

SPEC FINISH



The magazine of FIS
representing the finishes
and interiors sector

www.thefis.org



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Weathering the storm
and staying positive

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Why variations are
the spice of life



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Service Partitions Ltd (SPL) has been handling projects like these for 50 years and is celebrating its golden anniversary this year - read all about it in our news section.



WELCOME

We're bringing you this latest issue in times of economic uncertainty not just within the construction sector, but within the country as a whole. Not since post-war times has the UK been hit with such an impact and no-one can say for sure what the future holds.

But one thing we can be certain of is the common goal of our members to work towards overall achievement for the sector and to share good practice. So with that in mind we're endeavouring to keep you up to date not only with the support available during the coronavirus outbreak, but with all the developing news and fresh insights relating to everything from technology to design, and project initiation to payment.

For our May issue, we've lined up several thought-leadership articles that provide some interesting feedback and tips, as well as bringing you all the latest on the national situation, and our members' news and updates. In our skills section, George Swann details some of the information and revenue sources for apprenticeships, waiting to be tapped into by FIS members and we'd urge you to check out some of the website links he provides. The future of our industry rests in the hands of these new-generation workers and we're sure that it's a future that can still be full of innovation and achievement.



"One thing we can be certain of is the common goal of our members to work towards overall achievement for the sector and to share good practice."



Stephanie Cornwall
Editor

IN THIS ISSUE



EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS



Joe Cilia, Technical Director, FIS

Joe provides support to members of the association and works with relevant bodies on legislative and technical standards.



Isabel Blanco, Marketing Communications Manager, Armstrong Ceiling Solutions

Isabel Blanco has 17 years' experience in the construction industry and has been with Armstrong for four years, initially as marketing and sales coordinator (UK, Ireland and Southern Africa). Her current role is also international, with the marketing of 11 countries to manage. Prior to Armstrong, she held a similar role with Marvin Architectural, a supplier of bespoke windows and doors.



Nigel Morrey, Technical Director, Etex Building Performance

Nigel Morrey oversees the performance of Etex products and systems. He has more than 30 years of experience in the passive fire protection industry and is an active member of the Association of Specialist Fire Protection (ASFP). He is also a director of the Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS).



George Swann, Skills and Training Manager, FIS

George Swann looks after the training portfolio of FIS and helps to drive the organisation's focus on competence through the FIS For Competency's SAKE Framework. He has been employed in training and training development since 1979, having also worked for CITB where he facilitated the review of the National Occupational Standards for Demolition, Construction Operations and Civil Engineering Services and drafting CITB Training Standards.

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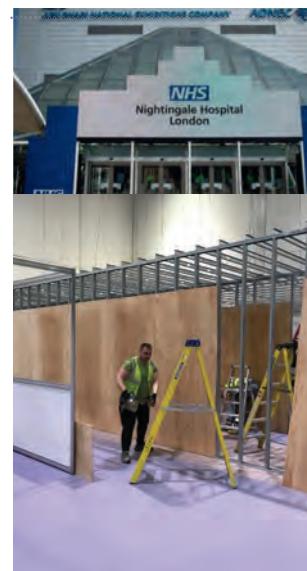
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OVERCOMING OUR FEAR OF THE DARK

IAIN MCILWEE
Chief executive
Finishes and
Interiors Sector



It's rather embarrassing to admit (don't tell them down at the rugby club) but I am still afraid of the dark. It's ridiculous, I know.

I am a 45-year-old man. I have been a CEO for a decade. I'm a husband and a father. I have played rugby for 30 odd years and, despite never being that good, countless times I've thrown my body in the way of a rampaging second row or stared into the eye of a prop before debating the rules of the game (the old-fashioned way). I like to think I even developed a bit of a reputation for being brave, but.... irrational maybe, embarrassing definitely, I am still afraid of the dark.

As a child, this fear was literal. I couldn't see the monsters, but they were every bit as real to me as the wardrobe - under the bed, lurking in the shadows. I didn't know exactly what they looked like, but could picture sharp teeth, fierce eyes and menacing talons. When the lights went out, they awoke... slowly creeping up on me...

This is the same fear that COVID-19 awakes in me. With this virus there is so much that we don't know or can't see (how long, how severe, who, when, what to do for the best). We are in the dark, surrounded

by all the grown-up monsters: The virus itself, our concern for loved ones and the workforce who rely on us, money worries, horrible clauses in contracts we have signed and contractors and clients who are exhibiting all the negative behaviours that we have bemoaned for years.

As a child, I reached for a torch to fight back the gloom and if I just couldn't take it any more, I called out "Muuuuuuuuuuuuuummmmm!"

As an adult, my light is experience, logic and fact. And Mum? Well, that is our community. Experience can be personal or an old head popping up to tell us "in my day....". This is less the case here as COVID-19 is unprecedented but there are things we can draw from such as recessions and contingency plans. Vitaly there are collective learnings that are being developed through our community as we all face this new normal.

In adversity, I have seen people sharing more than ever, giving us insight through their experiences and wisdom and allowing us to absorb and cascade all of this through the FIS. This has helped our team to focus, zone in on facts, challenge our wider network and present logical conclusions. It has helped us to cut through the fog of information and misinformation to ensure our community has access to the best possible information as soon as we can get it out. Never before have I so vividly seen that in the expression 'Together we are stronger'.

Where frustration has crept in, we have been able to channel it. If we are not getting clear guidance on the 2m working rule, our own community has stepped up, sharing thinking and supporting specialist working groups established through the FIS to interrogate the ground truths and explore the art of the possible. This and the information flow have strengthened our voice too, ensuring that we are able to relay clear information back up the chain. We may not agree with all the decisions that are being made, but we are damn well making sure they are not being made in the dark, but informed by the vital information that our community is sharing through us.

I'll be honest, there are still times I sit here looking at my screen and feel that wave of fear. Sometimes it still feels dark and there remain so many unknowns, but I do know that recover we will, that morning will come, the shadows will disappear and we can start to look forward.

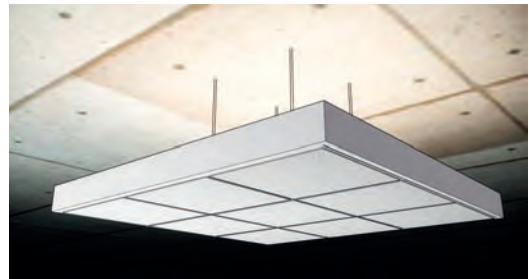
My sincere hope is that we can utilise the power of our community more effectively as we emerge and look together at some of the things we would like to leave there in the dark, how we will rebuild construction in the UK on a better footing, leaving behind some of the negative behaviours and practices that stand out so starkly in these darker times. As I was reminded in an email from a member today, it won't be dark for long, tough times don't last, but tough people do.



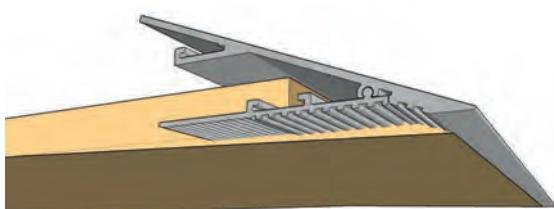
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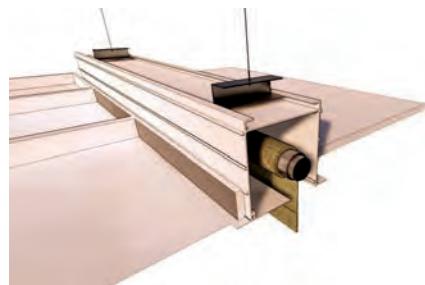
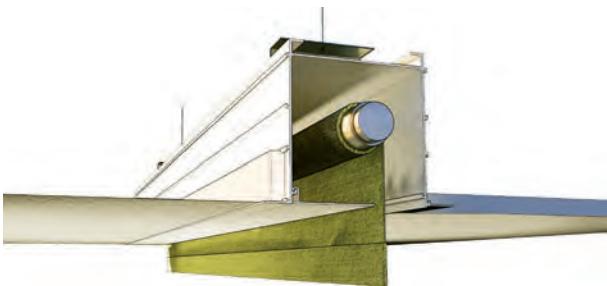
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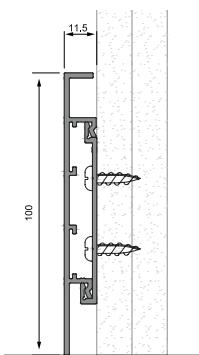
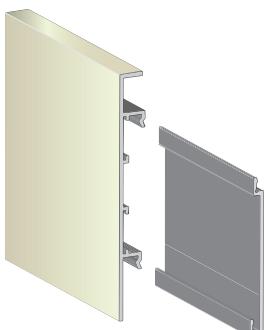
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BLIND BOX SOLUTIONS

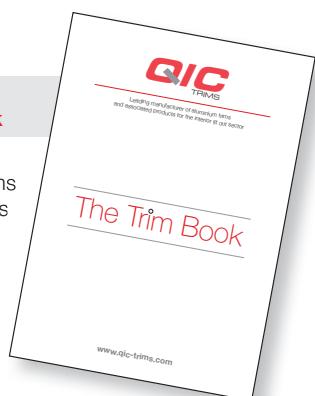


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NEWS

Fitting out bespoke new home for church

Derby-based design, refurbishment and fit-out specialist DSP (Interiors) has been appointed principal designer and contractor on the project to create a new home for Derby Central United Reformed Church.

The church is leaving its existing home to make way for a £200m regeneration project in the city and work is underway to convert former offices on Green Lane in Derby into a new multi-purpose facility for the Central URC.

The team at DSP has been working closely with members of Central URC to design a modern new internal layout, which will be better suited to the Church's community-



focused activities and provide improved accessibility for the disabled. Additional measures have also been taken to source durable materials and sustainable energy efficient equipment wherever possible.

Plans for the ground floor include entrance lobby and reception office along with a sanctuary, which will feature a concrete ceiling to enhance acoustics and showcase contemporary exposed services.

The sanctuary will also feature a bespoke lighting raft, backlit windows and a cross onto an oak timber-slatted wall, complemented by a cushioned acoustic grey oak effect vinyl flooring and aisle carpet. The first floor will include a multi-functional hall with children's soft play area and meeting rooms.

