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SPEC FINISH

FIS

The magazine of FIS
representing the finishes
and interiors sector

www.thefis.org

TRAINING AWARDS 2025

A man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and dark tie, is smiling and holding a large, ornate silver trophy with both hands. The trophy has two handles and a detailed inscription on its body. He is standing in front of a Christmas tree decorated with gold and silver ornaments and lights. The background is dark, making the tree and the man stand out.

RECOGNISING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS WITHIN OUR SECTOR

Skills:

Building the future: Tackling the global construction skills shortage

Feature:

How is construction shaping up for 2026?

Training:

From firefighting to freedom

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WHAT'S IN THE MIX FOR 2026?

2025 was flat and challenging; however, 2026 may well bring regulatory clarity, a fairer payment culture, AI adoption, and opportunities to grow talent.



IAIN MCILWEE
Chief Executive, Finishes and Interiors Sector

As we take down the tinsel and glance furtively at the bathroom scales, we are compelled to look 2026 squarely in the face.

For me, 2025 goes down as one of the least remarkable years in recent memory, pretty bland, especially given the tumultuous decade we have had so far! The market was flat, housing targets were barely dented, and higher risk projects remained constipated by an undercooked regulator. Commercial projects struggled as well, weighed down by uncertainty and indecision.

We did not see much in the way of new regulation - the Government spent more time testing policy on the polls than putting its best foot forward. The Budget probably raised more questions than it answered, and I still do not really know what the UK's Strategy for Growth is, other than knowing it has not really worked so far!

That said, some groundwork has been laid that could make 2026 an interesting year. The Health and Safety Executive is no longer holding the reins of construction regulation; the independent Building Safety Regulator is now established and has made a strong start clearing Gateway 2 backlogs.

They have made bold statements about efficiency in 2026, which could help unlock much-needed work. The picture is also becoming clearer on competence and organisational capability, and what they expect to see in applications.

The consultation on Approved Document B, covering fire safety matters within and around buildings, will keep us busy this year.

My hope is that it will provide a good opportunity to clarify some challenging compliance questions and help smooth out the kinks in the new regulatory environment, particularly the interface between product performance and design responsibility.

The consultation on Late Payment and Retention was a highlight of 2025. Some of the Government's suggestions were almost directly aligned to policy asks set out in the FIS Manifesto: A Blueprint for Change. Could 2026 finally be the year we say goodbye to retentions, or at least welcome regulation that bans them?

If we are to believe the economists, new projects should start picking up across most sub-sectors and regions as the year progresses. This is good news, but the challenges of 2025 did not help our efforts to increase recruitment and training of new entrants. The labour situation is likely to remain tight.

After countless attempts to fix the skills landscape, it is easy to be cynical about the newly formed Construction Skills Mission Board (CSMB). I am choosing, once again, to be optimistic. Whilst it is unlikely to provide much relief for 2026 labour shortages, if harnessed correctly, this Board represents a generational opportunity to fix a broken system. Chaired by the Skills Minister and backed by £600 million of Government funding, this is the first time I have seen a joined-up sector engaging with a joined-up Government.

There is an appreciation that radical overhaul of the way education prepares people for work is required, and an acceptance that practical intelligence is as important as academic knowledge. Courses and qualifications delivered in schools and colleges must deliver real employment outcomes - currently, only around 6% of people studying construction courses in FE colleges go on to work in the sector! You can find out more about the CSMB on page 14 of this issue.

So, what's in the mix for 2026? It could finally bring regulatory clarity, a fairer payment culture, and real progress on fixing the skills pipeline. Another major shift will be the rapid adoption of Artificial Intelligence in construction. The pace of change is astonishing, and "the machine" is already reshaping how projects are planned and managed. At FIS, helping you embrace this technology will be a core theme in 2026. While I don't believe it will replace you by 2027, it should help take some of the pressure off and tackle many of construction's challenges in a different way.

Happy 2026! If you haven't made a New Year's resolution yet, consider taking on a trainee or apprentice (we can help) - and start exploring AI. It might just change the way you work. I'm sure Artificial Iain will loop back to this when he writes next year's column!



Welcome

SPEC FINISH

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Cover image:

Ian Toogood of The Skills Centre collecting the College/Training Provider of the Year - Small Organisations award

SpecFinish magazine wrapper

Please recycle the wrapper this magazine was delivered in. It is recyclable plastic.



WELCOME

TO THE JANUARY ISSUE OF SPECFINISH

Wow, here we are again! When I was writing this, Christmas was approaching quickly. I hope you and your family had a fun and peaceful time. This season passes in a flash, and then we all turn our focus to our inspirations and aspirations for the New Year.

I recently went to a disco, yes I am that old, and they played the 90s classic Tubthumping by Chumbawamba. Many of you will remember the chorus: "I get knocked down, but I get up again. You are never gonna keep me down."

This resonates with me in so many ways. It also made me think of you all and FIS, not because of the next chorus about drinks, but because over the past four years I have witnessed your courage, both individually and collaboratively through FIS, to voice your opinions and take action against the many challenges the industry faces, including skilled labour shortages, rising labour costs, supply chain and material pressures, cash flow and contract risks, and regulatory complexity.

