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# SPEC FINISH

**FIS**

**The magazine of FIS**  
representing the finishes  
and interiors sector

[www.thefis.org](http://www.thefis.org)

## Championing bereavement and mental health support

FIS stalwart embarks  
on a new challenge



### **Legislation**

Get ready for the  
impact of Reverse VAT

### **Skills & Training**

A diverse look at the  
rewards of being a trainer

### **Technical**

A new approach to  
steel framed systems



Welcome

# SPEC FINISH

## CONTACT US

### EDITORIAL

**Editor:**  
Stephanie Cornwall  
**Email:**  
stephanie.cornwall@warnersgroup.co.uk

SpecFinish,  
Warners Group Publications  
West Street  
Bourne  
Lincs PE10 9PH

### ADVERTISING

**Advertising inquiries:**  
Jordan Paylor  
**Email:**  
jordan.paylor@warnersgroup.co.uk

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

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## FIS

### FIS

Tel: 0121 707 0077  
[www.thefis.org](http://www.thefis.org)  
Email: [info@thefis.org](mailto:info@thefis.org)  
FIS, Unit 4, Olton Bridge,  
245 Warwick Rd,  
Solihull, West Midlands,  
B92 7AH

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# WELCOME

Hello and welcome! As you'll probably have gleaned from the cover, SpecFinish is entering a new era, with a bold new image and a renewed approach to providing the most up-to-date and relevant information for FIS members and the finishes and interiors sector.

I'm excited to have come on board as its new editor and look forward to the interacting with all our readers going forward. Our aim is to provide a two-way vehicle where we can share and impart news, details of events, and one-to-one interviews, and encourage readers to get involved. So if you have anything you want to share with other readers, please do get in touch.

In this issue, we have a strong focus on mental health and employee wellbeing. Our Professional Profile, which will now become a regular feature, is an interview with Efreem Brynin, who has given up a career at the frontline of the finishes and interiors sector to focus on StrongMen, a new supportive service, and we also have some advice and knowledge to share on the topic in our Health & Safety focus.

Reverse VAT and implementation in October is a topic that many will be concerned about. We'll be holding a webinar about this next month (6 June) and Debra of Haslers takes a comprehensive view in this month's SpecFinish, which I hope will answer many queries about the topic.

We have some good insights into becoming a skills assessor, SFS updates, along with details of movements and appointments, events and more. We hope you enjoy reading this issue, and look forward to receiving your feedback. You can contact me at [stephanie.cornwall@warnersgroup.co.uk](mailto:stephanie.cornwall@warnersgroup.co.uk)



**'Our aim is to provide a two-way vehicle where we can share and impart news, details of events, and one-to-one interviews, and encourage readers to get involved.'**

*Stephanie Cornwall*

Editor



## EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS



### Joe Cilia, FIS

Joe is the technical director at FIS. He provides support to members of the association, and works with relevant bodies on legislative and technical standards.



### Suzannah Nichol, Build UK

Suzannah Nichol MBE is the chief executive of Build UK and has been awarded an MBE in 2005 for services to the construction industry.



### Debra Dougal, Haslers

Debra has been a VAT partner at Haslers Chartered Accountants since 2008 and has more than 30 years' experience in VAT.



### Mark Norton, ISG

Mark is head of BIM at ISG and chair of the BIM4FitOut UK strategy group, with more than 30 years' experience in the construction and engineering industry.



### Inna Kaushan, Solna

Inna is co-founder of Solna, a smart invoicing platform powered by credit score data, and has worked for finance practices and banks in Spain, Austria, Hungary and Ukraine, as well as the UK.

## ↓ IN THIS ISSUE

### 04

#### Voice of the industry

Iain McIlwee, chief executive of FIS, shares his insights on Black Box Thinking.



### 06

#### News round-up

We highlight what's been happening in all areas of the finishes and interiors sector.

### 08

#### New members

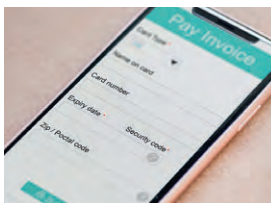
### 09

#### Events

### 10

#### Focus: Late payments

Inna Kaushan comments on the late payment culture and what it means, and we interview Suzannah Nichol about the effectiveness of the duty to declare.



### 14

#### Legislation

Debra Dougal discusses the implementation of Reverse VAT, how it will impact on contractors and subcontractors, and how to prepare.

### 16

#### Professional profile

Stephanie Cornwall talks to Efrem Brynin about why he has given up a career in the finishes and interiors sector to help tackle emotional and mental health issues brought about by bereavement.

### 19

#### Technical

Joe Cilia talks about the often-overlooked issues that can arise within the construction of SFS, and Mark Norton tells us why the BIM4FitOut group is being redefined.



### 23

#### People: The movers and shakers

### 26

#### Skills

Three diverse professionals expel the myth surrounding teaching and talk about the rewards to be gained from a career in training.

### 31

#### Health and safety

David Cant explores five misheld beliefs to address before an investigation by the HSE.



# Black Box Thinking – not a book review!

Sometimes you read something that makes you change the way you think about everything and for me, *Black Box Thinking* is that book.

I read it after Grenfell and amidst being involved in several associated working groups. In the book, the author, Matthew Syed looks at the mechanisms of failure and how Black Box Thinking drives safety in aviation. Syed uses the health service as a comparator (apparently more people are killed each year by medical mistakes than in traffic accidents!), but it was excruciatingly painful to think about construction as you read. How often in our sector are mistakes learned from rather than concealed? How often do we create schedules, cut costs and corners and set individuals up to fail? How often is a defect or error part of a closed loop, only to be repeated on sites across the UK again and again, wasting time and money and, in some cases, risking lives?

I admit I had to stop reading for a bit when I got to the quote below by Sully. It is hard not to think about Grenfell as you read his words. Sully is the pilot who landed that plane on the Hudson river (Tom Hanks plays him in the film). His words are humble, but profound:

**"Everything we know in aviation, every rule in the rule book, every procedure we have, we know because someone, somewhere died... We have purchased at great cost, lessons literally bought with blood that we have to preserve as institutional knowledge and pass on to succeeding generations. We cannot have the moral failure of forgetting these lessons and have to relearn them."**  
**Chesley Burnett "Sully" Sullenberger III**

The book touches upon some of the underlying reasons that people try to cover up mistakes and they don't half resonate: The blame game, little thought is given to the high-pressure situation in which the errors occur, how culture can obliterate openness and spawns cover-ups, how it destroys the vital information we need in order to learn. Has your mind jumped to the contractual nature of construction, liquidated damages, retention clauses, sequencing etc?

Syed concludes that positive change is about creating systems and cultures that enable us to learn from errors, rather than being threatened by them. It is about creating cultures that don't

walk past or seek to hide problems, but reward diligence. Easy to say, but how do we get there from here?

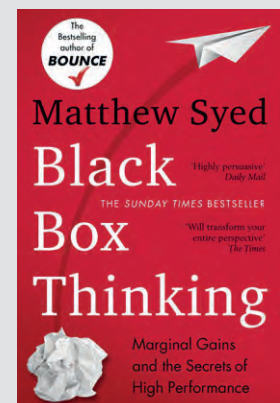
In the Competency Working Groups established in response to the Hackitt Review, FIS has been very vocal about the mnemonic SAKE (Skills, Attitude, Knowledge and Experience). Skills, knowledge and experience are the easy bits. We can give these to people. They are about training and time. The attitude is not so easy. We cannot give someone an attitude, we can only create a positive culture. This is why Dame Judith in her review highlights that we cannot wait and rely on regulation, because all that does is set the rules, how we adopt and adapt is down to us and frankly we already know what good looks like, we just don't always set the supply chain up to succeed.

The good news is that the future is coming, the Working Groups are all reporting in and we are expecting the next stage of consultation over the summer, but change is already happening. I was pulled up by a Tier 1 contractor last week for talking about subcontractors. "We don't use that term here anymore. It doesn't describe the relationship, it is not about master, servant, we have works partners". This is how cultural change starts. I also attended the Get It Right Initiative AGM in London and listened to voices across the room talking about how they are working to improve quality in their companies. The FIS Working Groups too are on the case, they are the embodiment of Black Box Thinking. We are, through these groups, exploring and sharing reasons for failure, looking for ways to reduce error (and eliminate waste), interrogating the elements of FIS Quality Framework (Product Process People) in the context of the various parts of the interiors sector and looking to create new standards, advice and support.

Dame Judith very much makes it clear in her roadmap and Syed draws the same conclusion in his book, that open groups like these are intrinsic to driving positive change, we can all make changes in our own world and if these are consistent and we work together, together we really can change the world.

**IAIN MCILWEE**  
**Chief executive**  
Finishes and Interiors Sector

**'Sometimes you read something that makes you change the way you think about everything and for me, *Black Box Thinking* is that book.'**





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# NEWS



## #iBuiltThis2019 – open for entries!

FIS opens this year's #iBuiltThis2019 competition for entries this month (May)

The #iBuiltThis2019 competition is designed to change the perceptions and image of construction and promote careers in construction to young people. Entry is open to all age groups, providing an opportunity to participate and show how proud they are of their contribution to the UK built environment in a fun, light-hearted way.

To encourage young people to get involved, the competition has been divided into three age groups (13 and under, 14-18 and 19 and over) with

some fabulous prizes to be won. To enter, just take a selfie with your project and enter your photo onto the competition platform when it opens, at [www.thefis.org/skills-hub/i-built-this-2019/](http://www.thefis.org/skills-hub/i-built-this-2019/).

Entrants are encouraged to showcase their project and skills whether they're made from Lego, Meccano, sand or even chocolate. The aim is to inspire people to view construction as a career of choice. All kinds of entries will be considered, showing built environment images and the roles involved in their construction.