DSP Director Andy Priestley said: "We have succeeded in designing a space which will serve as a place of worship and will also provide multiple uses for the community."

www.dsp-solutions.co.uk



Perfect for Breakfast at Tiffany's

Portview has fitted out Tiffany & Co's first 'blue box' cafe in Europe.

Located on the lower ground floor of Harrods, the pop-up cafe features an interior indicative of the famous Blue Box Cafe in the Tiffany flagship store on Fifth Avenue in New York City.

Managing Director of Portview Simon Campbell said: "It has married classic retail design with hospitality elements to produce a unique, experiential space that seamlessly blends the old with the new to create a new modern classic."

The brand's Tiffany Blue is used throughout the interior, complemented by a mirror silver leaf ceiling, creating the illusion of dining inside one of Tiffany's famed Blue Boxes. Amazonite stone features, oak parquet flooring and hand painted flora and fauna motifs also feature.

Lighting is provided by linear strips behind the banquet seating and staircase handrail.

www.portview.co.uk

Indoor air quality linked to respiratory problems in children

A recent report by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) and the Royal College of Physicians has revealed that respiratory problems among children may be exacerbated by indoor air pollution within schools and nurseries and other public buildings, as well as their own homes, and one of the causes can be chemicals from building materials and furnishings.

The report, based on a RCPCH commissioned systematic review of 221 studies, presents evidence linking indoor air pollution to a range of childhood health problems including asthma, wheezing, conjunctivitis, dermatitis, and eczema. Other listed causes of the pollution are smoking, damp, the burning of fossil fuels and wood, dust, aerosol sprays, and cleaning products.

Some of the recommendations within the report, entitled 'The Inside Story: Health effects of indoor air quality on children and young people' include setting up a cross-governmental committee to co-ordinate working in health, environment and education sectors and investment in high quality research and evidence to support decision making.

The Inside Story: Health effects of indoor air quality on children and young people' is jointly published by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) and the Royal College of Physicians (RCP). It is funded by Allergy UK, Airtopia, Asthma UK, BEAMA, British Heart Foundation, British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Dyson, and the Greater London Authority.



New maintenance service launched at university



Cumbernauld-based Indeglas has secured an ongoing agreement to regularly inspect and maintain internal glazed screens within the University of Strathclyde's Stenhouse, James Weir and Technology and Innovation Centre Buildings.

The agreement includes an initial survey followed by regular inspections to ensure compliance with all current building standards for the safety of occupants.

The university has committed significant and continued investment into the campus. The Indeglas contract covers the survey, inspection and maintenance of all internal glass screens.

Managing Director of Indeglas, Jeanette MacIntyre, said: "Our agreement recognises the requirement for building owners and estates managers to maintain, with confidence, the highly engineered interior spaces which are now a staple requirement for top performing organisations."

"We are extremely pleased to offer this new maintenance service to one of the country's leading educational institutions and have invested heavily to support its execution. The design and installation of internal glass has become an increasingly specialist sector within the built environment as the range of glass types, properties offered, and appropriate application continues to develop."

www.indegglas.co.uk

Health and wellbeing key to airport fit-out

Sustainability and wellbeing have been key specifications for the interior of a major new development at Bristol Airport.

The airport, which first opened its doors in 1930, has undergone an extensive expansion and project managers wanted its new building to provide a positive environment that supports the health and wellbeing of occupants.

One of the main concerns was indoor air quality, as many materials used in new builds emit potentially harmful Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) into the surrounding air, with formaldehyde being a particularly harmful VOC. It is emitted from a wide range of commonly used materials, such as chipboards, fibreboards, furniture, carpet, glue and interior fabrics – and would therefore be present in the new Bristol Airport building.

Johnstone's Trade Air Pure was the chosen paint for the interior decoration, which was felt to offer environmental and healthcare benefits. From the point of application, Air Pure neutralises up to 70% of formaldehyde from the air, helping to continually improve the indoor environment over a number of years. The paint is also 45% bio-based. The paint has already been used on the third building of the project, Aviation House.

Development Director at Bristol Airport, Andrew Goodenough, said: "Protecting both our employees and the environment was at the heart of this project."

He added: "Knowing that we're providing the healthiest working environment possible is really reassuring. Not only that, but the finish is spectacular."

www.johnstonestrade.com

Hospital interior facelift live environment



An interior refurbishment project at Sheffield Children's Hospital is well under way. The works include a full strip out and refurbishment of the Aseptic Unit and offices, along with the construction of a new plant room on the roof comprising a new steel frame structure, SFS walls and floor, rock panel cladding and a new sarnafil flat roof covering.

Doncaster-based Pacy and Wheatley Interiors is working in a live environment while carrying out the £690K project.

www.pacy-wheatley-interiors.co.uk

Entries sought for wood awards

The Wood Awards has launched its 2020 call for entries. 2020 is the 50th anniversary of the competition, which celebrates excellence in British architecture and product design.

Anyone involved in a UK-based wood project is invited to enter and has until 22 May to submit their applications. There is no entry fee and entrants may submit more than one project.

Established in 1971, the Wood Awards recognises, encourages and promotes outstanding design, craftsmanship and installation throughout the UK. Buildings must be located within the UK whilst furniture and other products must have been either designed or manufactured in the UK. There are no restrictions on the size or budget of a project. Entries must be submitted via www.woodawards.com

35th anniversary

Daventry Partitioning Services is celebrating 35 years in business this year. The company is a commercial interior fitter of suspended ceilings, partitions, mezzanine floors and more and is based at Siddeley Way, Daventry.

Hitting the right note at Royal Opera House

A balanced acoustic environment has been created at the world-famous Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. The StoSilent Distance monolithic, seamless acoustic solution has been installed within the new entrance foyer and front-of-house spaces as part of the recent 'Open Up' refurbishment to make the Royal Opera House a more welcoming building.

The work was part of a wider project to open up and reconfigure the main foyer areas. Stone flooring was used in the newly-created large open spaces which, being a hard reflective material, added to the acoustic challenges, while Venetian polished plaster was used on the walls.

The foyer stretches over three floors in height, with a main escalator which has a single

linear design and reaches up to the top floor area. It was decided to remove the existing metal tartan grid and install the StoSilent Distance system to the underside of this part of the building to enhance the acoustics and allow the ceilings to flow seamlessly throughout the space and create a visually appealing aesthetic. This ornate but modern ceiling concept involved many design challenges, including the need to create a contemporary appearance which would complement the interior of this historic building.

The StoSilent Distance boards were installed onto a Sto SC400 grid system, which allows for movement with the building therefore limiting the possibility of damage to the exterior finish at wall junctions and other detail areas. The boards also resist



Sto's StoSilent Distance monolithic, seamless acoustic solution has helped to create a balanced acoustic environment at the world-famous Royal Opera House in Covent Garden.

pattern staining and will maintain the desired monolithic, seamless appearance.

For this project, the StoSilent Distance system was finished with StoSilent Décor M, a spray-applied glass silicate acoustic plaster with a granular texture which provides a high degree of light resolution.

www.sto.co.uk

Joiner's daughter invents solution to target joint pain

A joiner's daughter, who was prompted to start her new business as a result of seeing her father develop arthritis and suffer progressively from painful joints while going about his work, is now looking to aid others within our sector.

Victoria Hamilton founded Recoil Kneepads in 2013 as part of her final year design project before graduating as a product design engineer from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.

Victoria wanted to help her father, Gordon Hamilton, who believed the cause of his pain was the use of kneepads that didn't appropriately protect his knees. Seeing his pain, the budding entrepreneur decided to set about creating a solution and despite securing a job in the energy industry after graduating, instead decided to start her business, by making her innovation mainstream.

The kneepad she invented utilises springs sandwiched between two layers to absorb impact and then spread pressure evenly across the knee. She claims it offers wearers up to 76% pressure reduction on the knee through its 360 degree pivoting abilities. The kneepads are equipped with foam that hugs the knee and straps. The kneepads have been put through their paces at the University of Strathclyde, with tests finding they decrease pressure by 76%. The nearest competitor reduced pressure by 60.7%.

In March 2017, Recoil was recognised by the Royal Academy of Engineering.

www.recoilkneepads.com



Earnings down since Brexit vote

The UK construction sector has seen earnings on its investments in the EU fall off a cliff since the Brexit vote with profits plummeting 95%, analysis of the latest ONS data has revealed. UK construction companies' earnings on its EU investment positions went from £24million in 2015 to £4million in 2018 - down 83%.



Support our 3 Step Plan

FIS has launched its 3 Step Plan to Rebuild Construction led by FIS President Helen Tapper of Tapper Interiors. All FIS members are urged to take a look at the plan and lend their support by visiting www.thefis.org/call-to-arms



GOLDEN TIMES

Founding member celebrates 50 years of business

Service Partitions Ltd (SPL), one of the founder members of the Partitioning Industry Association (PIA), is celebrating its golden anniversary this year.

The company, which is based in Bury St Edmunds, was founded on 10 April 1970 by Pat O'Brien, Neil Phillips and Peter Hankins, and started out as a supplier of partitions. Over the next 50 years, it evolved to become an all-round interior specialist and in 1984 Service Group Interiors (SGI) became the trading name of the company.

SGI works on the philosophy of 'exploiting design and creating environments', according to Managing Director William Kirkham, who joined the company 10 years after its inception as a Director. William was President of the Association of Interior Specialists (AIS), which merged with the Federation of Plastering & Drywall Contractors (FPDC) in 2014 to form FIS, from 2003 to 2005.

William and fellow Director Daniel Phillips, who joined the company in 2009, are now equal shareholders of the company.

William said the loyalty and understanding of his staff was the main contributor to the company's longevity. He said: "The success of the business throughout its existence has been based on excellent teamwork. Thanks to a deep pride in their company, staff at all levels have a commitment towards understanding the customers' needs and putting their requirements first."

Daniel was quick to back this up, saying: "Over the years, we've built up our expertise to offer full service from design concept through to installation, and we could not have done that without some deeply talented and reliable staff. We count ourselves lucky to have not only existed this long, but to have

grown and extended our range, and hope all our customers and suppliers will join us in celebrating our achievement."

Some of the company's standout projects over the years have been executed through works direct to clients and via main contractors, notably: RG Carters, SDC Builders, Hutton Construction, Ashe Construction, Lindum Group, Borras Construction, 8 Build, Ducron Construction, Seamans Building, Morgan Sindall, Kier Construction, Horizon Construction, McLaren Group, Forest Gate Construction, Bowmer & Kirkland and Barnes Construction.