Despite the challenges, just like the song says, when you get knocked down, you get up again, stronger and more determined. I appreciate that this is not easy, and each challenge can take its toll, but you have my respect and I am sure the thanks of the many thousands of individuals in our sector for continuing to make your business, and the sector, stronger for everyone.

This issue is full of examples of individuals and collaborations standing strong and making a difference. On page 26, we explore how a new FIS initiative, the Freedom Programme, is helping business owners break free from long hours, constant firefighting, and sleepless nights by stepping out of day-to-day operations and becoming excited about their businesses again.

In a recent onsite vetting visit, Nigel Higgins, Technical Engagement Manager at FIS, shared his eagerness to see how Arena Point in Leeds, such a complex and high-profile high-rise project, was being delivered to the highest standards. You can read the full story on page 22.

On page 24 we hear from an FIS member who shares the positive impact of having a mental and physical health nurse who amongst other things visits their sites monthly, runs structured workshops, and provides an ongoing informal on-site presence.

Please let us know about your projects and company news as we do like to feature members as much as we can. No project too small... david.crowson@warnersgroup.co.uk

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Community News

CITB launches free inclusive recruitment training for SMEs

The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) has launched new, free digital training modules that are designed to make recruitment more inclusive, accessible, and effective.

CITB established the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Commission to help drive lasting change across the construction industry by improving fairness and ensuring people from all backgrounds can thrive. Running until March 2026, the Commission brings together industry leaders and partners to embed inclusive practices that help construction attract new talent and retain skilled workers.

The training is hosted on the SME Community Hub, an online platform from the Supply Chain Sustainability School (SCSS). The Hub hosts tailored, easy to navigate

resources for SME employers that help to make training accessible for businesses that may not have a dedicated in-house role for this area. The Hub also offers advice, guidance and training materials across a variety of topics such as sustainability, procurement and Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR). In total, it has over 5,000 resources and 550 specifically for FIR.

The training modules will help people already in the industry, but CITB wants to ensure that the wider construction workforce is also more diverse.

To find out more about the SCSS Community Hub visit:

<https://landing.supplychainschool.co.uk/FIR/sme-community-hub.html>

Making Tax Digital for Income Tax: What it means for the Finishes and Interiors Sector

From 6 April 2026, HMRC's new Making Tax Digital for Income Tax¹ service will come into effect, marking a major change in how self-employed individuals, including many working within the finishes and interiors sector, manage their tax.

The move is part of HMRC's plan to modernise the tax system and reduce errors. It will be phased in over the next three years, starting with those earning over £50,000.

Under the new system, self-employed individuals will be required to:

- Use HMRC recognised software² to record income and expenses
 - Submit quarterly updates to HMRC, helping to estimate tax bills throughout the year
 - Pay a single annual tax bill by 31 January
- Those affected will need to check their eligibility³ and register in advance, as HMRC will not automatically enrol individuals in the new system.

FIS encourages members and sole traders within the sector to prepare early and review the HMRC guidance and FAQs to understand how the changes may affect them. Visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/4a7t56vu>

Source

1. <https://makingtaxdigital.campaign.gov.uk/>
2. <https://makingtaxdigital.campaign.gov.uk/making-tax-digital-software/>
3. www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-youre-eligible-for-making-tax-digital-for-income-tax



Ministry of Justice owes contractors £20m after ISG collapse

FIS CEO **Iain McIlwee** has spoken openly to the BBC about millions of pounds being owed to companies following the collapse of ISG last year.

The investigation by the BBC follows the failing of Project Bank Accounts (PBAs) which the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) said were being used on projects to upgrade three prisons in England.

At least 40 companies are believed to be owed the money for work they carried out in Birmingham, Liverpool and Dorset, and claim they should have been protected because the MoJ promised to pay for the projects through ring-fenced PBAs.

PBAs were designed to safeguard smaller suppliers by holding payments in dedicated accounts that can only be used to pay them. Money paid into PBAs should be handed out to suppliers almost automatically. However, administrators EY-Parthenon insisted that when appointed the accounts had "nominal funds" in them, meaning the money was probably never paid in by the MoJ. Iain described the situation as a "mystery" adding: "This is having a huge impact on small business owners, with some facing bankruptcy themselves and others struggling with significant mental stress and heartache."

"They are fighting to get back what they should have been paid 12 months ago. Companies are people and these are people in trouble that need the support of our government."



FIS is supporting some of the businesses that are owed money by co-ordinating legal action alongside law firm Hill Dickinson.

Sarah Emerson, partner at Hill Dickinson, said they were engaged in pre-action correspondence with the MoJ on behalf of seven firms who worked on the projects.

She said her clients were small companies who felt let down and could not understand what had happened to the money they were owed.

"They were told this was a positive thing because PBAs would protect them from an insolvency event," she said.

"They are set up as a trust mechanism which means funds are ring-fenced. That means money in those PBAs legally belongs to those that are due to be paid."