Images will be used to educate new entrants afterwards.

The winners will be invited to and announced at the awards ceremony at UK Construction Week at the NEC in Birmingham on 8 October 2019 by TV personality and architect George Clarke.

**To find out more on how schools, colleges and companies can partner with FIS, email [skills@thefis.org](mailto:skills@thefis.org) or visit our website at: [www.thefis.org/skills-hub/i-built-this-2019/](http://www.thefis.org/skills-hub/i-built-this-2019/)**

## New carpet puts primary school at top of the pile

Ferncumbe C of E Primary School in Hatton Green, Warwick has its first new carpet in 19 years thanks to a donation by Overbury. The last time new carpet was laid at the school, Tony Blair was prime minister, the National Minimum Wage had recently been introduced and the country was gearing up for millennium celebrations.

Overbury assigned four members

of its team to replace the school's old carpet. The team laid 1,800 ft<sup>2</sup> of new carpet tiles across three classrooms, two additional rooms and main corridor at no cost.

"Overbury was appointed to manage the office fit out of a nearby building which had been recently refurbished by the landlord in order to let the space. The carpet was brand new but as the occupier

wanted to fit a replacement, it was deemed to be surplus to requirements," said Overbury contracts manager Ian Bothamley.

"As a business we do all we can to avoid waste and if we're not able to recycle unwanted materials, we are keen to find a good home for anything that can be redeployed."

[www.overbury.com](http://www.overbury.com)

## FIS extends helping hand to Paragon Interiors Group staff

**FIS has extended its hand to help the 75 staff being made redundant at Paragon Interiors Group.**

Iain McIlwee, FIS CEO, said: "Paragon Interiors Group is a time served Gold award winning member of FIS and it's tragic to learn the deal with Red 7 Property has collapsed. We care deeply about our membership base and recognise that staff are the most valuable asset of any organisation. We have worked with our colleagues at

Paragon Interiors Group for a long time and for this reason we would like to help them secure employment in other organisations through our contacts and networks"

FIS has reached out to their colleagues at Paragon Interiors Group, their MP, local employment groups and their membership base to see if they can

find new employment opportunities for those impacted.

**Staff at Paragon Interiors Group can email FIS their details at [info@thefis.org](mailto:info@thefis.org) and we will endeavour to help them through discussions with our industry networks and on social media.**



# Mansell achieves trio of SHEQ accreditations

Mansell Finishes has been awarded ISO, FIRAS and Achilles accreditations following recent independent assessments.

The ISO9001:2015, ISO14001 and OHSAS 18001 accreditations have been re-issued following a successful quality assessment of business procedures and an audit of the company's Integrated Management System (IMS). First awarded to the company in February 2009, the accreditations have been added to and now include the assembly and installation of structural framing systems in addition

to the previously recognised plastering, rendering, drylining and suspended ceilings.

FIRAS certification, which has been instrumental in improving the standards of installation of fire protection products and systems, and Achilles certification have also been awarded.

Angela Mansell, operations director at Mansell Finishes, comments:

"As a company we have a considerable responsibility to our people, suppliers and as we go about our day to day business. We have always been totally committed to our SHEQ responsibilities and as a senior management team are keen to go further than regulations dictate to demonstrate our commitment to all."

[www.mansellfinishes.co.uk](http://www.mansellfinishes.co.uk)

## Penlaw & Co's interiors division sees Sydenham branch expansion



Penlaw & Co has acquired an additional 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of warehousing space to its Sydenham branch, allowing it to further expand its interiors range. Well known within the industry for offering outstanding customer service for all drywall products, it has a dedicated interiors specialist team that has a wealth of product knowledge and technical expertise.

Following the expansion, Penlaw is also proud to announce that it is now stocking OWA ceilings systems.

[www.penlaw.co.uk](http://www.penlaw.co.uk)

## Refurb of Radio House



Ceiling systems from Armstrong were specified for the £7 million high-spec refurbishment of a landmark Cambridge building.

The ceiling systems were specified by Aukett Swanke architects, whose brief was to refurbish the building internally and externally to bring the internal layout and services up to modern standards, to celebrate and enhance the positive aspects of the building envelope, and to improve the areas of the existing envelope which were no longer fit for purpose.

Radio House now offers approximately 7,452ft<sup>2</sup> to 43,382ft<sup>2</sup> of BREEAM "Excellent" Grade A office space in a self-contained building situated in the Chesterton Conservation Area between the city centre and the northern fringe business parks. It was vacated by the critical communications company Sepura which moved its headquarters elsewhere in the city.

The distinctive building underwent an 18-month refurbishment to provide a new main entrance and central core with double-height reception, full access raised floor, and Armstrong's suspended ceilings on the ground floor with a floor to ceiling height of 2.7m.

## Fire retardant fixings

With fire safety being of increasing concern to specifiers, Buttonfix has designed an all-metal version of its award-winning panel fixings for demanding applications. The Type 1 Metal Button-Fix retains all the benefits of the polymer versions but is manufactured in materials that are compliant for use with fire-retardant panels.



Producers of fire-retardant panels have been quick to see the advantages of this new product. With a stainless-steel spring to grip the Button within the Fix, Type 1 Metal Button-fix is also ideal for transport applications and other installations where vibration may be an issue. The reassuring 'click' as the Button-fix locks home has been tested over 10,000 times, to ensure reliable performance no matter how many times the panel is removed.

Available from May this year, Type 1 Metal Button-fix meets the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Standards: Annex 2.1 for non-combustible materials, making it ideal for all types of interior panelling on ships.

"Architects frequently ask us which Button-fix to specify with fire-retardant panels; now we have the perfect answer," says Buttonfix director Tony Wills.

Buttonfix is a comprehensive range of panel fixing products, manufactured in the UK and distributed globally. Their first fasteners were launched in 2012 and the Type 1 Metal Button-fix is the latest result of an ongoing commitment to product innovation.

[www.button-fix.com](http://www.button-fix.com)

## Improved fire classification

As a result of continued diligent product development, ask us aluminium profiles now has a fire resistance rating of A2 and all products supplied from 1 April 2019 will have the improved classification A2-s1,d0. A valid fire classification must include the surface finish/treatment and Ask us products are tested and classified including the final surface treatment of a polyester powder coat.

[www.ask.us](http://www.ask.us)

## OWAconsult collection at BAU 2019

OWA launched a number of new products at the BAU 2019 Exhibition in Munich. The new products from the OWAconsult collection included Corpus Lights, RAW, OWApplan 70, OWApplan 90 and an expansion to its range of fleece covered Sinfonia mineral tiles; Sinfonia Silencia, Sinfonia Balance, Sinfonia Privacy and Sinfonia Reflecta.



## JOB OPPORTUNITY Strategic Lead for Skills and Training

**FIS is looking to recruit a team player** with proven experience in leading a skills and training strategy in construction. The ideal candidate will enjoy engaging with FIS members and key stakeholders to support our ambitious plans to ensure the sector has sufficient skills and knowledge to meet the needs of its clients - now and in the future.

The Strategic Lead for Skills and Training will provide critical liaison between FIS and its members to deepen engagement and work closely with key stakeholders such as CITB, the wider contractor and supplier community and trade association partners to ensure that the sector has the support required to succeed.

This hands-on national role requires clear understanding of the skills landscape in construction, strong leadership and communication skills and an underlying belief in driving genuine, long-lasting improvement. The job will be field-based, with UK travel and regular visits to the FIS Solihull office.

Salary negotiable (depending upon qualifications and experience) plus benefits.

Applications: Covering letter, CV and salary expectations to [jane.knight@thefis.org](mailto:jane.knight@thefis.org)

**Closing date: 31 May 2019. No agencies.**

## Improved air quality focus



A new bio-based wall and ceiling paint, introduced by Johnstone's Trade, purifies indoor air, helping architects and designers respond to increasing calls for improved air quality in buildings.

On average, we spend 90% of our time indoors, and indoor air can be up to 10 times more polluted than outdoor air, containing volatile organic compounds (VOCs). This includes formaldehyde, which is present in all houses and public spaces at varying concentrations, but can be harmful when raised. Molecules are emitted from a range of common indoor materials such as chipboards, fibreboards, furniture, carpet, glue and interior fabrics.

Johnstone's says the new produce removes up to 70% of formaldehyde from the air, helping to neutralise the indoor environment over a number of years.

## Welcome to new members

### Keyes Brothers Construction Ltd

A family-run business formed more than 20 years ago, Keyes Brothers Construction operates from offices in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England where it has grown within all sectors such as health, education, commercial, residential, student accommodation and leisure.

[www.keyesbroconstruction.com](http://www.keyesbroconstruction.com)

### Central Partitions & Screeds Ltd

Central Partitions & Screeds is a leading Birmingham based contractor specialising in partitions, ceilings, SFS and screeds.

[www.centralpartitions.co.uk](http://www.centralpartitions.co.uk)

### ADA Fastfix Ltd

Based in High Wycombe, ADA Fastfix has been in the supply trade for more than two decades, offering fastenings and fixings, power tools, construction site supplies and equipment.

[www.adafastfix.co.uk](http://www.adafastfix.co.uk)

### Bolts of Hereford Ltd

Bolts of Hereford is a family run internal refurbishment and fit out, suspended ceiling and office partitioning company based in Hereford.

[www.boltsofhereford.co.uk](http://www.boltsofhereford.co.uk)

### Swan Commercial Services Ltd t/a NU Build

Based in Basildon, NU build is part of the Swan group of companies which includes Swan Housing Association and NU living which delivers modular homes to meet housing needs.