Service Group Interiors has formed long-standing relationships within the supply chain and has worked in partnership with Komfort for many years, being one of its first registered contractors.

Komfort's Sales and Marketing Director, Jim Smith said: "Over that time, they've become much more than just a customer, they're very much a partner in delivering a range of projects we're all very proud of."

He said Komfort's relationship with Service Group stretched back to "the evolution of partitioning" and pointed out that the company became one of the main exponents of frameless systems during the 1990s.

"Nowadays they continue to work closely with us on standard, bespoke and fire-systems. Will and Dan's knowledge is unparalleled in the industry and they are the first point of contact for personnel in our company that have a query on legacy systems. That is an accolade to their knowledge in itself!"

"I want to take this moment to congratulate Service Group for 50 years in business, a celebration that has been awarded through hard work, collaboration and excellent service.

Here's to the next 50 years of continued success for the whole team!"

The biggest changes SGS's staff have seen over the years have been in relation to health and safety and environmental issues, according to William.

One of SGI's long-standing suppliers has been Forza Doors and its Regional Sales Manager, James Humphreys, said the attitudes of SGI's staff and owners were a "shining light" that enabled them to respond to complex projects within critical timescales.

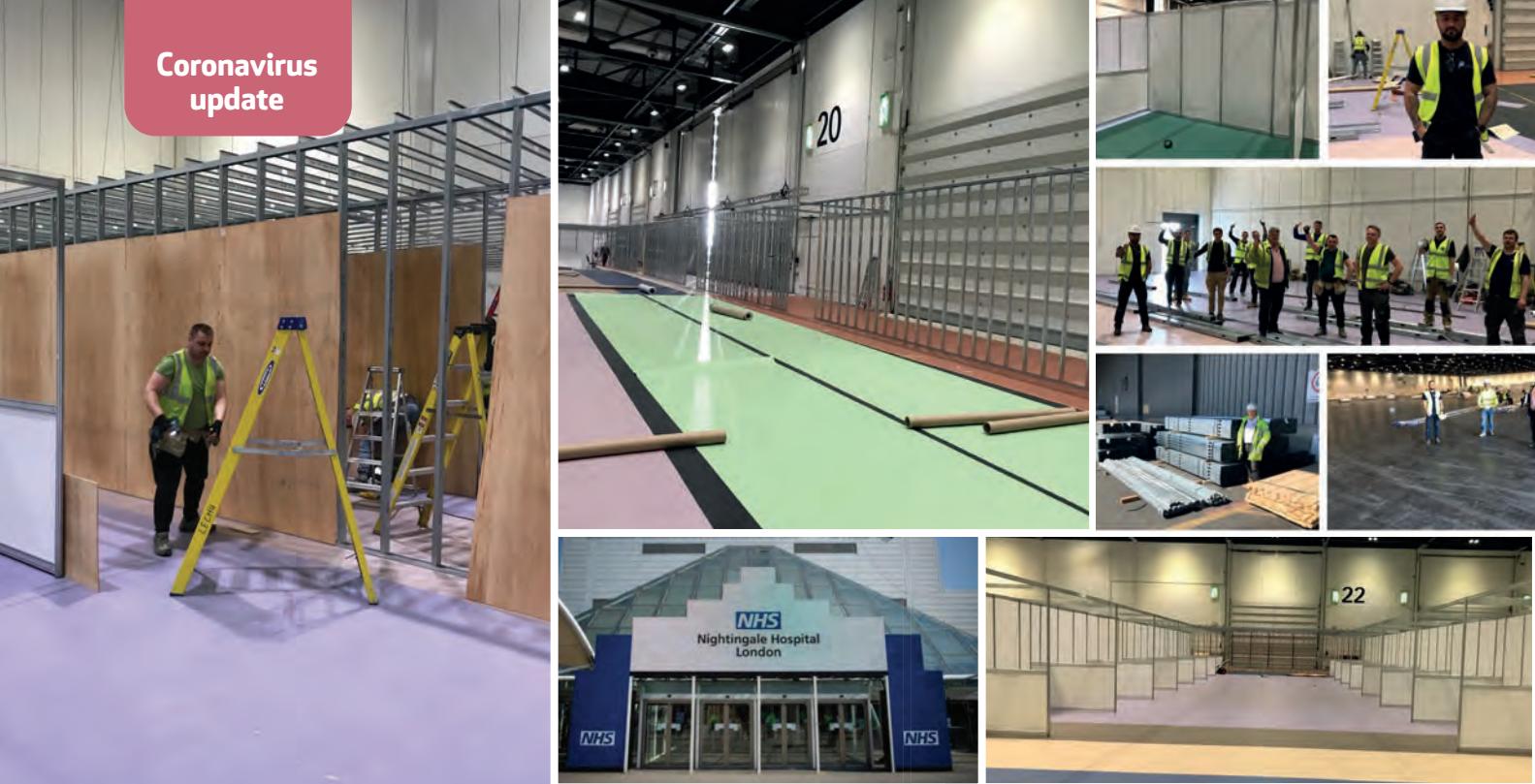
"The key relationships that the SGI workforce have with their supply chain partners has been built up over many years and is based upon the ability to give clear and concise information that allows Forza Doors to manufacture and deliver materials to the SGI projects that meets the demanding programme imposed upon them," he said.

"Congratulations to the SGI team on a tremendous history within the interiors industry and also the next chapter in the book of success that will be written by them."

FIS Chief Executive Iain McIlwee also praised the company on its milestone.

He said: "Congratulations go to SGI on the landmark. Nothing ever stands still in our industry, and over the years SGI's long-standing staff must have witnessed some notable changes, while William's expertise has been an invaluable input to the FIS and its forerunners."

"The success of the business throughout its existence has been based on excellent teamwork."



UNITED EFFORT FOR THE NIGHTINGALES

Our members pull out all the stops to get temporary hospitals up and running

FIS members have risen to the challenge of building and opening 10 temporary critical care hospitals being set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government and public health services began planning the creation of the hospitals to provide cover for the projected increase in patients likely to require treatment.

The first NHS Nightingale hospital, at London's ExCeL centre, officially opened on 3 April, having taken less than a fortnight to establish, originally offering 500 beds. The Birmingham NEC and Manchester Conference Centre have 3,000 beds between them, while other temporary hospitals were being established at Glasgow's Scottish Events Campus (SEC), Millennium Stadium in Cardiff and Belfast City Hospital's tower block.

At the time of SpecFinish going to press, Health Secretary Matt Hancock had just announced a further two planned facilities to open in Bristol and Harrogate which between them would have up to 1,500 beds.

'Military precision'

Within hours of the Government's announcement to turn London's ExCeL into a temporary hospital, five FIS members - British Gypsum, Penlaw & Co,

PWB Drylining & Interiors, Etag Fixings and Hadley Group - were pulling together to construct ward areas, ward entrance booths and corridors.

Dryliners from PWB Drylining & Interiors are amongst those working on site, while independent distributor of drywall materials, Penlaw & Co, stepped up to the challenge to supply all the materials required.

Penlaw & Co's Supply Chain Director Paul Scott said: "This build is unlike anything we have witnessed, the logistics and planning that has gone into turning ExCeL into a hospital in just one week is beyond comprehension. The entire build is completely reliant on hundreds of suppliers providing materials at exactly the right time - the precision is military."

"This build is unlike anything we have witnessed, the logistics and planning that has gone into turning ExCeL into a hospital in just one week is beyond comprehension."

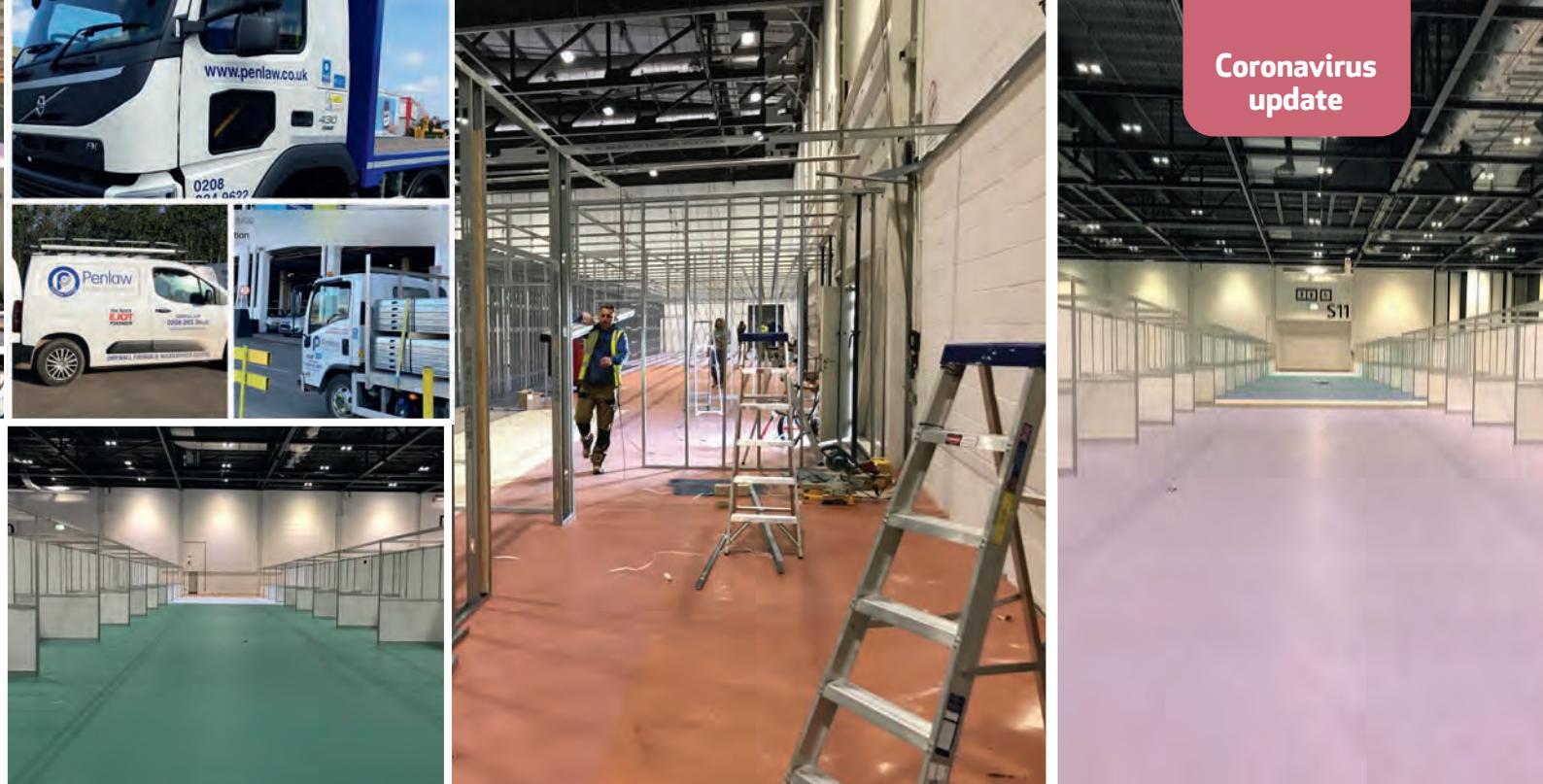
Paul Scott, Penlaw & Co

Originally designed to accommodate just 500 beds, as the number of people affected by COVID-19 has ramped up, especially in London, the project quickly escalated to 4,000 beds, changing the dynamics of the build and the materials required to fulfil the job.

