



COMPETENCE IN PASSIVE FIRE PROTECTION DESIGN & SPECIFICATION ACTIVITIES

Benchmarking

Industry Competence Steering Group Sector Led Group 12

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1 Introduction

1.1 Drivers for change

In 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire created shockwaves throughout the built environment sector and generated a great deal of focus on deficiencies in both construction practices and the capability of the construction workforce.

It was recognised in the report of Dame Judith Hackitt, 'Building a Safer Future: Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety'¹ (also known as the Hackitt Report) that a simple, more effective regulatory framework would be required to deliver change. This included moving to an 'outcomes-based' model, rather than a prescriptive rules-based model reliant on complex and detailed guidance. To achieve this, competent people who are capable of understanding their responsibilities for safety & integrity and thinking for themselves are required.

The Building Safety Act 2022 (the Act) has introduced a new regulatory regime which puts a legal requirement to demonstrate competence front and centre. The Act, together with supporting secondary legislation including the Building Regulations Amendments (2023) and the Higher Risk Buildings (Management of Safety Risks etc.) (England) Regulations (2023), sets a general requirement for competence at both organisational and individual levels:

- Organisational capability – Organisations must have the organisational capability to perform their functions. Organisational capability is defined within Building Regulations as having the appropriate management, policies, procedures, systems and resources in place to ensure that individuals under the control of the organisation comply with relevant regulations and that those in development are appropriately supervised
- Individual competence – Any person carrying building or design work must possess the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours (SKEB) necessary

1.2 Addressing organisational capability

Approaches to setting out requirements for, and implementing approaches to, demonstrating organisational capability are currently under consideration in collaboration with the wider built environment sector. This work is on-going and is not directly addressed within this document or any competence outputs created.

1.3 Addressing individual competence

The Industry Competence Steering Group (ICSG) is a formal, cross-sector working group of the Industry Competence Committee (ICC), a statutory committee of the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). ICSG provides a vehicle for industry collaboration in the development and implementation of competence frameworks in the built environment².

ICSG is made up of 15 sector led groups (SLGs), each leading work in a specific area. Within this, SLG 12 is representing the overall picture of passive fire protection. Work to set out competence standards

¹ Building a Safer Future. Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final report. Dame Judith Hackitt DBE FREng. Published May 2018. Available from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/707785/Building_a_Safer_Future_-_web.pdf

² Industry Competence Steering Group. Construction Leadership Council (CLC). Published Dec 2024. Available from: <https://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/news/industry-competence-steering-group/>.

and routes for those carrying out design and specification of passive fire protection has been included under the SLG 12 structure.

1.4 The passive fire protection design & specification competence group

The passive fire protection design & specification competence group (the design & specification group) was set up to define standards, set out routes, and document requirements for individual competence in relevant activities.

The group is made up of key stakeholders active in this space from a range of backgrounds.

The work of the design & specification group has been focussed on defining an approach to individual competence which is set out within this document, aligned with the requirements set out in BS 8670-1:2024, the code of practice for competence frameworks for building safety – core criteria³.

The following organisations have contributed and been instrumental in the production of this document:

Allford Hall Monaghan Morris	Laing O'Rourke
Association for Specialist Fire Protection (ASFP)	RIBA
Buckley Grey Yeoman	Rockwool
Compliance Plus Fire	Siderise
Golden Thread Fire Delay	Skanska
Hilti	Vinci

The group would also like to thank Sam Allwinkle (Edinburgh Napier University) for his contributions to this work, and Milford & Marah Ltd. for facilitating its development.

At every stage, the group has endeavoured to consult with or include the work of other relevant bodies or working groups to ensure a joined-up approach to competence with allied sectors or working groups addressing competence.

