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SPEC FINISH

FIS

The magazine of FIS
representing the finishes
and interiors sector

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MEET THE GRADUATE WHO FOUND HIS FUTURE IN FIT-OUT

Sustainability:

What type of
"Sustainability"
frameworks exist
and why?

People:

A lifelong passion for
skills and training

Industry interview:

A curve above the rest



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TRUST

SIGNING OFF: THE DAWN OF ANOTHER NEW ERA

After eight years at FIS, I leave optimistic about the sector and confident in its future.



IAIN MCILWEE

Chief Executive, Finishes and Interiors Sector

As my time at FIS draws to a close, I went back to the first article I wrote for SpecFinish in 2018, headlined “The dawn of a new era.”

The Grenfell tragedy had taken place little more than a year earlier, and Dame Judith Hackitt’s review had laid bare deep flaws in how we designed, procured and constructed buildings. Trust was low.

The Building Safety Regulator did not exist, and the Building Safety Act (BSA) was not even a working title.

In the article, I made three predictions. The first was that competency would become the new watchword. Fair to say, I was spot on. Now enshrined in regulation, the conversation has travelled far beyond cards and courses to encompass behaviours, capability, leadership and culture.

That conviction has shaped much of what FIS has done since: the competence frameworks for our trade workers, supervisors and designers; our work with the Industry Competence Steering Group to help define and explain organisational capability; and the FIS Academy, which is making effective, cost-effective training available to all members.

The second was that risk could no longer be thrown around the supply chain like a hot potato.

Here, I was only half right. Accountability under the BSA is far clearer, but responsibility has moved faster than the contracts around it. What I underestimated was how stubborn commercial behaviours would be. While risk

management has matured as a conversation, risk is still pushed down the supply chain, where margins are fragile and specialists carry responsibility without reward – and, at times, without even the information and support needed to manage it.

Fighting that has been a constant: campaigning against the amendment of contracts, challenging the abuse of cash retentions, backing conflict avoidance ahead of dispute, and encouraging members, through our “Responsible No” campaign, to walk away from terms that cannot be delivered safely or profitably.

Despite frustration at the speed of change, momentum behind the Commercial Payments Bill gives me hope here.

The final prediction centred on a tidal wave of digital solutions revolutionising the way we work. Reports at the time put construction on a par with carrot farmers when it came to digital adoption. We have come a long way.

The Golden Thread and the rapid rise of AI have accelerated adoption, but I still feel we are on the cusp of that revolution. The challenge now is how we deal with the deluge of data and, with it, the myriad of solutions. A focus on consolidation and compatibility will help us move towards genuinely interoperable systems. Right now, I fear we are still very much embroiled in the Betamax or VHS conversation.

What I did not predict, and what fuels my optimism that transformation is real, was how quickly sustainability would move. Eight years ago, it was largely a post-project process, counting carbon after the event to pretend that someone cared.

Today, project verification schemes such as SKArating are growing fast, and Environmental Product Declarations are becoming mainstream expectations, driven by clients and investors as much as by regulation.

The FIS sustainability work has been a particular source of pride for me: firmly on the front foot, with a genuinely collaborative group hell-bent on changing the world.

Through all of it, the core FIS strategy, centred on the right Product, a robust Process and competent People, has held firm. My biggest lesson is that durable change will not be achieved by regulation alone, or by anyone acting alone – hence a fourth P: Partnership is needed.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the work we are doing on design, looking at better definitions and clearer accountability. I am excited to see the impact of the groundwork we are laying; I believe it will be transformative.

All that FIS has achieved, including membership growth, broader services, stronger research and a louder policy voice, is down to the team here and to the members who have given their time freely. I inherited a cracking team from David Frise, and I hope I am passing on a stronger organisation than the one I joined.

I remain optimistic about the sector. Not because every challenge has been solved, but because I have seen what this sector can do when it commits to doing better. We are no longer simply reacting to change. Increasingly, we are helping to shape it.

Thank you, genuinely, for eight of the best years of my working life – it has been a privilege to serve you.



Welcome

SPEC FINISH

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Cover image:

(L-R) Gareth Davies and Mario Senno of Proline Internals

SpecFinish magazine wrapper

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WELCOME

TO THE OCTOBER ISSUE OF SPECFINISH

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge both **Iain McIlwee** and **Ian Strangward**, who are stepping down from their respective roles as Chief Executive and President of FIS.

I was genuinely shocked to hear the news about Iain and, like many across the sector, will be very sorry to see him step down. I would personally like to express my appreciation for his service and, in particular, for the support he has shown me over the past five years as we, together with the team at FIS, have continued to bring you interesting, educational and thought-provoking content through SpecFinish.

Both Iain and Ian have made a significant contribution in these roles to FIS and to our wider industry. Their commitment, leadership and support have been greatly valued, and I wish them both every success for the future.

In this issue, on page 14, we hear from the inspirational and passionate industry trainer and assessor, **Colin McCaughey**, Tutor/Assessor at Errigal Academy, who shares his journey spanning more than four decades of developing his own skills, supporting others and inspiring the next generation of tradespeople.

We hear how securing a Debt Relief Order (DRO) gave a former self-employed Site Manager hope and a fresh start. You can read Tim's story on page 16.

And on page 20, we take a look at new CIOB research that has exposed major gaps in awareness and management of the dangers of silica dust across the construction sector. The Residents, Clients and Construction Excellence Toolkit (ReACT) aims to help address this, but industry voices are needed to shape the next steps.

Please let us know about your projects and company news as we do like to feature members as much as we can. No project too small... david.crowson@warnersgroup.co.uk

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Community News

“Britain will value the hard hat as much as the graduation cap”

The Prime Minister is due to unveil a fundamental change to the education system, with the launch of new prestigious technical educational routes. The new pathways will provide 14-year-olds with valuable early access to technical skills, work experience and connections with local employers.

The students will have the chance to combine core academic subjects – including English, maths and science – with a high-quality technical education that’s linked to the jobs available in their area. They will be able to spend time with employers and gain real-world experience.

The new technical routes will mean young people can develop the technical knowledge and skills needed to progress in areas like engineering, healthcare and digital technology, skilling them up with the specific knowledge and capabilities that local employers need.

To read the story and views of individuals such as PM **Andy Burnham**, Education Secretary **Lucy Powell**, **Alan Milburn**, Mayor of London, **Sadiq Khan**, **Tracy Brabin**, Mayor of West Yorkshire and many more visit: <https://specfinish.co.uk/prime-minister-britain-will-value-the-hard-hat-as-much-as-the-graduation-cap/>



New employment rights: What you need to know

The Employment Rights Act represents the ‘biggest upgrade to rights at work for a generation’ and further measures will come into force next month. From 1 October, the time limit for an employee to make a claim to an Employment Tribunal¹ will be increased from three to six months, with the following measures to be introduced from 30 October:

- Employers will be required to prevent harassment of their employees by third parties and to take ‘all reasonable steps’ to prevent sexual harassment², replacing the current legal obligation to take ‘reasonable steps’. Ministers will also be given the power to bring into effect at a later date evidence-based steps that employers must take to prevent sexual harassment.
- Employers will have to provide a written statement to workers informing them of their right to join a trade union. This statement must be provided at the start of a worker’s employment and at other prescribed times, and the Government is expected to publish further guidance on what it must include this month.

The Government has created a dedicated webpage³ with guidance and practical tools to support employers in meeting their obligations under the Act. This is being regularly updated as more measures are introduced throughout the rest of 2026 and 2027.

Source

1. <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/employment-changes/employers/employment-tribunal-time-limits/?lang=en-gb>
2. <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/employment-changes/employers/workplace-sexual-harassment-and-third-party-harassment/>
3. <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/employment-changes/employers/?lang=en-gb>

BCIA launches new BEMS Delivery Framework to tackle inconsistency in BEMS specifications

The Building Controls Industry Association (BCIA) has launched a new Building Energy Management Systems (BEMS) Delivery Framework designed to tackle inconsistent specification and create a clearer, more consistent approach to the delivery of BEMS.

It establishes a common language for defining the level of building controls functionality required by a project.

It addresses a longstanding industry challenge: specifications can leave BEMS requirements open to interpretation, resulting in contractors pricing different levels of functionality, difficulties comparing tenders on a like-for-like basis and uncertainty over whether the completed system will meet the client’s operational expectations.

Rather than prescribing particular products, manufacturers or technologies, the framework introduces six clearly defined Delivery Levels, from L0 to L5. These range from basic controls capability through to highly integrated intelligent building functionality, allowing project teams to define the level most appropriate to a building’s operational requirements.

By establishing the required capability before products and technologies are selected, the framework gives clients, consultants, electrical contractors, controls specialists, system integrators and manufacturers a shared understanding of what the completed system is expected to achieve.

The framework is deliberately manufacturer agnostic. Instead of assuming that selecting a particular technology will deliver a

particular level of performance, it encourages project teams to establish the required capability first and then determine the most appropriate technical solution.

This clearer definition can support better decision-making throughout the project lifecycle, helping to reduce ambiguity within specifications, improve the consistency and quality of tender submissions and enable fairer comparison between contractor proposals.

It can also improve collaboration between consultants, controls specialists and electrical contractors, support more effective commissioning and system integration, align delivered functionality with client expectations and provide a stronger foundation for ongoing operation, maintenance and future upgrades.

The BCIA BEMS Delivery Framework can be downloaded at: <https://www.bcia.co.uk/frameworkdocument>



FINDING YOUR PATH INTO CONSTRUCTION

A journey from architecture to discovering a passion for construction, showing how the right opportunity can open the door to a rewarding career.



Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training

There are many different pathways into the construction and fit-out industry, yet the range of opportunities available is not always clear to young people considering their next steps. While university can provide a route into certain professional roles, it is just one of many ways to build a career in the sector. Apprenticeships, vocational qualifications, college courses, site-based experience and direct entry into skilled roles can all provide valuable routes into the industry.

From specialist trades and skilled operatives to site management, surveying, design, quality and commercial roles, construction and fit-out offer careers that suit a wide variety of skills, interests and backgrounds. Importantly, these pathways are not always separate or fixed. Experience gained in one area can open doors to progression into other roles, whether through further training, qualifications or on-the-job development.

For those coming from architecture and other built environment disciplines, the industry can provide an opportunity to apply existing knowledge in a more hands-on environment and develop a deeper understanding of how buildings are actually delivered. Equally, someone entering through an apprenticeship, trade or site-based role can progress into supervision, management or other professional careers, demonstrating that there is no single route into the industry.

Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training, spoke to **Mario Senno**, Quality Assurance Manager at Proline Internals about

his journey, from studying architecture to discovering a passion for construction and finding his place within the fit-out sector. His journey demonstrates that careers do not always follow a straight line and that there are many different ways to enter, develop and progress within construction.



Mario Senno, Quality Assurance Manager at Proline Internals

Mario explained that by being open to different opportunities and pathways, he believes young people can discover careers they may not have initially considered.

He said: "After spending three years in Newcastle, I found myself feeling disorientated. The uncertainty was consuming me, and I didn't feel that I was in the right place. I loved my course; through architecture, I explored my creativity, discipline and curiosity. I met incredible people throughout my journey, from tutors to colleagues and others. Even though everything seemed perfect while I was studying, the reality after graduation was different, and there was always a voice in my head pushing me in another direction.

"During the summer, when I returned to Ecuador, I found myself increasingly drawn to being on site. I worked as an intern at a construction and architecture firm in Quito called Perpetuo Studio. There, I had the chance to gain a better understanding of what life as an architect was like. I would sit at my desk for long hours, reviewing drawings and plans. I was later encouraged to spend some time on site and see how the design was brought to life through construction.