Paul said: "The original brief was to supply a bio-cleanable product to construct the main walls. As the announcement came that the Nightingale needed to accommodate a further 3,500 beds, within a few hours we completely switched supply to British Gypsum materials."

British Gypsum's National Trade Sales Director, Gordon Parnell, said it had been a great example of FIS members pulling together for the greater good.

"In just 48 hours the scale of this build changed dramatically. With over 60 dryliners on site, they needed material quickly to get the job done. In normal circumstances this is a complex project but has been made possible by the collaborative nature of Penlaw & Co and our logistics team at our East Leake depot. If evidence was ever needed to demonstrate how the construction industry can pull together in a time of crisis, then this is surely it," he said.



Etag Fixings and Hadley Group have also provided materials for the ExCeL hospital. Etag opened its store specifically to provide fixings for the job, having pledged to keep the supply chain open to the construction industry for as long as it conceivably could. It recently tweeted: "Pulling together for everyone and willing to help in any way we can for any essential sites. Thank you to PWB Drylining and all other teams working on the construction of NHS Nightingale."

Cold rollforming manufacturer Hadley also tweeted a photo of its lorry being unloaded at ExCeL London, stating: "We are delighted our products are being used in the construction of the NHS Nightingale Hospital. We're grateful to be a part of such an outstanding, essential project, fighting against COVID-19."

Another FIS member, Bryson, which imports, manufactures and distributes fixings, temporary protection and safety products, has provided support for the London, Birmingham and Manchester hospitals. Managing Director Daniel Reiner said it would continue to stay open for essential supplies including PPE, hygiene products and other much-needed materials with next day and same day delivery to help in the fight against COVID-19.

"We are delighted our products are being used in the construction of the NHS Nightingale Hospital. We're grateful to be a part of such an outstanding, essential project, fighting against COVID-19."

Hadley Group

"If evidence was ever needed to demonstrate how the construction industry can pull together in a time of crisis, then this is surely it."
Gordon Parnell, British Gypsum

'What a remarkable effort from everyone involved in getting the NHS Nightingale Hospital in London ExCeL up and running in under two weeks. Bryson are pleased to have supported this project with fast delivery of much needed PPE and hygiene products to the contractors working on the project and we are actively involved in supporting the upcoming critical care field hospitals in Birmingham and Manchester,' he said. 'During this challenging time we are prioritising supply of PPE and hygiene products for the NHS and care providers throughout the UK and Europe to support the fight against the COVID-19 crisis. Our message to our Bryson team and to everyone we work with and support is to stay positive, stay safe, and remember we are all in this together.'

Sound Interiors is working on the Deeside facility. Commercial Director Graham Flynn said: 'We started Tuesday morning and completed the sports hall last night. We are now in what was a skate park, about the size of a football field. Then we move on to the ice rink. We have 30 men working round the clock and hope to finish by the end of next week.'

Supporting the Louisa Jordan

In Scotland, PFP is amongst those working to build and open the new NHS "Louisa Jordan" field hospital at Scottish Events Campus (SEC), Glasgow.

The hospital is named after Scottish nurse Louisa Jordan, who died in service during the First World War. More than

400 contractors are working alongside nearly 150 NHS Scotland clinicians and operational staff to establish the new NHS Louisa Jordan.

Scottish Health Secretary Jeane Freeman has praised all staff who are working at the site to develop this new facility, saying: 'They are working together, under exceptional circumstances, to deliver a clinically safe and fit-for-purpose hospital that, if required, will provide extra capacity for NHS Scotland.'

Building Heroes sign up to help

FIS Approved Training Provider Building Heroes, which provides construction training for former services personnel is assisting with setting up the Nightingale hospitals in Newcastle and York. Building Heroes graduates are signed up to support the scheme.

Building Heroes' Founder Brendan Williams said: 'Sixteen of our Building Heroes graduates will be working on the Harrogate Nightingale. The skills they learned on our Foundation Programme, which incorporates the FIS BuildBack programme will have prepared them well. Southern-based graduates have already been active at the ExCeL Nightingale. We at Building Heroes are humbled to assist our NHS in their hour of need.'

FIS Chief Executive Iain McIlwee said it was heart-warming to see the wider industry come together on the Nightingale projects.

'We praise all those involved in this time of crisis to help defeat COVID-19 and ultimately save lives,' he said.

REAL-TIME SUPPORT

Hub and webinars answer members' pressing COVID-19 queries

In order to keep its members and the sector as up-to-date as possible FIS has created a Covid-19 Hub on its website. It is closely monitoring the development of the coronavirus situation and is receiving regular briefings from the Civil Service and continues to follow official advice from government and the health authorities.

CEO of FIS, Iain McIlwee, said: "We are very mindful of the additional pressure this is putting on our membership and our sector as a whole and the amount of misinformation that is out there, so we are working to keep this area of our website, live, uncluttered and targeted on how things will impact our community. We are dedicating all of the resources available to us to finding the answers and sharing best practice".

In uncertain times, identifying risk is critical to effective planning, so FIS also developed a Covid-19 Management Toolkit. The tool is developed in real-time by the FIS team, ensuring that risks are identified and where possible the very best resources supplied to help quantify and mitigate are these. The key areas are:

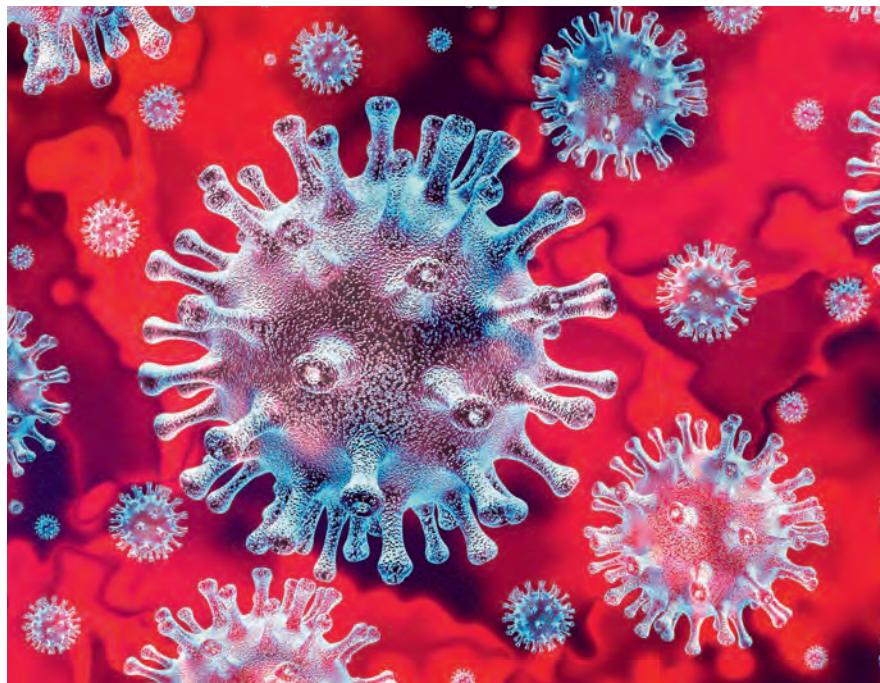
- Leadership
- Workforce welfare
- Contractual matters
- Project continuity
- Business continuity

FIS Operations Director Jane Knight added: "FIS is also sending out almost daily updates by email and social media to both its members and SpecFinish readers and the FIS team is reaching out to all members by phone to offer their support. If you have not yet received a call but would like to speak to one of our team, please do not hesitate to call."

Commenting on the information flow, Yvette Jacobs from new FIS member Sto said: "I just wanted to write and say thanks for the updates you provide in these unprecedented and scary times. The comms you send are truly excellent, exceptionally useful, motivational and resourceful. I am very glad to be on your mailing list!"

Webinars address concerns

FIS has held a number of webinars aimed at answering many of the questions and concerns raised by members since the COVID-19 outbreak, all of which are available to listen to.



Advice on funding streams, managing work delays, commercial pitfalls, employment and contractual issues during and after the government-advised lockdown, has been made available following talks and insights from a number of experts in different fields.

The 'Important government funding for FIS members' R&D tax credit specialist ForrestBrown explains how to quickly access government funding through R&D Tax Credits in a time where cash flow may be scarce.

Marc Preston looks at the common sense steps needed to navigate potential commercial pitfalls associated with delays to construction projects caused by COVID-19 in our 'Conflict Resolution and COVID-19' webinar, with advice focussing on record keeping, how to communicate effectively and structure arguments to elicit collaboration and avoid conflict. A qualified psychotherapist and quantity surveyor, Marc is CEO of Vertice Development Management, a project management and quantity surveying practice.

Delay and quantum expert Damian James looks at the practical steps to ensure contractual entailment to time and money in our 'COVID-19: How to manage suspensions' webinar, while our 'COVID-19: cash flow forecasting' webinar looks at the

fundamentals of cash flow forecasting and what you can do to help your business ride the storm.

Mental health expert Red Umbrella delivers a webinar whose focus is on the impact of fear and uncertainty on mental health and how this in turn affects physical health, concentration, anxiety and worry for oneself and others. It also addresses the impact of isolation and working remotely, suggesting practical steps to reduce isolation and loneliness, and how to deal with disruption and lack of control in dealing with the current crisis. This webinar is delivered by Nathan Shearman, a qualified counsellor.

