



COMPETENCE IN PASSIVE FIRE PROTECTION SALES & DISTRIBUTION 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 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 sales and distribution of passive fire protection has been included under the SLG 12 structure.

1.4 The passive fire protection sales & distribution competence group

The passive fire protection sales & distribution competence group (the sales & distribution 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 sales & distribution 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:

CCF
Encon
Incendin
Etex Building Performance
Saint-Gobain
Siderise
Tenmat

The group would also like to thank Milford & Marah Ltd. for facilitating this work.

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 sales & distribution 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

Competent sales & distribution of passive fire products is critical to ensure that building work can be carried out safely and that the resulting buildings are safe for their users and occupants. This includes sales & distribution of products for:

- 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

Employees in a range of organisations may carry out activities related to making passive fire protection products available in the market, including manufacturers, retailers and distributors. Routes to competence should therefore be considered for:

- Specialist distributors – counter staff, more specialist sales staff, technical specialists offering advice driven sales
- Merchants (e.g. builders' merchants) – counter staff, telesales staff
- Retailers (e.g. B&Q, Screwfix) – counter staff, online sales staff
- Manufacturers – technical sales agents (potential overlap with design and specification)

2.2 Aligned areas / occupations

It should be noted that some sales staff (e.g. manufacturers' technical sales agents) may also carry out activities associated with design and specification as a part of their sales role. Employers will need to determine where sales activity and design activities overlap within their organisations and ensure that individuals have demonstrated the correct competence for the whole scope of their role. Activities associated with design and specification are set out within the 'design & specify' domain of the passive fire competence framework. A transition route to allow those with design and specification competence to demonstrate sales and distribution competence easily may be required.

2.3 Existing industry adopted routes to competence

No formal, industry adopted pathways to competence in passive fire sales & distribution currently exist (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.

In some cases, trade body membership requirements are linked to achievement of specific training and / or qualifications. For example, ASFP requires achievement of its introductory course for passive fire protection, or the relevant passive fire protection knowledge-based awards (at level 2) or certificates (at level 2 or 3) dependent on job role and level. These are currently used as a proxy for

competence. It should be noted that the ASFP intends to update these requirements to reflect the competence arrangements identified through competence development groups as these emerge.

Fire-related professional bodies (e.g. IFE) may register those in more senior / technical roles in this area, and as part of that mandate CPD to evidence ongoing learning. This is not specific to sales & distribution pathway.

2.4 Developing SKEB

2.4.1 *Developing skills and knowledge*

Much training in this area is carried out in-house – employers report that this works well where they have it in place. There does not appear to be any industry wide, non-manufacturer led, off the shelf training that supports competence in this area. Additional external training would be beneficial for the wider sector, to add to in house training or to ensure training provision for organisations who are unable to put their own training in place.

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. Making training optional within routes to competence would allow employers to take the best approach for them to develop their staff.

Any new training developed should provide a clear focus on limits of responsibility. This is essential for organisations to discharge their responsibilities with regards to accuracy of information and supplying appropriate products.

Consideration of how existing training supports development towards the competence standard should also be made, for example the ASFP Introduction to Passive Fire Protection. This may provide a basis for the development of a tailored introductory course specific to design and specification for those carrying out the most basic level of activity. ASFP also has mechanisms already in place to measure the quality and relevance of third-party training on behalf of industry.

2.4.2 *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.

2.5 Evidencing SKEB

Evidence which cuts across skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviour is required to determine competence. Evidencing skills and knowledge

2.5.1 *Evidencing skills and knowledge*

No qualifications specific to sales & distribution of passive fire protection currently exist. Formal qualifications may create an unnecessary burden on organisations and individuals (in terms of time, logistics and cost) and, as such, their use would need to be considered carefully.

A softer approach to introducing assessment of skills and knowledge in this space may be required, for example through online, scenario-based testing. This would provide evidence of baseline knowledge, limits of responsibility and cognitive skills in a way that is relevant to them.

Modular assessment would allow for individuals to evidence skills and knowledge specific to their scope of work, alongside basic knowledge about product types.

More than one assessment package is likely to be required to meet the needs of employees within differing organisations. For example, there may be differences in requirements for distributor and retailer staff. Initial developments should focus on the lowest level activities to make the most impact. Relevant activities will need to be selected for each assessment pathway, and questions developed against the relevant standards.

As the sales & distribution space is one where industry requirements have not previously been in place, new requirements identified may need to be introduced slowly and strengthened over time to generate engagement.

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. Take up of these qualifications and associated training has, largely, been driven by ASFP membership requirements.

2.5.2 Evidencing experience

Evidence of applying skills and knowledge in real work environments (experience) will be required over time to determine how individuals are performing on a day-to-day basis. Consideration should be given to how evidence can be gained through existing organisational systems.

2.5.3 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.

2.6 Currency of competence

There is a clear requirement in legislation and 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. Currently, there are no formal requirements in place for this, but consideration of how to leverage workplace evidence as part of this picture should also be made.

It is also felt that individuals would benefit from re-evidencing their knowledge and skills through a periodic refresher assessment. This would ensure that knowledge continues to stay up to date and that understanding of limits of responsibility stays fresh in individuals' minds.

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.

2.7 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.

2.8 Manufacturers' training

In addition to generic, baseline competence, those working in sales & distribution 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.

2.9 Communication & consultation

It was noted by the group that work on competence does not address every industry issue with regards to sales & distribution, particularly with regards to culture around providing appropriate and accurate information. Organisational behaviour is a key component in changing ways of working. Organisational capability (including organisational culture and behaviour) is being addressed by wider industry groups. As the competence system in general matures there will need to be more links between organisational behaviour and individual competence.

Buy-in from a wider range of organisations may be required in order to implement routes to competence in this space. Additional guidance may need to be given to industry on the importance of competence to achieve that buy-in. Time may also be taken to achieve critical mass.

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 sales & distribution 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

3.3 The detailed functional map and SKEB statements can be found in the ‘sell & distribute’ domain of the passive fire protection competence framework, available on the ASFP website: <https://asfpindex.org.uk/competenceframework>. Error! Reference source not found. Mapping to other standards and frameworks

The SKEB statements developed have been mapped against BS 8670-1⁴, the emerging requirements for construction products competence as outlined in the WG12 whitepaper⁵ (note that this is currently in redevelopment as BS 8670-2), and the requirements of the Code for Construction Product Information (CCPI)⁶. 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 2023⁷.

3.4 Ongoing monitoring and maintenance

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

⁴ 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>

⁵ 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/>

⁶ Code for Construction Product Information v1.0. CCPI. Published September 2021. Available from: <https://www.cpicode.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Code-for-Construction-Product-Information-v1-0.pdf>

⁷ 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>

Minor amendments to the framework, including the addition of clarification text to existing statements, can be made by the sales & distribution 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.

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