"I had always been curious about what happens on site and wanted to see how a project develops over time. I chucked my boots on and got there early, and from that moment, I spent more time on site than in the office.

"I started building relationships with the operatives, managers and labourers. It was just fascinating to see how so many people, specialised in different areas, work together as a team to build something. Soon, I became addicted to the satisfaction of feeling that you have solved something.

"From that moment, I always knew that, after finishing my studies in the UK, I wanted to make a slight shift in my career towards construction."

"As the perfectionist that I am, I outlined my life for the next couple of years. I wanted to gain some architectural experience in a studio for a couple of years, perhaps get a master's degree in something related to construction, and then make the jump into the industry," commented Mario.

He went on to explain that, months after his graduation, his inbox was flooded with job rejections, and he started to become quite desperate. He said: "My peers and I were all having a difficult time finding architectural assistant roles. My visa was set to expire, and I could already see myself returning to Ecuador. The plan I had in mind wasn't working out, but I didn't give up. I extended my visa, believing that I would soon find employment.

"I thought to myself that I would try everything within my reach to get what I was looking for. I signed up for events and career fairs and decided to take every small opportunity I had. I even printed some business cards with my contact details to take with me to these events."

Exploring new pathways at a Careers Festival

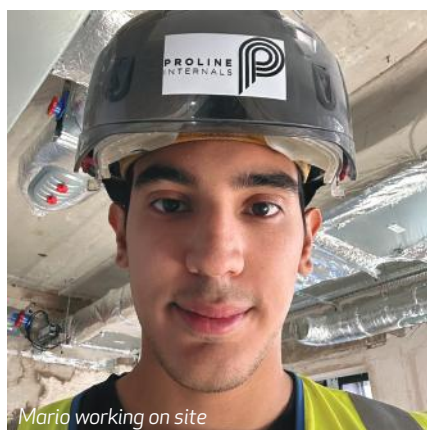
In October 2025, Mario attended the Building Our Skills – Making Fenestration, Glass and Glazing a Career of Choice Careers Festival¹ at Birmingham City Football Ground, where he and the other attendees had the opportunity to learn more about careers and pathways within the construction industry. →



(L-R) Gareth and Mario

Talking about his experience, Mario said: "As I was walking around, I saw the FIS stand. I knew almost nothing about the fit-out industry, but it caught my attention. I walked over and started speaking with a man about my background, the industry and the challenges that it is currently facing."

"I told him that I had always seen myself working in construction and that, at some point in my life, I wanted to make the move into it. We exchanged business cards, and I followed up on our conversation by email. A few weeks and several emails back and forth later, **Gareth Davies** at Proline Internals offered me a role as a Quality Assurance Manager.



Mario working on site

"Nine months later, I have been involved in two projects and have been exposed to many different areas of the industry. Mainly, I have been focusing on delivering high-quality projects and installations compliant with manufacturers' details, but I have also gained valuable experience in site management, health and safety, and quantity surveying."

Developing skills on site

Mario explained that on the quality side, he had learnt that every manufacturer and system is different, so it is important to fully understand the specifications, project packs and details. "I was also been involved in introducing a new quality system for the company. This new software was introduced to allow our operatives to access drawings and for me to complete quality checklists, raise snags and identify blockers."

"This experience has also taught me that quality assurance is not just about checking work at the end of a project. Quality is actually about preventing problems rather than finding them. It is important to check work as it progresses, from the start, before any work is carried out and through to completion. Issues need to be identified before they become defects, snags need to be raised, inspections need to be consistent, and documentation should always be provided. Quality is also not simply about ticking a box; it is about understanding why something needs to be done in a certain way," he said.

Being regularly present on site has helped me develop my site management skills, he told Beena. He said: "I am constantly communicating with trades and the main contractor, as well as planning work for our operatives. Communication and confidence are two other key areas that I have had to develop. Communicating with trades, supervisors, operatives, commercial teams, manufacturers and clients differs from one another. It is very different from what I was used to in a university studio environment. Now, communication needs to be clear and direct, while also understanding who you are speaking to."

Building confidence and experience

Talking about the biggest change he had experienced, Mario explained that it was confidence. He said: "Being a graduate with limited experience and surrounded by people who have been in the industry for years sometimes made me feel that I didn't know enough to speak up. Not being afraid to ask questions, along with my motivation to keep learning, has helped me become more confident and more aware of what is happening on site every day."

"One of the biggest differences I have found between university and working on live projects is understanding that a drawing is only the beginning. There can sometimes be a gap between design intent and buildability, and on site, you have to understand how that design can actually be delivered, taking into consideration materials, labour, programme, other trades and the practicalities of construction. I have learned how managers deal with issues, how operatives approach their work, and how important it is to be reactive to problems. These are all things that you simply don't learn at university."

Talking about Mario, Gareth said: "Meeting Mario at the Building Our Skills careers event has been a real success story for us. What initially stood out was his attitude, enthusiasm and willingness to learn, and since joining Proline he has continued to impress us with exactly those qualities."

"We deliberately wanted to try a different approach to developing our future

management team. Rather than simply recruiting another experienced construction manager, we saw an opportunity to take someone with Mario's architectural background and develop him from the ground up, initially through quality assurance and technical understanding, with a longer-term pathway towards project management."

"The FIS has been a big part of that journey. Being able to lean on their technical resources, industry knowledge and development network gives a contractor like Proline a much stronger platform from which to develop young people properly."

"Mario still has a lot to learn, which is exactly what we would expect at this stage, but his progress and attitude have been excellent. We're excited to see where his career takes him and hopefully his journey demonstrates what can come from bringing talented graduates into the finishes and interiors sector through a different route."

Opening doors to construction

Reflecting on the support Mario has received he said: "Alongside the support from my colleagues, FIS has played an important role in developing my skills. Coming straight from university into a site-based role, there were naturally some technical gaps in my knowledge, and the training provided by FIS has really helped me build my confidence and understanding. Added to that, you find people within FIS who are always supportive, approachable and genuinely interested in your career and the industry."

"I'm not the only graduate who has struggled. Many of my university friends are still trying to find their place. Some of them find it difficult just to get into the market, while others have jobs but aren't happy with the direction their careers have taken."

"That's why organisations like FIS are so important. They don't just provide training; they create opportunities and introduce young people to careers they may never have considered. I am certain that there are many talented graduates who would enjoy a career in construction if they simply knew more about the opportunities available."

Discussing what he would tell others who want to join the industry, Mario said: "I would encourage people to explore these opportunities, give them their best and never give up on what you want. I am pretty sure that if you take every opportunity you have, you will eventually meet someone like Gareth, who will have a reason to believe in you."

"I'm genuinely proud to be part of this industry. Every day, we are part of the creation of spaces where people live, work, learn or receive healthcare. That's something we should all be proud of. Aside from the industry itself, I could not have landed in a

better place. At Proline, I am surrounded by passionate and committed people who support me and give me opportunities to grow, both personally and professionally."

Mario concluded by saying: "Architecture gave me the foundation, but working on site made me realise where I wanted to take that knowledge. For me, this is only the beginning of my journey, and I'm excited to see where it leads.

"Employers have a vital role to play in inspiring and developing the next generation of construction and fit-out professionals.

"By offering work placements, site visits, work experience and opportunities to learn from experienced teams, businesses can give young people and career changers a valuable insight into the industry and help them take their first steps towards a rewarding career."

Fit-Out Futures Network

As the fit-out and construction sector continues to evolve, the way we approach contracting, technology and our people must evolve with it.

Mario will be supporting the next FIS Conference later this month to discuss the next generation of contracting. Along with other members of the Fit-Out Futures network, they will explore the changing workforce, the imperative to embrace Gen Z, how technology can improve the way we work, and what an inclusive workforce really means for our sector.

The Fit-Out Futures network has been developed to connect, support and inspire the next generation of fit out and interiors professionals, providing opportunities to:

- Build confidence and develop professional skills
- Expand your network by connecting with peers and industry professionals
- Learn from experienced professionals through fireside chats and other events
- Explore career opportunities and discover the different routes into the industry

To find out more about the FIS Conference and register, visit: <https://www.thefis.org/project/fis-conference-2026/>

Get involved

Whether you're starting out in the industry, considering a career change or an employer looking to support the next generation, Fit-Out Futures is a great way to get involved and help shape the future of our industry.

If you can offer workplacements², work experience, site visits or other opportunities to gain an insight into the fit out and interiors sector, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch to find out how you can support Fit-Out Futures and help inspire the next generation by visiting: www.thefis.org/membership-hub/working-groups/fit-out-futures/

Building Our Skills

Building Our Skills are planning careers festivals for March 2027, to find out more visit: <https://buildingourskills.co.uk/>

Source

1. <https://buildingourskills.co.uk/>

2. www.thefis.org/2026/06/16/250860/

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WHAT TYPE OF “SUSTAINABILITY” FRAMEWORKS EXIST AND WHY?

Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion, spoke to **Nitesh Magdani**, Founder of Net Positive Solutions, and they take a look at social value and sustainability frameworks and how they can help businesses manage risk, meet expectations and turn good intentions into meaningful action.

Nitesh started by discussing the evolution of key sustainability frameworks, standards and reporting approaches. She explained that The Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, is often quoted for its definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

A few years later, **John Elkington** developed the concept of the “Triple Bottom Line”: People, Planet and Profit. The idea behind this was to encourage businesses to look beyond financial performance alone and to consider social and environmental impact as well.

In 2015, the UN launched the Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) following a United Nations summit. The UN SDG are intended as a universal and globally recognised framework which everyone is able to understand and implement. They frame sustainable development through 17 goals and recognise that sustainable development is not only about tackling climate change and preserving our oceans and forests, but also about ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequalities while also considering economic growth.

The 17 goals are often referred to in sustainability strategies.

The concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) have evolved and build upon those definitions. These terms that are often used interchangeably, particularly in smaller businesses, but they do slightly different roles.

CSR is the broadest and perhaps most familiar term. It is about how a business chooses to act responsibly towards its people, communities, customers and the environment, alongside making a profit.

ESG developed more recently as a way for investors, lenders and larger organisations to understand and compare the non-financial risks, opportunities and impacts of a business. ESG remains one of the most prominent sustainability frameworks used and recognised today.

Another popular framework is B Corp, or Certified B Corporation, which is a very comprehensive certification for companies who want to meet high standards of social and environmental performance, including high levels of disclosure and accountability. We liken a B Corp assessment, somewhat crudely, in terms of process, to a BREEAM, LEED, or WELL Building assessment, at a company level rather than for single building projects.

In addition, many larger European companies face additional pressure for non-financial reporting, disclosures and transparency.

Why does this matter to businesses?

Nitesh said: “Firstly, it can make commercial sense. Good sustainability frameworks embedded into businesses well, can help manage risk, strengthen relationships with clients and communities, attract and retain people, improve efficiency and open up new work. Increasingly, it is also expected by customers, funders, employees and supply-chain partners.

“There are also external drivers – social value considerations are now mandated in many government procurement tenders (covered by PPN 002), whilst the UK government’s commitment to net zero by 2050 has also influenced public and private sector commitments (and expectations) around carbon reduction commitments, science-based targets (and similarly covered by PPN 006 in government procurement tenders).



Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion



Nitesh Magdani, Founder of Net Positive Solutions

“There is no “one size fits all” with non-financial “ESG” or other sustainability frameworks, but each have their pros and cons, usually depending on the type of company, their level of maturity, and their level of ambition.”

How do I get started?

It doesn’t need to be complicated. It is about understanding the initiative you have already implemented, identifying the areas where you can make a difference, and turning good intentions into commitments that can be delivered and measured, stated Nitesh.