In other webinars, ClarksLegal representatives discuss employment and contractual matters, Citation looks at a year of unprecedented change, John Bradley of Reynolds Colman Bradley LLP discusses unreasonable contractual clauses, and Stuart Young from the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy updates us on the current state of play and answered some probing questions.

To listen to the webinars, visit www.thefis.org/covid-19-hub/webinars.

To subscribe to our updates email clairmooney@thefis.org

MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH CRUCIAL DURING CRISIS

Misinformation and lack of communication will be the key causes of business crisis during the COVID-19 outbreak, according to crisis management expert Ronn Torossian and wellbeing advisor Craig Bulow, who both stress the importance of employers keeping in regular touch with workers and ensuring information is filtered down, no matter how minor the update.

Ronn has more than 20 years' experience working with national and international companies who have been through disruptive and unexpected events that threatened to harm their organisation and stakeholders.

He said: "It goes without saying that the human impact and health concerns of the outbreak are the biggest priority. But as the uncertainty surrounding this pandemic continues, the way companies approach this crisis is top of mind for many CEOs.

"We've witnessed the rippling effects of the media over the past few weeks. For many people, their greatest source of anxiety has been the process of watching the news unfold—with information, and misinformation, fueling panic and distress. Fear and uncertainty breed mass hysteria. Right now, people need a voice of reason. First and foremost, communication is key. Now is not the time to stay silent with employees, customers, stakeholders, etc. Regular communication alleviates concerns and provides reassurance."

Consideration of what service/information could be provided could vary from free deliveries to just sending weekly emails or texts to check in, he said, adding that employers should use this time to commit to a crisis communications strategy that "informs, educates, reassures customers, and earns trust".

Craig Bulow is the founder of Corporate Away Days, an organisation which develops corporate wellbeing policies and provides workshops, seminars and talks on improving mental health and overall wellbeing. He said that while fit-out businesses need to adapt to survive, the stance they take now could result in their business emerging stronger than before.

"It's important to consider not only how this will affect your business but how it will affect your employees from a mental health perspective," he said. "Employers really can make a difference to the employee experience when working in isolation or remotely and to succeed you need your team, so you must be putting their mental health and wellbeing right at the top of your list."

With stress about job security being prevalent, one proven way to alleviate this is to have clear, honest and regular conversations with your team, he said.

"Call them and have a chat. Put a time in your diary to speak to them - don't just leave it to chance," Craig advised. "Let them know what the business is doing, tell them the truth – don't sugar coat it. Help people understand what the company is doing and what plans it has."

Where possible, opportunities to bring groups together virtually, whereby they can take part in open discussion and provide support for each other should be encouraged. "This human connection is an incredibly important part of work. It boosts engagement and morale and needs to be maintained," said Craig. "Organising regular group conference calls using Zoom or Skype is a great step, ideally video calls where you can all see each other."

"Make connecting with colleagues and getting to know them socially, as well as professionally, part of the new culture within the business, and actively encourage it while working remotely. This way you can keep the



connection your team enjoys at work and even build upon it!"

If there's an opportunity to offer virtual counselling, with an internal wellbeing / trained HR Officer or an external professional, this could be offered on a group conference call basis, he added.

"The calls could be used to talk through various tools that can be used to reduce stress and anxiety; covering mindfulness techniques, sleep, rest, nutrition and diet and how to keep calm and focused," Craig said.

Employees will benefit from knowing who to call, when to call, and how to reach the right people if they have a query so an organised approach to managing call times, blocking out hour slots to receive or make calls to individuals will help avoid a deluge of unnecessary phone calls, he said, adding that it is imperative to keep thanking them for their efforts and even giving them something to look forward to in the future.

"Whilst there doesn't seem much to look forward to right now, as time passes we will be able to see the end of the pandemic. Giving your team something to look forward to, something exciting, would be a perfect way to keep them motivated, inspired and create a conversation / discussion on that group chat that has been set up."

KEEPING UP THE TEAM SPIRIT WHILE WORKING REMOTELY

As with many organisations, all FIS staff are now working remotely. For some, this is the norm, whilst for those that are generally office-based, it has come as a bit of a shock to the system.

FIS operations director Jane Knight said: "The wellbeing of our staff is paramount. For the 50% of our staff who are office-based, working remotely has taken a bit of getting used to. To support our team, we have a

virtual meeting every morning. We try to vary the call every day. Some days, team members give an update on what they are working on, some days we do a quick refresher training session, chosen by and led by one of the team. On others, we just have a general catch-up to see how everyone is. We conclude with a quick round-up of latest developments from our CEO Iain Mcilwee. It is working really well and much appreciated by all."

"We are also fortunate to have one of our staff recently qualify as a mental health first aider. Staff are encouraged to call her, particularly those that live on their own and are feeling particularly isolated. She is doing a grand job. In fact, the whole team is supporting not only each other but also reaching out to our FIS members to offer support in this difficult time. We are proud of them all."



VARIATION – THE SPICE OF LIFE?

It remains to be seen what the full impact of COVID-19 will be on the UK construction sector and an area that must change is our reliance on variations.

As the military says, no plan survives first contact and this is certainly the case in construction. Data by nPlan, a project delivery and risk consultancy, found that across its database of more than 250,000 projects, more than 90% of construction projects experience some level of delay greater than 10% beyond the planned schedule.

Surely if we are getting it right only 10% of the time, we have to admit there is something very wrong with the process? The ground truth here is that in a market that is so price driven, companies are forced to tender to win and it is often only through variations that profit can be extracted.

So it is little wonder that notifications are pawed through by overzealous quantity surveyors motivated to squeeze something out of the job. This in turn leads to conflict and dispute as payment gets delayed and vital time and energy are wasted, business relationships break down and mental health suffers. Ultimately, getting paid for variations is one of the core skills required when running a successful 21st Century contracting business.

A recent report by the CBI highlights the stark inefficiency inherent in this adversarial approach to pricing work. Oxford Economics research commissioned for this report by the CBI established that the construction industry spends 1.6% of its total expenditure on services and goods from UK suppliers on legal services - around £1.27bn. That proportion of spend is

close to two-thirds of the average margin made by the 100 largest contractors in 2018 and double the median for other UK industries.

Alex Wright, Estimator at Great Yarmouth Ceilings (GYC), said 'last minute extras' are often carried out quickly on site to maintain progress and good will but all too often there is no reward for this when a contract ends and the job is billed.

"The greatest challenge faced at GYC is obtaining approval as to the most appropriate valuation rule associated with a variation, and where it fails to be agreed using fair rates and prices," he said. "Then the arbitrary crystal ball gazing by contractors is difficult to overcome without good records. Likewise, work undertaken in dissimilar conditions is never considered and fair allowance is seldom offered."

Managing Director at RPN, Kevin Naughton, blamed aggressive tendering practices and time pressure for contractors not being as vigilant as they could be up front with variations, thereby leading to negative consequences further down the line.

"I think much of the challenge is the speed at which everything happens nowadays and the tender process encourages a lowest price approach," he said.

Main contractors also acknowledge that variation payments frequently lead to disputes. Martin Adie, formerly of MAC Construction and Willmott Dixon, said contractors are frequently asked to price up without a full specification and this is where the problems start.

"In construction, we often start on site without really knowing what we are doing. 'Sort it out on site' is one of the most common things you will hear said within construction," he told FIS members at its annual conference.

If specialist contractors fail to properly consider and administer variations requests, they risk incurring costs they can't recover and disputes over whether the work done was that they requested.

So what steps can contractors take in advance to help ensure a fair conclusion is reached? We spoke to consultants and contractors to obtain the following tips to help you get paid in full.

1. Check contracts carefully

Contracts such as JCT and NEC provide for variations but often amendments to the contract will be favourable to clients, so be sure you understand and raise concerns before signing.

Simon Lewis of Womble Bond Dickinson stressed that the clarity of the contract, combined with contractors' own record-keeping, will be key to any potential future dispute resolution. "It is important to check to make sure your contract has a clearly drafted variation clause. Unfortunately, even if it does, you could still face arguments later on over the valuation of your variation, so the more information you have from the outset, the better," he said.

2. Obtain correct authorisation

When you are asked to make a change to work, it's imperative you get an instruction by someone who is properly authorised before carrying this out. Try not to be intimidated if challenged and just explain that it's necessary before you can legitimately carry out the work requested. Ideally, ask for this in writing or digital form and ensure the instructions are clear, not open to misinterpretation. If in doubt, ask for clarification.

Alex Wright said: "Surveyors are the industry's worst nightmare to contractors as it seems their ultimate aim in life is to reduce any valuation by as much as possible despite the validity of the works being carried out in the first instance. Wherever possible, it's best to seek agreement in writing from the QS for value expended."

3. Verbal and written instructions

'Word of mouth', ie verbal instructions, cannot be proved and challenged if dispute arises further down the line, so avoid accepting these at all costs.

There may even be a disclaimer about this in the contract. If you don't obtain a written instruction immediately, be sure to request a Confirmation of Verbal Instruction (CVI) document that can convert, and get it signed.

4. Good record-keeping

Keeping detailed records of a variation, which can be tracked, is an important part of ensuring you get paid for the actual work done. Ensure all members of your team have access to this as the work progresses, and make sure everything relating to the variation is properly filed so it is easy to reference. Sometimes you may need to duplicate documents if they relate to more than one instruction, to ensure they are accessible wherever they are needed.

Scotwood's Joint Managing Director, Doug Kerr, is a strong advocate of record-keeping. He said: "What Scotwood does to minimise final negotiations is not rocket science. As a project progresses, we keep an up-to-date spreadsheet of the starting point of the original purchase order and all the variations to date."

Simon Lewis also stressed the importance of recording information in case legal action is ever required, pointing out that the valuation of a variation is a matter of assessment rather than strict legal ruling, therefore good record-keeping is key.



"Surveyors are the industry's worst nightmare to contractors as it seems their ultimate aim in life is to reduce any valuation by as much as possible despite the validity of the works being carried out."

Alex Wright, Estimator, Great Yarmouth Ceilings

"We try and cost variations as soon as possible and discuss them at weekly site meetings to get an agreement. This hopefully means no bun fight at the end of the day."