[www.nubuild.co.uk](http://www.nubuild.co.uk)

### Neslo Direct Ltd t/a Neslo Partitioning

Since 1947, Neslo has provided durable demountable partitioning systems and operates from North and South offices in Merseyside and Burgess Hill in West Sussex.

[www.neslopartitioning.co.uk](http://www.neslopartitioning.co.uk)



## Working together to provide solutions

### FIS technical director **Joe Cilia** gives an update on FIS working groups.

Our recent meetings of the Ceilings, Drylining and Heritage Plastering working groups were attended by stakeholders from across the supply chain, who discussed a wide range of subjects with the consistent theme of performance and competency running through all groups.

The Drylining working group, which met in March, was a particularly lively event. It has been apparent for some time that there is a potential risk of musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) brought about from manually handling plasterboards and the group is working closely with HSE to establish a solution. With that in mind, we invited Ekso Bionics to demonstrate how technology is being developed to help address the problem.

Always up for a challenge, I was the first to give its EksoVest a go and I have to say it was an eye opener. The EksoVest is an upper body exoskeleton that elevates and supports a worker's arms to assist them with tasks ranging from chest height to overhead. It is lightweight and low profile, making it comfortable to wear in all conditions while enabling freedom of motion.



The group is also exploring whether a proposed standard test report summary sheet could be adopted in the sector for acoustic and fire performance to address issues with variations in performance data reporting and we are supporting a working group looking at managing penetrations in buildings.

More work is being done by the Ceilings working group on recycling mineral wool ceiling tiles and surveys will take place to establish what is happening in the market.

The Heritage plastering group is looking to create a process chart to address decision making and options when repairing and maintaining lath and plaster ceilings with reference to the Historic England guidance document. It is also looking at training standards, and we are working

with CITB to look at the eight proposed heritage plastering training standards that have been developed as short duration training course modules for a Level 3 NVQ.

And finally, all groups are looking to establish competency levels at all stages of a products integration in a building through CITB funded training, with a call for FIS approved training centres to be established.

If you would like to attend any of our working groups, please email [joecilia@thefis.org](mailto:joecilia@thefis.org)

## Trained but not claimed?

FIS Skills is running clinics to help contractors maximise their CITB grant claims during May in different locations across the UK. Assistance will be provided to retrospectively claim and set your business up for the future. Skills Clinics dates will be published on the FIS website at: [www.thefis.org/events/](http://www.thefis.org/events/).

If you need assistance, you can register your interest in advance at [skills@thefis.org](mailto:skills@thefis.org).

Also taking place next month in London is The Inspiring Change Conference and Awards, which will bring together a range of inspirational industry-wide speakers from diverse backgrounds, including politicians, industry stakeholders, and representatives from a wide range of sectors to share client expectations and good practice, while offering networking opportunities with 280 like-minded professionals.

The Inspiring Change Awards, highlight and reward organisations within the construction and infrastructure sector that have created more inclusive cultures in their workplaces, education, and the community.

## Dates for your diary

**16/05/2019**

### **SFS working group**

Plasterers' Hall offices, One London Wall, London EC2Y 5JU

**Working group:** 14:00-16:30

**SFS Guide launch:** 16:30-18:00

**16/05/2019**

### **Partition Industry working group**

Plasterers' Hall offices, One London Wall, London EC2Y 5JU

**Time:** 10:30-13:30

**21/05/2019**

### **Inspiring Change Conference and Awards 2019**

No. 11 Cavendish Square, London, W2G 0AN

**Conference:** 10:00 - 16:30

**Drinks reception:** 16:30 - 18:00

**30/05/2019**

### **Reverse VAT workshop**

Construction innovation Centre, Hamilton

**Time:** tbc

**04/06/2019**

### **FIS Awards Lunch **SOLD OUT****

The Dorchester Hotel, London

**Time:** 12:00 - 15:30

**11/06/2019**

### **Digital Construction working group**

ISG, London

**Time:** 14.00-17.00

**12/06/2019**

### **Ceiling Industry working group**

Saint Gobain Multi Comfort Centre, 95 Great Portland St, Marylebone, London W1W 7NY

**Time:** 10.30-13.30

**13/06/2019**

### **Drylining working group**

TBC

**18/06/2019**

### **Heritage Plastering working group**

Knauf Showroom, 20 Baltic Street East, London EC1Y 0UL

**Time:** 10.30-13.00

**19/06/2019**

### **Partition Industry working group**

Saint Gobain Multi Comfort Centre, 95 Great Portland St, Marylebone, London W1W 7NY

**Time:** 14.00-17.00

**19/06/2019**

### **Operable Wall working group**

Saint Gobain Multi Comfort Centre, 95 Great Portland St, Marylebone, London W1W 7NY

**Time:** 10.30-13.30

**20/06/2019**

### **SFS Working Group**

Knauf, 20 Baltic Street East, London EC1Y 0UL

**Time:** 10.30-13.30

Visit [www.thefis.org/events](http://www.thefis.org/events) for more information on all our events

# HELPING TO FIX THE LATE PAYMENT CULTURE



**Inna Kaushan**, co-founder of Solna, believes policy makers, trade bodies and the smart use of technology will combine to improve the eventual fortunes of business owners throughout the finishes and interiors sector. Here, she shares her insights.

If you are a freelancer, sole trader or own a small business you'll have been interested to hear the Chancellor Philip Hammond talking about the destructive impact of our late payment culture in his Spring Statement (13 March 2019).

The collapse of the construction company Carillion acted as a stark warning about the importance for the economy to make sure that SMEs are paid on time by larger companies. Carillion, one of the biggest suppliers to the Government, was essentially using its supply chain as a line of credit, where it estimated that £750 million was owed to a range of small businesses and freelancers.

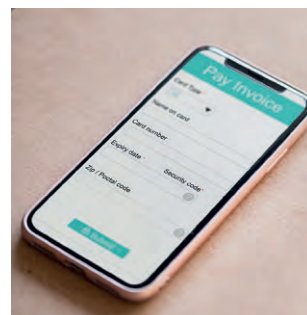
Small companies have always found it hard to get paid on time from the larger businesses. However, I find it encouraging that there is now much greater awareness among policy makers of how systematic the issue of late payments is.

## Government efforts

Dealing with the late payments problem is clearly on the Government's agenda. In 2017 Paul Uppal was appointed as the first Small Business Commissioner. His remit is to promote responsible payment practices, alongside helping to mediate specific disputes between large and small companies.

Additionally, the "Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance Regulations" were introduced. This requires large companies to report twice a year on their payment practices and policies.

In time it is possible that these measures may help solve the late payment epidemic. Until then, trade bodies representing the interests of SMEs should keep lobbying for policy makers to make interventions which go even further.



**'Small companies have always found it hard to get paid on time from the larger businesses. However, I find it encouraging that there is now much greater awareness among policy makers of how systematic the issue of late payments is.'**





## FSB Action

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) independent research found that 84% of small businesses have been paid late by big companies. The FSB's national chairman, Mike Cherry, has taken direct action by writing to the chairmen and CEOs of all FTSE 100 companies to challenge the late payment culture head on.

In order to hasten change Cherry is pushing for large companies to be forced to appoint a non-executive director, who would take responsibility for ensuring responsible supply chain practices, to take charge of payment best practice.

The FSB is also trying to persuade the Government to force its own suppliers to pay their bills on time, in order to encourage more SMEs to bid for their contracts. This would help the Government reach its target of small businesses winning 33% of central government spending by 2022. This is a timely issue, with recent figures revealing that this dropped from 24% to 22.5% over the past 12 months.

## The role of technology

Technology is starting to play a prominent role in addressing late payments. Cloud accounting and invoicing platforms, such as Xero, Sage One, Quickbooks, and Solna are now used by hundreds of thousands of small businesses in the UK.

Aggregated data from these platforms can reveal intelligence on payment trends across all company users, as well as being able to drill down on a sector specific basis like construction.

Xero is already beginning to explore such use of its data, and recently introduced the Small Business Insights dashboard. This has an ambition to give policy and industry decision makers real time insights into the health of small businesses.

Information on payments is central, with the Xero Dashboard revealing that more than half of invoices with 30-day payment terms were paid late in 2017.

The other cloud accounting platforms have the capability to provide similar insights. I hope that sharing these late payments trends will put more pressure on policy makers and support future SME policies.

## Using credit scores

A credit score is a numerical indicator of a company's financial health and its ability to service debt. Historically, they have tended to be used by larger companies to monitor their supply chain but are now also becoming increasingly marketed to small business owners.

I hope more small business owners will start monitoring the credit scores of new and potential customers. Keeping tabs on the credit score of customers allows businesses to respond to adverse changes in the circumstances of clients by chasing customers for payment or changing payment terms on future related contracts.

The FIS is able to carry out free credit checks for members. Please [email info@thefis.org](mailto:info@thefis.org) for details.

Credit score monitoring can be blended with automated invoicing which allows users to access payment insights from their customers through a combination of credit score data as well as intelligence from open rates of invoices.

The accessibility of credit scores creates an opportunity for both trade bodies and policy makers to raise awareness of their importance in reducing late payments and help SMEs make informed choices about who to work with and what terms to offer.

The problem of late payments won't be solved immediately. However, I am optimistic that the collective efforts of policy makers, trade bodies and the smart use of technology will help make progress and improve the fortunes of the millions of business owners, in construction and in other sectors.



## Inna Kaushan Co-founder, Solna

Inna Kaushan is co-founder of Solna, a smart invoicing platform powered by credit score data, which aims to speed up the invoicing and payment process for freelancers and small businesses. She has worked for finance practices and banks in Spain, Austria, Hungary and Ukraine, as well as the UK. She was a previous partner with city-based Stockhorn Capital, a Member of the Board at Causality Group, and worked within M&As and corporate finance for Erste Group, KPMG, ARTA and the National Bank of Ukraine.