1.5 Document purpose

This document sets out contextual and background information collated through consultation with the design & specification group, and details of the benchmarks for competence that have been put in place by industry. This is intended to be used as a basis for further development of:

- Pathways for competence - requirements for competence, including how SKEB should be evidenced and how competence should be validated, kept current, and revalidated, for various relevant occupational areas
- Implementation plans – the actions required to implement the agreed standards for competence

³ BS 8670-1:2024. Competence frameworks for building safety – Core criteria. Code of practice. BSI. Published 31 May 2024. Available from: <https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/products/competence-frameworks-for-building-safety-core-criteria-code-of-practice>

2 Background & context

2.1 Scope and criticality

Good design and specification of passive fire products and/or systems is critical to ensure the safety of buildings and their occupants. This includes:

- Fire protection to the structural frame
- Fire resistant walls, floors & ceilings
- Penetration seals
- Linear gap seals
- Large cavity barriers
- Cavity barriers for use in facades
- Fire resisting ducts and dampers
- Operable fire curtains
- Fire resisting doors and associated hardware
- Fire resistant glazing

Detailed design and specification activity specific to passive fire protection takes place at RIBA stages 3 (spatial coordination) and 4 (technical design). Concept design is considered to be out of scope.

It is important to note that in the RIBA Plan of Work it is anticipated that, for many projects, stages 4 and 5 (manufacturing and construction) will overlap. Other discipline mapping systems also acknowledge this. For example, BSRIA⁴ (for MEP) and IStructE⁵ (for structural engineering) both publish guidance mapping deliverables and processes across RIBA and project stages.

For projects where the construction phase is within the scope of the Higher Risk Building regulations, the Building Safety Regulator will be the approving authority. Gateway 2 (building control approval) must be passed before construction can begin, and Gateway 3 (completion certificates) must be passed before a building or stage of work can be occupied. Gateway 2 is anticipated to be towards the end of RIBA stage 4, and Gateway 3 after RIBA stage 6 (handover and closeout) and before stage 7 (use).

For the purposes of this work, the definition of design under the Construction (Design and Management) [CDM] Regulations is being employed. This includes drawings, design details, specifications and bills of quantities (including specification of articles or substances) relating to a structure, and calculations prepared for the purpose of a design.

Consideration needs to be given to the range of roles and role types that may undertake design and specification work. Both the CDM regulations and the Building Regulations (2010) define a designer as any person (including client, contractor, or other person referred to in those regulations) who in the course of business prepares or modifies a design / carried out design work, or who arranges for, or instructs, any person under their control to do so.

⁴ BG6: A Design Framework for Building Services, 5th Edition. BSRIA. Published 2018. Available from: https://www.bsria.com/uk/product/gDXYiB/design_framework_for_building_services_5th_edition_bg_62018_a15d25e1/

⁵ The Structural Plan of Work 2020. IStructE. Published 2 July 2020. Available from: https://www.istructe.org/resources/guidance/the-structural-plan-of-work/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=17329935055&gbraid=0AAAAoXX4CGU7xks5S531qh7fgMXLHkRt&gclid=Cj0KCQjwqebEBhD9ARIsAFZMbfxPzDtsTcnRAE226CjGAODO7TGaO_Ixyl8fcbSV13h3cSyJgTepV6kaAh6qEALw_wcB

Competence to carry out assessments / make engineering judgements associated with the design and specification of products and systems should also be considered.

Much detailed design and specification of passive fire protection is undertaken by technical specialists within manufacturers or contractors. A smaller amount may be undertaken by Fire Engineers or Architects / Architectural Technologists who specialise in passive fire protection. Design may also be split across disciplines and between client and contractor side designers. Points of entry for those developing and evidencing their competence from a range of backgrounds may therefore need to be considered.

In addition, increasing emphasis on ensuring appropriate passive fire design and specification within industry (driven by acknowledgement of likely design liability) has resulted in the emergence / concept of a specific 'Passive Fire Designer' role. Formal routes to competence for this role also need to be considered.