Sarah also commented that Hill Dickinson could take the MoJ to court over the dispute. You can read the full article on the BBC website by visiting: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gwz8gg6plo>



BUILDING THE FUTURE: TACKLING THE GLOBAL CONSTRUCTION SKILLS SHORTAGE

Beena Nana, FIS Head of Skills and Training, discusses the global skills shortage crisis facing construction and takes a look at how Unispace is tackling talent shortages by developing skills from within.



Beena Nana, FIS
Head of Skills
and Training

The construction industry is facing a crisis that can't be ignored. Across the UK, Europe, and far beyond, tens of thousands of skilled workers are retiring or leaving the workforce. The result? Projects stalling, costs spiralling, and ambitious housing and infrastructure targets slipping further out of reach. With demand for new homes, commercial spaces, and green retrofits soaring the race is on but right now, there simply aren't enough hands on site to keep pace.

This isn't just a UK problem. It's a global challenge. Major newspapers and industry bodies have warned of the risks, with The Times recently reporting that flagship projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing and the National Grid expansion are under threat because of severe skills shortages.

The numbers behind the shortage

In the UK, an estimated 47,860 additional construction workers will be needed annually between 2025 and 2029, according to the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). Around 12.4% of UK firms report labour shortages, particularly in key trades such as bricklaying and electrical work (Construction Digital). Civil engineering roles are especially affected, with vacancies in the UK rising by 84% between 2022 and 2024 (Financial Times). The situation is similarly challenging in Germany, where in 2024, 53% of construction firms and 61% of civil engineering firms reported difficulties filling roles (Reuters). At an EU-wide level, construction consistently ranks among the top sectors for labour shortages, with both the EU Labour Market Dashboards and EURES actively promoting construction careers in the sector.

Beyond Europe, the story is the same — and often worse

In the United States, 91% of construction firms report difficulties in finding qualified workers, and with 41% of the current workforce expected to retire by 2031, the industry must attract 723,000 new workers annually just to meet demand (Autodesk / NAHB). Australia is experiencing similar challenges, with a 22% drop in apprenticeships in 2023 and a projected shortfall of 40,000 workers in Queensland alone as it prepares for the Brisbane 2032 Olympics. In Asia, the situation is particularly acute; Thailand faces a shortage of 300,000 construction workers, and surveys indicate that 70–80% of markets across the region are grappling with serious skills gaps (Turner & Townsend).

Who's missing from the workforce?

The construction labour shortage spans a wide range of skilled trades, with the most critical gaps appearing in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, plastering, roofing, plumbing, electrical work, HVAC/MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing), and civil engineering.

Why the shortage exists

The drivers are well known, but no less daunting:

- **Aging workforce:** A generation of experienced tradespeople is retiring faster than replacements can be trained.
- **Post-pandemic disruption and Brexit:** Migration fell sharply, leaving structural vacancies.
- **Training gaps:** Low apprenticeship uptake, underused levy funds, and underinvestment by small firms.
- **Image problem:** Construction careers are still under-promoted to young people, and career-switchers rarely see it as a first choice.

And it's not just retention. Other countries are actively poaching talent. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority referenced one design business with several hundred designers recently leaving the UK market to work on Saudi projects.

Fighting back

In response to the growing labour shortages, governments and industry bodies are stepping up efforts to attract and train the next generation of construction workers. In the UK, £600 million has been pledged to train 60,000 workers by 2029, while innovative approaches such as flexi-job apprenticeship agencies are being piloted to allow apprentices to gain experience across multiple employers — making it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate in training. Across the EU, initiatives like BUILD UP Skills and EURES campaigns aim to modernise vocational training and actively promote construction careers.

Businesses in the sector, including FIS and our members, are also exploring alternative routes into the industry, such as skills bootcamps, targeted training initiatives, and partnerships with colleges and training providers. These efforts particularly focus on developing skills from within the existing workforce while creating accessible entry points for new talent. By supporting flexible learning and upskilling opportunities,

FIS is working tirelessly to bridge the skills gap and strengthen links between education, employment, and long-term career progression.

At the same time, the sector is undergoing a rebranding effort, with improved marketing strategies highlighting construction as a career offering strong pay, clear progression routes, and international opportunities — helping to attract a more diverse and future-ready workforce.



*Penelope McCallum,
Head of Sustainability
Unispace EMEA*

Penelope McCallum, Head of Sustainability Unispace EMEA, explained to Beena, their approach to tackling the talent shortages by developing skills from within. Through studio hopping, mentoring, and work experience programs, the business

fosters growth, shares global expertise, and inspires future talent — helping build a stronger, more resilient industry.

The Unispace approach

Unispace is a global business, which feels the impact of these shortages first-hand. But is also uniquely positioned to respond. Since 2010, it has provided the world's only fully end-to-end workplace partner, blending strategy, design, and construction under one roof. "With more than 5,500 projects delivered worldwide, we understand what it takes to attract, train, and retain the very best talent. We want to share our ideas with others as although global initiatives they can be applied at local levels," said Penelope.

Retaining talent and upskilling internally

Penelope explained to Beena how Unispace grows talent through global studio rotations, mentoring, and hands-on apprenticeships.