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# Data provides a benchmark to measure progress.

Stephanie Cornwall interviewed Build UK's chief executive **Suzannah Nichol** about how effective she feels the duty to declare will be. She believes things are heading in the right direction – but better business models and practices are still needed.

Using data submitted under the Duty to Report on Payment Practices and Performance, which requires all large companies to report on their payment practices every six months, Build UK is benchmarking its members on the average time they take to pay invoices and the percentage of their invoices paid beyond terms.

According to Build UK chief executive Suzannah Nichol, when the Duty to Report on Payment Practices and Performance came into force in 2017, it presented a clear and comprehensive picture of payment within construction for the first time.

She highlighted that the Government has identified the need for a more sustainable business model and improved payment practices within the Construction Sector Deal. The majority of Build UK members published their payment results for a second time earlier this year, revealing an improvement across the board since last year. Across Build UK members, the average time taken to pay has fallen from 45 to 43 days and the average percentage paid beyond terms has reduced from 30% to 26%.

"It is starting to have the desired effect. It is giving people choices about who they work with and who they work for," said Suzannah.

"The duty to report and the publication of data are helping people in our industry to recognise that we are not just going to keep talking about it – it is a commercial issue and the whole supply chain needs to think about it and work towards a better business model."

"Changing payment practices that have been embedded within the industry for many years will take time but publication of the latest data had shone a light on this issue and we now have a clear benchmark to measure progress.

"This business sector can lack transparency, and transparency is key. In January, there were improvements throughout the figures, and it demonstrated to others where their own payment terms could improve," said Suzannah.

Further transparency is needed around disputed payments, and in-house processes desperately need addressing if the industry as a whole is going to become more efficient, she said.

"Government has said later this year it will take payment performance into account when awarding contracts. It would be



**'Changing payment practices that have been embedded within the industry for many years will take time but publication of the latest data had shone a light on this issue and we now have a clear benchmark to measure progress.'**

nice to think the Government will be leading by example and doing more of what it says, but it needs to implement this within all its frameworks. The requirement for these payment terms is not clearly set out."

All central Government departments are required to report their payment performance on a quarterly basis and Build UK is now collating the latest data from central Government alongside the payment performance of its members. On average, Government currently pays 83% of invoices within five days, with 97% being paid within 30 days.

Osborne chief executive Andy Steele has formerly been quoted as saying that the industry can't afford to tackle late payment under the current market climate. He stated that the financial sector has had a "change in appetite" towards construction, making access to finance tougher for contractors and, in order to pay suppliers earlier, companies would have to take out loans to fund this, as historically contractors have "held the cash to get their business models to work".

To make the business model better within construction, members needed to look at the right procurement method and not always look for the lowest-cost option, said Suzannah. However, she acknowledged the 'Carillion effect' and that access to finance was tougher than before. Carillion collapsed in January,

becoming the largest construction bankruptcy in British history, leaving creditors and the firm's pensioners facing losses.

"Banks will see the whole of construction as being a potential Carillion," she said. "It is like being a teacher, and seeing someone come on to your register with the same surname as a previously difficult student - alarm bells go off! Banks do want to lend to the construction industry, but they are being picky in their choices and don't really understand construction and how it operates."

Nevertheless, the fact that talks were ongoing between Build UK and many high street banks was a positive thing, she said.



## FIND OUT MORE

Build UK publishes a comprehensive table showing payment performance. For more details, please visit <https://builduk.org/priorities/improving-business-performance/duty-to-report/table>

# START PREPARING FOR DRC IMPLEMENTATION

**Debra Dougal** discusses the implementation of Reverse VAT, how it will impact on contractors and sub-contractors, and how to prepare

**T**HE implementation date for reverse charge VAT accounting in the construction sector is fast approaching. Main contractors and subcontractors affected by the change need to understand what this means and to start preparing now, ready for its implementation on 1 October.

The domestic reverse charge (DRC), as it is known, is not new but it is new to the construction sector and its impact is far reaching. It means that businesses in the construction supply chain will not be paid VAT on the services they supply. Their customer, the next contractor in the supply chain, will account for this VAT instead, as a DRC.

By way of an example, a drylining contractor working for a main contractor on a commercial new-build site, will invoice for their work plus 20% VAT, but the contractor will not pay over the VAT. Instead, the main contractor will account for this VAT to HMRC, as a DRC, which means accounting for output tax (payable) and input tax (repayable) on the same VAT return, resulting in nil net tax due to HMRC.

## Combating fraud

DRC has been introduced, quite simply, to combat fraud. HMRC has identified the construction sector as a main contributor to lost tax by way of missing trader fraud where VAT is charged and paid, but the business fails to account for this VAT or to pay it to HMRC, and the business goes missing. As the DRC means no physical movement of the money representing VAT, this type of fraud disappears.

Those affected include VAT registered contractors and subcontractors supplying and receiving services covered by the CIS which are liable to VAT at the standard or reduced rate. Zero-rated construction services are not

affected as there is no VAT to account for.

Supplies to end users, or those connected to end users, are not covered by the DRC. End users are those who receive the construction services for themselves rather than as part of an onward supply of construction services.

## HMRC supplies list

HMRC has published the following list of supplies which will be affected by the DRC when liable to the standard or reduced rate of VAT:

- Construction, alteration, repair, extension, demolition or dismantling of buildings or structures (whether permanent or not), including offshore installations
- Construction, alteration, repair, extension or demolition of any works forming, or to form, part of the land, including (in particular) walls, roadworks, power-lines, electronic communications apparatus, aircraft runways, docks and harbours, railways, inland waterways, pipe-lines, reservoirs, water-mains, wells, sewers, industrial plant and installations for purposes of land drainage, coast protection or defence
- Installation in any building or structure of systems of heating, lighting, air-conditioning, ventilation, power supply, drainage, sanitation, water supply or fire protection
- Internal cleaning of buildings and structures, so far as carried out in the course of their construction, alteration, repair, extension or restoration
- Painting or decorating the internal or external surfaces of any building or structure

It also applies to services which form an integral part of, or are preparatory to, or are for rendering complete, the services described in

**'Main contractors and subcontractors affected by the change need to understand what this means and to start preparing now, ready for its implementation on 1 October.'**



the bullet points above, including site clearance, earth-moving excavation, tunnelling and boring, laying of foundations, erection of scaffolding, site restoration, landscaping and the provision of roadways and other access works.

Not included within the DRC are the following:

- Drilling for, or extraction of, oil or natural gas
- Extraction (whether by underground or surface working) of minerals and tunnelling or boring, or construction of underground works, for this purpose
- Manufacture of building or engineering components or equipment, materials, plant or machinery, or delivery of any of these things to site
- Manufacture of components for systems of heating, lighting, air-conditioning, ventilation, power supply, drainage, sanitation, water supply or fire protection, or delivery of any of these things to site
- The professional work of architects or surveyors, or of consultants in building, engineering, interior or exterior decoration or in the laying-out of landscape
- The making, installation and repair of artistic works, being sculptures, murals and other works which are wholly artistic in nature
- Sign writing and erecting, installing and repairing signboards and advertisements
- The installation of seating, blinds and shutters
- The installation of security systems, including burglar alarms, closed circuit television and public address systems

Neither list is exhaustive and the general advice that payments required to be reported through the CIS are likely to be subject to the DRC is a good starting point for anything not covered above.

## How should you respond?

### For main contractors:

If the supply you have received is subject to the DRC, you will not pay VAT to the supplier. You will complete your VAT return showing the VAT as an input and an output with no net tax payable on that supply.

As a main contractor, you would expect your supply to be to the end user but you need to be sure of this to know whether or not the DRC also applies to your services.

Completing your VAT return for the DRC means showing the VAT amount in Boxes 1 and 4 and the net amount in Box 7.

### For subcontractors:

First you need to ensure that your customer is VAT-registered and then you raise your invoice as usual, including the appropriate VAT rate and amount, but show only the net amount as payable. Completing your VAT return for the DRC means just entering the net amount of your supply in Box 6.

## Issues to be aware of

Apart from the obvious administrative burden of a change in accounting procedure, the single biggest issue facing the sector is the negative impact on cashflow for subcontractors.

Materials suppliers are not within the DRC so VAT will still have to be paid on materials purchases and claimed back through the VAT return but subcontractors will not have use of the VAT paid to them by their customers for up to three months as they do currently.

In a sector where late and slow payment is such a significant concern, a further hit to cashflow is very unwelcome.

Inevitably some will stick their heads in the sand or actively refuse to change their procedures. HMRC has announced a light touch approach to penalties for the first six months but with the reality that VAT claimed which should have been subject to the DRC is not repayable, main contractors need to be very aware of the risks they face even during the light touch period and certainly after it.

## Our recommendations

For main contractors, our advice is to err on the side of the DRC applying and to not pay VAT to your suppliers without properly questioning why they are charging it.

Many subcontractors will become net VAT repayment businesses, regularly claiming refunds on their VAT returns. These businesses should consider switching to monthly VAT returns to limit the impact on cashflow.

For main contractors working for end users, cashflow will improve. With the backing of the FIS, it is time to leverage this advantage to further reduce payment delays for the benefit of the sector as a whole.

Speak to your accountant to get prepared and to check that your software can handle DRC accounting. Put your accountant in touch with a VAT specialist if they don't have the in-house knowledge to assist you with the DRC implementation.

