

## HEALTH & SAFETY PRE-QUALIFICATION SCHEMES

<b>Problem:</b>	Proliferation of health and safety pre-qualification schemes and standards
<b>Solution:</b>	A widely accepted set of pre-qualification criteria - the benchmark for UK clients and contractors, supported by the HSE and local authorities.

The ECA welcomes the use of pre-qualification assessments to provide confidence about contractors' health and safety (HS) capabilities. However, the proliferation of HS pre-qualification and related schemes is a major concern. For contractors and others, this proliferation:

- Raises costs and complexity
- Creates uncertainty about which scheme is best suited to various clients and projects
- Leads to differing standards
- Works against the message that health and safety adds value to business
- Reinforces negative stereotypes about the direct and indirect cost of health and safety.

Clear, practical guidance on generally acceptable pre-qualification criteria will help all parts of industry to comply with HS legislation, and improve the cost effectiveness of assessing, and delivering, HS performance.

The ECA is working with other key players (e.g. HSE, SEC Group, the Construction Confederation, CHAS) to establish widely accepted core criteria for pre-qualification. We have already discussed this exercise with the Construction Confederation, MCG and CHAS. Further support for this initiative appears in the recent 'Carpenter' report for HSE on the use of such schemes in CDM projects.

The Carpenter report offers a set of 'core criteria'. These are broadly compatible with current SEC Group, MCG and CHAS guidelines and they have had widespread stakeholder support.

This initiative does *not* introduce a new pre-qualification scheme (part of the problem is that there are already too many). It aims at providing a widely acknowledged focal point for pre-qualification schemes, and to maximise recognition between schemes.

Small businesses in particular should benefit from widely accepted core pre-qualification criteria (see case study).

### **Case study**

A small electrical contractor in the South West had been doing work at the local branches of a major clearing bank for many years. The contractor was an ECA member and already registered with various health and safety assessment schemes. They received a letter from the bank's central office notifying them that in future, they could not work for the bank unless they joined a national pre-qualification scheme run by a commercial provider. The bank had been persuaded by the commercial provider to use their scheme, and not to recognise any others. The contractor was advised that to join the scheme they would have to pay £700 in year one for an audit, and then pay smaller sums after that. What this micro business really needed was one set of health and safety criteria that it could achieve, and which would be nationally recognised by all clients.

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(This initiative has been put forward in close collaboration with the HVCA, as part of SEC Group.)