He said: “Net Positive Solutions have structured an approach to help companies understand their impacts, undertake stakeholder engagement, and to look at internal and external factors which in turn helps the company to decide on the most relevant sustainability framework or approach for them.

"Ultimately our aim is to help organisations better understand how they can drive sustainable growth, improving profitability and enhance stakeholder value. We often find that our clients' key stakeholders are very complimentary that our clients have decided to progress their sustainability journey.

"It's ok to start with small steps – we tend to find companies have done more than they think...in some cases it's about joining the dots, and a very large part due to communicating better. Sustainability frameworks are useful tools to sit alongside company strategic roadmaps and business plans. Very broadly speaking, the sustainability frameworks mentioned above have the key differences, but also benefits which are outlined in the table (Fig 1.).

Where does social value come into the picture?

Flavie explained that social value is not a new concept. It is often embedded in a company's CSR, sustainability plan or ESG strategy. She said: "From our experience, whilst social value as a term is less understood than Environmental terminology, ironically it is usually the area we find most companies have made more progress on, as we can relate more to people and society rather than 'green' topics.

"The Social Value Act was passed in 2012 and in 2020, the UK Government published their social value model – referred to as Procurement Policy Note PPN 06/20.

"There is no legal definition of social value,

but it can broadly be defined as the impact of our activities on people's lives. Organisations such as the UKGBC or the Social Value UK have created their definitions relevant to the sector in which they operate. UKGBC's definition states that "social value is created when buildings, places and infrastructure support environmental, economic and social wellbeing, and in doing so improve the quality of life of people.

"When tendering for work with organisations which have their own framework or local authorities, it is important to understand what their values are in order to respond to their tender or planning requirements. Examples of social value include, training and upskilling employees, volunteering, employing apprentices, paying the living wage and managing nuisance and disturbances from site, such as noise, dust or lorry movement.

"The benefits of social value are broad and beyond enhanced reputation and help win/retain contracts, a good strategy can support the employment and engagement of future generations in the construction sector and increase staff retention. While working on large developments, the engagement with local communities can also avoid delays due to legal challenges related to disturbance to the neighbourhood. In general, social value is about improving people's wellbeing – not just staff, but also local communities or supply chain. Consideration of social value for the supply chain, in the UK or abroad, is referred to as responsible sourcing. It is important not to promote poor work practices from the UK to

other countries where we cannot see them – such as child labour or unsafe, unethical work practices.

"It is possible to quantify the benefits of social value in monetary terms, for example using a social value return on investment (SROI) approach."

Flavie went onto explain that The Supply Chain Sustainability School provides Social Value Training¹ and on 22 September, the School ran a webinar "Delivering social value in an interesting way" in support with FIS. That webinar brought together **Sam Walker**, a sustainability consultant from Action Sustainability and **Beth Jepson**, sustainability manager for Parkeray. Parkeray shared their vision of social value through their "Positive Impact Program" and how they apply these principles to projects. To listen to the webinar in full visit:

<https://www.supplychainschool.co.uk/>

Final thoughts

Flavie said: "Sustainability frameworks can seem complicated, but the reality is that they don't need to be. One of the key learnings is to start with simple frameworks and with targets which are easy to implement. To get the most impact, align sustainability objectives as close to the organisation's business objectives."

www.netpositivesolutions.co.uk

Source

1. www.supplychainschool.co.uk/topics/sustainability/social-value/

Fig. 1

Key sustainability framework	Key benefits
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Globally recognised goals and shared language, broad enough for most organisations and easy for stakeholders to relate to. https://sdgs.un.org/goals
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	High-level and flexible, useful for showcasing a company's social and environmental responsibility through community engagement, people initiatives, charitable activity, local employment, supply-chain opportunities and environmental action. www.supplychainschool.co.uk/log-in
Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)	Useful for identifying, managing and communicating environmental, social and governance risks, opportunities and impacts. Often used by investors, lenders, clients and larger organisations as a way to compare non-financial performance and demonstrate transparency and maturity. www.supplychainschool.co.uk/log-in
Certified B Corporation (B Corp)	A comprehensive, externally assessed certification for companies seeking to demonstrate high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency at company level. https://bcorporation.uk/b-corp-certification/

ADDRESSING A BROKEN DESIGN PROCESS

James Parlour, Technical Director at FIS, explores the importance of the drylining package, including how design is novated and what is needed to effect change.



James Parlour, Technical Director at FIS

Design will often be developed through an iterative process, with a number of specialists contracted via separate Contractor Design Portions (CDPs) or specific design instructions. In these cases, the design coordination of the various design development responsibilities will be managed by a principal designer.

As well as being critical to the delivery of safe, compliant buildings that meet the requirements of the specification, a clear design coordination and development process is essential to clarifying responsibilities, avoiding disputes and clashes, and eliminating compliance concerns both during the project and after completion.

In a robust survey of our members, when asked, "How often are you asked to commence construction without sufficient design details to adequately detail the construction?"; only 3% of contractors responded, "Never".

The responsibility gap?

The core role of the principal designer is to plan, manage, monitor and coordinate matters relating to the design work. They have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all designers comply with their duties under the Building Regulations and for assessing design work to ensure it complies with the relevant requirements.

In their principal designer's guide, RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) states that the principal designer is "Not responsible for discharging compliance of the design work (which is for the Designer to evidence)".

This creates a permission structure for delegation of design duties that typically fall to the specialist subcontractor, with no controls placed on the scope of the package or competence requirements. In some cases, this makes the subcontractor responsible

for all elements of the package, including those not prepared by the subcontractor.

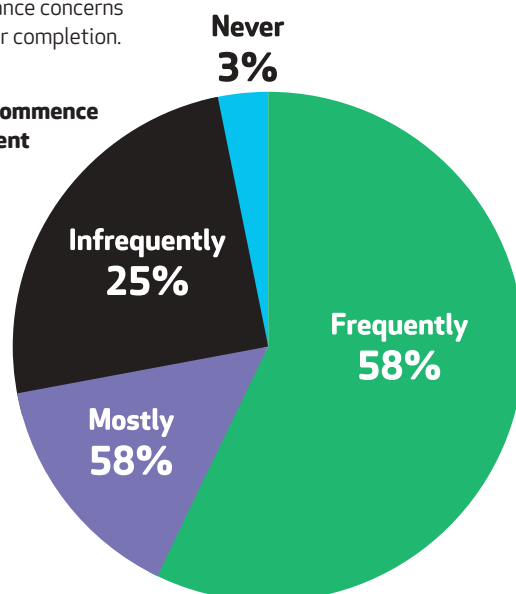
It is important to note that, unlike the principal designer role, which can only be fulfilled through formal appointment, designers are defined by function in the regulations as "any person who prepares or modifies a design." This means that, even outside of any formally novated contractual design portion, it is possible to fulfil the role of designer unintentionally¹.

Why drylining?

Walls and ceilings constructed from drylining are routinely relied upon to deliver critical performance in a building, including fire compartmentation, structural movement accommodation, acoustic separation, and air and smoke control.

Drylining systems are fairly unique among interior systems in that they perform as a product in their own right, while simultaneously acting as supporting construction for other internal elements, such as doorsets, fixed glazing, firestopping products (service penetrations), fire/smoke dampers, and access panels.

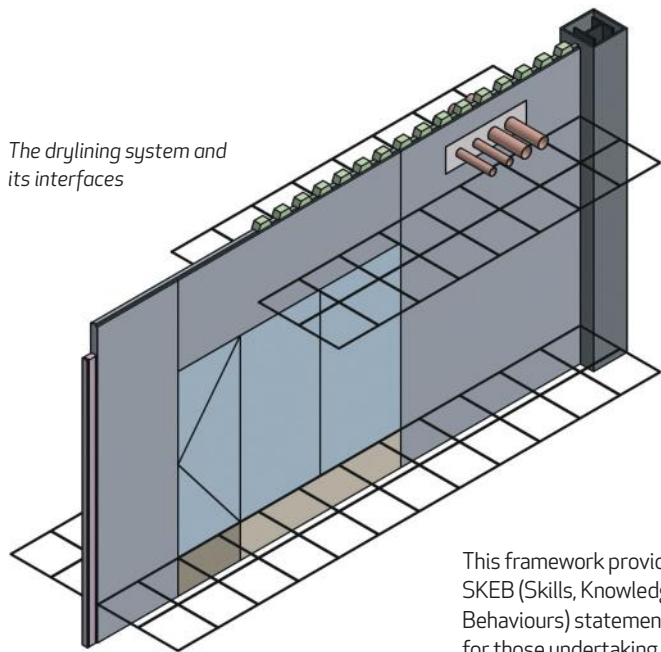
How often are you asked to commence construction without sufficient design information



Activity	Level of Risk
None	No Risk
Advice	Lower Risk, important to be clear on limits of advice and adhere approval process
Sub-contracted Design	Medium Risk, important to check competency of designer and check insurance risk for contingent liability
Design	High Risk, important to have clear controls and be able to demonstrate organisational capability and individual competence of designer
Co-ordinating Design	Very High Risk, as above, but extended liability to confirm competence and sign-off work of others

Levels of design risk

The drylining system and its interfaces



This requires a complex exercise in managing the compatibility of evidence for the various interfacing elements with the system as a supporting construction, while maintaining the system's own performance, which can be compromised by builders' work openings, in both the fire and cold states.

The October 2024 issue of SpecFinish featured article titled All fire-resistant wall types are equal, but some are more equal than others², which gave a more in-depth breakdown of the challenges relating to standard and associated flexible supporting constructions.

Despite the significance and complexity of this package, these systems have often been treated as secondary elements, with key design decisions deferred and problems left until late in the programme, often resulting in complex and, at times, unresolvable design issues.

Given the overlap with other elements of construction, the drylining design package is vulnerable to differing and increasingly liberal interpretations of its scope. It is therefore particularly important that, in the case of the drylining package, the contract outlining the novation clearly establishes the limits of design responsibility.

Who is competent to carry out drylining design?

FIS has developed and published a competence framework³ for the person with responsibility for taking a completed RIBA Stage 3 design and preparing a completed RIBA Stage 4 design for the drylining part of the interior system.

This work may be undertaken by:

- An architect or architectural technician;
- An independent drylining design engineer operating on a consultancy basis;
- A drylining design engineer employed by the specialist drylining contractor.

This framework provides a comprehensive SKEB (Skills, Knowledge, Experience & Behaviours) statement that sets expectations for those undertaking the work directly, as well as those looking to appoint a drylining design engineer. It should be remembered that principal designers have a duty to ensure that individual designers are competent.

As with all competence frameworks, the precedent is useful for increasing accountability and assisting those evidencing competence, but also for providing a sense check on the work within the design package. If the principal designer determines that a design engineer who is competent according to this framework lacks the ability to complete the design, then it is likely that the scope of the design package has been poorly defined and scoped.



Addressing a broken process

FIS has access to hundreds of years of accumulated knowledge and experience in manufacturing and contracting through the volunteers who participate in our Drylining Working Group to develop and maintain industry best practice. This group is currently

drafting a Drylining Design Code of Practice (DDCoP), due for release in early 2027, which will outline the end-to-end process for the benefit of the whole supply chain.

The DDCoP consolidates established industry guidance into a design-led, principle-based framework. Its purpose is to define:

- How drylining systems behave;
- What constitutes drylining design;
- How critical design decisions should be made and approved;
- How responsibility and acceptance should be exercised.

The principles and processes set out in the DDCoP are intended to reduce reliance on assumption, clarify design contribution boundaries, and support proportionate and defensible decision-making by designers and duty holders.

Ultimately, the DDCoP will provide an industry-recognised benchmark for reasonable and defensible drylining design practice under modern duty holder and regulatory frameworks.

