



## Youth & Experience: Competence and SKEB Requirements for Cladding Remediation Projects

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In the construction industry, the delivery of cladding remediation projects requires a careful balance between the enthusiasm and fresh perspectives of young professionals and the valuable experience of seasoned experts. The competence and skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours (SKEB) of individuals play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and sustainability of Britain's buildings. This article explores the trade-offs between youth and experience, highlighting the competence requirements and the incorporation of SKEB in the construction industry, with a specific focus on cladding remediation projects. Intelligent FS, a renowned construction company, exemplifies the importance of this balance and provides insights into their approach.

Recruitment is an ongoing challenge in the construction industry, and addressing this issue requires innovative solutions. Over a year ago, Intelligent FS recognised the value of welcoming young professionals into the team, like Damian Campbell, a quantity surveyor student at the University of Salford. Having then recognized the value of collaborating with an academic institution, Intelligent FS began a partnership with the University, starting with a scholarship of two new students: a Construction Project Manager and a Construction Quantity Surveyor. This enables Intelligent FS to nurture young talent and provide opportunities to individuals who are passionate about the construction industry.

Damian's journey into the construction industry offered valuable insights into the motivations behind choosing a career in construction and the support mechanisms required to make this successful. Being able to offer practical experience

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alongside academic studies, ideally with the support of the college or university was quickly recognised as a successful formula for attracting and retaining young talent and their contributions to the workforce. Certainly, for Damian, Intelligent FS welcomed the arrangement, highlighting their commitment to supporting this student and valuing his potential contribution, which may otherwise have been missed.

Competence in cladding remediation projects is a crucial aspect of ensuring safety and sustainability, which has been set out in collaboration with industry in BSI Flex 8670 and begs the question of whether time-served professionals without formal qualifications can be considered competent. Intelligent FS believes that newly qualified individuals cannot be equated to experienced professionals due to the multifaceted nature of competence, with safety being of paramount importance.

The delivery of cladding remediation projects requires not only technical expertise but also a comprehensive understanding of construction generally, with the knowledge and experience that comes from time served completing projects, coupled with a set of ethical and behaviours underpinning a culture of safety.

The construction industry relies on the collective competence of its workforce to ensure quality and safety. Competence extends beyond technical skills and includes a range of attributes such as problem-solving abilities, communication skills, adaptability, and a strong ethical framework. By incorporating SKEBs into the evaluation and selection process, construction companies can identify individuals who possess not only the technical expertise but also the broader set of competencies required for successful project delivery.

Striking a balance between the enthusiasm and fresh perspectives of young professionals and the valuable experience of seasoned experts is crucial for ensuring the safety and sustainability of Britain's buildings. However, there is an obvious cost difference and shortage in the industry of experienced experts who also possess the desire and aptitude to continue their learning journey as the industry goes through what is one of its largest transformations for several decades.

To ensure the safety and quality of cladding remediation projects, it is essential to establish a minimum level of competence for professionals involved in these projects. This minimum level should encompass both technical knowledge and the broader SKEB. While qualifications

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and certifications can provide a baseline, they should not be the sole determinants of competence. Experience, practical skills, and a demonstrated understanding of the complexities and risks associated with cladding remediation are equally important. Conversely, an individual with 10 years' experience managing cladding remediation projects but no formal qualifications may also be insufficient if SKEB cannot be proved. The formal qualification underpinning the experience shows an aptitude for learning and, maintaining an understanding of current legislation and best practice; something vital with the still evolving changes to the Building Safety Act 2022.

Competence is not a static attribute but a continuous journey of personal and professional development. Construction professionals, both young and experienced, must actively engage in continual learning and improvement to adapt to the evolving industry standards, technological advancements, and regulatory changes. Emphasizing the importance of personal development and providing resources and opportunities for training and upskilling will ensure that individuals remain competent throughout their careers.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in preparing individuals for careers in the construction industry. By incorporating SKEBs into curricula, universities and training providers can equip students with not only technical knowledge but also the broader range of skills and behaviours necessary for competence. This can be achieved through a combination of theoretical teachings, practical applications, case studies, and industry placements. By simulating real-life scenarios and projects, students

can develop problem-solving abilities, teamwork skills, and ethical decision-making, in addition to technical proficiency.

Implementing robust Continual Professional Development (CPD) programs for employees is a proven approach to achieving this. CPD provides opportunities for individuals to enhance their existing skills, acquire new ones, and stay up to date with industry developments. This can be achieved through workshops, seminars, conferences, online courses, mentoring programmes, and knowledge-sharing platforms. Encouraging employees to pursue CPD demonstrates a commitment to their professional growth and ensures the ongoing competence of the workforce.

Achieving a balance between youth and experience is crucial for the success of cladding remediation projects in the construction industry. By incorporating

SKEB into both a minimum level of competence and a continual personal development approach, construction companies can build a competent workforce capable of tackling the challenges of cladding remediation projects effectively. Intelligent FS's collaboration with the University of Salford exemplifies the potential for bridging the gap between academia and industry and by recognizing the value of SKEB and investing in education, training, and CPD programs, the construction industry can foster the growth of competent professionals who will drive innovation, ensure safety, and enhance the built environment for future generations.

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