Routes to competence should therefore be considered for:

- Passive Fire Designer (new specialist role)
- Technical Specialist (within manufacturer or contractor)
- Fire Engineers wishing to specialise in passive fire design and specification
- Architects and designers (including CIAT Architectural Technologists) wishing to specialise in passive fire design and specification

ASFP is in the process of developing a design guide to aid understanding of contractual requirements for passive fire. Links will need to be made between any new guidance emerging, the competence framework and any associated routes to competence.

Further clarification of what that means in the passive fire industry may be required. ASFP is separately considering the guidance that may be needed by industry. Any additional roles identified through this work may require additional routes to competence to be developed.

2.2 Existing industry adopted routes to competence

No formal, industry adopted pathways to competence in passive fire design and specification exist at the time of producing this document (including tools to evidence SKEB, e.g. national qualifications, apprenticeships, accredited training pathways etc.).

Some organisations have in-house competence frameworks or development programmes in use. Alignment with the competence standards developed by this group has not yet been established.

2.3 Developing SKEB

2.3.1 *Developing skills and knowledge*

Formal, industry-wide training programmes specific to design and specification of passive fire protection are not currently available. There are inclusions within some wider fire engineering programmes, but these are not targeted at the individuals likely to work as technical specialists within manufacturers or contractors or in the new 'passive fire designer' role.

Initial training may be required to ensure that the individual has developed the required skills and knowledge prior to assessment to allow them to produce evidence. The form that this training takes may differ depending on the target audience and the scope of activities of the individual(s) in question. For example, full programmes of training may be required for new entrants into the role of 'Passive

Fire Designer', or more targeted training may be required to fill gaps for those upskilling from other roles.

Although important, evidence of training does not in and of itself create objective evidence of skills and knowledge. As such, evidence of training should not be mandatory within the routes to competence created.

Where third party training does take place, a mechanism to assure organisations that they are using training which links to the framework and provides value would be beneficial.

In addition to generic, baseline competence, designers and specifiers may require specific manufacturers' training. This is an important component of familiarisation with the products / components / systems involved. Although aligned, this is considered separate to the validation of initial competence.

2.3.2 *Developing experience and behaviour*

Experience and behaviour are inherently developed in the workplace. Individuals engage with a range of work as they learn to carry out activities in this area, learning how to apply their knowledge and skills and how to interact with others.

2.4 *Evidencing SKEB*

Evidence which cuts across skills, knowledge, experience and behaviour is required to determine competence. There is acknowledgement that evidence from the workplace is required to show design and specification competence in practice.

2.4.1 *Evidencing skills and knowledge*

Qualifications, or other programmes of assessment, may be useful in providing some objective evidence of an individual's initial knowledge and skills. Although proper completion of work is needed in the wider sense, qualifications may provide useful evidence against the standard at the point of first validation. Creating scenario-based assessment tools will help to show that individuals are capable of applying their skills and knowledge as well as having harnessed the underpinning concepts.

No qualifications specific to design and specification of passive fire protection currently exist. Consultation with group members suggests that a qualification in this space may provide a useful, standardised, independent measure of skills and/or knowledge to add to other evidence generated in the workplace. This may be particularly useful as individuals complete their development and transition from supervised to non-supervised work. Consideration would need to be given to the best delivery methods and assessment instruments to use.

Creating a separate knowledge assessment may allow this to be implemented more quickly, in advance of qualification accreditation, supporting employers to evidence knowledge in this area in the shorter-term.

Consideration also needs to be given to the relationship between existing non-specific qualifications (e.g. IFE level 2/3 certificates in passive fire protection). These should be examined for their relationship to the framework and their likely contribution to transition arrangements for registration.

Where individuals are upskilling from other aligned work areas (e.g. fire engineering or architecture) it may be possible to bolster existing qualifications in those areas to include more emphasis on passive fire protection. Initial discussions with University College Birmingham (UCB) suggest that additional

content could be built into their existing degree apprenticeship which may provide some evidence against the competence framework designed.

