

Summary report

Building Safety Regulator Insight: Testing Building Inspector Competence Framework

Commissioned by Insight and Service Design Team, Health and Safety Executive

Conducted by Kantar Public

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Background and objectives

Commissioning

This report is a summary of a qualitative research study conducted by Kantar Public between November 2022 and January 2023. The research was commissioned by the Insight and Service Design Team in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The content of the report, including any opinions or conclusions expressed, are the views of the agency alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the HSE.

Business context

The new building safety regime will introduce significant reform to the competence of professionals supporting the delivery of building control functions.

As part of activity being undertaken to unify the profession, increase consistency and drive-up standards, building control professionals will have to register with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) to perform building control work in England.

To support the registration process, BSR has developed a Building Inspector Competence Framework (BICoF), which specifies the skills, knowledge, behaviours and experience that registered building inspectors are expected to demonstrate in each registration class.

Research objectives

Research was commissioned to understand how building control professionals responded to a draft version of the framework, identifying opportunities to improve its design and usability.

This included understanding how to develop the framework to ensure it is clear, usable and effective in supporting building control professionals to identify and register for the appropriate registration class.

Linked but separate pieces of research were conducted alongside this research, this included a piece of research on the Building Inspector Code of Conduct which took place between December 2022 and February 2023 and a Building Inspector Competence Framework [consultation](#), the findings of which are documented in separate reports.

Research methodology

Phase 1

Phase 1 involved 3 one-hour-long online depth interviews with key HSE stakeholders and a review of relevant documents.

Phase 2

Phase 2 involved 24 one-hour-long online interviews conducted with building control professionals in England.

All participants completed a pre-interview task that involved reading the framework in full, answering questions about their initial responses, and using it to identify either: their own registration class; the registration class of another team member; or competence gaps in their team.

Participants were:

- 12 local authority building control professionals.
- 12 approved inspector building control professionals.

The research sample comprised a mix of: Directors and Heads of Service; Building Control Managers, Heads, Team Leaders and Principal Surveyors; Building Control Surveyors and Senior Surveyors; and Trainees and Apprentices.

While this sample was robust for a qualitative research study and included professionals across a range of organisations, grades and numbers of years of experience of the profession, it is important to emphasise that this a limited number of people and, as such, may not fully represent all views within the profession.

Main findings

Awareness and attitudes

Awareness of the framework was relatively high across all research participants. However, participants working in local authorities tended to have greater awareness than approved inspector participants, due to communication from Local Authority Building Control (LABC).

In principle, participants supported the introduction of the competence framework and felt it had many potential benefits, including:

- Defining competence standards and providing greater certainty about them.
- Creating parity between local authorities and approved inspectors, which could help to standardise practice and unify the sector.
- Encouraging continuous learning and development, which participants felt was essential given the rapid pace of change in building technology, regulations, and materials.

Beyond this, participants' responses were affected by their age and professional grade, their academic background, whether they worked in the public or private sector and the breadth of their professional experience.

Participants with less confidence about demonstrating their competence tended to be:

- Older
- Without traditional academic qualifications
- Unchartered
- Non-managers

Local authority participants appeared to be more anxious about evidencing their competence and tended to be particularly focused on the possibility of exam-based validation, due to their greater awareness of LABC's Building Safety Competence Foundation assessments. By contrast, approved inspectors interviewed were more used to demonstrating their competence to their regulatory and membership bodies and mostly expected validation to be case study based, which they perceived as less daunting than exams.

Managers tended to have practical concerns around the narrowing timeframe available to validate their own and their teams' competence, and the implications of registration on resources. Apprentices and trainees were least concerned overall, as most were already engaged in work-based learning and saw competence validation as an extension of this.

Format and usability

Participants reacted positively to the framework's format, which was felt to be familiar, easily accessible and of appropriate length. Participants liked the division of information into chapters and the structure of these, which transitioned from high-level summaries to further detail. They also appreciated the use of plain English and the tone, which they described as informative.

In principle, participants welcomed the individual components of the framework, especially the high-level summaries (e.g. profile descriptions, minimum requirements table and BICoF wheel) and the use of visual and/or tabular formats to provide an overview of competence requirements. Participants also liked the inclusion of indicative examples that provided more detailed information regarding subject area competences.

However, there were barriers to participants engaging with the document fully and reading all of it. Participants tended to find the document difficult to digest, due to the quantity of text, some repetition and what they perceived as some vague terminology.

As a result, when participants completed their pre-interview task, most skim-read the framework (despite being asked to read it in full) and estimated their class based on the profile descriptions towards the beginning of the document.

This could lead to key information being missed, classes being misinterpreted, and competence requirements being underestimated. Often, a more detailed review of the document revealed opportunities to improve the framework that participants had not previously noticed.

Effectiveness in supporting registration

Participants identified two main areas for improvement with the version of the framework that was tested: for registration classes to be clearer and descriptions of competence requirements to be more specific. They believed this would enable them to assess competence and identify an individual's registration class more confidently and accurately. It would also allow users to better identify competence gaps and make plans to address them.

Some groups of participants found it easier to identify the 'correct' registration class than others. These tended to be: new entrants and junior trainees (Class 1); experienced

inspectors who did not work on HRBs (Class 2); and those who did work on HRBs (Class 3).

For other groups the process was less straightforward. For example, participants were unsure whether experienced inspectors who were not fully qualified or had chosen to specialise in domestic buildings should register for Class 1 or 2, or whether inspectors with experience of complex commercial buildings but not HRBs should register for Class 2 or 3.

In terms of assessing and identifying competence gaps, participants most frequently raised the following questions:

- Whether professionals needed to have knowledge and experience across 'all building types' and all subject areas.
- Whether all subject areas and topics were applicable to everyone.
- What each competence level (awareness, appreciation, understanding and comprehensive) meant in practice.
- How many 'indicative examples' of skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours needed to be evidenced, and what depth of knowledge was needed for each subject area.
- How competence would be validated, as participants' views of whether they would be able to 'pass' varied according to whether they imagined validation taking place via a traditional closed book exam, an open book exam, portfolio submission or case study interview.

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