

Embracing Competency is Key to Improved Building Efficiencies

The Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) introduces significant changes to ensure higher standards of construction and safety in the industry. Competence is a central requirement, placing legal duties on individuals and organisations involved in the design, construction, refurbishment and management of buildings. Here, Tony Lawther, MD at BriggsAmasco discusses how the company rolled out a competency framework and the benefits that brings.

The Act legally mandates that anyone carrying out design or building work must be competent for their role. This means possessing the necessary skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours (SKEB) to undertake their work safely and in compliance with building regulations. This applies to all levels, from individual tradespeople to organisations and duty holders such as clients, principal designers and principal contractors.

and other stakeholders in the building envelope sector. The white paper was developed specifically to address the competence requirements introduced by the Building Safety Act 2022. The guidance document provides a competency benchmark for job roles throughout the building supply chain.

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The aim of the BSA is to improve building safety and efficiency. It stems from Dame Judith Hackitt's requirement for a 'golden thread' of accurate, accessible data to be assigned to buildings throughout their lifespan, as outlined in her *Building a Safer Future* report.

While the regulatory change will have been a culture shock to some construction companies, BriggsAmasco proactively addressed the legislation by developing an employee competency matrix for all relevant staff and installers.

Starting Point

The starting point for our competency matrix was the industry white paper: *Achieving Competence in the Building Envelope* published by the JCI, a collaboration of leading construction companies, trade associations

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of experience, but don't have the qualifications suggested in the white paper according to *Achieving Competence* guidance. In such cases, we've sourced relevant courses – some CITB-sponsored – to achieve the appropriate qualification.

Monitoring Progress and Communication

Our competency strategy is a genuine company-wide programme that I am fully on board with. To meet *Achieving Competence* guidance, I am undertaking a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme. For this, I must demonstrate a minimum of 24 hours of personal development per year. This involves anything from reviewing new or upcoming industry legislation and communicating the findings to company colleagues, to demonstrating an understanding of product manufacturing techniques. Employee competency training and development are digitally recorded and monitored throughout the year, so no one is in any doubt about their progression.

Communication was key to our successful rollout of the competency framework. We needed staff to buy-in



to the initiative to convince them it wasn't a bureaucratic, box-ticking exercise. We emphasised the need to embrace rather than push back on the training, telling staff, 'You should hold your head up high, as once you've completed the training, it will signify you are at the top of your game.' The response has been extremely positive. All staff have been receptive to the training requirements. They understand that the competency programme will improve and prove their skills and help to raise industry standards.

Benefits Outweigh Costs

From a company point of view, our competency matrix is critically important. It will provide evidence of our employees' qualifications to tier one contractors, many of whom have told us we're 'ahead of the game' with our training approach. Furthermore, we are complying with our legal obligations as set out in the BSA.

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I've heard people in the industry question the relevance of competency programmes, and others question the costs involved in qualification-based staff training. Employee training does come at a cost. But it's a price worth paying to ensure people are appropriately qualified to do their job.

Staff development is good for the individual, good for the company and just as importantly, it's good for the building industry. Our competency matrix took many months of preparation and implementation. But anything of real value takes time to nurture and flourish.

Staff development has been core to BriggsAmasco's culture

for several decades. We have an impressive track record of employing apprentices and facilitating their career progression. As the current managing director, I first joined the company as an asphalt apprentice in 1984, and I believe this offers a fine example of the in-house opportunities available to BriggsAmasco trainees. Our training programmes support NVQ Level 7 – the equivalent of a Master's degree – to all employees who wish to reach the highest level of training, which exceeds the attainment target typically offered by construction companies. We currently employ 18 apprentices.

Increases Commitment

We believe that empowering individuals with the right skills, knowledge and qualifications is not only essential to improving their confidence and performance, it increases the likelihood of their long-term commitment to a career in construction. Such dedication is needed now more than ever.

There remains a chronic skills shortage in the construction industry, an issue that isn't going to be solved any time soon. It threatens to undermine the government's 1.5m new homes target; and the quality and quantity of infrastructure projects many years hence could be jeopardised by the qualified labour shortfall. Hopefully, the legacy of our efforts, to increase workforce sufficiency and skills, will be a built environment that demonstrates industry competencies inside and out. III

For further information visit: www.briggsamasco.co.uk or telephone: 0121 502 9600.