2.4.2 Evidencing experience

Evidence of applying skills and knowledge in real work environments (experience) will be required over time to determine whether individuals are actually performing in the workplace. Consideration should be given to how real work products can be reviewed and integrated into competence pathways.

2.4.3 Evidencing behaviour

There are obvious links between individual behaviour and organisational management of competence. Consideration should be given to how employer-based systems (e.g. performance management, appraisal etc.) can be used to demonstrate behaviour against the framework.

2.5 Currency of competence

There is a clear requirement in legislation and accepted best practice that evidencing of competence is not a one-off activity. Being able to evidence that competence is current and that individuals have continued to apply their knowledge and skills, keep these up to date appropriately and behave in an appropriate manner for the activities that they are carrying out is essential.

Where the scope of an individual's competence needs to change over time, mechanisms to evidence against a wider scope of standards will be required. This needs to be considered in the routes to competence created.

Currently, no formal requirements for continuing demonstration of competence are in place. Consideration should be given to requirements for ongoing training (e.g. through CPD seminars) and knowledge / skills refreshers as appropriate. Consideration of how to leverage workplace evidence as part of this picture should also be made.

2.6 Validation and revalidation of competence

There are no existing industry level measures to validate competence, either initially or as part of ongoing requirements. It is, however, recommended that a third-party check on evidence of competence is in place to provide objective oversight.

ASFP is currently implementing a register to validate evidence of competence and make its achievement visible on an ongoing basis. This register can be aligned to routes to competence determined by this group to act as a third-party check on whether the benchmarks for competence have been met.

2.7 Raising awareness

Aligned, awareness training and / or targeted marketing messages will be required for others who need to engage with PFP design specialists. This does not need to confer competence but should increase awareness of their own responsibilities to ensure that competent people are carrying out design and specification work. Appropriate vehicles should be considered for:

- Concept designers
- Fire Engineers
- Clients / end users

2.8 Communications

It was noted by the group that work on competence does not address every industry issue with regards to design and specification, particularly with regards to understanding of design responsibility.

To enable the outputs of competence work to be taken up effectively, additional communications may be required to help those working within passive fire to understand their duties and responsibilities with regards to design and specification. Linking competence work to insurance requirements (or ability to get or retain insurance) may help to embed the competence framework within wider discussions around design responsibility.

3 Functional map & framework of competencies

3.1 Development background

A functional map has been created which breaks down the work carried out across passive fire design and specification into discrete activities. These activities reflect the types of work that are undertaken and, where appropriate, include differences by product type (but not by specific manufacturer or product range).

Each activity has been assigned a level according to its complexity. These levels have been benchmarked against national qualification framework levels and other sector and professional frameworks (see Appendix 1 – Level descriptors for more details). Each activity has then been broken down into competency statements outlining the skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviour (SKEB) required to perform that activity competently.

Input was sought from industry guidance documents, statements included in descriptions of competence in similar areas, and from best practice guidance in development of competence frameworks.

Together, the functional map and SKEB statements set out the benchmark for competence. This benchmark is intended to support one or more standards for competence for the occupational areas described in section 2.1, which will define routes to competence and how individuals can demonstrate and validate competence against this framework.

3.2 The functional map and framework of competencies

The detailed functional map and SKEB statements can be found in the ‘design & specify’ domain of the passive fire protection competence framework, available on the ASFP website: <https://asfpindex.org.uk/competenceframework>.