### Who:

**VAT registered contractors and subcontractors supplying and receiving services covered by the CIS which are liable to VAT at the standard or reduced rate**

### What and where:

**FIS is running a Reverse VAT Webinar at 1pm on 6 June. To join the webinar visit the events page on the FIS website ([www.thefis.org/events](http://www.thefis.org/events)) This will also be discussed at Regional Workshops running throughout May and June.**

### Why:

**To reduce lost tax from missing trader fraud**

### When:

**1 October 2019**



## Debra Dougal: VAT Expert

Debra has been a VAT partner at Haslers Chartered Accountants since 2008 and has more than 30 years' experience in VAT. She worked for HM Customs & Excise, as it was then known, for 14 years before moving into practice with a top 10 city firm.

As well as being Haslers' VAT partner Debra is head of UK VAT Advice Limited, Haslers in-house VAT consultancy. She provides high-level VAT advice on a wide range of complex issues.

Her expertise allows her to assist businesses with VAT efficient transactions and structures, with an emphasis on property and construction, where the VAT exposure is often significant.

Debra's expertise is recognised in her role as former Chairman of the Tax Panel of the UK200Group, the UK-wide association of independent, quality assured chartered accountants and lawyers.



### FIND OUT MORE

Visit [www.thefis.org/events](http://www.thefis.org/events) for further details on the reverse VAT webinar and workshops FIS is running in May and June.

# BUILDING ON THE STRONG POINTS

**Stephanie Cornwall** talks to **Efrem Brynin** about why he has given up a career at the frontline of the FIS sector to help tackle emotional and mental health issues brought about by bereavement

**A**T 18 years old, Efrem Brynin was celebrating his landmark birthday year, becoming a parent for the first time, and starting out on his career within the moveable partitions sector.

As an estimator, he then earned the grand total of £7K per year.

Over the next 16 years, after stints as a sales manager, area sales manager and sales director for the likes of Unilock Partitions, Alco Beldan, and Citywalls, he'd worked his way through the ranks to become director at Skyfold/Style Partitions, where he's worked for the past 12 years.

So, almost 30 years after entering the industry, what has persuaded him to hang up his hat and embark on a completely new path, championing mental health and bereavement support for men?

Efrem said it's the desire to have a break after an emotional few years, change his work life balance, and use his experiences to help others to manage their response to a bereavement through a joint physical and mental health approach.

In 2016 Efrem entered the public spotlight when he battled through the Ecuadorian jungle in Channel 4's *SAS: Who Dares Wins* show. Then aged 44, he was the oldest contestant to take part in the show.

Efrem had suffered a family tragedy, after losing his son James. Entering the show and putting himself through the gruelling physical trials helped him to deal with the effects on his own mental health.

During the making of the show, he experienced the first symptoms of what was later diagnosed as prostate cancer, for which he has since received treatment and is now in remission.

It's a series of events that would have broken the spirit of many. But

Efrem believes we must learn from our experiences and use them to shape our future and those of others. Through the *SAS: Who Dares Wins* show, he met Dan Cross, a contender in the following series, and former UK Special Forces member Ollie Ollerton, and between them they co-founded StrongMen.

"Dan is a co-founder of StrongMen. He works in IT, so a completely different industry to me," said Efrem. "We got put together, if you like, because we have a similar type of story. Dan lost his wife – she was murdered about three years ago. He has two young kids and is just a little bit younger than me. It was his idea to try and pair physical fitness and mental fitness together. Dan has had more of an issue with mental health and I've probably had more of experience with my physical health."

Because both had been through the bereavement process, and used a similar coping mechanism, they decided to draw on their experience, as well as the challenge and camaraderie they'd experienced during the making of the *SAS: Who Dares Wins* show, as a concept for the non-profit organisation, with aims and ambitions to tackle emotional and mental health issues brought about by suffering from bereavement.

The StrongMen team, made up of Efrem, Dan, Ollie and Alexandra Wells who previously worked within the child and adolescent mental health sector, focuses on early intervention and offers the opportunity for men aged 18 to 55 to speak out about their problems. It provides weekend breaks for men based around physical activities, along with talks and discussions from experts on the importance of looking after your body

through areas such as nutrition, leisure and exercise to aid recovery, and speaking to people about their thoughts and problems.

"We are all slaves to our phones, our emails, and this doesn't actually help anything in regard to how things effectively boil up inside you. You know what it is like – if someone can't get hold of you for half an hour, it is like the world is going to end," said Efrem. "So what I do, and what I have always done, is leave my phone at home and go off and do what I want to do. Often that is a run (even though I HATE running!). But it is just nice to go out and no-one can disturb that. The most ridiculous thing I see is when people go out running, then stop and take a phone call. We all get soaked into that culture where we think 'I have to take this call'. Well, no, you don't."

## Providing an outlet

Too many people have a misunderstanding of what mental health means, said Efrem. "Mental health and mental illness are very different things. But they can stem from similar things, and from people not doing anything about them. In that way it's the same as the physical side. If you have a minor leg injury for example and don't do anything about it, it is going to get worse and worse. It will affect your hamstrings and the way you walk, until eventually you have a major problem because you didn't do anything about it when it was a relatively small thing."

Efrem said he went back to work too soon after James' death, which many bereaved people do as a way of getting back into a routine. In that sense, more awareness and understanding from employers can help the healing process, as well as enabling employers themselves to get the best from their workers by



ensuring they heed the early warning signs and can make provisions accordingly. Men are also less likely to open up than their female counterparts.

"I never speak to my family about my work, or really share that side of things. When James, our son, died, as head of our family I took on board everybody else's wellbeing just to make sure we made it through the day, the week, the month, the year. What it didn't do was give me the chance to offload and it's very difficult to know who to offload to, even when you want to."

Efrem attended a support group. "The only thing I found useful to me was to sit in a room full of people who understood the process because they had been through a similar type of thing. There were 15 men – dads, brothers and others – who would sit and talk about what had happened to their relative and how they got to be there. It was like somebody had just taken the lid off and let you just talk about them.

"Often, when you've lost someone, particularly a child, no-one really knows the process involved and don't really know what to say. They often come up with things like 'It will get better', 'Time's a great healer' and 'He wouldn't want you to do that' – all these things where it's not really the right thing to say but they don't know any different."

StrongMen seeks to provide situations where a group of men who have all suffered a bereavement can go away to a completely different environment, where physical activity is combined with the opportunity to talk and bond with others in the same group. The latest two-day expedition to Snowdon at the start of April involved 20 men, of a variety of ages and backgrounds, from civilian and military situations and whose bereavements weren't just recent, but sometimes from several years ago.

"What we are trying to do is talk to people in a different scenario, offering not just support but understanding. We've not just talked the talk, we've walked the walk. That is the whole ethos behind StrongMen," said Efrem.

"We take people away, take them into the Great Outdoors, and get them to do stuff. We are doing Snowdon and we are doing zip-wiring. We want to offer them a kinship, a kind of brotherhood. Hopefully the support will then go forward from there – they will then make friends with a few other people and have that shared experience."



## Spreading the message in industry

StrongMen formed in May last year, as a CIC (Community Interest Company), and is in the process of transitioning into a full charity. Its next step will be to seek corporate backing, as well as further fund-raising campaigns, and raise awareness of its offering.

To date, funding has been raised through a Lottery Grant and various fund-raising campaigns.

"To push it on further we need to get more interest, more funding, more awareness," said Efrem. "People from other charities have told us we are more or less unique. Although you have other mental health things like Movember and The Samaritans, they're geared at a different side of things. Ours is pretty much a niche market – the bereavement side of things."

In December, the StrongMen team visited McClaren Construction in Uttoxeter, where Dan and Efrem gave a presentation, told their stories and talked about the signs of mental health, and physical wellbeing.

"We sat in a site hub at the JCB office. We had steel fixers, ground workers, dryliners, all kinds of men coming in in their big builders' boots, but you could have heard a pin drop. It was amazing how many of them came up to us afterwards and said 'I've got a friend who has those issues' and similar things."

Efrem said it was important to make people aware that bereavement and mental health are not "scary subjects", to be able to recognise symptoms and know what kind of approach to take. With this in mind, StrongMen is looking to visit more companies within the finishes and interiors sector, to offer a support service to employers and employees alike.

Few people know what to do or what to say to a bereaved person, yet every company is likely to have to deal with the situation at some point, while stigma and reluctance to open up are barriers that will need to be broken down, particularly in the finishes and interiors sector, because the location of work projects is continually changing, men are effectively 'guns for hire' and a feeling of solitude could develop, he said.

"In terms of people who work with contractors, you don't get many nowadays who are as brutal as they could be years ago, often shouting and swearing, which is a very good thing. But that doesn't mean they are ready to provide that back-up and opportunity for staff to open up – they are generally aware they need to but don't know how to."

Offering people the physical and mental link-up through StrongMen's activities could be a valuable tool for many employers in our industry, as well as enabling them to get a better understanding of how to respond to bereaved work colleagues. Those visited by the StrongMen team so far had demonstrated that there is plenty of empathy and understanding within the sector, and interest in what StrongMen can offer. Efrem himself will also continue to work as a consultant in the finishes and interiors sector, so is not entirely hanging up his hat.

"If you look after people, in any respect, you will get more out of them in the long term," said Efrem. "That can be in terms of vitality, life balance, what's expected from them, getting them together in groups to do things. It's all based on awareness. If you have a good boss, who has good empathy and understanding, you will remember that, wherever you end up working."



### FIND OUT MORE

FIS has created a dedicated website page focussing on Mental Health in Construction and has been leading the social campaign #BuildersBrew. To find out more visit [www.thefis.org/about-us/builders-brew/](http://www.thefis.org/about-us/builders-brew/)

Any readers wish to contact Efrem to look at arranging a talk they can contact him through his website.