Doug Kerr, Joint Managing Director, Scotwood



5. Schedule of Rates

The Schedule of Rates will be referred to in most contracts but may also include provisions for revision according to the conditions of specific jobs. You therefore need to check these can be adjusted to allow for changes in conditions.

To do this, gather together any drawings, schedules and other documents, pinpoint reasons why the work is now being carried out under different conditions and detail exactly why a price change is needed. Don't forget to include the costs of administration, supervision, design etc.

Where work can't be valued by measurement, use daywork sheets. Be sure each sheet includes details of setting up and clearing up and is signed by an authorised representative of the client company.

Alex Wright pointed out that signed daywork sheets are only ever classed as agreement to the hours / items of work carried out and not an agreement of cost therefore contractors need to be "extremely aware" that costs, wherever possible, for extra works should be agreed in advance of them being carried out and not after completion.

6. Submitting the valuation

When you are ready to submit your variation payment claim, be sure everything complies with the contract and follow any procedures outlined by the client in terms of submission, if possible. Try to keep the client updated on a regular basis, so that any final valuations are less likely to come as a shock.

Kevin Naughton, Managing Director at RPN, stressed that rushing the process results in mistakes, therefore you should take your time to do this properly, regardless of the client pushing.

"We are put under pressure to get prices back in very tight timescales and don't really get the time we need to discuss some of the problems that we may face and so they end as variations, which often then turn into a protracted and time-wasting process that seems to be more about

finding ways to slow up and reduce final account settlement. For me, there needs to be more time and candour up front from all parties and we can streamline the whole process and improve relationships," he said.

Many contractors don't claim for variations until the later stages of the job, which is an obvious pitfall, with many potentially damaging consequences.

Doug Kerr said: "We try and cost variations as soon as possible and discuss them at weekly site meetings to get an agreement. This hopefully means no bun fight at the end of the day."

At the end of the day, no contractor should underestimate their own work or be intimidated while working on a job. Martin Adie said specialist contractors are in the best position to get prices agreed up front and should not underestimate their bargaining power.

"You are pushing from the bottom, but you need to keep asking for that full specification, so I would urge you to ask for a very specific brief about what work is being proposed," he concluded.

FIS CEO Iain McIlwee concluded: "There are some great tips in here to help companies through the minefield that variations create, but it can't be right that when we talk to contractors they are not sure if and when they will make money on jobs that they are currently undertaking. We have started looking at this in more detail and are planning a detailed survey focussed on our community, but early anecdotal evidence suggests that the average value of variation is around 20% of the initial contract value."

"There is a better way. It means leading from the top with more realistic tendering, better engagement with the contractor at the design stage, quality, whole life-cost, focussed procurement and returning to standard, unamended contracts."

"The next 12 months is going to be about rebuilding construction and unrealistic tendering, unsustainable margins and risk avoidance through contract amendment cannot be part of this future."



FIND OUT MORE

Find out more about the FIS campaign, Rebuilding Construction, at www.thefis.org/call-to-arms

'IT'S ALL ABOUT GETTING BETTER RESULTS'

Kevin Dundas, Supply Chain Manager (Products) of Willmott Dixon, discusses the challenges of specifying moveable walls and his support for the FIS Acoustic Verification Scheme.

In the built environment, main contractors are constantly striving to get the best results for their clients, which is why the specification and performance of building products is so critical, according to Kevin Dundas, Supply Chain Manager (Products) of Willmott Dixon, who is an advocate of the FIS Acoustic Verification Scheme.

Kevin has spent the past 17 years working in construction in various roles from buying, site management and supply chain management. He is passionate about continuous improvement and says collaboration is what will drive the industry and result in vastly improved end products.

He said for contractors such as Willmott Dixon, the scheme has become a game changer, as it has meant the company can specify products with confidence that it is on a level playing field.

"As a business, we noticed various issues with moveable walls. These included broken slabs fitted inside panels to provide weight, misleading or missing acoustic data, large panels fitted on a single track, to name a few," said Kevin.

Historically, acoustic testing and test certificates have been very inaccurate, in Kevin's view.

"It has been commonplace for many years for manufacturers to provide just the front page of a test certificate. This first page tells us very little in the way the panel has been tested," he said. "Whilst it may not be an outright lie, it is very misleading. Our teams on site have a lot to deal with and are responsible for checking a lot of data."

"There's a zeal for not accepting the status quo just because it works – because who knows if it will work tomorrow?"



With these reports not being clear and presented in a misleading way, it can result in us providing a product to our customers that does not meet their requirements.

"As a business, we aim to astonish our customers. This approach goes against all we stand for."

Testing falsifications

So what are some of the scenarios Kevin has experienced in terms of testing falsification?

"The most common is the term "tested inoperable" where a company has tested the moveable wall but in a way that makes it inoperable," he said. "This generally includes sealing all the gaps with rockwool and tapes prior to the sound testing. This is obviously unacceptable to anyone. Surely we must have test evidence based on how the wall will be used? If inoperable, it is no longer a moveable wall and becomes just a wall."

Another issue Kevin has encountered with some tests currently provided is the standard they are testing against.

He said: "It happens all too often that we will be referred to a test that is in accordance with a standard from nearly 40 years ago, despite the test being carried out in the past five years. Some companies will send test data from companies that no longer exists. It is an old test and they feel it is acceptable to just keep using it to avoid carrying out new testing. But this gives no assurances that the wall will perform as required."

So how important does he think an acoustic rating on a moveable wall is?

"It all depends on what the project requires. If the acoustician has designed the building and requires a wall to be a certain dB rating, then it is vital that the wall achieves what is required. Acoustics play a huge part in the success of a

building and the wellbeing of those using it. We cannot compromise on this," he said.

Contractors or specifiers will benefit from the scheme because it addresses the issue of misleading use of data and means that the product selected has been properly and independently tested, he said.

"There is a growing understanding of the intrinsic link between good acoustic management and wellbeing for occupants, and this scheme helps to deliver what our customers expect from us and our industry."

Moveable wall challenges

Highlighting the benefits and negatives of different types and mechanisms of moveable walls, Kevin said he believes it is important to engage early with moveable wall partners.

"This will help them understand what the building is being used for, the amount the wall will be opened and by whom," he said. "If the wall is in an unmanaged building and will be opened on a regular basis, it is key to ensure the mechanism is robust and well-engineered. Some I have seen in the past have looked very botched and it is hard to see how they will last beyond a year or two."

So what are the longer-term impacts to Willmott Dixon when products do not meet acoustic standards?

"These can materialise as loss of profit owing to rework or in the worse cases, replacement. There is also the loss of reputation," said Kevin. "This one is very hard to quantify but can have a huge impact on a business. We like to pride ourselves on delivering a perfect product that is right first time, every time. If a customer is not happy then we are not doing our job correctly."

Outlining the Building on Better strategy, Kevin said it's always possible to keep driving improvement. "We can always keep learning and getting better! The aim is that through our work we build lives that are less ordinary," he said. "Willmott Dixon's Building on Better strategy is about getting the best results for our customers by ensuring nothing is taken for granted, no matter how good we think it is. However excellent the project, we can always learn and improve."

He said his company's teams are required to examine and challenge everything and never accept that something cannot be improved, even if it already works well. "Ideas are never dismissed, no matter how small or irrelevant, and there's a zeal for not accepting the status quo just because it works – because who knows if it will work tomorrow?"

Speaking about future specification challenges, Kevin said: "The challenges we face are finding more like us to follow. We need more tier 1 contractors to know about the issues facing the moveable wall industry and to stand up and do something about it as we have. While the industry remains focussing on cost alone, we will never improve."

"There is a growing understanding of the intrinsic link between good acoustic management and wellbeing for occupants."



FIND OUT MORE

The scheme has been extended to include the verification of glazed partitions. Manufacturers wanting to find out about getting data verified can request a copy of the FIS Acoustic Verification Scheme Manual by emailing info@thefis.org



OUT OF OFFICE: RESTORING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Increasingly, the boundaries between workplace and living space are blurring. How can the ceiling play its part in creating an equilibrium? **Isabel Blanco** discusses.

Remote working is on the rise. Managers are seeing the benefits of fostering wellbeing in the office. Just as we're working longer hours at work, we're encouraged to take more time out, in breakout spaces or simply stepping outside. It's all a shifting trend towards the fluidity of the working day and this is linked to wellbeing.

People seek spaces they can enjoy at work - points to disconnect from the endless flow of tasks, as well as spaces that are brighter and more inspiring. The aim of this is to improve their day-to-day wellbeing and managers are fully aware of the benefits this can bring. Happier

employees are naturally more productive. They're also more loyal to an employer who understands the importance of a good work-life balance. But what does this look like in practice?

Make yourself at home

Gone are the days of the uniform, featureless box-offices and cubicle farms. After all, when the average UK worker spends around 3,507 days of their lives in the workplace, we need to ensure it's a place we enjoy.

Increasingly, managers are looking to bring the outdoors inside. Biophilic offices, green spaces

"Ceilings themselves need high levels of reflectance to aid the spread of light."

"Greater focus needs to be placed on acoustic systems to create spaces conducive to home working."

and nature play an ever-larger role in workplace design, creating brighter, airier spaces. Open-plan office layouts are more or less the norm today, with the intention of fostering closer collaboration and enhancing wellbeing.

For both of these trends, the critical element is natural light. Large windows and glazed areas are, of course, key to this but ceilings themselves need high levels of reflectance to aid the spread of light. Coupled with using materials such as mineral tiles that improve indoor air quality and we're already looking at a more desirable place in which to spend a third of our lives.

Wellbeing, daylight and indoor air quality are just part of the story. In these open-plan workspaces, we also need effective zoning solutions: Breakout areas for relaxation, meeting areas for collaborative/confidential work, quiet spaces for focus and concentration. It's crucial at the specification stage that materials for acoustic zoning of spaces is accounted for. For example, mineral ceiling tiles with high levels of sound absorption/attenuation will be required for more private spaces, while ceilings that can direct sound within a certain radius will make for more effective collaboration.

It's also important to specify ceiling solutions that mask sounds from the mechanical services in the plenum space. Good indoor air quality often relies on HVAC systems which can add unwelcome noise to a space. Working with a ceiling specialist can ensure this is minimised.

Most importantly, comfort is key. All aspects of the space's architecture and interior design need to work together, from layout to materials to colours to furnishings. Only by doing so can we make workers feel at home while at work. Which brings us to what happens when people take their work home with them.