This Code is informed by established design and information-management frameworks, including the RIBA Plan of Work, BSRIA Design Framework, and relevant fire and safety-critical guidance. It does not replace those frameworks. Instead, it defines the design judgement, compatibility, and acceptance principles required to apply them robustly where drylining systems perform safety-critical functions.

The DDCoP should be used by:

- Designers undertaking drylining system design;
- Principal designers exercising acceptance and governance responsibilities;
- Principal contractors and contractors to help recognise design-significant change;
- Fire engineers, manufacturers, assessors, and reviewers supporting design decisions;
- Clients seeking clarity on what drylining design entails.

If your business is navigating design responsibility for drylining packages and would like advice, or are interested in participating in the drafting of the code of practice, please reach out to

James Parlour, FIS Technical Director, via email at jamesparlour@thefis.org or by calling **07741 090274**.

Source

1. <https://specfinish.co.uk/the-unintentional-designer/>
2. <https://specfinish.co.uk/all-fire-resistant-wall-types-are-equal-but-some-are-more-equal-than-others/>
3. www.thefis.org/membership-hub/publications/competency-frameworks/drylining-design-engineer-competency/

A LIFELONG PASSION FOR SKILLS AND TRAINING

From apprentice plasterer to inspirational and passionate industry trainer and assessor, **Colin McCaughey**, Tutor/Assessor at Errigal Academy, shares with **David Crowson**, Editor, his journey spanning more than four decades of developing his own skills, supporting others, and inspiring the next generation of tradespeople.



Colin started serving his time as an apprentice plasterer with McLaughlin Harvey Ltd in 1979, and from the very beginning, he loved the trade. In 1983, he began his journey into teaching part-time at the College of Technology in Belfast — now Belfast Metropolitan College — while continuing to improve his plastering skills with R Moreland and Sons. Colin said: “Those early years at ‘The Tech’ shaped the rest of my career.”

Colin explained that, as the only plastering lecturer in Northern Ireland at the time, he found himself responsible for organising the plastering competition for the Northern Ireland Construction Inter-campus Competitions (CICC). As Belfast was the largest college, they hosted the event every year for the first decade. He said: “It was a lot of work, but it was incredibly rewarding. It brought lecturers and tutors together from across Northern Ireland, giving us the opportunity to share best practice and raise standards.”

Finding a passion for teaching

Colin told me about his time teaching in Belfast in the mid-1980s. He said: “This was challenging, but I knew from the start that education was where I belonged. I was in my early twenties, with apprentices older than me in the classroom and school pupils in Years 11 and 12 who often had their own

issues to deal with. But from those groups came some excellent apprentices. The second- and third-year plastering classes were the most rewarding, even if I often drove home with a sore head from answering questions and keeping everyone engaged.

“In 1989, I became a full-time lecturer at Belfast Institute, and I felt like I had finally made it. The trowel only came out at weekends and during holidays, and I threw myself into preparing lessons and developing my teaching skills. I had many happy years there, but like many colleges, the spreadsheet eventually became more important than producing quality tradespeople. I reluctantly took redundancy in 2015 after 32 years of part-time and full-time teaching — most of them very enjoyable.”

Continuing to share knowledge

When asked about the next step in his journey, Colin said: “I had no intention of retiring. I still felt I had plenty to give, so later that year I went back to part-time teaching at Southern Regional College (SRC). I worked two or three days a week

with school groups and apprentices, and SRC had the best plastering and drylining facilities in Northern Ireland at the time. It was a very enjoyable seven years.

“During that period, I was approached by The Errigal Group — one of the largest interior systems fit-out companies in the UK and Ireland — to help set up and teach at their new academy. I am still in that role today, splitting my time between our academies in Monaghan and London. With so much of our work based in London, it made sense to recruit apprentices there and open our new academy at Royal Albert Dock in 2024.

“It is a pleasure to deliver training for an organisation that genuinely values skills development.”

A passion for skills competitions

It is very clear that competitions have always been important and one of Colin’s major passions. Talking about them, he said: “From organising the plastering competitions in Northern Ireland, I have gone on to become the Lead Judge for SkillBuild, the biggest construction skills competition in the UK.



Colin receiving the Northern Ireland Lecturer of the Year Award from CITBNI chief executive Barry Neilson

PEOPLE IN BRIEF

New Technical Director appointed at Etex Building Performance

Etex Building Performance has appointed a new Technical Director to head up specialist construction brands Siniat and Promat.



In his new role **Si Gibson**, who joins from civil engineering access solution firm Wrekin, will work to expand the extensive testing portfolio of both passive fire protection specialist Promat and drywall manufacturer Siniat.

www.etexgroup.com

BW announces a series of senior leadership appointments



BW: Workplace Experts (BW) has announced a series of senior leadership appointments.

Peter Nagle, as Chief Operating Officer, **Paul Kavanagh**, as Managing Director, **Rachel Tabone**, as People Director and **Helen Mulligan Lowe**, as Sales Director.

wearebw.com

CICV: Organisational changes and developments



Paul Mitchell, Managing Director of the Scottish Building Federation, has been appointed Chair of the Construction Industry Collective Voice (CICV), succeeding **Alan Wilson** following his retirement as Managing Director of SELECT and decision to step down as CICV Chair. **Fiona Hodgson**, Chief Executive of the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation was re-elected as Deputy Chair.

<https://cicvforum.co.uk/>

"Each year, from March to July, we travel to around 15 colleges, setting up and marking regional competitions to find the top eight competitors for the SkillBuild National Final at the MK Dons football arena in Milton Keynes.

"I have also had the privilege of working with WorldSkills UK, helping to select and train the UK team for WorldSkills International. I served two cycles as Assistant Training Manager before becoming UK Training Manager in 2019. I trained a young competitor for three years — delayed by Covid — and we finally got to compete in Bordeaux in 2022. It was by far the best experience of my career. Judging alongside experts from around the world taught me so much, and many of those people are still friends today."



The UK WorldSkills squad 2021

A member of Team UK Brendan Duddy at the 2022 WorldSkills International



Adapting to a changing industry

Discussing the biggest lessons he has learnt throughout his career, Colin explained that it is the importance of constantly adapting to new materials and techniques.

"I have had great support from companies like British Gypsum, Weber and Gyproc Ireland, who offer training in their academies or send subject experts out to colleges.

"When I moved into specialist drywall training, I relied heavily on their expertise. As a plasterer, I could always board and fix centres, but the intricacies of metal systems were a steep learning curve. At Errigal, I deliver the theoretical training, and I rely on **Terry McDermott** — our practical trainer and an experienced site supervisor and dryliner — to complement my work. We have a strong team and support each other well. Always seek support for your areas of weakness; it's what makes you good at your job, said Colin.

As well as the lessons learned throughout his career, Colin recalled the countless challenges he has faced during his time in education and training. These ranged from disruptive students to learning new skills on the go, but he has always learned to adapt quickly.

He said: "I don't take my problems home, and I don't let personal comments bother me. If I got angry every time a student called me a name, I would not have lasted a year, never mind 43. I very rarely say no to a challenge. I was always keen to learn as an apprentice and plasterer, and I volunteered for anything new. The same applies now in interior systems: I listen, I learn, and I spend as much time on site as possible with experienced fixers."

Protecting the future of our sector

When asked about his thoughts and potential solutions to the challenges our sector currently faces, Colin expressed concern that qualifications within the sector are constantly changing. He said: "I try to get involved in the working groups shaping them so I can have a say in what goes in.

"I feel strongly that we need to stop stripping content out of qualifications. Employers, educators and manufacturers are involved in designing them, but too many employers only want the elements they deliver included. Colleges and training providers must continue to offer a wide range of content. Give apprentices the opportunity to learn all aspects of their trade, and they will become a valuable asset to any company."

Another area Colin highlighted was apprentice pay, which he explained he was pleased to see had finally started to improve, as this is crucial for attracting young people. He added that Errigal pays apprentices well, and that this helps to build loyalty.

FROM STRONG EARNINGS TO A DISAPPEARING INCOME: HOW A DEBT RELIEF ORDER GAVE RELIEF, STABILITY AND A RENEWED SENSE OF HOPE.

Tim Reisner, a former self-employed Site Manager, shares his story of how deteriorating eyesight brought his construction career to an end, leaving him with £24,000 of debt. With support from Business Debtline, he secured a Debt Relief Order (DRO), giving him relief, hope and a fresh start.

I had a proper working-class upbringing. My mum had come from a mining family up north, my dad had been a prisoner of war, and we didn't have much at all growing up. But I went out to work early, did an apprenticeship as a carpenter, and from then on, it was construction. That is all I have ever done.

And I loved it, I really did. I worked on everything, bridges, housing, military bases, big commercial builds. Travelled all over the country, even worked in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. It was hard graft, don't get me wrong, and there were jobs I hated - standing waist-deep in sewage springs to mind - but overall, I enjoyed my career. I was good at it, and it gave me a decent living.

Then later on, I was self-employed, working as a senior site manager. I could earn good money, £1,000 a week clear was pretty normal. But the job got harder physically. The travel especially. I was doing 50 miles each way on some projects, long days, leaving in the dark, getting home in the dark. I noticed my eyesight starting to go. I knew driving was getting harder, especially with oncoming headlights. Those modern LED lights were

blinding me. I'd find myself drifting, hitting verges. I used to joke the drive was 96% boredom and 4% sheer terror, but I knew I was going to have an accident.

I got checked, was told I had cataracts, had the operations in early 2025 and thought, right, sorted. But it didn't work out like that. My eyesight got worse again because of a condition called Posterior Capsule Opacification. By that point I knew I couldn't carry on driving. I just couldn't risk it.

I took a week off in October and realised something properly important - I hated the whole routine. The driving, the hours, the pressure. I went back for one day, walked out by 10am, and that was it. Done. And overnight, my income disappeared.

Now, on paper, I was earning good money before that. Between work and pension, I had about £60,000 a year coming in. So understandably people might wonder, how do you end up in debt with that kind of income?

The house needed work, kitchen, roof, chimney. Cars needed replacing. All normal life stuff. And it's so easy to borrow money now. I remember sitting with my banking app



Tim relaxing at home

and it offering me a loan. Just like that. A few clicks, a couple of screens, and suddenly there's £7,000 in your account. No meeting, no conversation, no real pause to think. And then later, "Do you want to increase your loan?" Pay off the old one, top it up, carry on. It becomes normal.

But the bigger thing - the really insidious thing - was the buy now, pay later. PayPal especially. That was a big one for me.

It didn't feel like debt. That's the problem. It felt like convenience. You're online, you're buying something - it could be anything, like a pack of socks - and there it is: split it, defer it, pay later. It doesn't matter. The option is always there.

And it's not just one plan. You can have loads running at the same time. Ten, twenty, whatever, there's no limit. You don't sit there thinking, I'm taking on debt. You think, I'm spreading the cost. Before you know it, you've got PayPal sitting at £3,500. A Barclays loan at £10,000. Credit cards. Store finance. Bits everywhere.

I was telling myself, I earn good money. I work hard. I deserve this. That's the mindset. That's the trap.

By the time I stopped working and I sat down to look at it all properly, I owed about £24,000. And suddenly, with my income gone, it all came crashing in. I sat down with my wife and worked out the basics, council tax, bills, food, and realised we'd be left with maybe a couple of hundred quid a month to live on.



That's before you even think about the debt repayments. It just wasn't doable. I remember sitting there thinking, what are my options?

One was just to stop paying everything and let it all fall apart. Let the letters come, let the pressure build, deal with it that way. The other was to face it properly.