Studio hopping: At Unispace, studio hopping isn't just a perk it's a strategic approach to talent development and client service. By rotating across studios, our team members gain a cross-pollination of ideas, seeing how colleagues tackle challenges, innovate in design, and solve complex projects. Equally important, they experience firsthand how we support our global clients consistently, learning best practices from each region. This approach not only enhances individual growth but also ensures that every project, whether in London, Sydney, or Singapore, benefits from the collective knowledge and expertise of Unispace worldwide. In short, studio hopping turns mobility into mentorship, collaboration, and global consistency helping us retain top talent while delivering seamless, high-quality solutions for our clients.

Mentoring: Within Unispace this is a one-to-one relationship, typically set over a defined period, where a more experienced professional (the mentor) provides guidance, support, and practical insights to a less experienced colleague (the mentee). The goal being to help the mentee develop skills,

knowledge, and confidence, enabling them to perform at a higher level and advance in their career. Mentoring offers access to impartial, non-judgmental advice, and fosters personal and professional growth.

Importantly, mentoring is a voluntary, two-way relationship. Both mentor and mentee collaborate to achieve agreed objectives and often both parties take great learning and discover new ways of thinking to really spark. It's about mutual commitment, learning, and shared success.

Apprentices/work experience: Across the globe we open our doors to work experience students. We want the next generation to see the potential and types of careers in design and delivery. The programme is designed to build confidence and spark curiosity, showing that opportunities stretch far beyond construction sites — from marketing and client engagement to design, 3D visualisation, and project delivery.

The most recent was in our London offices where we encouraged the students to roll up their sleeves on real campaigns, producing visuals, crafting presentations, and even joining photoshoots. The result? An engaging, eye-opening experience that showcased the creativity, collaboration, and excitement of a career in design and construction.

Some of the students provided us with their feedback.

Dominic Henderson, a first-year engineering student at Cambridge, said: "I recently completed work experience at Unispace's London offices over the summer. It was an exciting two weeks, and I had the opportunity to work with both the Finance and Sales departments, gaining exposure to live sales calls and the fundamental principles of accounting. It was an exciting and very insightful introduction into the world of finance.



*Maxime Phung,
first-year engineering
student*

"Spending a week at Unispace was eye-opening. I got to see how every department, from design to construction, works together to bring projects to life. It wasn't just observation — I was trusted to contribute and learn hands-on,

which made me feel like a real part of the team," said **Maxime Phung**.

A further success is where **Dana Serrano Phung** our Principal Delivery has developed a relationship with ESCT, a well-known

construction school in France. The school offers a program supported by the French government that allows students to alternate between academic studies and professional work experience.

This system enables Unispace to train students according to our processes and values, and once they graduate, we have the opportunity to hire them directly thus ensuring a smooth integration into our teams.

Unispace has employed two students as a direct result of this approach. **David Afonseca** as a Project Manager Assistant and **Leonard Salomon** as a Junior Site Manager. This approach to learning ensured these candidates gain hands-on experience in construction and take an active role in real-world projects. Unispace offered them the opportunity to join the Delivery team, collaborate with highly skilled Project Managers, and contribute to the successful completion of prestigious projects such as Jacquemus, The Independents, and FIFA.

Providing feedback on their experiences Leonard said: "Our time at Unispace has been an incredible learning experience. We were given real responsibility, guided by experienced mentors, and exposed to the full life cycle of complex projects. It's the kind of experience that truly prepares you for a career in construction."

"Joining Unispace as a student was the start of an incredible journey. From day one, I was trusted to contribute, learn, and take ownership on real projects alongside experienced professionals. Today, as a full-time employee, I can truly see how that experience shaped my confidence, my skills, and my passion for building spaces that matter," said David.

In conclusion we are committed to fostering growth and learning, no matter where you are in your career or your aspirations for the future, with meaningful and practical learning experiences facilitated by our teams, and partnerships with award-winning global learning providers.

By investing in apprenticeships, embracing flexible models, and showcasing construction as a career of choice, we're helping to future-proof our workforce and deliver the world-class spaces our clients expect.

www.unispace.com

The skills shortage is real, global, and multi-faceted. Immediate recruitment gaps number in the tens of thousands, while long-term needs run into the hundreds of thousands. Demographics, training pipelines, and migration all play a role. Policy responses are gaining momentum — but it will take time before they fully bridge the gap.

For now, Unispace believes the industry has one clear task: to inspire the next generation of builders, designers, and makers. Because without them, the foundations of our future can't be laid.

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HOW IS CONSTRUCTION SHAPING UP FOR 2026?

Ed Griffiths, Head of Business and Client Analytics at Barbour ABI, discusses how 2025 was a mixed year for construction, with modest growth driven by a few high-value projects amid workforce, planning, and economic challenges. Looking ahead, RM&I work is set to dominate over new builds, while caution, delays, and affordability pressures will shape 2026.

Ed Griffiths, Head of Business and Client Analytics at Barbour ABI



2025 was another mixed year for the construction industry. Contract award values (as of November 2025) were slightly higher than in 2024, but were powered by a smaller number of high-value projects rather than a broad level of work across the industry.

Project delays, the ageing workforce, declining planning application numbers, and limited government support for the industry point to another uncertain year ahead in 2026. We are also entering a decade in which Repair, Maintenance, and Improvement (RM&I) work is expected to dominate over new construction projects.

