit <https://firedoors.bwf.org.uk/competence-certification-and-compliance/>