I'll be honest, there were moments where it felt overwhelming. I'd seen people in my working life take their own lives. I understood how someone could get to that point. And I did have thoughts about just stepping away from it all. But I knew I couldn't do that to my wife. I couldn't leave her with the mess.

So, I decided to deal with it and started researching. Google is your friend! I found some information online, tried StepChange, realised they didn't deal with self-employed people like me. Then I found Business Debtline. Getting through took a bit of time but when I finally spoke to someone, that call changed everything.

It lasted about an hour and a half. And the biggest thing was that they didn't judge me. Not once. I didn't need someone telling me I'd been stupid. I already knew that. What I needed was someone calm and practical.

We went through everything. Every debt. Every outgoing. They split things into what I had to pay (like council tax) and what was more flexible. Then we built a proper budget.

That was a real eye-opener. I realised how much I was spending on things I didn't need. Sky TV alone, £190 a month. It made everything feel manageable. Like there was a way forward. Then they sent me template letters to use to send to my creditors. It felt like someone had thrown me a lifeline. I decided to go for a Debt Relief Order (DRO).

I hadn't even heard of it before all this. But it made sense. It meant gathering all my debts together into one legal process. It didn't cost me like bankruptcy would, and it gave me a proper route out.

I went through another detailed process with a specialist organisation, got all my figures up to date, and then we submitted it. About three weeks later, on 11 March, it was approved and I don't think I'll ever properly be able to describe how that felt.

Weightless is the best word I've got. Like something massive had just been lifted off me. Euphoric. Genuinely euphoric. I sat there thinking, I can breathe again.

What it means in practical terms is that the people I owe money to can't chase me for it anymore. And if everything stays stable for 12 months, that debt gets written off. So, if I start earning money again, I might have to pay it back.

But the biggest difference is the emotional impact. Before this, I felt like I was working just to service debt. That was

my life. Now, for the first time in years, I can actually look forward to tomorrow. It's changed everything.

My wife is happier. I'm happier. The house is lighter. Even my dogs are happier - I'm around more, we go out every day. We walk, we get out in nature, we actually enjoy life again. I notice things now. Sunrises, sunsets, the countryside around me. That's what I imagined retirement would be, and for a while I thought I'd lost it. But I haven't, I've got it back, that's what

Business Debtline gave me. They gave me a future when I couldn't see one.

If I could say one thing to anyone in the same position, it's this: don't hesitate. Talk to someone. However bad it feels, however much shame is wrapped up in it, it is not as hopeless as you think it is. I thought it was. I genuinely did and I was wrong.

The difference between where I was and where I am now, it really is the difference between night and day.

Business Debtline

Business Debtline provides free, independent, expert advice to small business owners and self-employed people. If you're worried about your finances you can contact Business Debtline for free on **0800 197 6026** or via **www.businessdebtline.org**

**BUSINESS
DEBTLINE**

Expert advisers are ready to talk:
9am - 8pm, Monday to Friday.

Alternatively, you can use their webchat service, 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday:
<https://businessdebtline.org/get-help/webchat/>

Before getting in touch, there is a free My Budget tool to lay out your business and personal budget, which advisers can then use to help you make a plan:
<https://businessdebtline.org/get-help/my-budget/>

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FIS Conference, AGM and Innovation Awards

Whittlebury Park, Northamptonshire
22 October

FIS Golf Competition

Whittlebury Park, Northamptonshire
23 October

FIS Training Awards Lunch

Plaisterers Hall, One London Wall, London
24 November

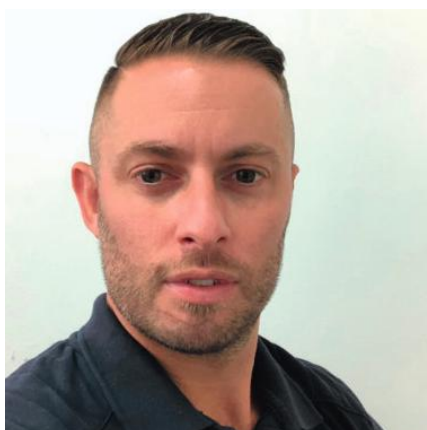


Training Awards 2025: All the worthy winners

For further information of these events visit: **www.thefis.org/events**

A CURVE ABOVE THE REST

We find out more about ML Interiors' award-winning project at a Private Investment Company, what made it stand out and what winning the award means for the business.



Matthew Lawler, Managing Director at ML Interiors

The impressive project, delivered by ML Interiors, won the FIS Partitioning Award for Small Contracts, held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in the heart of London. The awards celebrated outstanding craftsmanship, exceptional collaboration and exemplary adherence to best practice across the finishes and interiors community.

David Crowson, Editor, spoke to Managing Director **Matthew Lawler** to find out what made the project stand out, the challenges they faced and overcame, the role of collaboration, why ML Interiors entered the FIS Contractors Awards, and what winning the award means for the business and its future.

David asked Matthew to **tell us more about the project and why he thought it stood out from the competition.**

Matthew explained that he believed the project stood out on the strength of its design.

He expanded on this, commenting that the scheme called for a significant amount of curved partitioning and curved bulkheads, all of which had to align precisely with SAS International 700, 330 and 600 ceiling systems, as well as curved, double-glazed screens threaded through the same lines. Getting stud, board, ceiling grid and double-glazed units to meet on a curve, rather than a straight run, left no margin for error. Every setting-out decision on one trade affected the next, while the double glazing added a

further layer of technical complexity to the curved screens that a single-glazed system would not have presented.

He said: "We worked with Aurora Partitioning on the curved glazing, SAS International on the aforementioned ceiling systems, and CCF, whose Tradeline system was used across both the MF ceilings and the partitioning to tie the interfaces together.

"Getting these specialist scopes to agree on a single curved setting-out line, and hold to it through installation, took in-depth CAD work and detailed mathematics on radial plan from an early stage, alongside close coordination between all parties.

"The result was delivered snag-free and on programme, which, on a job with this much curved, trade-critical geometry, is a genuine reflection of the standard ML Interiors sets for itself"

David commented that this was an impressive achievement in what was clearly a complex project and was interested to hear **what were the biggest challenges the team faced and how they overcame them.**



Private Investment Company project

"The core challenge was alignment, made harder by a fixed programme. Curved partitions, curved bulkheads and curved double-glazed screens all had to be set out against the SAS 700, 330 and 600 ceiling grids, and any small discrepancy between trades would have shown immediately on a curve in a way it never would on a straight run. The double glazing in the curved screens added a further technical constraint, introducing concentric arcs with a very small offset that reduces manufacturing and installation tolerances even further.

"We resolved this by working out the setting-out points and tolerances across the supply chain before installation started. Using detailed CAD drawings and the fixed radii, we agreed the geometry on paper first, rather than resolving clashes on site as they arose. This meant closer collaboration between our surveying and design teams and each supplier's technical team than a standard partitioning package would require. Because the project was programme-led, that upfront coordination had to happen within a fixed timeframe rather than being open-ended, which made getting it right first time even more important. The result was that what went up on site matched across every trade, on time and with no rework," commented Matthew.

Matthew was asked, **"Who were the key individuals and teams involved, and how did collaboration contribute to the project's success?"**

He explained that it was a genuine multi-trade effort, delivered on time through close collaboration between the ML Interiors installation and delivery teams, working alongside Aurora Partitioning, SAS International and CCF, with Zentura Workspace as the main contractor, ensuring the programme remained aligned across all the curved elements.

He said: "What made the difference was that collaboration started at the setting-out stage, not on site. Getting the partitioning, ceiling and double-glazing specialists aligned before anyone started installing meant the trades supported each other on site rather than working around each other. It also meant the fixed programme could be maintained without compromising accuracy. That level of coordination across our own teams and the wider supply chain is, we believe, exactly the kind of collaborative delivery the FIS Contractors Awards are designed to recognise."

"What motivated ML Interiors to enter the Awards, and why Matthew felt this project deserved industry recognition?" asked David.

He responded by saying: "We entered because this project represented a genuine step up in technical difficulty from a standard partitioning package, and we wanted that recognised. "Curved partitioning, curved bulkheads and curved double-glazed screens, all set out against three different SAS ceiling systems and delivered to a fixed programme, demanded a level of CAD and precision work that isn't easily appreciated in the finished space, but is exactly the kind of capability we want the industry to associate with ML Interiors.

"This was our first entry into the Awards, and we felt this project was the strongest possible showcase of what our team can deliver."

Matthew went on to tell David **what winning the award meant for the business, team and their clients.**

He explained that it was a milestone for ML Interiors. He said: "The award provides independent, industry-level confirmation that the company can deliver complex, multi-trade geometry to programme and without snags, setting it apart from the competition.

"For the business, it strengthens its position when tendering for architecturally ambitious, complex fit-outs and gives clients and main contractors such as Zentura Workspace tangible proof of what the company can deliver.

"For the team, it is recognition of the precision, passion and expertise they have spent years developing."

www.ml-interiors.co.uk/



Matthew, third from the left, with some of the ML Interiors team receiving their award

Call for Entries: 2027 FIS Contractors Awards

The search is on for the very best projects in the finishes and interiors sector.

The **2027 FIS Contractors Awards** provide contractors with an opportunity to showcase outstanding projects and gain industry recognition for exceptional workmanship, quality and craftsmanship.

If you have completed a project that demonstrates the very best of what your business can deliver, now is the time to put it forward.

Entries close on 31 October 2026.

For details on the Awards and how to enter visit <https://www.thefis.org/fis-contractors-awards/>

SILICA DUST IS A SERIOUS HEALTH RISK — BUT ARE WE DOING ENOUGH TO PROTECT PEOPLE?

New CIOB research has exposed major gaps in awareness and management of the dangers of silica dust across the construction sector. The Residents, Clients and Construction Excellence Toolkit (ReACT)¹ aims to help address this, but industry voices are needed to shape the next steps.



Dr Scott McGibbon

Senior managers across the construction sector do not have the awareness, knowledge or organisational support needed to effectively manage silica dust, according to a major new study the ReACT which was funded through the Chartered Institute of Building's (CIOB) Paul Dockerill Award.

The worrying discovery has led to the launch of a potentially life-saving toolkit for anyone working on a construction project – whether that is at home or as part of their work – to be aware of the dangers posed by silica dust.

The research and toolkit, led by **Dr Scott McGibbon** FCIOB, found significant gaps in understanding among those responsible for planning, managing and overseeing construction work, despite silica dust being one of the industry's most serious long-term occupational health risks.

Dr McGibbon said: "The industry has made enormous progress in improving site safety, but occupational health has not always kept up. Silica dust remains one of construction's most underestimated hazards, and our research shows there are significant gaps in awareness among those responsible for managing risk."

Understanding the health risks

Respirable crystalline silica (RCS) is generated when materials such as brick, concrete, mortar, stone, tiles and plasterboard are cut, drilled or demolished. The microscopic particles can penetrate

deep into the lungs, causing irreversible diseases including silicosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disease and lung cancer.

Alongside the research, Dr McGibbon has developed the Residents, Clients and Construction Excellence Toolkit (ReACT) – a practical resource to help professionals and the public understand the risks posed by silica dust and adopt best practice to minimise exposure and impact.

Significant gaps in awareness

The study combined an extensive literature review with a survey of housing management professionals, interviews with senior leaders across the construction sector and a consultation with industry stakeholders to examine how silica dust is currently managed.

While respondents overwhelmingly recognised the importance of education and training, the findings revealed worrying shortcomings.

The survey revealed significant gaps in silica dust management, with 75% not consistently using exposure plans or inspecting safe working practices, 75% unaware of the UK Workplace Exposure Limit, 68% unaware of recognised transmission routes, 63% unaware of wider health risks, such as silica dust exposure being linked to cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disease and cancer and every respondent reporting that their organisation was not fully equipped to manage the risk effectively.