Creating the home office

Worldwide, it's estimated that up to 70% of people work remotely at least once a week so it's clear that residential projects need to factor in spaces enabling occupants to work with focus.

In terms of refurbishment/renovation projects, this often involves converting a bedroom/spare room, or even a particular corner of a common area, into a space where the inhabitant can work effectively, or undertake conference/video



calls with colleagues, without disturbing other residents or neighbours. So, the ceilings in these spaces should reflect the same acoustic/visual qualities as those of the workplace: Good levels of attenuation/absorption and brightness.

This situation is complicated for new-builds. Particularly in inner cities, where space is limited, multi-occupancy apartments and mixed-use developments need solutions that limit noise from the street and neighbours. Given the increased reliance on lightweight plasterboard solutions for walls, the ceiling here needs to play a larger role so greater focus needs to be placed on acoustic systems to create spaces conducive to home working.

Work and life – a ceiling apart

Just as boundaries between home and work are blurring, the way we approach creating each space is being inverted. We need to maximise wellbeing in the workplace – codes such as BREEAM and LEED demand it – so we're bringing the visual and comfort aspects of the home into the working space. Conversely, at home, we need to design spaces that enable remotely effective working.

Whichever space we design for, maintaining the work-life balance needs to be foremost throughout the design, specification and build process. Because work and life are just a ceiling apart.



FIND OUT MORE

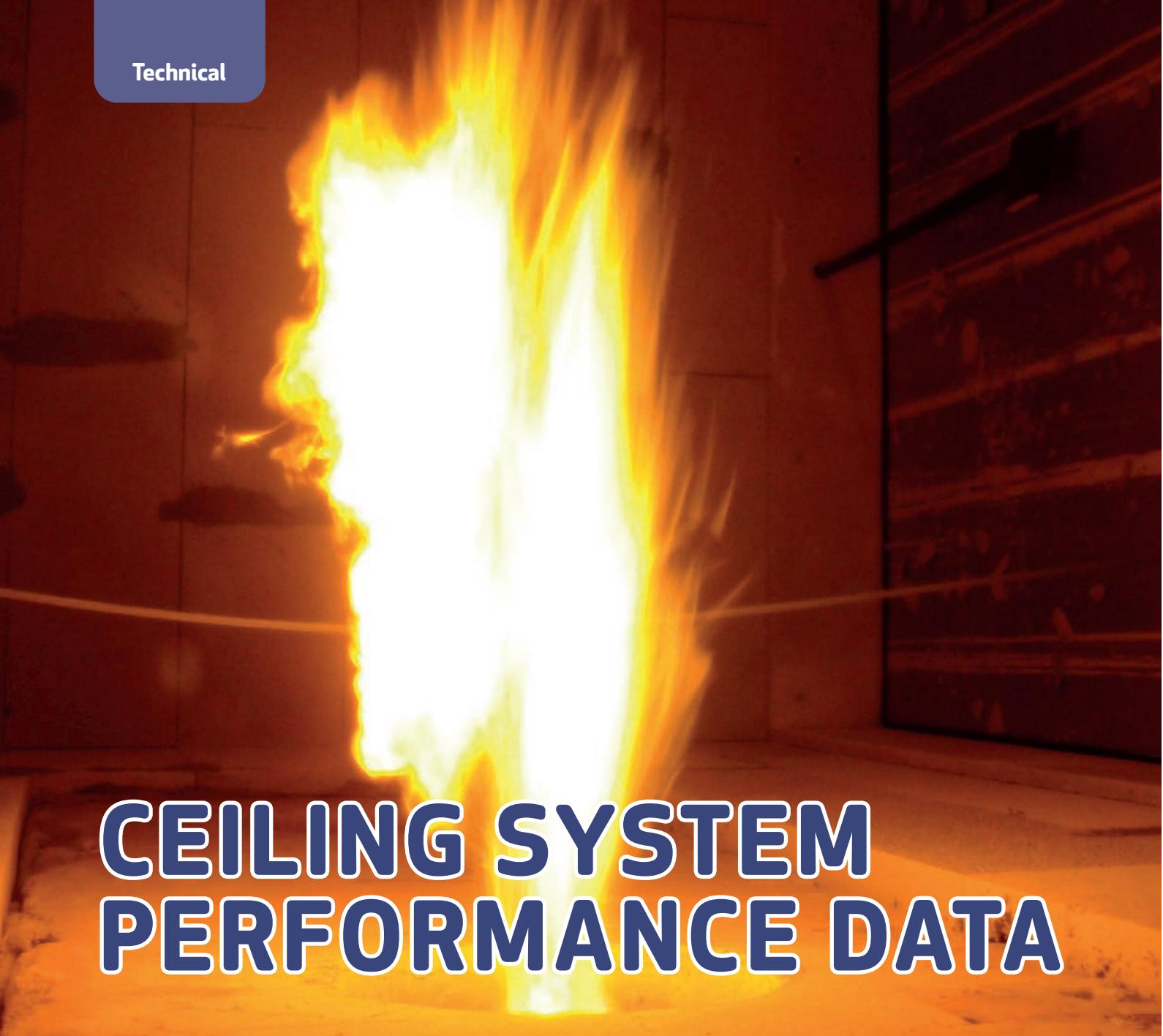
The FIS Client Guide to Office Fit-Out and Refurbishment offers some useful advice and can be found at www.thefis.org/membership-hub/publications/client-guide-to-fit-out



Isabel Blanco

Isabel Blanco has 17 years experience in the construction industry and now holds the role of Marketing Communications Manager for Armstrong Ceiling Solutions. She has been with the company for four years, initially as Marketing and Sales Coordinator (UK, Ireland and Southern Africa) but her current role is also international, with the marketing of a 11 countries to manage. Prior to Armstrong, she held a similar role with Marvin Architectural, a supplier of bespoke windows and doors.





CEILING SYSTEM PERFORMANCE DATA

Joe Cilia discusses the importance of understanding the specified performance of a ceiling system in different situations and where to find evidence of compliance.

Trawling through car magazines and car websites, I found myself drowning in data: MPG, urban, CO₂ per Km and so on. But what I really wanted to see was consistent information that I could trust, all in the same order, so I could compare it, then I could make an informed decision.

It made me wonder if designers, architects and anyone buying a construction product are in the same boat and when they do see information, whether it is relevant, clear and more importantly a demonstrable claim.

We decided to take this to our working groups who all agreed that it made perfect sense. In fact, two of these groups, the Operable Wall Group and Partition Industry Group, thought it was such a good idea that they asked for our help to get their acoustic test data independently verified

(see 'Find out more' button at the end of this article and our interview on page 18). During a conversation with our Ceiling Industry Working Group, we mapped out the various parameters and standards that applied to ceiling systems and were astounded at the list.

There were 14 things to consider before a ceiling system which is made up of grid, tiles or panels, and hangers could be specified. That still leaves 12 things to think about when you have considered fire and acoustics and 25 standards that ceiling systems can be tested against.

Sound absorption is probably the first thing that specifiers consider when specifying a ceiling, but there are two standards that products can be tested against and depending on where the products are used, for example a school or hospital, or where it is being assessed (LEED, SKA

"Sound absorption is probably the first thing that specifiers consider when specifying a ceiling."

or WELL). The requirement may be different.

Ceiling systems can also be tested for their sound insulation values and that can be in relation to a single or double pass of sound energy.

Fire is the performance requirement that really needs consideration especially where it will form a compartment between floors. Unfortunately, the term 'fireproof' has percolated into the vocabulary, despite it having no relevance when it comes to performance; it's frightening.

Ceiling systems can be tested to understand their reaction to fire and their fire resistance; they are two different things. Fire resistance is the measurement of the ability of a material or system to resist, for the period of required fire performance, the passage of fire from one distinct area to another, and is measured in minutes for integrity and crucially thermal insulation which is key for compartmentation. It's worth mentioning here that putting lights which are penetrations will compromise the fire performance without additional measures to mitigate.

Reaction to fire is the measurement of how a material or system will contribute to the fire development and spread, particularly in the very early stages of a fire when evacuation is crucial.

Further considerations

So that's fire and sound, so what else?

The designer might want to know what the light reflectance value (LRV) of the ceiling is. Lighting designers know that they can achieve a better and even light field if the LRV is high. Equally the sustainability manager might want to know the recycled content or environmental impact by

At a glance:

- Sound absorption - there are two standards that products can be tested against.
- 'Fire rating' - reaction to fire and fire resistance are two different things and need separate consideration.
- Light reflectance value - Higher LRV equates to better/even light.
- Sustainability - an Environmental Product Declaration may be required.
- Product-specifics - Different kinds of building designs may mean different additional assurances.

"The term 'fireproof' has percolated into the vocabulary, despite it having no relevance when it comes to performance."

asking for an Environmental Product Declaration.

Someone designing a school would be interested in the effect of a school bag or ball hitting the underside of the ceiling.

Someone specifying a ceiling in high humidity areas would want to know about the humidity resistance of the tiles and what tests have been done on the grid which might be affected by moisture and even chlorine.

Manufacturers can even provide test data for ceilings used in a clean room or places where hygiene is important.

Finally, there is a standard which ensures that ceiling systems are supplied within tolerance and installed to a standard.

There's a lot to understand, which is why the FIS Ceiling Industry Working Group is developing a guide to Specifying Suspended Ceilings and Absorbers which will be available from FIS and selected manufacturers.



FIND OUT MORE

For help getting your acoustic test data independently verified, visit www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/specifiers/acoustic-verification-scheme/

To register for a free copy of the Specifying Suspended Ceilings and Absorbers Guide, please email info@thefis.org with 'Ceiling Guide' in the title and a fresh copy of the guide will hit your inbox on publication.

Ceiling systems can be tested to understand their reaction to fire and their fire resistance; they are two different things.



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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

SpecFinish is the magazine of FIS members, so we want to share your news with ALL our members. If you've recently completed a project or successfully tendered, please get in touch to tell us about it.

It's also good to put a face to a name, and learn about people's accomplishments, so whether you've just made a new appointment, are celebrating an apprentice's achievement or have won an award or testimonial to tell us about, do let us know.

Contact the editor:

Email: stephanie.cornwall@warnersgroup.co.uk Tel: 01778 395 055.

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If we are to continue pushing the boundaries of good design and build practices, then we need to make sure that our approach to building material development and installation keeps up.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN MATERIAL PERFORMANCE

Nigel Morrey discusses the importance of understanding how building materials interact in real-world scenarios.