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# RESOLVE OF STEEL

**Joe Cilia** talks about the often-overlooked issues that can arise within the construction of SFS, and newly-launched guidelines for designers and installers



**F**IS and the Steel Construction Institute (SCI) have been working with the FIS steel framed systems (SFS) forum and industry to update guidance for the sector, and the launch of the new guide takes place on h/16 May.

SFS is the lightweight steel frame used to create the inner frame of an external wall. Despite being around for more than 20 years, its benefits are only just being realised. It's now being used for many projects, but potential problems frequently arise because of a lack of planning and knowledge. It's the first thing you see, but often the last thing that's designed in a building. Therein lies the issue.

SFS is seen as non-load bearing. It doesn't actually hold the structure up, but it supports cladding, internal linings insulation and perhaps even mechanical services such as ventilation, electrical, and plumbing (MEP). There are significant implications should it fail, which could lead to the external cladding falling off.

The report on the collapse of the brick cladding at Oxfangs Primary School Edinburgh on 29 January 2016 highlighted that there was a failure in the correct installation of a simple element: wall ties. Although there are no direct examples of this happening where SFS has been installed, it highlights the danger of ignoring the correct installation process. The newly-launched SFS guide, will help to ensure that everybody, from designers to installers, are clear about what is required.



**It will help to raise standards, show clients what SFS is and how it works. It will get people thinking about what is expected of them, the design and the final installation.**

The guide will spread best practice, help to raise standards and educate clients and installers. Because it's effectively a new sector, there are still many clients, designers and installers who will benefit from an education process driven by the document. The guide will help to avoid the issues caused by last minute changes.

The guide is for anyone who designs and installs SFS infill walls, and anyone checking that the products are being correctly installed, such as a 'Clerk of Works'. It will help to raise standards, show clients what SFS is and how it works. It will get people thinking about what is expected of them, the design and the final installation. It will give installers the confidence to question designs and provide guidance to ensure the installation is as good as it can be. The document includes check lists, as well as guidance that makes people stop and check that all the information that they need, is provided.

As the landscape post-Grenfell develops, we envisage that it will be very different from the way in which buildings are being designed and constructed now. This guide will become the 'go-to-reference' for all involved.

The guide will be launched on 16 May at the next SFS Working Group meeting at Plaisterers' Hall, One London Wall, London. Spaces for the event are limited and will be on a first come first served basis. To register please follow this link: [www.thefis.org/events/](http://www.thefis.org/events/)



# THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL CONSTRUCTION



**Mark Norton**, head of BIM at ISG and chairman of the FIS Digital Construction working group, tells us why the BIM4FitOut group is being redefined and the fresh outlook now being taken

**B**IM4FitOut is a special interest group that introduces FIS members to BIM and guides them on their digital journey. Since the group's initial inception and the government's mandate for BIM Level 2, the group saw a steady year-on-year increase in activity and interest. With external speakers, plain language talking and a

BIM 'toolbox' produced, the strength of the group was recognised by the wider fit out industry.

Now a wide-variety of FIS members have joined the group and the future is bright. However, the past year has seen another significant turn in the construction industry, albeit subliminal. New technology and improved process has changed the way we work once again, providing a 're-boot' in BIM from where we started.

For this reason, the group has decided to refresh and redefine itself as the 'Digital Construction working group' incorporating BIM4FitOut.

In the coming year we will expand our repertoire to include a 'digital' perception of the construction industry, still incorporating BIM at its heart, but engaging in the way we can now apply different process and technology, to our advantage.



## Top 5 digital technologies

### 1 SMART DEVICES

We have seen huge advances in what phones and tablets can do over the past few years. The technology they pack into such a small space is incredible and mostly goes untapped or unused by the average person. This is changing in construction. Industry professionals can now download apps that measure and create a 3D space and then save it and send it to their project team. These apps can overlay BIM models, create full 3D panoramas of the build, take pictures of the site and add notes.

And now, even the most menial of tasks are achievable with the aid of a smart device: Quick surveys, site diaries and snagging can all be carried out in seconds to provide an accurate, clear and instantly accessible depiction of a project. The result is a trouble-free installation with clarity and information which is available at the touch of a button.

### 2 LASER SURVEYING

Laser surveying is not a new technology but has

significantly moved up the tech agenda. Whether checking new build structure against models, or surveying an existing building to validate the space, this is the technology to use.

Traditional surveys took many man days and only captured what was measured and was limited and time consuming. With a point cloud survey via a laser scanner, the device uses a laser to scan 360 degrees in about three minutes and creates enough data to import to a BIM model or take accurate measurements for design and installation purposes. What used to take a few days can take just a few hours now. For example, a Faro X70 scanner can scan 488,000 points per second at an accuracy of +/-3mm over 70m.

### 3 3D PRINTING

3D printing has been around for many years but now we are seeing the price point drop to an affordable level. This now gives all construction companies the option to purchase and produce 3D prototypes in hours, using various filament materials.

Creating a test model that can be evaluated in a tactile manner. This is far quicker, cheaper and easier than CNC machining or conventional prototyping.

### 4 ARTIFICIAL REALITY (AR)

AR is prevalent in the gaming industry, creating life-like scenarios and immersing us into imaginary worlds that appear real. This is now migrating across to construction, we have seen several contractors and specialists adopt this technology to use for training purposes.

Dangerous and hazardous areas are a health and safety headache, but we can now train staff in a realistic, immersive world without exposing ourselves to the real dangers. The ability to perfect our training in a safe environment is a truly significant benefit to businesses, whichever way you look at it.

### 5 DESIGN FOR MANUFACTURE AND ASSEMBLY (DFMA)

The government has set this as a high priority on its

agenda for 2019 as it could revolutionise the way we construct new buildings and spaces. Componentisation and repetition will be key in this approach to accelerate deployment of a kit of parts for quicker, more efficient construction projects.

Ultimately, positive disruption from emerging technology and embracing new ideas and concepts will characterise the industry over the next five years. Modern methods of construction will prevail, and we will see standardisation, modular scalability and off-site manufacture become the dominant methodology for delivery.



#### FIND OUT MORE

If you would like to get involved with the FIS Digital Construction working group, more details are available on the FIS website. Visit [www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/working-groups/digital-construction-group/digital-construction-group](http://www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/working-groups/digital-construction-group/digital-construction-group)



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Tony Johnston, Sound Interiors Ltd



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### FIGHTING YOUR CORNER

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### CHAMPIONING FIT-OUT

FIS brings the finishes and interiors community together.

**"For any company that actively works within the fit-out sector, I strongly recommend membership of FIS. We have gained from the FIS groups we have associated with, and became nationally recognised as a Gold Winner in the annual Contractors Awards competition."**

Julian Sargent, Style Partitions

## PRODUCT PROCESS PEOPLE

### MANAGING YOUR RISKS

FIS will help you to identify your risks and how to overcome them.



### DELIVERING SKILLS

FIS is providing the training and skills the sector needs.

**"Being part of FIS gives us the back-up we need, and gives our clients confidence in the products we offer."**

Tony Regan, Building Additions

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# Former fit out industry chairman retires after **50 years**

After more than 50 years working in association with the interior fit-out sector, and three former attempts at retirement, **Peter Gardner** has now retired for real.



**P**eter has led three trade bodies during his colourful career, having been president of the GAI in 1986, chairman of the IAI 1983-84, and president of the PIA, which became the AIS and is now the FIS, in 1994.

Peter began his career at the tender age of 16, working for a builders' merchant in South London, before joining G&S Allgood as an architectural representative in 1973. During a time of great product innovation, he later joined D A Thomas, also in South London, where he helped make the German brand Hewi, which was barely recognised in the UK at that time, into a popular UK product name.

He became MD of Beaver Architectural Ironmongery, and oversaw its sale to Fredrick Cooper Group, before jointly taking over Komfort Systems, a revolutionary but struggling office partitioning manufacturer in Crawley. Despite being new to the industry, Peter and his team revitalised the company and within five years it became an industry leader in Europe.

In 1995 Komfort was sold to the SIG Group, which also marked the first of Peter's previous retirements.

But just four weeks later, he had set up the company that became Glass Door Solution.

In 2005, when Peter was taken ill to Guys Hospital, he contracted MRSA. Over several weeks, and being moved to various hospitals, he discovered the poor state of hospital curtains around the beds was a cause of many infections – which gave him his next business idea. He and two friends began manufacturing disposable hospital curtains, which are seen in many hospitals today, and he won the coveted Queens Award for Innovation.

While looking forward to taking a well-earned rest, Peter paid tribute to the industry and those he's worked with over the years. "I have been so lucky to be involved in businesses where I have been able to count my colleagues, competitors and customers as my friends," he said.



## Neil takes on new QIC position

**Neil Miller** has been named sales and marketing director for QIC Trims Ltd. Neil has worked within distribution and manufacturing for more than 20 years, serving the past four years at QIC. He joined the company in 2015 as a business development manager, before moving into a national sales role. Neil has a depth of experience within the sector, having previously worked for New Link (UK), Komfort, Saint-Gobain Ecophon AB, Alco Beldan and CCF.

## New strategy in celebration of 30th anniversary

**Mark Randall**, the founder of IOR, a specialist in office design and build, is celebrating the company reaching its 30th anniversary this year and has marked the event by launching a new growth strategy.

"1989 was very much a time of change with an incredible number of historic events - the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, the path for the release of Nelson Mandela, the political change made by the Polish Solidarity Movement, Ayatollah Khomeini's funeral in Iran, the coup against Ceausescu and the birth of the World Wide Web, to name a few. It's interesting that, in building a business, I had very little awareness of all these events occurring over such a short period," Mark states in his company blog. "Over the following 30 years I have been fortunate to make many lifelong friends, work with world-class businesses and have the pleasure of being part of a truly exceptional team that has delivered award-



winning workplaces and transformed people's work lives."