Interviews with senior leaders revealed further challenges. Participants identified commercial pressures, organisational culture, skills shortages and inconsistent understanding of existing health and safety frameworks as barriers to improving silica dust management.

Many also felt current construction health and safety processes do not sufficiently address silica dust risks and called for a more structured approach, similar to asbestos management.

Driving change across the sector

Dr McGibbon added: "This isn't simply about introducing more paperwork. It is about embedding silica dust management into the way projects are procured, planned and delivered. Clients, contractors and the wider supply chain all have a role to play in raising standards through better training, stronger leadership and greater accountability.

"I hope anyone working in the industry or carrying out a construction project in their own home will use the ReACT toolkit to better understand how they can protect themselves from the serious health risks which silica dust can cause if not treated with caution"

The report recommends developing recognised competency standards and qualifications for silica dust management, introducing mandatory training and upskilling programmes, producing practical technical guidance and embedding silica dust considerations into procurement. It also calls for greater investment in exposure monitoring, health surveillance and workforce development.

Making a difference: Your voice is needed to build a credible, evidence-led response to this issue

The CIOB would like your support to directly shape practical tools, industry guidance and training interventions designed to improve how they assess, control and manage dust risk across our sector – protecting both workers and the public. The outputs will influence real-world practices, from site decision-making to leadership capability and compliance approaches.

Complete the survey by visiting: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/t/T008FM/>

The stronger the response, the greater the impact this work can have. The more people who understand the risks associated with dust exposure, the better equipped we will be to drive meaningful change.

Dr McGibbon concluded: "Let's not accept harmful exposure to dust as 'part



of the job” or stand by while people fail to consider the impact on themselves and others. Help us drive meaningful change. Together, we are stronger.”

Discussing the importance of this issue and Scott’s work **Justin Devaney**, Operations Director at Platt Reilly, said: “Scott’s work needs to be championed by all companies within the industry. Although your team may not be generating dust through their work, they are breathing the same air as the person generating the dust, even if that person is wearing the appropriate PPE and RPE.

“Silica dust does not discriminate. In an industry where there is an awareness of the dangers of silica dust, there are still 600 fatalities every year directly related to exposure to workplace dust. No other industry would accept the deaths of 600 workmates, fathers, brothers, sisters and mothers, yet the construction industry accepts these numbers without a blink of the eye and rumbles on.

“At Platt Reilly, we have a duty of care to all our staff and to those working around us on site who are employed by other companies but also need protecting.

“Every site operative deserves to go home at the end of the day as healthy as when they clocked in that morning, and that expectation of good health should continue indefinitely into the future.”

In summary, Justin said: “Protecting workers from dust exposure today can help prevent ill health not only now but also in the future.

“All companies, regardless of the work they undertake on site, should have a robust dust policy. As an industry, we must work together to eliminate the statistic of 600 fatalities every year due to dust exposure.”



Silica Dust

This tiny speck is the most you should be breathing in a day

Paul Dockerill Award

The award celebrates **Paul Dockerill** FCIOB, who passed away suddenly in November 2022. Paul, a CIOB Trustee, was a visionary and a dedicated professional in the construction and built environment industry, and the award reflects his passion for innovation in building safety through mentoring, skills development, and, most importantly, the improvement of fire safety and resident engagement in the UK.

His pioneering initiatives, notably the development with DEEO of the Twinnedit digital twin solution created following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, showcased his commitment to enhancing fire safety and building regulations. Paul was a founding member of the Housing Safety and Wellbeing Taskforce.

His legacy lives on through The Paul Dockerill Award, inspiring future innovators in the construction sector. The prestigious award is managed by the CIOB and is open to any UK resident looking to develop a research project fuelled by innovation, skills development, fire safety, and resident engagement.

To find out more visit: www.ciob.org/learning/scholarships/the-paul-dockerill-award

Source

1. www.ciobacademy.org/cpd/the-silent-threat-of-silica-dust-in-construction

BEYOND THE FIXING: SPECIFYING DIRECT FASTENING AS A COMPLETE SYSTEM



A specialist looks at selection, installation and support for concrete and steel applications. For specialist contractors and specifiers, a fixing is not an isolated component. It is part of a system in which substrate, load, installation method, documentation and site support all influence the final result.

A system-led approach to specification

Fixing into concrete or steel demands more than choosing a familiar product code. The correct solution must suit the base material, application, working environment, and installation sequence. It must also be practical for the people completing the work and supported by the documentation required for the project. Treating these factors as one system helps reduce ambiguity between design intent and site delivery.

This is where specialist manufacturers add value. **ITW SPIT** focuses on **direct fastening systems** for **concrete and steel**, covering gas-powered nailers, fire-rated fixings, cable-management solutions, concrete screws, consumables and

accessories. The breadth matters because it allows the tool, fixing and application to be considered together rather than as separate purchasing decisions.

Start with the substrate and application

Concrete and steel behave differently, and the installation method must reflect that. The fixing decision should begin with the substrate, followed by the item being secured, the demands placed on the fixing and the conditions in which it will be installed. For drylining, mechanical and electrical, fire-safety and general construction applications, speed is important, but it cannot be separated from consistency, reliability and suitability.

Direct fastening can simplify repetitive installation work because the fastening operation is designed around a matched tool-and-consumable system. Products such as the Pulsa 65 gas nailer are intended for a range of direct fastening tasks, while the Pulsa 27 Insulfast is designed specifically for insulation installation. Tapcon concrete screws and tested fire-rated fixing solutions address different application requirements. The specialist point is not that one method suits every situation, but that each installation should be matched to an appropriate system.

Design for installation, not just approval

A technically acceptable fixing still needs to work in practice. Access, installer movement, application volume, tool weight, consumable changes and the sequence of other trades can all affect productivity. Specification decisions made without reference to installation can lead to substitutions, inconsistent methods or avoidable delays once work begins.

A more robust approach is to consider the people completing the installation. Is the method straightforward to repeat? Are the tool, consumable and accessory clearly matched? Can the installer obtain training

or a demonstration? Is maintenance support available if the tool is used intensively? These questions move the conversation from product selection to installation assurance.

Evidence matters in safety-critical work

Where applications have fire or other safety requirements, supporting evidence becomes central to the specification. Product selection should be accompanied by the relevant technical documentation and certification, with the proposed fixing considered in the context of the actual application. Clear information also helps contractors, distributors and project teams communicate the intended solution consistently.

ITW SPIT supports its systems with technical documentation, fire certification information, product training, on-site demonstrations, technical advice, tool servicing and maintenance. This support is particularly valuable where a project team needs to move from a written requirement to a repeatable site method.

Support is part of product performance

Tool downtime, unclear product matching and late technical questions can affect programmes as much as the fixing operation

itself. A complete specification should therefore consider what happens after the product is selected. Availability of consumables and accessories, access to technical advice, maintenance arrangements and the ability to demonstrate the system on site all contribute to continuity.

This is also why specialist distribution remains important. In the UK and Ireland, **ITW SPIT** works with specialist fixings distributors and national merchants to supply construction professionals. That route brings together product availability, application knowledge and practical support for contractors working across drylining, electrical, mechanical, fire-safety and general construction.

A specialist framework for better decisions

For project teams reviewing direct fastening solutions, five questions provide a useful starting point:

- What is the base material, and is its condition understood?
- What is being fixed, and what demands will the application place on the fixing?
- Is the proposed tool, fixing, consumable and accessory a clearly matched system?
- What technical documentation or certification is required for approval and handover?
- What training, demonstration, servicing and site support will be available during delivery?

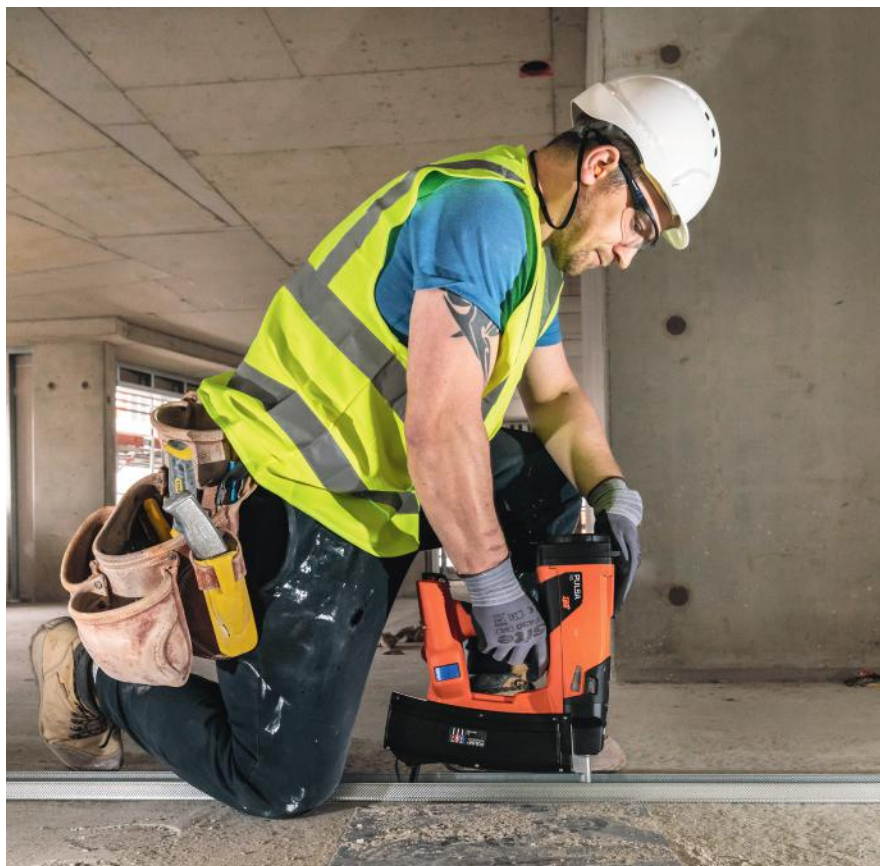
These questions encourage earlier collaboration between the specifier, specialist distributor, manufacturer and installer. They also create a clearer route from design requirement to final installation.

From invention to application expertise

SPIT was founded in France in 1951 as Société de Prospection et d'Inventions Techniques, translated as "Company for Exploration and Technical Inventions". Its founder, engineer **Roger Dorgnon**, adapted powder technology to develop early powder-actuated fastening tools for construction.

SPIT later became part of **Illinois Tool Works** and today operates within **ITW Construction Products** alongside brands including **Paslode**, **Cullen** and **Gang-Nail**.

That history is relevant because specialist fixing continues to depend on the same principle: understand the application, engineer the complete system and support the people using it. As construction programmes tighten and requirements around safety and sustainability continue to develop, the most effective solutions will be those that combine product performance with installation efficiency, evidence and accessible technical support.



Cocoon
5.129-5.130

SLEEPING PODS: A BESPOKE PROJECT IN THE HEART OF LONDON

How close to 1,000 sleeping capsules were engineered, prototyped, manufactured, delivered and installed inside a listed building at Piccadilly Circus.

Above one of the busiest junctions in Europe, the London Pavilion at Piccadilly Circus became the setting for an unusual challenge: how to introduce close to 1,000 contemporary sleeping cocoons into a listed building where space, access and the existing structure placed clear limits on what was possible.

The answer was not a standard product adapted to fit. The Capsule Cocoon was developed specifically for the project, shaped as much by the constraints of the building as by the architectural concept, and delivered as a single integrated undertaking within IBG – International Business Group. Led and managed by DVM, the solution was designed at the Group's Innovation Centre, engineered by MYPA and manufactured in Portugal by Haken Design Solutions, before being delivered and installed by DVM in the heart of central London.