The performance of building products is under scrutiny. New legislation is being brought forward to create a more robust regulatory framework and make clearer the responsibilities held by designers, developers, product manufacturers, contractors and building owners. This is an important step but there is still a long process for the Building Safety Bill to become law.

In the interim there are changes that materials providers and installers can make to provide peace of mind to clients and end users that building products will live up to their promises. Crucially, we need to see more real-

world testing of materials and an explanation of their performance in systems. This is particularly vital for passive fire protection materials and their interface with the building fabric.

Fire protection systems come in two forms: Active protection such as fire alarms, sprinklers and fire extinguishers, and passive protection – a group of systems that compartmentalise a building through fire-rated walls and floors, structural protection, and critically firestopping. Building fires are complex, scientific events and the effectiveness of passive fire safety products can be affected not only by the materials they are abutted against, but also by penetrations in

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"If we are to continue pushing the boundaries of good design and build practices, then we need to make sure that our approach to building material development and installation keeps up."



Nigel Morrey

**Technical Director,
Etex Building Performance**

Nigel Morrey oversees the performance of Etex products and systems. He has more than 30 years of experience in the passive fire protection industry and is an active member of the Association for Specialist Fire Protection (ASFP).

the building fabric. Whether installing systems directly or working with partners, contractors need to be mindful of this wider interplay of materials.

Testing system performance, not product

The key question is how materials interact. How is the fire performance of a timber structure affected when it's joined to a concrete frame construction? Regulations tend to deal with individual products, but fire is influenced by the performance and interaction of building systems as a whole. Material providers have a vital role to play. They need to create testing rigs that study the performance of products working in conjunction with each other.

It's about holistically testing systems that match real-world conditions as closely as possible. This is particularly important for unusual or ground-breaking designs where materials are used in unexpected ways. Testing a standard steel beam, for example, is not the same as understanding how the impressive steel vaulted ceiling at London King's Cross station will react and hold up structurally when exposed to fire.

Building up this bank of data will help specifiers and in turn installers to identify the right materials for different design configurations. When it comes to the construction process, detailed alterations such as service penetrations can also compromise a building fire safety system. Every cavity in a structure is a route that fire could travel through.

Take the partition system in a modern apartment or office as an example. It will rarely mirror standard models, but will be penetrated by plug sockets, telephone wires or cables for satellite television, potentially altering the way the overall system behaves. There will also be varying junctions to consider and the relationship between walls and ceilings, as well as the positioning of loadbearing elements, which will differ in each case. It is vital that these elements are accounted for during the development, testing and installation of materials to ensure that they perform as expected, now and in the future when occupiers may add or change services.

Collaboration is key

Putting in place more robust testing processes is one thing. Knowledge also needs to be cascaded up and down the supply chain. Keeping to the building specification and manufacturers' design details is paramount to constructing safe buildings. By sharing information and best practice, materials providers can ensure that their partners understand the thinking behind these guidelines and dispel any temptation to cut corners.

Construction is continuing to evolve, with new ways of building, modern methods of construction and innovative materials coming



to the fore. This is vital to help us deliver faster, more cost-effective and, ultimately, better buildings that meet the demands of 21st century life. However, if we are to continue pushing the boundaries of good design and build practices, then we need to make sure that our approach to building material development and installation keeps up.

Developing a better understanding of how different materials perform together and the stresses they are likely to be put under by real-world conditions is key. This will help to ensure that the buildings we construct in future are safe, allowing us to fulfil the creative vision of architects and specifiers while offering peace of mind for building users.



FIND OUT MORE

To attend one of the SFS Working Group meetings or find out how you can get involved with the project work, please contact Joe Cilia jocelia@thefis.org or follow this link or visit www.thefis.org/membership-hub/working-groups/steel-framing-systems-working-group/

"By sharing information and best practice, materials providers can ensure that their partners understand the thinking behind these guidelines and dispel any temptation to cut corners."



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APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING – IT'S NO SECRET

George Swann details some of the information and revenue sources waiting to be tapped into by FIS members.

Despite the stream of initiatives and services generated by FIS to assist members wishing to access funded training, many still seem daunted by the apparent administration hurdles that appear greater than they actually are, or remain unaware of the opportunities that exist.

Local Enterprise Partnership funding, CITB grants and National Insurance breaks for employers of apprentices under 25 are all waiting to be tapped into.

If you are an employer based in England and looking to take on an apprentice, there are now apprenticeships for two finishes and interiors occupations with a total of four options: Plasterer (with options for solid plastering and fibrous plastering) and Interior Systems installer (with options for drylining systems and suspended ceiling and partitioning systems).

The English apprenticeship system has changed and as an employer you will be required to be involved in the training and testing of your apprentices. The Richards

Review of 2012 recommended 'putting the employers in the driving seat'. This is an outline of some areas where your involvement will assist in ensuring a unified approach between you, your apprentice, your chosen training provider and your chosen end point assessment organisation.

The English Apprenticeship is based on a trained and tested outcome, just like the UK Driving Licence system. Your apprentice will be trained in every skill, knowledge and behaviour listed in the apprenticeship standard, for the chosen option, by an organisation, registered on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers, that you chose. At the end of the training, your apprentice will be tested in accordance with the assessment plan by an assessor or tester that has had nothing to do with the training delivered. As the employer, you can stipulate which end point assessment organisation your apprentice will be tested by.

The employer will be responsible for or be required to be involved in all of the following.

Selection recruitment and funding support:

It must be noted there is no age limit for an English apprentice. Local training providers and the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) will be able to help you select individuals identified as suitable for your organisation. Visit the CITB website's 'courses and qualifications' section for more information about this.

There are specific CITB grants to support 'in scope' smaller construction employers with start-up costs when taking on a new apprentice, £500 per apprentice and further CITB grant funding can be claimed for each year the apprentice is in training, £2,500 and on achievement £3,500 or for Interior Systems Installer £8,500 and Plasterer £11,000.

The government provides details on savings that can be made in National Insurance contributions for apprentices under 25 years on its website and your Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) may >>

be able to assist with recruitment and funding, so be sure to interrogate the web pages of the LEP nearest to you.

One example is the Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) web page where a new web portal is now available so that all employers can go online, request or share funding and plan their current and future apprenticeship requirements.

FIS will be happy to provide more information, advice and guidance. We may also be able to directly assist in the selection and recruitment of apprentices via the Fit-Out Futures programme. Please contact FIS directly.

Contributing to the cost of training:

Employers not paying the Apprenticeship Levy are required to pay 10% of the total cost of training in advance to the chosen provider. This equates to £58.34 per month for an interior systems installer and £27.78 per month for a plasterer, which can be reduced by securing the funding detailed above. However, there is enhanced or additional government funding available for people under the age of 18 and for those employed by organisations with fewer than 50 employees, micro and small organisations. Any additional training not listed in the standard must also be paid for by the employer.

Extract from the guide:

We will ask you to make a 10% contribution to the cost of apprenticeship training and government will pay the remaining 90% up to a maximum amount of funding allowed for the apprenticeship you have chosen. You will have to meet, in full, any cost (including for end-point assessment) which is above the funding band maximum. You will pay your contribution to your training provider over the lifetime of the apprenticeship.

Identifying, sourcing and engaging a training provider:

Look for providers who offer an initial programme, up to three weeks that will ensure your apprentice is 'site ready'. The programme should include, but not be limited to; health, safety and welfare, manual handling, an introduction to the occupation and the wider construction industry and acquisition of the CSCS red apprentice card. It is strongly advised to decline the green labourer's card, if offered. Being site ready will ensure the apprentice can be employed to support your contracts.

Delivering training in the workplace:

The English apprenticeship requires a minimum of 20% off the job training (OJT). Based upon a working year of 233 days this is 46.6 days. It is expected some of this training will be provided in the employer's premises and it would be prudent to assign a mentor or mentors to your apprentice. Ask the training provider what subject(s) need to be delivered in the workplace. At the early point of the programme virtually everything the apprentice does could be considered as training e.g. organisational policies and procedures, workplace and site induction. This will diminish as the apprentice gains skills, knowledge and experience.

Ensuring the apprentice stays on programme and progresses:

The providers programme will be based upon the skills, knowledge and behaviours listed in the Apprenticeship Standard. It is worth comparing the Training Providers Programme with the standard prior to engagement. Ensure you communicate with your chosen training provider. There is an example 'Tri-Training Agreement' available on the FIS website.

Engaging an End point Assessment Organisation:

Your chosen provider can help you with this. When you deem the apprentice is consistently working at or above the level set out in the occupational standard then the apprentice may be registered for the end point assessment. You may take advice from the training provider(s), but the decision must ultimately be made solely by the employer. The apprentice must have completed all the Gateway requirements as detailed in the assessment plan before the end point assessment can be attempted.

Responsibility:

As the employer you are always ultimately responsible for the individuals in your employ while at work and in training. This responsibility does not diminish with an apprentice, your investment in the individual will be realised only on their successful completion of training and by passing the end point assessment. Your responsibility continues through every phase of the training and testing e.g. administration, welfare, salary, work transport, accommodation, tools, equipment including PPE etc.

Completion:

Congratulate your apprentice and celebrate their and your organisation's success. Please ensure you claim all CITB grants and other funding that may be available to your organisation.

Although this may seem a lot of trouble, increased work for you and your organisation, with the right apprentice it is without doubt the most effective, efficient and economical way of contributing to the succession planning of your workforce. As many have said before, the employees are an organisation's greatest asset.



FIND OUT MORE

FIS is happy to support you with any queries relating to the items discussed in this feature. For help and assistance please contact FIS
01217 070077 or info@thefis.org.

Here are some useful links for information, guides and downloadable documents relating to the points raised in this article.

- www.apprenticeshipsnewanglia.co.uk
- www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/plasterer
- www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/interior-systems-installer
- www.citb.co.uk/courses-and-qualifications/citb-apprenticeships
- www.citb.co.uk/levy-grants-and-funding/grants-funding/apprenticeship-grants
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-insurance-contributions-for-under-25s-employer-guide
- <https://www.lepnetwork.net/about-leps/location-map>
- www.gov.uk/guidance/employing-an-apprentice-technical-guide-for-employers#funding-for-your-apprenticeship
- <https://findapprenticeshiptraining.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/Apprenticeship/Search>
- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831593/OTJT_Flowchart_v2_-12092019_Final.pdf



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