Mark is a member of the British Council for Offices (BCO), and the British Institute for Facilities Management (BIFM).



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# Award-winning apprentice takes a **first step for womenkind**

Worksmart Contracts' **Briony Aulton** recently picked up the John Mather Trust Award.

**T**he joinery apprentice was given the award in recognition of her career achievements to date and will aid the young apprentice in her career progression.

The John Mather Trust is a charitable organisation set up to benefit young people in the West of Scotland and allow them to gain a solid foothold in a wide range of careers. The Trust has already helped more than 3,000 individuals.

The 27-year-old from Galston was accompanied by representatives from Worksmart Contracts to collect the award, which was presented to her at The Riverside Hotel in Irvine on 6 March. The awards ceremony took place during Scottish Apprenticeship Week, a nationwide campaign that celebrates apprentices in every industry and recognises the benefits they bring to the Scottish workforce and economy.

Worksmart is at the pioneering end of the movement to involve more women in the construction industry. Having started her apprenticeship last year, Briony represents a huge step in the right direction as Worksmart's first ever female joinery apprentice.

Lisa Neilson, Worksmart's owner and financial director has been involved in the



campaign to include more women in fit-out, she said: "We are all incredibly proud of Briony for what she has achieved. It shows that we are moving in the right direction in terms of attracting more women into the industry and helping them to flourish. People like Briony are proving that women have what it takes to succeed in what is a traditionally male-dominated sector. She is a credit to herself and Worksmart Contracts."

Worksmart tries to employ locally when possible. Owner Steve Neilson added: "It's wonderful to see one of our apprentices given such a prestigious award that has helped many people in the West of Scotland over the last two decades. Briony has been excellent since joining the Worksmart family and is helping to shatter any pre-conceived notions of gender stereotypes within the industry."

## New technical manager appointed

**Mark Harman** has become technical manager at Komfort Partitioning Ltd. He joins the company after a year spent as project manager at Planet Partitioning, and previously worked as southern contracts manager for Komfort and project manager for Komfort Workplace.

## Kerry takes over as Lorient MD

Former sales director for Lorient, **Kerry Hicks**, has now stepped into the role of its managing director, replacing Maria Powell, the company's former owner and a past president of the Guild of Architectural Ironmongers. Kerry has been with the company since 2014. Lorient, based in Newton Abbot, specialises in acoustic, smoke and fire containment systems.

## Kelly steps up to MD's seat at RDF

**Kelly Bell** has recently joined Leeds-based construction company RDF Building Group. Kelly has worked in a leading senior role within the construction and refurbishment industry for the past decade. Kelly is RDF's new managing director. RDF has a diverse portfolio of projects, specialising in new builds, refurbishments, conservation and heritage.



## Roy heads up regional sales in new role

**Roy Glewitz** has taken on the role of regional sales manager for the UK, ROI and the Baltic States at Armstrong Ceilings Solutions. Roy spent 18 years working for Armstrong World Industries, Inc. (AWI), a global designer and manufacturer of commercial and residential ceiling, wall and suspension system solutions, before taking on his new role.

## New technical/compliance challenge

**Andrew Orriss** has moved to SAS International in Oldbury and is now head of technical and compliance for the Reading-based interior products manufacturer. Formerly sales director at Sheffield-based building materials company, SIG plc, where he had worked for seven years, Andrew began his career in sales before being headhunted to become managing director for offsite construction specialist Innovaré Systems in 2006. He was also chairman of the UK SIPs Association for three years.

## Matthew promoted to Head of Advocacy and Standardisation

**Matthew Sexton** has taken on his new role at Saint Gobain, as head of advocacy and standardisation for British Gypsum. Previously responsible for marketing strategy within the commercial sector for the company, he had held a number of roles within Saint Gobain and British Gypsum since joining as a divisional project manager in 2011.

# WHY 'CAN'T' IS A DIRTY WORD



Interested in becoming a training professional or assessor? Here three diverse professionals talk about the rewards and dispel some of the myths surrounding teaching and training

**S**OME phrases deserve walling up behind drylining or burying under a screed and never seeing the light of day again. For instance: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach."

It's grating for those who can, those who do, those who teach and those who assess. In drylining and related trades, if you can't do, then you can't assess or teach, but for those who can do both, there's a rewarding career choice beckoning.

Three very different examples of this include an assessment leader at a college and then a major contractor who is now a consultant and has assessed more than 1,000 candidates; a further education trainer and assessor who still sometimes works on sites; and an assessment centre founder who took a leap of faith.

What they have in common is they all started out young, learning a trade, and were on the tools.

Andy Pearce has been in construction for 35 years, starting out in drylining, learning the trade and getting a level 2 NVQ. He got into assessing as he became more experienced (he's now 54) and led the construction apprenticeships assessment at a college before heading the NVQs programme for a London contractor. He's now helping the construction skills training academy Silver Trowel to expand.

Andy said: "Assessing is all about having the experience, the knowledge. I'm a dryliner by trade, I have run my own company that has employed people. But I couldn't assess a carpenter, because I don't have that experience of carpentry."

Stevan Dawson is a trainer in drylining and plastering at TyneMet College in Newcastle. Stevan, 30, started out working for a family company after school and got a level 3 NVQ in

plastering. He moved to Germany for about nine months where he picked up drylining.

"TyneMet's teachers all come from different places and trades," said Stevan. "But they all served time on the tools."

"You could be a fantastic teacher, but it would be impossible not to have your trade background and try to teach the subject. Textbooks are excellent resources, but if you have never been on site it would be impossible."

Dan Plosky is managing director of the training centre Now Get Qualified, which he set up with his wife in 2012. Dan, aged 46, who had been a plasterer, dryliner, and cladder for more than 16 years, became a site manager for a contractor working on housing developments and then a hospital.

"I left school at 16 and started working with a plasterer in North London on his concrete mixer for £30 a day," he said. "Once I was 'on the tools' so to speak, doing plastering, I spent a lot of time working for contractors and had a small company for my own domestic work."

## Different backgrounds

The trio of trainers and assessors each had their own reasons for taking the turns in their careers. For Dan, it was doing his own drylining qualification that sowed the seed. He said: "I did my NVQ on 2007. The chap who assessed my qualification was David Kirk."

"During the recorded discussion we did, covering my background, David said 'You have done loads in your time, you know what you are talking about, you have a good way about you'. He asked if I would be interested in assessing. I was flattered and said I would give it some thought. I had done a lot of angles in construction, but assessing – that hadn't occurred to me."



**Andy Pearce** has been in construction for 35 years, starting out in drylining, learning the trade and getting a level 2 NVQ

**'From the labourer to the site manager, everyone needs to be suitably qualified to do that job.'**



"A few months later, I called him back. Am I glad now that I made that call? Absolutely. Even though he said 'You've called at the worst possible time, the funding is being cut...' It was one of those moments. The easiest thing to do was carry on with price work. But I had tennis elbow, a bad back, my knees were going. I knew I couldn't do it for ever. So, I took a leap of faith."

Stevan was younger and had a desire to teach. "It was always something I quite fancied doing and I wanted to explore different career options," he said. "The guys who had taught me to plaster were old school and I wanted to hand down some of that knowledge like they had, so I worked whilst I did evening classes in teaching and assessing. I volunteered at Newcastle College for a year and when a role came up there, I started teaching and then came to TyneMet"

For Andy it was a delivery of 3m long plasterboard: "I was the only guy on site. I got half way through lifting the first pallet and thought I should maybe stop and take a different direction. Becoming an assessor is not a monumental shift in career. It's about applying your knowledge and experience in a different way."

### Funding challenges

But when should you make that step? "It costs a lot of money to get the assessor qualification," said Andy. "I funded my own but it would be good if there were funded courses around, as there is a shortage of assessors."

Dan said: "After I made the phone call to him, David Kirk took me on and I did my assessor's qualification under his mentoring. It's important to work closely with an experienced assessor, to understand and learn assessing techniques. Without that support, it can be a bit daunting. You have to understand computers, paperwork, it takes a bit of getting used to. Training for it is a hard time. You have to be financially able to do it. I was assessing a couple of days a week and on the tools for the other days"

Stevan said: "The teaching aspect is totally different. The teaching qualification was a year's course and another three to four years of experience to be fully qualified. And you don't stop learning. I've been teaching for five or six years now and it keeps evolving and techniques change – similar to what happens in the trade really."



Photo by Annie Spratt

Asked what makes for effective assessing, Andy said: "It is asking questions and listening to the answers and it is watching the candidate do their work. It's really important that you give feedback and plenty of it. I have an awful lot of advice that I can give if it is needed."

Stevan: "When they first arrive with us, our apprentice students can be a bit boisterous. We are not just teaching them a trade, we are teaching them how to behave in a workplace, how to get along in a professional environment. You need patience. You need to show understanding. Sometimes you have to think back and remember how you were, what it's like to be 16. And you have to be willing to keep learning yourself."

Assessors do have their frustrations. Andy said: "I don't think assessors are well respected by the wider industry. There are still lots of people who think the CSCS card and NVQ qualifications are just a bind. But we are trying to help them. From the labourer to the site manager, everyone needs to be suitably qualified to do that job."

"There are misunderstandings about the assessor's role. Some people assume I'm going to do it for them. But if they are not producing the evidence, I am prepared to walk away. The inconsistent approach of contractors is frustrating. Many will now not allow workers on their sites without a blue CSCS card. But not all sites enforce that. And the influx of European labour has been challenging for assessors, as NVQs are in English."

Dan said: "You hear the usual mumblings of 'it's a waste of time'. But we don't make the rules, we provide a service. The biggest issue we come across as assessors and as a company is the disadvantage smaller contractors face with the difficulty of obtaining grants. It makes it harder for us to help the smaller guys."