The question was never simply what the finished installation should look like, but how every component would reach that point.

Prototyping and engineering: designing a space measured in centimetres

A capsule is a small volume in which every centimetre is felt. At roughly a metre wide, a metre high and two metres deep, it is a

space a guest enters, sleeps in and leaves, often in the dark and often when tired. No drawing can confirm whether that is comfortable; only a full-size prototype can.

The capsule therefore went through three prototype stages, each built at full scale and tested before the next was developed. The first established the volume and the fundamentals of the experience. The second refined ergonomics, materials and services: clearance to sit up, reach to the controls from a lying position, mattress height, the sound of the shutter closing at three in the morning, lighting that dims to a restful level. The third confirmed the design as a product that could be manufactured, transported, installed and maintained a thousand times.

Running alongside them was an equally decisive engineering effort, led from the Group's Innovation Centre, whose role was to turn architectural intent into a manufacturable product: not a one-off piece of joinery, but a repeatable unit with defined structural performance, tolerances and assembly method. The capsule was developed as a complete three-dimensional model and analysed using structural simulation software. The model assessed the loads acting on the assembly and how they travel through it, verified panel thicknesses and material performance,

and tested connections and fixings, both between the components of a single capsule and between stacked units. Deflection and stress concentrations were examined before anything was cut, allowing material to be used where it does structural work and reduced where it does not.

That work replaced rules of thumb with documented evidence of performance and made the capsule leaner: every millimeter saved on a panel is multiplied by a thousand units in weight, cost and load on the building. The model then became the reference for machining, assembly and quality control.

The prototypes also gave the client something to walk into. Expectations were discussed in front of a physical object rather than through documents, and changes agreed while still cheap to make de-risking the greatest hazard of a repetitive product: repeating a small mistake a thousand times. Once the third was signed off, the design was frozen and industrialization began.

Three levels high: access, loads and stacking

The commercial logic of a capsule hotel is density, and density comes from stacking. Within the floor-to-ceiling height available, capsules were arranged three levels high on floors 2 and 5 and two levels high in the

others, a decision that shaped the whole installation. Access had to be resolved within the capsule design rather than added afterwards: steps and handholds intuitive for a guest arriving late at night, and compact enough not to consume the floor area stacking had been introduced to save.

A stack of three capsules, plus occupants and belongings, also concentrates load on the slabs of a building conceived in the nineteenth century for entirely different purposes. Load paths, point loads and dormitory layouts were established from the model and coordinated with the structural design before the first unit arrived.

Stacking was the third challenge. In an existing building, floors are rarely flat and walls rarely plumb, and any deviation at the base is multiplied as the stack rises. Leveling the bottom tier was critical, supported by a purpose-designed levelling and fixing system, restraint back to the structure and a defined sequence for each run. Alignment had to hold along rows of dozens of capsules, so each dormitory reads as one deliberate piece of architecture.

Flat pack or plug and play?

One of the most significant decisions was also the least visible in the finished result: whether the capsules should arrive flat-packed or complete. Flat packs are efficient to transport and easy to move through a constrained building, but it transfers assembly to the most constrained environment available — a live site in central London — with more operatives, more quality checks, more waste and more programme. Plug and play reverses that balance: the capsule leaves the factory fully assembled and tested. Once on site, each unit is again tested and QA inspected before being moved into its final position. It is then



positioned, levelled, connected to the electrical supply and it's ready for use.

Both were modelled in detail. Plug and play was selected, and the capsule dimensioned around the route into the building rather than the reverse. The decision proved right: quality was inspected once, under factory conditions, instead of a thousand times in a dormitory; site work became predictable and safer; and noise, dust and waste inside a listed building fell sharply.

Twenty a day: the rhythm of a mature process

At peak, twenty capsules were delivered, installed, connected and left ready for use in a single working day. That figure is a statement about process, not speed. It depended on delivery slots booked against the realities of Piccadilly Circus access, loads configured in installation sequence so the last capsule on the vehicle was the first one needed, and teams working to a repeatable method.

Information moved in both directions, with observations from site feeding back into the assembly line. For the client, the value was predictability: a reliable daily rate allowed floors to be planned and handed over in sequence.

One stop shop: a single group, a single chain

Underpinning this was an advantage rare in projects of this type: design, engineering, manufacture, project management, logistics and installation all sat within one group. With DVM leading the overall delivery of the project acting as the link between the client, design, engineering, manufacturing and site operations. The Group's Innovation Centre supported the design and product development, MYPA provided the engineering expertise, and Haken Design Solutions manufactured the capsules in Portugal. This integrated structure allowed DVM to coordinate the entire delivery chain across the two countries, from factory production and logistics through to installation, testing and final handover on site.

That structure changed how the project could be run. Prototype decisions passed straight into production, and a single quality standard applied from the first component to the finished capsule. Capacity was matched to the installation rate, so the factory produced to the rhythm of the site, and loads were planned by those who would unload them. Above all, it removed the interface risk that so often defines complex fit-out: no gap between designer, manufacturer, haulier and installer, and one point of accountability.

Constraints as design drivers

Rather than adapting a listed building to a predetermined system, the project developed the system around the building. The constraints of the London Pavilion were not obstacles to overcome; they shaped the final solution.

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THE COMMERCIAL PAYMENTS BILL PROGRESSES AT PACE THROUGH PARLIAMENT

We take a look at the journey of the Commercial Payments Bill following its First Reading in the House of Lords and what happens next.

In the previous issue of SpecFinish we discussed that Ministers introduced a landmark Bill aimed at ending the scourge of late payment and setting clear boundaries around payment practices. The Commercial Payments Bill¹ was introduced in the House of Lords on 19 May by **Lord Leong**, a former businessman who understands the need for prompt payment. This was referred to as the First Reading.

The aim of the Bill is to strengthen payment discipline across the UK economy by imposing maximum payment periods, making statutory interest on late payments mandatory, and banning retention clauses in construction contracts.

The Bill marks the toughest crackdown on late payment in a generation, putting a clear duty on large firms to pay smaller suppliers on time and giving small businesses the certainty they need to continue investing, supporting jobs and growing their communities.

Government is responding to evidence that late payments cause 38 businesses to close every single day. Construction data from FIS report called Procurement, payment and contract management: The challenges in the low and mid-rise housing sector² shows that 58% specialists supplying major house builders are stressed about payment most of the time. These businesses are forced to spend hours chasing invoices instead of running their businesses, putting jobs, livelihoods and health at risk. They are also denied of the vital funding and confidence needed to invest in people and innovation.

Emma Jones, Small Business Commissioner at the Department for Business and Trade and Non-Executive Director at Ramsgate Space, provides the journey of the Commercial Payments Bill after the First Reading and introduces some of the terminology she has had to learn along the way.

Emma explained that her office has been focused on its mission to make life easier for

small firms by getting money moving. A key part of this work is the introduction of the Commercial Payments Bill, which will establish a maximum 60-day payment term in the UK, apply automatic interest to late payments, and give new powers to the Small Business Commissioner. The Bill has now made its next step by going to Committee Stage.

The Second Reading

Emma said: "I have come to learn that Bills can start in either the House of Lords or the House of Commons, and they move between the two Houses as points relating to the proposed new laws are debated.

"Just a couple of weeks after the First Reading, the Bill moved to its Second Reading³, which is when the debate begins and Members of the Lords offer their reactions. Following this debate, amendments to the Bill are 'tabled'. This can be an intense and busy time for the team, made up of lawyers and prompt payment policy officials, as amendments can come in overnight and have to be rapidly addressed.

"A total of 103 amendments were received, ranging from questions about resource requirements for the Office of the Small Business Commissioner to the definition of a small firm for the purposes of adjudication."

Committee Stage

On 21 July the Government responded to the amendments that have been raised⁴, this included a detailed examination and line-by-line consideration. Several amendments were debated — including proposals to shorten the maximum payment window from 60 days to 30 days and requests for statutory funding plans for enforcement, explained Emma.

What happens next?

Emma commented that the next phase is referred to as the 'Report Stage', when the Bill is updated to reflect any agreed amendments. She said: "The Bill will then be



Emma Jones, Small Business Commissioner at the Department for Business and Trade and Non-Executive Director at Ramsgate Space

presented to the House of Commons to go through the process in that Chamber, which will hopefully happen in October.

"The aim is for the Bill to have completed its passage through both Houses by the end of this year or early 2027, when it will receive what is referred to as Royal Assent. This is when HM The King signs off the primary legislation, meaning it becomes an Act.

"At that point, the process moves into what is known as 'secondary legislation', which will provide further detail on how the law will be implemented. This usually takes three to four months, before the journey reaches its end point and the Act comes into effect.

"Throughout this process, we are working to ensure that firms of all sizes are ready. For small businesses, this means knowing your rights, while for larger firms, it means preparing for compliance."

Source

1. <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4128>
2. www.thefis.org/procurement-contracts-and-payment-practices-in-the-housebuilding-supply-chain/
3. www.smallbusinesscommissioner.gov.uk/late-payment-bill-second-reading-lord-leong-opening-speech/
4. <https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/020de255-0eb7-4d66-bf70-096b7c925cd8>

TWO YEARS AS PRESIDENT: BELIEVING IN THE POWER OF OUR COMMUNITY

As he comes to the end of his two-year term as FIS President, **Ian Strangward** reflects on what the experience has taught him and where we need to go next as a community and sector.

I stepped into the role because I believed FIS, as a collaborative network, a melting pot for ideas and solutions, a champion of higher standards and a stronger voice for finishes and interiors, could help bring change to my sector. I wanted to help. What I did not fully appreciate was how much the role would reveal about the breadth, complexity and significance of the community we represent, or how much I still had to learn.

Over the last two years, I have engaged with members from every part of the supply chain, from specialist contractors and manufacturers to distributors, consultants and training providers. I have listened to businesses facing pressures that are often greater than they appear from the outside, and seen first-hand just how diverse the sector is, even within sub-sectors that can look clearly defined. There are many ways to skin a cat and deliver a fit-out it turns out!

Despite the professionalism, expertise and commitment across our community, the sector remains under immense pressure. Economic uncertainty, rising costs and challenging market conditions have taken a real toll, and old, unacceptable behaviours remain deeply engrained. We have seen respected, long-established businesses disappear. Every insolvency sends shockwaves through supply chains and communities, reminding us that behind every company are people, livelihoods and years of hard work.

Change is needed, but without empathy it is impossible. This is why research has been one of the central pillars of my Presidency. Data gives gravitas to our voice for change and helps turn frustration into evidence that can be acted on.

A powerful voice

FIS continues to fight for a better commercial approach, and recent developments give reason for encouragement. FIS was at the table as the Commercial Payments Bill was being conceived, making the case for fairer treatment of the supply chain. The Bill

recognises that fair payment is critical to building the construction industry we need, with late payment made illegal and retention abolished. Too often our sector carries disproportionate risk on tight margins. If construction is to become more resilient and sustainable, fair and prompt payment must be part of the solution.

A powerful voice means putting the data to use, being in the room when decisions are shaped, not waiting to respond afterwards. That has been evident in FIS's lead role in helping establish the Construction Skills Mission Board, our involvement in the Commercial Payments Bill, and the competence work that has followed the Building Safety Act. FIS has written more competence frameworks than any other organisation in the sector and helped shape a process that allowed thousands of companies to contribute. Our housing research has called out some of the worst market behaviours, giving evidence and language to problems the supply chain has too often absorbed in silence. We have also been prepared to engage lawyers and challenge the Ministry of Justice where, in our opinion, the supply chain has been abused.