		Existing indicators: The information below provides an indication of how the passive fire framework levels link to the levels set within existing regulated frameworks and professional framework, and that types of activities that sit at those levels. [NB: this is not a list of competence requirements or routes to competence and is provided for guidance purposes only]			
Passive fire framework level	Level descriptor	Regulated framework levels	Bloom’s cognitive domain*	UK-SPEC**	Activity types
Foundation	Operational activities undertaken, supervised or unsupervised, within existing defined procedures	EQF level 3 RQF / CQFW level 2 SCQF level 5 NQF IE level 4	Remembering / understanding / applying		Answering routine product queries
Intermediate	Supervisory and independent activities that complete tasks and address problems that, while well-defined, may be complex and non-routine	EQF level 4 RQF / CQFW level 3 SCQF level 6 NQF IE level 5	Understanding / applying / analysing	EngTech	Answering complex product queries
Experienced	Activities that broadly involved making independent decisions or taking responsibility in broadly defined, complex contexts	EQF level 5 RQF / CQFW level 4/5 FHEQ level 4/5 (HNC (L4); Foundation Degree, HND, short cycle (L5)) SCQF level 7/8 NQF IE level 6	Applying / analysing / evaluating		Design Specification Authorised signatory / relevant responsible person Development of product information

Advanced	Activities that involved critical analysis and evaluation of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought, and the theories that underpin them	EQF level 6 RQF / CQFW level 6 FHEQ level 6 (Bachelor's Degree, first cycle) SCQF level 9/10 NQF IE level 7/8	Analysing / evaluating	IEng	Technical management Basic assessment / engineering judgement Signoff of product information
Authoritative	Complex or strategic activities that inform the direction of work or the broader industry, including understanding the wider context and current developments, and producing change	EQF level 7 RQF / CQFW level 7 FHEQ level 7 (Master's Degree, second cycle) SCQF level 11 NQF IE level 9	Analysing / evaluating / creating	CEng	Intermediate & complete assessment / engineering judgement Technical product evaluation Technical product standards and norms

* Note that this constitutes broad alignment only and is used as an indicative resource for development purposes only

3.3 ** Note that this does not indicate that everything at this level contributes to UK-SPEC, or a link between its requirements and the specifications made in this framework. This is purely for indicative purposes only. Mapping to other standards and frameworks

The SKEB statements developed have been mapped against BS 8670-1⁶ and the emerging requirements for construction products competence as outlined in the WG12 whitepaper⁷ (note that this is currently in redevelopment as BS 8670-2). Details of that mapping are available from the chairs of SLG 12 upon request.

Consideration has also been given to the contents of the whitepaper by the Joint Competence Initiative for the Building Envelope Sector (JCI), published in June 2023⁸.

3.4 Ongoing monitoring and maintenance

This version of the framework was published in {July 2025} and is due for review in {July 2028}. The functional map and framework of competencies will be hosted by ASFP on behalf of SLG 12 and the ICSG.

Minor amendments to the framework, including the addition of clarification text to existing statements, can be made by the design & specification group during this period.

Resolving typographical errors and formatting changes to ensure the framework is up to date may be made by ASFP on a continuous basis.

⁶ BS 8670-1:2024. Competence frameworks for building safety – Core criteria. Code of practice. BSI. Published 31 May 2024. Available from: <https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/products/competence-frameworks-for-building-safety-core-criteria-code-of-practice>

⁷ Built Environment – Proposed construction product competence standard – white paper. CPA. Published September 2022. Available from: <https://www.constructionproducts.org.uk/publications/technical-and-regulatory/built-environment-proposed-construction-product-competence-standard-white-paper/>

⁸ Achieving Competence in the Building Envelope Sector. JCI. Published June 2023. Available from: <https://c-a-b.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/White-Paper-Achieving-Competence-in-the-Building-Envelope-Sector-Publication-Version-09.05.23.pdf>

Appendix 1 - Level descriptors

The activities detailed within the functional map described in section **Error! Reference source not found. (Error! Reference source not found.)** have been split into five levels based on the complexity of the activities. These levels are linked to levels associated with UK and European regulated qualifications frameworks and have also been benchmarked against key professional statuses. It should be noted that these descriptors are intended to provide information on the framework level and examples of alignment to other existing frameworks training, qualifications, or related products only. This does not infer that these products will necessarily appear in, or form the basis of, routes to competence.