Macro-economic factors ending 2025

In November 2025, unemployment reached 5%, the highest level since 2020. While the base rate has steadily fallen to 4% (and is expected to drop further to 3.5% in 2026), this stability hasn't provided enough easing to offset the absence of government support for the industry.

Affordability constraints, coupled with slower sales of new homes, have dented confidence, especially for housebuilders. Last year, in this piece we questioned the likelihood of Labour hitting their 1.5 million homes target. One year on, with housebuilding rates lower across 2025 than they were in 2024, that target now appears all but impossible.

Policy interventions aimed at improving standards have also come with unintended costs. The Future Homes Standard has added further expense to housebuilding, while the Building Safety Levy has introduced both additional financial burden and significant delays throughout the delivery chain.

With no fresh stimulus on the horizon, we can expect increasing caution from the market about where their limited resources are deployed. Unfortunately, insolvencies are also expected to rise further.

Another growing concern is the retiring workforce. Between 2019 and 2025, the construction workforce declined by 16.4%, an unsustainable rate of decline. Apprenticeship opportunities remain far too few and are compounded by a high dropout rate of 47%.

One bright spot is that those who remain in the industry may benefit financially from reduced competition and increased demand for their labour.

What to expect in 2026 - The shift to RM&I

What was once seen as a post-pandemic blip towards RM&I now looks to be a confirmed long-term trend.

As the chart shows (Fig 1), since 2020, new construction work has flattened, while RM&I workloads have grown and remained resilient. Several factors underpin this shift.

Firstly, financing costs and project delays have made large-scale developments less viable than previously. Developers' margins are being squeezed by material costs and labour shortages. In contrast, RM&I work is far less sensitive to financing conditions, making it a safer commercial proposition.

Index of New Work and RMI (Jan 2020 = 100%)

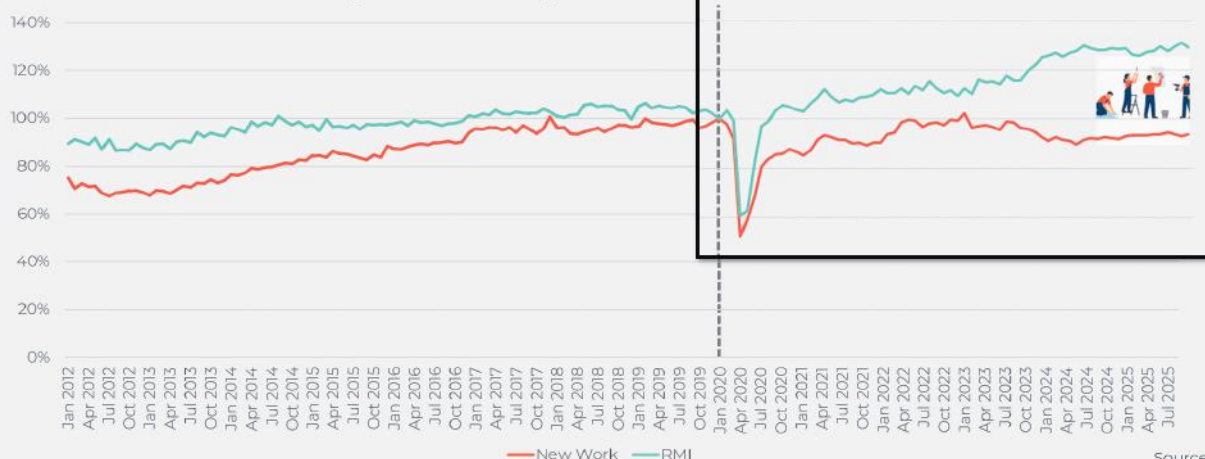


Figure 1

Source : ONS

Policy driving towards net-zero also mean a funnelling of work into retrofitting existing assets. The need to upgrade housing stock, improve energy efficiency, and decarbonise sits alongside falling confidence in affordability and house sale rates, suggests a move away from speculative new-build projects.

In the public sector, RM&I budgets continue to flow, particularly for schools, hospitals, and local authority housing, whereas new-build projects face far greater budget scrutiny and delays.

Smaller projects of course mean smaller margins, but they should also mean steadier income streams and less volatility exposure. Firms may become less reliant on large

development pipelines and instead focus on fostering smaller, localised supply chains.

An interesting area to watch will be whether Tier 1 Contractors choose to embrace the emergence of long-term asset management models and service-based recurring revenue, as opposed to relying on large-scale, but risky and small-margin projects.

The final constraints to look out for in 2026 are approval delays and the continuing decrease of planning applications submitted. As shown on the below chart (Fig 2), in residential construction, the time from planning application to approval has risen continuously since the Building Safety Act was implemented in 2022. These delays are

likely undermining confidence, discouraging businesses from submitting plans for new projects while they remain tied up with delayed developments.

2025 saw fewer planning applications than any of the previous six years, with final tallies expected to land between -9% and -5% year on year.

