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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONIAC)

Improving competence in the Construction Industry: update on work being done by HSE

Summary

This paper summarises the work being done by HSE's Construction Division to improve standards of competence, both:

- in the assessment of the competence of organisations, and
- in the application of approaches to assure and improve the competence of individuals.

Issue

1. Competence in the construction industry.

Timing

2. Routine.

Recommendation

3. That CONIAC notes the contents of this paper which will form the basis for discussion at its meeting on 22 November.

Background

4. The Approved Code of Practice (ACOP) supporting the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 (CDM 2007) sets out, for the first time, the Core Criteria¹ against which the competence of organisations can be judged, at the pre qualification stage. The ACoP also makes more explicit the requirements for individuals to be competent (whether site workers, managers or professional staff).
5. A key objective of the revision of CDM is to reduce bureaucracy and paperwork, CDM 2007 gives a clear framework on what would constitute competence for both workers and companies. Adoption of this framework will reduce the burden from the wide variety and complexity of competence assessments that duty holders are asked to complete.
6. Since publication of the ACOP in April 2007, HSE's Construction Division has been active in seeking co-operation from the industry to both raise standards and simplify assessments in these areas.

Current position

Organisational Competence

7. The ACOP states that competency assessments of organisations should be carried out in two stages.
 - (i) Stage 1: An assessment of the company's organisation and arrangements for health and safety to determine whether these are sufficient to enable them to carry out the work safely and without risk to health.
 - (ii) Stage 2: An assessment of the company's experience and track record to establish that:
 - It is capable of doing the work,
 - it recognises its limitations and how these should be overcome; and

¹ Prior to the introduction of CDM 2007 John Carpenter's research report RR422 - *Developing guidelines for the selection of designers and contractors under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994*, - set out proposals for core criteria to define the standard against which the organisational competence of contractors should be assessed. With amendments, these core criteria were adopted by CDM 2007 and are now a part of the CDM 2007 ACOP.

- it appreciates the risks from doing the work and how these should be tackled.
8. Stage 1 can be viewed as a largely desktop exercise where a large number of businesses meet the standards of the core criteria to form an “approved list.” Stage 2, by contrast, is the stage in which the Client, with a particular project in mind, uses specific criteria to select a short list of suitably experienced and skilled contractors from which a preferred contractor can be selected.
9. Through the Safety Schemes in Procurement – Competence Forum, HSE has met with a number of organisations that use the core criteria as the basis for assessment of organisational competence, and provide services to clients. The Forum has met twice². Details of the members of the Forum are attached at Annex 1.

Next steps

10. Discussions are now taking place in this Forum to develop a UK-wide approach to providing a baseline accreditation service, which will allow clients to access any contractor organisation that has been accredited by any of the member organisations. The Forum will be adopting some basic quality checks, ensuring that the core criteria are being used fairly and consistently - in other words, to ensure that a Stage 1 assessment has been carried out in a simple, cost effective and proportionate way.

Individual Competence

11. There is evidence that the introduction of CDM 2007 has had an effect on the efforts of the industry to secure a competent workforce:
- The number of candidates taking the ConstructionSkills Health and Safety Test has increased sharply in 2007, and is forecast to top the half million mark. The number of tests taken with voiceover in a foreign language has almost tripled;
 - The Construction Plant Certification Scheme has demonstrated, through a pilot initiative, that by careful targeting and support, individuals can be taken through an accelerated process to achieve an NVQ qualification. In the period from December

² On 24th April, in Rose Court, and on 21st September at Achilles offices in Derby

2006 to March 31st 2007, 500 operators holding red trainee cards were targeted.

By the end of the period 392 had achieved a Level 2 NVQ in Plant Operations.

12. The uptake of places for the Site Managers Safety Training Scheme is also very high with over 10,000 being trained this year. Other training schemes for site managers are also reporting high levels of uptake. In addition, the new Plant Managers Safety Training Scheme has completed its pilot courses, and is due for launch.
13. Construction Division has developed a closer working relationship with ConstructionSkills and other stakeholders over the past two years, and the CDM ACOP uses examples of industry-derived training courses to establish quality benchmarks. Construction Division acknowledges the work done by the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) and other independent training providers. It is inevitable however, that the focus of regulatory effort will be on the poorer performing sectors of the construction industry, particularly house building, refurbishment and projects involving large scale work on domestic properties.
14. A significant force for improvement in these sectors is the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS). In each of the following, so called "biblical" trades, there has been a growth in CSCS membership of around 10% in the last two years. Painting and decorating is up from 6.4% to 16.08%, bricklaying up from 9.8% to 21.36% and carpentry and joinery is up from 11% to 21.75%. Construction Division's view is that whilst possession of a CSCS card does not automatically prove the competence of the holder, it is evidence that a level of competence has been achieved. The best evidence of competence for most construction trades is possession of a relevant Level 2 or 3 S/NVQ. We will be investigating ways in which its inspectors may be able to promote the CSCS scheme over the next year.

Action

15. Members are asked to:

- note the contents of the paper and use the points raised as a basis for discussion; and
- share information they may have on current competence initiatives / developments in the industry;

at its meeting on 22 November 2007.

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The members of the Safety Schemes in Procurement – Competence Forum are:

CHAS - The Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme. This is national scheme run by the London Borough of Merton. John Murphy is the Scheme Manager and attends the forum. CHAS has 290 active client users, and 17,200 registered contractors and consultants from a broad business background, not just construction. The client base includes a wide range of public sector clients and private businesses. CHAS offers an accreditation service that is very closely aligned to the CDM Core criteria, and is predominantly a desktop exercise. CHAS offers tailored services to businesses employing less than 5 employees as well as to Designers and CDM Coordinators.

Exor Management Services are broader than just construction; Exor represent 120 local authorities and private businesses, with 13,000 registered members. Dermot Maurer, Head of Business Development represents Exor on the Forum.

National Britannia-Safe Contractor With a variety of private and public clients, and over 9,000 contractors, the SAFEcontractor scheme is developing its pre – qualification service to incorporate environmental, quality and financial assessments including corporate and supplier accreditations. There are 16,000 contractors expected to be registered by end 2008. John Kinge is SAFEcontractor's Audit Services Manager and National Britannia's representative on the Forum.

Achilles has clients mainly from pharmaceuticals, oil, gas, railways, and transport systems. Mike Ford is Head of Assessment Services for Achilles, and attends the Forum. Achilles has 5,000 suppliers registered. Achilles operates a number of established accreditation systems, tailored to clients' needs, for example UVDB Verify in the utilities sector, which offers site assessments as well as a desktop assessment.

Constructionline - Constructionline was established by the then DTI in 1998 as the UK's register of prequalified construction services. Constructionline concentrates on establishing financial and legal criteria. In 2002 formed a link with CHAS, and from 2004, all Constructionline applicants requiring health and safety pre qualification have been referred to CHAS