		Existing indicators: The information below provides an indication of how the passive fire framework levels link to the levels set within existing regulated frameworks and professional framework, and that types of activities that sit at those levels. [NB: this is not a list of competence requirements or routes to competence and is provided for guidance purposes only]			
Passive fire framework level	Level descriptor	Regulated framework levels	Bloom's cognitive domain*	UK-SPEC**	Activity types
Foundation	Operational activities undertaken, supervised or unsupervised, within existing defined procedures	EQF level 3 RQF / CQFW level 2 SCQF level 5 NQF IE level 4	Remembering / understanding / applying		Answering routine product queries
Intermediate	Supervisory and independent activities that complete tasks and address problems that, while well-defined, may be complex and non-routine	EQF level 4 RQF / CQFW level 3 SCQF level 6 NQF IE level 5	Understanding / applying / analysing	EngTech	Answering complex product queries
Experienced	Activities that broadly involved making independent decisions or taking responsibility in broadly defined, complex contexts	EQF level 5 RQF / CQFW level 4/5 FHEQ level 4/5 (HNC (L4); Foundation Degree, HND, short cycle (L5)) SCQF level 7/8 NQF IE level 6	Applying / analysing / evaluating		Design Specification Authorised signatory / relevant responsible person Development of product information
Advanced	Activities that involved critical analysis and evaluation of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought, and the theories that underpin them	EQF level 6 RQF / CQFW level 6 FHEQ level 6 (Bachelor's Degree, first cycle) SCQF level 9/10 NQF IE level 7/8	Analysing / evaluating	IEng	Technical management Basic assessment / engineering judgement Signoff of product information
Authoritative	Complex or strategic activities that inform the direction of work or the broader industry, including understanding the wider context and current developments, and producing change	EQF level 7 RQF / CQFW level 7 FHEQ level 7 (Master's Degree, second cycle) SCQF level 11 NQF IE level 9	Analysing / evaluating / creating	CEng	Intermediate & complete assessment / engineering judgement Technical product evaluation Technical product standards and norms

* Note that this constitutes broad alignment only and is used as an indicative resource for development purposes only

** Note that this does not indicate that everything at this level contributes to UK-SPEC, or a link between its requirements and the specifications made in this framework. This is purely for indicative purposes only.

Appendix 2 - Terms & definitions

Behaviour

Observable traits or ways of working that should be displayed. Observable things that an individual does or does not do

Competence / individual competence

Application of skill, knowledge, experience, and behaviour consistently by an individual to achieve a specific outcome

Standard for competence

Procedures & requirements for developing, measuring, validating, and proving competence against agreed skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours required for an individual undertaking a role, function, activity, or task in order to perform their work to predetermined standards and expectations and maintain or improve their performance over time. This is sometimes referred to as a competence framework or competence standard

Experience

Participation in relevant activities or observation of facts and events leading to acquisition, improvement or demonstration of skills and knowledge

Framework of competencies

Agreed statements of skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviour against specific activities identified in the functional map

Functional map

A map of activities included in the sub-sector, split into pre-determined levels of complexity

Individual

A single human being

Job role

The specific combination of activities performed in a specific role, as agreed between an employee and an employer. This

may change over time, or from employer to employer, or between employees of the same employer

Knowledge

Assimilation of facts, theories, and practices in relation to a given role, function, activity, or task

Occupation

The area of work undertaken by a category of employees, each of which may have a related but different job role. This is standard across the entire industry

Organisational capability

The combination of people, practices and other resources brought together by a business to allow it to function effectively and deliver value to customers and stakeholders

Qualification

A regulated programme of assessment, sometimes with aligned training, which results in the issue of a nationally recognised award being made upon completion

Revalidation

The formal process of reassessing an individual's competence against a sector-specific framework on a periodic basis to check that competence has been maintained

Sector-specific competence framework

A competence framework relevant to a specific role, function, activity, task, trade, or discipline

Skill

The ability to perform an activity or task consistently with a specific intended outcome

Validation

The formal process of assessing an individual's competence against a sector-specific framework