Conclusion

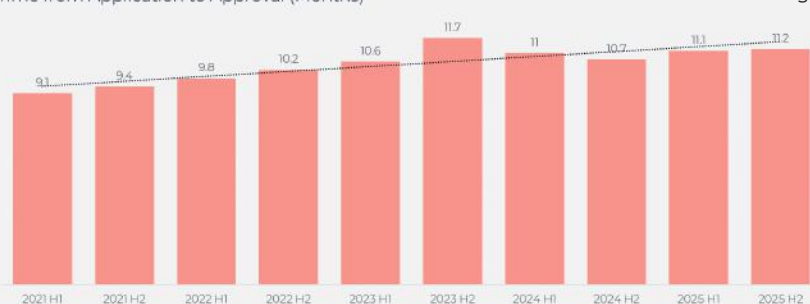
Overall, I broadly agree with most industry forecasts for the next two to three years: growth in the region of 1-5% is achievable if the right conditions are in place. Any predictions of more than 10% growth in the overall construction market are, frankly, unrealistic given current constraints.

The Labour Government has admirable objectives - accelerating housing supply, driving net-zero investment, boosting renewables, delivering major infrastructure, expanding manufacturing capacity, and improving construction productivity. It remains to be seen whether they can create the environment necessary for these goals to be realistically achieved.

<https://barbour-abi.com/>

Time from Application to Approval (Months)

Figure 2



Source: Barbour ABI Residential Application Data

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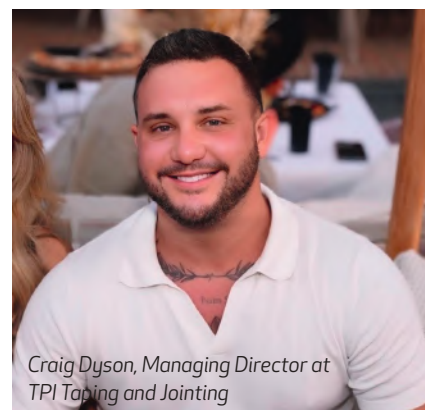


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FROM SANDING WALLS TO LEADING A MULTI-MILLION-POUND BUSINESS: A STORY OF GROWTH AND SUCCESS

Craig Dyson, Managing Director at TPI Taping and Jointing, speaks to **David Crowson**, Editor, about his journey from apprentice to business leader. He shares how he built one of the UK's leading specialist taping and jointing contractors and how his passion for developing local talent has shaped the company's successful in-house apprenticeship program.



Craig Dyson, Managing Director at TPI Taping and Jointing

Craig explained that his journey began in 2004, when, at the age of 16, he became a plastering apprentice, although he was uncertain about the career path he wanted to pursue.

He said: "I had initially applied for a plumbing course at Leeds College of Building, but since it was full, I chose plastering instead."

He smiled and continued saying: "It's amusing to think how different my life might have been if things had gone another way."

"At 17, in 2006, I unexpectedly transitioned into taping and jointing after meeting a local tradesman who had been trained by a Canadian in the late 1990s. I decided to give it a shot, and I still remember my first job — a night shift sanding a wall in the fish section of a supermarket. It was quite the introduction to adult work: exhausting, and with the unmistakable smell of fish lingering on me and my clothes."



A young Craig on site at the age of 18

"By the time I turned 20, the man who had trained me faced personal challenges and stopped working temporarily. This pushed me to become a self-employed bona-fide subcontractor. This was a significant challenge, as I had never even sent out an invoice before."

"Unfortunately, as I started on this exciting path the 2008 recession had just begun, and at this time I only had one contact. When work was slow, I searched for opportunities online and in the Yellow Pages, sending many letters and emails to potential clients. I even visited job sites in person, armed with a portfolio I had created. Disappointingly, some people I spoke to laughed at me or commented on my age, which was tough to handle and often belittling, but I persevered. Looking back, that experience strengthened my resilience and maturity. Although it was a challenging time for many, I am grateful for that period of my life."

Craig went on to explain that by the age of 27, he had built a strong reputation for reliability and quality, which led him to train a few local workers in taping and jointing, some of which had no construction experience. He said: "In 2017, I established TPI Taping and Jointing (TPI) to manage multiple projects simultaneously. I launched the business with less than £1,000 in the bank; however, I already owned a van, tools, and had a small client base. It was an interesting time, as it felt like I was back in an apprentice role — this time learning the business side of things."

Craig proudly explained that the business grew gradually, which, in hindsight, was crucial to its success. He recalled managing three

jobs at once with just himself and three taping and jointing trainees and wondering how they would cope — but they did.

He said: "Today, TPI handles 10 to 20 projects simultaneously, supported by a team of around 30 people, from on-site labour to management."

"In 2021, during our fifth year of trading, **Wayne Moseley**, our current Operations Director joined TPI, bringing over 40 years of experience in the drylining sector and an extensive network of contacts. In this year, Wayne helped us surpass £1 million turnover in taping and jointing for the first time, which was an amazing achievement."

"Wayne's expertise has been invaluable to my growth as Managing Director and has relieved the heavy, and at times unhealthy workload I was carrying."

"My decision for Wayne to join TPI, has proven highly successful, and as we approach our ninth year in business, I am pleased to see that we continue to achieve a multi-million-pound turnover year after year."