The same is true in regulation. We have spent endless hours with the Building Safety Regulator, helping shape change, making sense of requirements and showing where they fall short on the ground. FIS is respected because it engages constructively, speaks out when clarity is needed and acts as a conduit to a practical supply chain that is a critical part of the solution.

Another vital lesson from the last two years is that there is no silver bullet: none of construction's major challenges can be solved in isolation.

Whether we are talking about better design, competence, sustainability, digital transformation, information management or commercial reform, progress depends on collaboration. The siloes that have characterised construction for too long have no place in the future industry we need



Ian Strangward, Current President of FIS and Managing Director at Architectural Wallsz

to create. The Integrated Management Standard launched by FIS last year helps break this down, while also exposing the scale of the challenge.

Through FIS, that collective supply chain approach has become a superpower. I have seen competitors share knowledge, members contribute expertise for the collective good and businesses work together on problems that affect the whole sector. Increasingly, I see the supply chain not as separate organisations pursuing individual interests, but as a powerful network whose expertise is one of our greatest strengths.

Delivering value

That influence matters because it allows FIS to turn advocacy into practical service for members and the wider sector. Our voice grows as our community grows, and I am pleased that over the past two years we have continued to grow. Another pillar of my Presidency has been ensuring that FIS delivers tangible value.

This is why setting up the FIS Academy and making competence a central, shared resource has been so important. It is not a side project or a technical add-on; it is a statement about what FIS is here to do: creating a trusted platform for knowledge, standards and delivery.

The Academy is about helping members make better use of the knowledge bank on which FIS sits, breaking it down

and delivering it in ways that support competence. FIS is not a conventional business, but to be effective as a platform for delivery it must be properly resourced. Members and partners increasingly look to FIS not only to explain change, but to organise, translate and help deliver it. That requires resource.

Collaborative funding models such as SFS and Project Re-use show what is possible when partners back shared priorities. They have enabled FIS to reach further and faster, moving beyond talking about change to helping bring it about. If the Academy is to gather, test, maintain and share knowledge so competence is built collectively rather than fragmented, that delivery capacity has to be sustained.

The same applies to design quality and occupational safety. Challenging a disjointed design process remains vital because poor information and fragmented decision-making carry real consequences for specialist contractors and the finished building. FIS has also stepped up its work on occupational safety, an area I know Justin will press as a top priority. The Academy gives us a route to connect these priorities because competence, safety, design coordination and commercial fairness all depend on better information, shared responsibility and a sector willing to act together.

Looking back, I am proud of what has been achieved, not because the work is finished, but because FIS is better positioned than ever to support members through change and help shape what comes next.

It has been a privilege to serve as President, and I am grateful to everyone who has supported me, challenged me and contributed to the work of FIS over the last two years.

My belief in FIS has never been stronger. In a rapidly changing industry, a trusted, member-focused body that can convene, inform, advocate and support is more valuable than ever.

That gives me real confidence for the future.



Justin Devaney, current FIS Vice President and Operations Director, Platt & Reilly

Talking about his outlook for his upcoming presidency **Justin Devaney**, current FIS Vice President and Operations Director, Platt & Reilly commented.

It's an honour to take up the position of FIS President for this term, and it gives me the opportunity to build on the fantastic foundation that previous presidents have left as their legacy.

Ian Strangward, the outgoing FIS President, has had two brilliant years and demonstrated the calibre of leadership required by FIS. I would like to thank him for his time, commitment and leadership during his presidency.

As we are all aware by now, **Iain McIlwee** is moving on to his next challenge, leaving behind an organisation that he has shaped into a resilient, fit-for-purpose and truly outstanding association for its member companies.

Iain's leadership during his tenure couldn't have been more successful. He has brought FIS to a position where it is now the go-to organisation for knowledge, skills, legal advice and guidance, and anything else a

member company or the wider industry could possibly need.

Iain's dedication to the industry is something I have never seen before, and I would be surprised if I ever see it again. For that, both the FIS and I, along with the wider industry, owe Iain a tremendous debt of gratitude.

He has led a team of consummate professionals within the FIS, and the whole team should be commended for their knowledge, commitment and dedication to the organisation. It really is an honour to be part of the team for the next two years.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish Iain the very best in his future endeavours. However, I have no doubt that Iain will be successful in whatever environment he finds himself in, thanks to his unwavering ability, commitment and dedication.

As part of my presidency, I will be working with the team on our goal of eliminating death by dust exposure, as I believe no other industry would accept death from lung disease as part of everyday working life.

I will be working closely with **Davinder Jhamat**, who has been a perfect fit for the FIS since taking up her position in 2026. Davinder has achieved great success in such a short time.

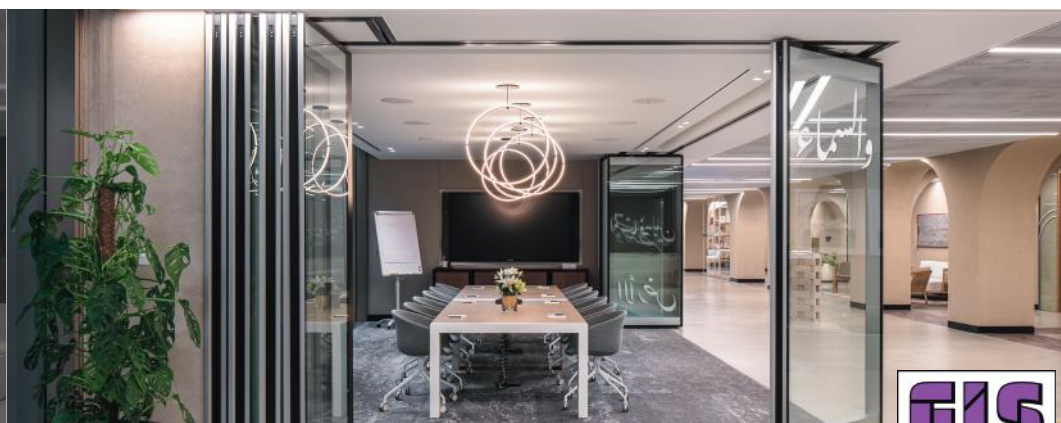
I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Lucia Di Stazio who is an FIS Board Member and the Group Marketing Strategy & Communications Director, Encon Nevill Long on her appointment as FIS Vice President. I'm sure she will be an outstanding Vice President, based on her extensive industry knowledge and the valuable input she has provided to the FIS Board to date.

I look forward to meeting you all and working with you over the coming years.

“Change is needed, but without empathy it is impossible. This is why research has been one of the central pillars of my Presidency.”

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Style Group acquired by dormakaba to support future growth

Style Group has been acquired by dormakaba and will be part of the company's Global Movable Walls business. The acquisition marks an important milestone for Style, strengthening its position for future growth while ensuring complete continuity for customers and partners.

For customers, it is very much business as usual. Style will continue to operate under its existing name, with the same experienced team, the same customer contacts and the same commitment to delivering industry-leading movable wall solutions, installation, service and aftercare throughout the UK.

The move provides Style with access to additional resources, innovation and international expertise, enabling further investment in its products, services and future growth while maintaining the personal service and trusted relationships the business has built over the past 30 years.

www.style-group.co.uk

www.dormakabagroup.com/en



DSP (Interiors) apprentice secures place in national construction skills final

A Derby apprentice is heading to the national stage after impressing judges at one of the UK's leading construction skills competitions.

Harrison Priestley, 21, an apprentice with DSP (Interiors), competed in the Drylining category at the SkillBuild Regional Finals held at Dudley Construction Apprentice Training Centre, impressing judges with his technical ability, attention to detail and determination under pressure.

His outstanding performance has now secured him a place at the SkillBuild National Final, which takes place this November and brings together the country's most talented construction apprentices and trainees.

Organised by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), SkillBuild is the largest multi-trade skills competition in

the UK, designed to showcase the next generation of construction talent.

What makes Harrison's achievement even more remarkable is that many competitors came from colleges and training providers that run dedicated SkillBuild preparation programmes and practice sessions.

Harrison entered the competition without that additional support but rose to the challenge and delivered an exceptional performance.

His success highlights the importance of apprenticeship programmes in developing the next generation of skilled construction professionals.

Harrison will now spend the coming months preparing for the final, where he will compete against the best young dryliners from across the UK.



Harrison, proudly displaying his exceptional work

For more information about SkillBuild, visit: www.goconstruct.org/skillbuild.

To read the story in full visit: <https://specfinish.co.uk/dsp-interiors-apprentice-secures-place-in-national-construction-skills-final/>

Three decades of excellence: iWall celebrates 30th anniversary

This year marks a significant milestone for iWall as the company proudly celebrates its 30th anniversary.

Founded in 1996, the company's vision was simple: to deliver exceptional glass partitioning solutions with outstanding craftsmanship, honest relationships, and a service clients could depend on.

A spokesperson for the business said: "While our industry has evolved significantly over the years, our values remain at the heart of everything we do.

"We have had the privilege of working with organisations of every size across the UK, helping to create workplaces that inspire collaboration, enhance wellbeing, and reflect the ambitions of the businesses that occupy them. Every project has been an opportunity to demonstrate the expertise and professionalism that define our company.

"Thank you to every colleague, past and present, along with our clients, partners, and suppliers, for the trust they have placed in us.

"Reaching 30 years isn't just about looking back — it's about looking ahead.

"Here's to the next chapter and many more years of building exceptional spaces together."

<https://iwall.co.uk/>



Staff at iWall celebrating their anniversary

Celebrating excellence at the 2026 FIS Scottish Awards

The FIS Scottish Awards are a celebration of the exceptional work and diverse range of projects carried out in Scotland. On 18 September, the awards ceremony was held at the impressive voco Grand Central Glasgow. The event, which was hosted by former Scotland and Hibernian goalkeeper **Alan Rough**, and supported by our event partner Knauf, was well-attended, with guests eagerly anticipating the announcement of this year's winners.

The ceremony began with a short speech from FIS Chief Executive **Iain McIlwee** followed by a welcome address from FIS President **Ian Strangward** who highlighted the organisation's activities in 2026 and plans for the future.

After a fantastic three-course lunch, the presentation of the awards began. The winners were as follows:

Interior Fit-Out

- D V McColl – Ayrshire Hospice

Ceilings

- Linear Projects – Dunfermline Learning Campus



Linear Projects – Project of the Year: Dunfermline Learning Campus

Partitioning

- Indeglas – Citizen's Theatre

Acoustic Excellence

- Glasgow Ceilings – Blairgowrie Recreation Centre

Most Sustainable Project

- Indeglas – Citizen's Theatre

Project of the Year

- Linear Projects – Dunfermline Learning Campus

The Lifetime Achievement Award

- Douglas Kerr previously of Scotwood Interiors

Read all about the winners at:
www.thefis.org/2026/09/18/celebrating-excellence-at-the-2026-fis-scottish-awards/

New RIBA-approved CPD explores why door hinge specification deserves more attention

Hinges account for only a small proportion of the cost of a typical door assembly, yet they play a critical role in how doors perform throughout their lifespan.

A new RIBA-approved CPD from SIMONSWERK explores the factors that influence hinge specification, helping architects understand how considerations such as door properties, applied hardware, environment and fire safety requirements can all affect hinge selection.

"Specifying Door Hinges: Balancing Design, Performance and Compliance" covers two RIBA core curriculum areas, legal, regulatory and statutory compliance, and design, construction and technology.

The CPD provides a practical framework that architects can use to support early design decisions and discussions with

specialist suppliers. The presentation also includes project examples to demonstrate how hinge specification responds to different architectural requirements.

The session runs for approximately 45 minutes and is available in person at your practice or online. For details or to book, contact **cpd@simonswerk.co.uk** or visit **uk.simonswerk.com/en/architecture/riba-approved-cpd**



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