

# Standards – and why they are our friend

FIS technical director **Joe Cilia** considers the usefulness, and importance, of standards in the finishes and interiors sector, and opens up discussion on whether they can become our friend.



The phrase “Standards are used to hit us over the head” is often used when a contractor’s work is being questioned or is an opening statement when the final bill needs to be paid. But are standards unreasonable? What are the risks of ignoring them? And can they, in fact, become the contractor’s friend?

To dispel any confusion, BSI describes a standard as follows: *In essence, a standard is an agreed way of doing something. It could be about making a product, managing a process, delivering a service or supplying materials ... Standards cover a wide range of subjects from construction to nanotechnology, from energy management to health and safety, from cricket balls to goalposts. They can be very specific, such as to a particular type of product, or general, such as management*

*practices. The point of a standard is to provide a reliable basis for people to share the same expectations about a product or service.*

Standards go back to 1901 when the original BSI committee met for the first time on the day Queen Victoria died. One of the first standards BSI went on to publish related to steel sections for tramways. This allowed rails and components for joining them to be purchased in complete confidence from different manufacturers with the knowledge that what was supplied would work.

It’s not dissimilar to buying products today, though those who recently bought a Volkswagen car in the US might disagree; and that’s the point, we should know what is expected and have something that things, be they product assembly services or processes, can be

measured against.

So, where do standards impact us specifically and how do we make them our friend?

Standards will appear as a measure of compliance in a PQQ. For example: “Do you meet the requirements of BS EN ISO 9001:2008 Quality management systems?” As a measure of performance in a specification, such as the fire rating of a partition BS476: Part 22: 1987 or the workmanship of the installation such as BS 8000 series. They also appear in the Approved Documents used as guidance to meet Building Regulations.

We have seen an increase in the level of expectation being described in specifications, and this is where the risk can manifest itself if you are unaware of what to look for or how to construct an evidence-based argument for the

clause to be removed.

The level of expectation is being squeezed between the huge costs of some high-end property being developed and the contactor’s race to the bottom with value engineering processes being implemented post-tender. A recent example that crossed my desk was a specification for a tape and filled joint that was “true and flat”, yet BS 8212:1995 Code of Practice for drylining and partitioning using gypsum plasterboard states that a crown of 3mm is permissible using this method of finishing. In essence, the specification asked for a Volkswagen at a Skoda price.

The standards used in drylining are admittedly old, with some going back to the early 1990s. They were produced with expert contribution from industry, and they are still relevant because the basic principles of drylining haven’t changed. BS 8212:1995 is the commonly referred standard for drylining and it describes deviation bands of  $\pm 5$ mm. We have seen evidence where the designers are asking for this to be reduced by 50 per cent to 2.5mm without understanding that drywall is constructed using a framework that will build up at the head and base because the track is wider than the stud, and that there will be a build-up of materials at door frames to accommodate noggins and boxing, let alone how to measure 0.5mm deviation?

With a good understanding of the relevant standards that you will see in the Building Regulations Approved Documents and in the tender requests and specifications you receive, it is possible to use the standards as your friends to apply reasonableness to discussions and avoid the bun fight at the end of a project where long-running arguments based on expectations can rumble on and on.

A full list of all the standards that FIS has identified so far can be viewed at [www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/technical](http://www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/technical)

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