Rising above challenges

During the conversation, we discussed the challenges he and TPI had faced on their journey. Craig acknowledged that it had not been without difficulties. He reflected on learning the importance of resilience and developing a thick skin. He said: "Success often brings scrutiny, and my circle of friends has narrowed. Problems and negativity are a regular part of business, but I make a point of celebrating small victories, such as contract wins and successful project handovers."



The first ever TPI van and the commercial premises which Craig rented



Craig receiving his Rising Star award at the 2025 Training Awards

Craig recalled that, like many in the sector, a continuous challenge they have faced is significant financial setbacks caused by client companies going bankrupt. He said: "I am relieved to say, during these times we have managed to stabilise and then keep moving forward, albeit I can admit I have suffered with a few sleepless nights. It's tough to handle when you put in so much effort to do a good job and then you don't get paid for this work."

"At times, I questioned whether it was all worth it, but reflecting now, I realise that these experiences fuelled my drive and helped shape the strong mindset I have today."

I asked Craig for his thoughts and solutions to the challenges currently facing the industry.

He told me that one critical area that must be addressed is the industry's continued struggle with outdated retention processes which have shifted focus to cost-saving rather than their original purpose.

"The current process is ineffective; for example, you could withhold payments on the final invoice until all work is signed off, then release payment promptly, rather than taking large sums throughout the entire project. In some cases, retentions cannot be claimed for years, making full recovery unlikely even after project completion," said Craig.

Craig went on to say: "Another equally important challenge is the growing skills gap, highlighting the need to develop the next generation of skilled professionals capable of meeting and exceeding the demands of the sector."

"In the UK, there are no Government apprenticeships specifically for tapers and jointers, so I had to acquire all my skills on the job. To address this gap, TPI created an innovative in-house taping and jointing training program which does not involve any colleges. The program guides apprentices through various stages, starting with

sanding to understand what the finished product should look like, progressing to first coat and preparation work, and finally the last coating process — while offering pay increases as they advance. This initiative has successfully trained 14 local individuals, many of whom remain with us today. As a result, TPI has gained a strong local reputation, generating numerous inquiries about our apprenticeship program."

He continued by saying: "I strongly believe the UK Government should seriously consider establishing taping and jointing as a college course, as it may now be more popular than traditional plastering in the construction sector."

Looking ahead

Craig shared that the TPI team is excited about what the future holds. He concluded by saying: "We have specific targets and financial milestones that we are pursuing, moving closer to them each day."

Craig's story is one of dedication and growth: He took the initiative and applied the skills he learned at an early age to build a thriving business, one that is built on people. Its success stems from developing a skilled, loyal team through mentoring and an in-house apprenticeship program, creating a strong foundation for growth while addressing the industry's skills gap.

PEOPLE IN BRIEF

New faces join OCL Facades' Pre-construction team

OCL Facades welcomed several new faces to their Pre-Construction Team: Steve Smith, Sam Sharp, Prateek Rajan, and Hayden Lewis, who are all Senior Estimators, as well as Nick McCaig, who has joined as an Assistant Estimator.

Pre-construction Director Tommy Occleshaw said: "We have a brilliant team of estimators joining the team, bringing an enormous amount of experience and knowledge to the department. I'm really pleased with the dynamic of the team and look forward to seeing what we deliver collectively."

<https://ocl.london/>

Mansell welcomes new business development manager

Mansell Building Solutions have recruited Ben Pemberton as their new Business Development Manager.

Ben brings more than 25 years of experience across estimating, technical sales, and client partnerships. Ben joins Mansell at a really exciting time as they work to generate over 100,000m² of off-site panelised construction from their MMC factory in Greater Manchester, helping the region create over 1,000 spaces each year.

To read more about Ben's appointment visit: <https://tinyurl.com/36hh86ec>



Innovate at SA Appoints New Sales & Marketing Director

Innovate at SA has announced the appointment of Neil Miller as its new Sales & Marketing Director.

In his new role, Neil will oversee the company's global sales and marketing operations, working closely with the executive leadership team to strengthen market positioning, enhance customer relationships, and support the company's long-term growth strategy.

<https://innovateatsa.co.uk>



BUILDING BETTER CONTRACTS, TOGETHER

Iain McIlwee, Chief Executive at FIS spoke to **Kate Kennedy**, Contracts Transformation Leader at Laing O'Rourke, about how they are leading the way in transforming industry contracting and learning from other sectors.

Iain opened the conversation with Kate, noting that her job title is certainly unusual, and asked her, **"What is your mission in the business?"**

Kate explained that the business has always been known for innovation and thought leadership, and the executive team is clear: if we want to deliver the level of growth that Government and clients are asking for, we need to transform how our industry operates. That means moving away from an adversarial, high-risk, low-resilience model and shifting toward one built on collaboration, trust, quality, and safety.

Kate said: "Contracts play a critical role in shaping project outcomes, yet they are often overlooked in transformation efforts. Depending on the project, the way we contract can significantly impact performance on site. Our mission is to lead that change, transforming how we contract across the industry and ensuring we learn from other sectors. We aim to propose solutions that are genuinely win-win outcomes for both client and contractor and it is this that we hope will create a foundation for better project delivery."

