



Introduction

A blueprint to improve the competence of those working on higher-risk residential buildings and drive culture change has been set out by a cross-industry group representing more than 150 organisations in the fire and built environment sectors.



Background

Grenfell Tower tragedy and building safety review

The Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017 led to a wholesale review of building safety and regulations in the UK. Led by Dame Judith Hackitt, the independent review identified a broad range of industry failings, including a fragmented approach to the processes and standards for assuring the competence of those working on buildings, as a key flaw in the current legislative framework.

In December 2017 an interim report called for “a universal shift in culture”, and in May 2018 the final report was published. ‘Building a Safer Future’ set out over 50 recommendations for creating a more robust regulatory system. It also challenged the industry to come up with an improved set of systemic competences within a year, or have the Government impose a mandated solution.

Work of the Competence Steering Group

To take forward the report’s recommendations, the Competence Steering Group (CSG) was created in August 2018. Led by Graham Watts, CEO of the Construction Industry Council, this steering group drew on the experience of over 300 people from 150 organisations in the built environment and fire safety sectors.

The CSG setup 12 working groups (WG1–WG12) of experts to develop enhanced competence frameworks. It also established Working Group 0 (WG0) to look at the principles of competence and how to manage the process with an overarching competence system.

In August 2019 the CSG published its report, ‘Raising the Bar’, which included 67 recommendations and made clear the need for “competences for all issues of the life safety of those who occupy and use the facilities that we construct”.

Recommendations of Working Group 0

The CSG’s WG0 was chaired by BSI’s Director of Standards, Scott Steedman. It focused on how to devise a system for overseeing the competence of those involved with higher-risk residential buildings. The working group’s recommendations included creating a suite of national standards and defining additional competences (beyond sector-specific competences) for three key roles that will be regulated, namely Principal Designer, Principal Contractor and Building Safety Manager.



Creating National Standards

These will be delivered in two phases:

An overarching competence framework standard for everyone working on a building

This is intended to be used by key professions and trades including designers, contractors, fire risk assessors, building managers and others in specialist technical or corporate roles.

It is likely that there will be a set of eight core principles of competence underpinning each of these deliverables.

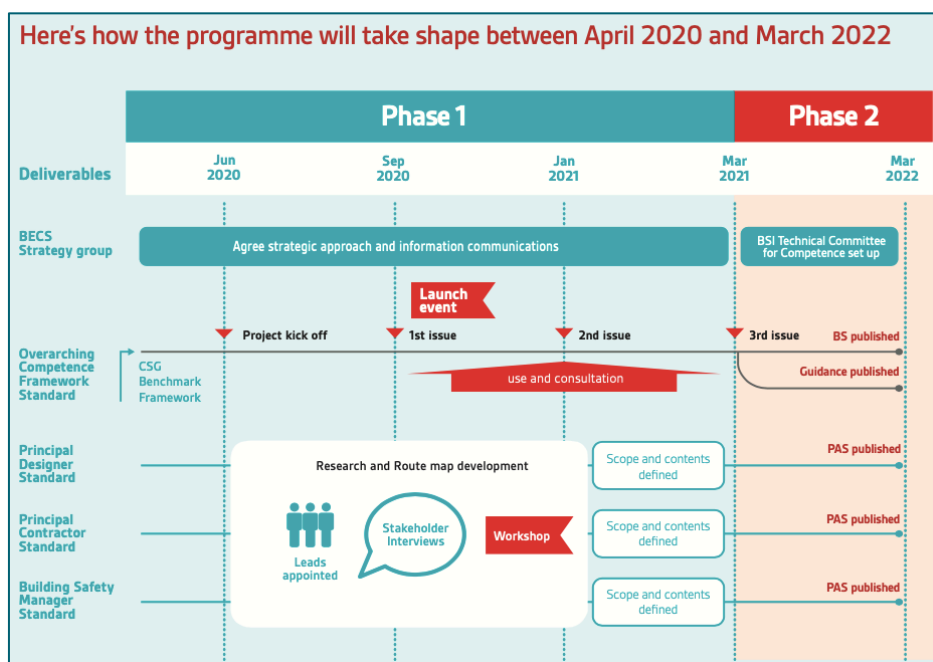
The relevant sectors can then define the competences needed in their specific sectors and disciplines to match the overarching competence framework standard. The advisory group will provide guidance by outlining a standard approach, with clear definitions and terminology – and all those relevant bodies will be expected to conform to the framework.

The framework will be developed and made available for use from early Autumn. After three periods of public consultation and refinement, it will be published as a British Standard and supported by a guidance document.

A set of competence requirements for the three newly-regulated roles: Principal Designer, Principal Contractor and Building Safety Manager

These key roles have overarching responsibility for the main activities affecting building and life safety at each stage of a building's life-cycle: design, construction and operation. They require enhanced competences in addition to any discipline-related competences, relating to their overarching role to ensure that the design intent of the building is maintained and that workers employed and used in design, construction, refurbishment, maintenance and operation are suitably competent.

This set of standards will be made available as Publicly Available Specifications, or PASs. They will be fast-tracked to meet the urgent need for competent individuals to fulfil these roles in the Government's new regulatory regime to ensure a safe environment for residents.





The Benefits

There are many expected benefits to developing these standards, the most significant of which include:

1. Improving building safety. In this case, that means primarily the safety of residents, but also of the workforce, including emergency responders.
2. Making it easier for different parts of the built environment industry to work together by establishing agreed core principles, terminology, and requirements on competence. This will provide a shared understanding of roles along the delivery supply chain.
3. Providing a bridge to wider competence requirements being developed for the professional, technical and traditional skills of those working in the built environment, raising the quality of work, the behaviour and the culture of individuals working in the built environment.



William Martin Compliance is now engaging with property management clients to help assess the impacts of the forthcoming Building Safety Act with regards to how they will manage higher risk residential buildings going forward.

One of the most significant proposed changes involves the appointment of the Building Safety Manager who will have responsibilities for fire safety management. In appointing the Manager, the Accountable Person will need to ensure they are competent to discharge various fire safety management duties and therefore, the work of the CSG Working Group in producing competency standards for this role will be very helpful.



At William Martin Compliance we have a nationwide team of experts who can provide compliance advice and risk assessment services to property management professionals.

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