"Another frustration is people not being on the job when you are visiting to assess. Every assessor has to travel. We have sometimes travelled a hundred miles. To get there and find the candidate is not there when you have planned a two-day visit..."

### The attraction of assessing

So why should tradesmen consider the step? Dan said: "More people might consider becoming an assessor if they knew more about it. Most do like the idea of putting their tools down. But doing it is conditional on their finances"

Stevan: "You've got to not be put off by paperwork. That's a big part of the job. It's not for everyone. You might be the best tradesman in the world but would find teaching a big jump. You have to really want to do it. But if it is for you, it's an enjoyable job."

"It sounds like a cliché, but it is rewarding when you take students and see a turnaround, watching them develop from not being able to do anything much, to being members of the next generation of tradesmen."

Andy said: "What makes someone cut out for assessing? You have got to have confidence, >>>



**Stevan Dawson** is a trainer in drylining and plastering at TyneMet College in Newcastle.

**'We are all human and humans make mistakes. Assessors and QAs are there to pick them up.'**



**Dan Plosky** is Managing Director of the training centre Now Get Qualified, which he set up with his wife in 2012.

**'Assessing is all about having the experience, the knowledge.'**



### FIND OUT MORE

Interested in becoming an assessor?  
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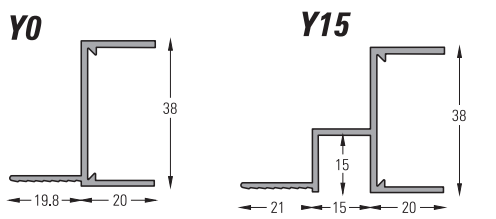
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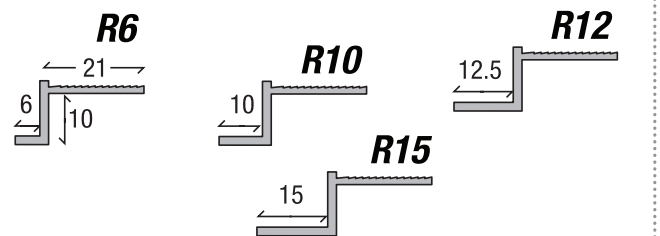
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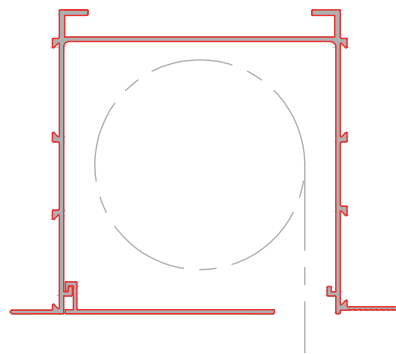


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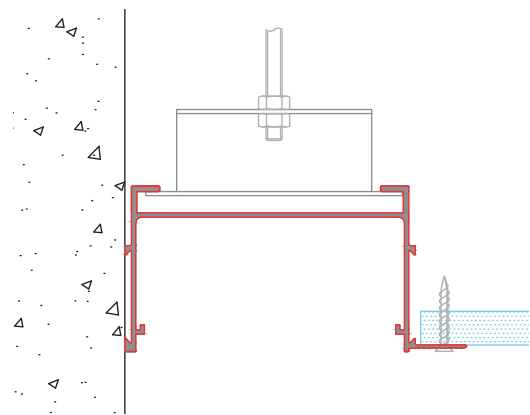
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>> because you are dealing with people. You have to be well versed in your subject, you have to know what you are talking about – you can't blag it. But above all, confidence is key."

Dan not only picked up assessing, he ran with it too: "I worked for David's company for a few years. By 2012 he was thinking about retiring. So, I had a choice. I could be a freelance assessor or go back on the tools or I could move forward. So that's what I did, setting up a limited company in 2012. We have good work coming in from all over the country."

The work of assessors is, in turn, checked by IQAs (Internal Quality Assurers). And they are monitored by external EQAs (External Quality Assurers). The quality of training in colleges is monitored too.

Stevan said: "A big part of what we do is verification, both by people in the trade and in education. There are regular observations of teaching and walk throughs. City & Guilds are in quite often to do external verification, checking our assessment decisions, talking to the students.

"We work with FIS and with employers to make sure we are up to speed with how the industry and standards are evolving. And then there is Ofsted."

Dan: "I did my level 4 IQA so I can sample portfolios, make sure the evidence is valid, sufficient and authentic. When sampling work, it's about constructive criticism. I observe the assessors. It's all valuable feedback about what was great, what could have been better. It's about maintaining the quality of the centre.

"We are checked, as a centre, by the awarding bodies' verification teams (EQAs). They oversee what I do, my discussions, what I'm feeding back to assessors. We are in the middle of a peer-reviewed system, where everyone is looking to ensure the quality is there."

Andy, who is a qualified lead IQA, said: "IQAs and EQAs are not the enemy. They are there to help, advise and assist. We're all on a learning curve. I would suggest I'm a much improved assessor than I was. I would hope that is true of all assessors.

"My job as an IQA is to identify mistakes, help them be rectified and make sure they don't happen again. The EQA is there to work through problems too.

"We are all human and humans make mistakes. Assessors and QAs are there to pick them up. We're all part of the same family."

# Apprenticeship Trailblazer announcement

## Interior Systems Trailblazer Apprenticeship - End Point Assessment Approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships

**F**OLLOWING two years' hard work, FIS has announced that the final stage of development of the new apprenticeship standard has been approved, ensuring that Interior Systems Trailblazer Apprenticeship will be able to deliver well in time for the new academic year.

Developed by a group of employers with a broad reach across the sector, the apprenticeship offers new entrants a core and options approach incorporating two pathways: Drylining or ceilings and partitions. The end point assessment that has now been approved will ensure all apprentices will pass the core before taking their chosen pathway, where additional final assessment will prove their skills.

Vice president of FIS, Helen Tapper, praised those who helped develop the standard.

"We owe a massive debt of gratitude to the contractor members and training providers that gave up their valuable time to both write The Standard and develop The End Point Assessment," she said.

It is testament to the sector's desire to finally have a trailblazer apprenticeship that is fit for purpose.

Working with FIS Approved Training Providers, the FIS skills team will ensure that there is geographical coverage to deliver across the UK. FIS skills delivery director Helen Yeulet said: "Now the standard is available, we need to work hard to ensure that apprenticeship providers see the value of working with FIS employers, ensuring there is access across England and high quality of outcomes for our new entrants."

FIS can offer employers support in helping to find the right apprentices and provide collaboration on cohorts.



**Helen Yeulet:** 'Value of working with FIS employers'



**Helen Tapper:** 'A fitting testament'



### FIND OUT MORE

If you are interested in Interior Systems Trailblazer Apprenticeships, email [skills@thefis.org](mailto:skills@thefis.org)

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# RISK ASSESSMENT MYTH BUSTERS



**David Cant of Veritas Consulting** explores five misheld beliefs that need to be busted before your business ends up under investigation by the HSE.

UK employers are legally obliged to conduct a workplace risk assessment for activities that are likely to cause harm to their workers. Risk assessments are one of the most common documents in any business – so why are there so many myths surrounding them?

## 1 I'M SELF-EMPLOYED - I'M EXEMPT

Most self-employed people are aware that they are now exempt from health and safety law – which means that legally, they don't have to complete risk assessments. But there's more to this story than the headlines.

The exemption only applies if "your work activity poses no potential risk to the health and safety of other workers or members of the public." Which means that all self-employed individuals will need to carry out a basic risk assessment to ensure that their activities meet those criteria.

## 2 THE CONTRACTOR HAS COMPLETED THE NECESSARY RISK ASSESSMENTS

When arriving on a construction site, subcontractors may assume that the principal contractor has carried out all the necessary risk assessments, and the necessary safeguards are in place. For the safety of your own employees however, you must confirm that the paperwork is in place and that your employees understand what is expected of them.

## 3 THE CONTRACTOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS OWN RISK ASSESSMENTS

When outsourcing tasks to subcontractors, they sometimes may assume that responsibility for risk assessments is also transferred. But as principal contractor, you must ensure that the risk assessments are provided by the subcontractors and offer adequate protection for all parties on site.

Remember, employers are responsible for the welfare of their employees – they cannot outsource their duty of care to the principal contractor.

## 4 OUR EMPLOYEES IGNORE THE RISK ASSESSMENTS, SO THEY DON'T MATTER

Often workers will take shortcuts, or ignore explicit instructions, placing themselves and their colleagues at risk of injury. But just because people ignore risk assessments, does not mean you can choose not to carry them out.

Instead, you should complete workplace risk assessments as normal, monitor adherence, and provide training to employees as appropriate. In this way, you can encourage everyone to better protect themselves and take action where the safeguards are being ignored.

## 5 RISK ASSESSMENTS ARE A ONE-TIME EXERCISE

With a risk assessment in place, all health and safety planning is done, right? Not quite.

Your workplace risk assessments need to evolve as conditions change on the worksite to ensure they continue to address issues faced by your employees, and anything that has changed since the original was written up, such as new equipment or significant alterations to the operating environment.



### FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about workplace risk assessments, contact David Cant at [www.veritas-consulting.co.uk](http://www.veritas-consulting.co.uk)

## UPDATED GUIDE HELPS MEMBERS TACKLE HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

FIS has updated its Health and Safety Handbook. An invaluable tool for contractors, the handbook is designed for distribution by members to site operatives as a tool to help remind them of the hazards that they may encounter every day in their job and assist them in meeting company health and safety requirements.

Members purchasing bulk copies may have them overprinted with their company logo.

More details are available at [www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/healthandsafety](http://www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/healthandsafety)





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