"What transformation do you believe is needed?"

She said: "There is a lot to tackle! We have studied other industries to understand how they contract and what lessons we can apply. We have been working a lot with World Commerce & Contracting (World CC), which is a global leader in improving contracting practices backed by robust data and research.

"One key insight is the success of contract simplification in other sectors. This does not mean the commercial deal is simplified but does mean that contracts are clear and accessible for the people who actually deliver the work. Construction projects are complex, with multiple stakeholders and regulatory requirements. If contracts lack clarity, we start from a position of risk.

"For 2026 we have launched a pilot simplified contract, building on these proven approaches from other industries. Our goal is to use real-world data from this pilot to demonstrate to clients that clarity, consistency, and accessibility in contracts drive collaboration and, ultimately, better project outcomes."

"Are you seeing wider support for transformation of this type?"

Kate said: "Absolutely. While we are at the start of this journey, we have been doing a huge amount of work to showcase this initiative across the industry. We were delighted to see organisations such as the Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) and the Technology and Construction Solicitors Association (TECSA) recently champion contract simplification, influenced by the presentation we delivered at one of their events in the summer. Insurers have also responded positively and are actively helping us showcase this initiative to a broader audience.

"We are excited to hear feedback from our supply chain as they engage with the new contract, and we are very keen for as many people as possible to engage with and adopt the type of work that we are doing. So please spread the word!"

"Where is resistance coming from?"

"I would not say there is resistance to this idea, as we are only at the start of the journey. However, we are asking teams who have contracted in the same way for decades to shift from a mindset of "the contract governs what happens when things go wrong" to "the contract governs how we

"Contracts play a critical role in shaping project outcomes, yet they are often overlooked in transformation efforts."

Kate Kennedy, Contracts Transformation Leader at Laing O'Rourke



can best achieve each other's outcomes." That is a move from a negative to a positive mindset. It is a cultural change, and cultural change takes time.

"But the progress we are making already in this area feels significant. In terms of what our contracts look like and how they function, it is perhaps more progress than the industry has seen in many years," said Kate.

"What support is out there for other businesses looking to embrace this type of change?"

Kate explained she would strongly recommend exploring the resources offered by World CC. She said: "They are an independent body, not aligned to either supplier or contractor interests, which makes their insights and proposals highly credible. Their research and frameworks can help any business begin this journey with confidence.

"FIS are also doing a good job of promoting the benefits, and I am sure their team are keen to support anyone on a simplification journey. And of course, please feel free to reach out to me as well at kkennedy@laingorourke.com if you would like to hear more about the journey we are on."

changes do you expect to see in the way we manage contracts?"

Kate commented: "Looking ahead, I see huge potential for AI to help identify discrepancies and conflicts between contract documents at an early stage, reducing risk and improving delivery. I also expect a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to presenting contract information for contractors and their supply chain, making it easier to understand what matters and why.

She concluded by saying: "The biggest challenge remains risk allocation. Until we see meaningful change upstream, Tier 1 contractors will struggle to shift risk allocation downstream. We are already seeing progress in some sectors, and I believe others will follow. We all have an important role to play in improving our communication with clients about why balanced risk allocation leads to better project outcomes, and in promoting more collaborative contracting models that prioritise shared success."

www.laingorourke.com



FIS Simplified Contracts

To support its members, FIS has produced a simple contract built for use by members. This work very much aligns to our Responsible No² Campaign and our wider work on improving contractual practice and procurement in the sector.

The suite of FIS Simplified Contracts and associated training can be accessed (freely for members) via the FIS Contractual and Legal Toolkit by visiting:

www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/business/contractual-and-legal/

Source

1. www.worldcc.com

2. www.thefis.org/about-us/fis-campaigns/responsible-no/

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From left to right: (L-R) The expert panel: John Sinfield, Jade Sandhu, Mark Crosby and Sam Downton

SOLVING THE SKILLS CONUNDRUM: HOW WE MAKE THE CONSTRUCTION SKILLS MISSION BOARD WORK FOR US

At the FIS Conference, a panel of four industry experts shared their insightful and passionate views on the systemic challenges the construction sector faces in recruiting and training enough people to meet demand and seize the opportunities presented by the Construction Skills Mission Board (CSMB).

Panel members

John Sinfield,
Etex and Construction
Mission Board



Jade Sandhu,
HR Manager at Measom and
Chair of the FIS Skills Board



Mark Crosby,
Head of Strategic
Engagement at CITB



Sam Downton,
Managing Director at The
Skills Centre



The session consisted of some framed questions put to the panel members from the Chair **Iain McIlwee**, Chief Executive at FIS.

Opening the discussion, Iain asked Jade, **“When we look at the current skills landscape and the large numbers of people we need to recruit, where do you see the key challenges?”**

Jade said: “The UK construction industry has long relied on migrant labour, but tighter migration rules, coupled with an ageing workforce, mean we must urgently focus on attracting and retaining domestic talent. One of our biggest challenges is encouraging people to choose — and stay in — roles that often involve early starts, travel to site, and demanding working conditions.

“To make construction a genuinely attractive option, we need to reset how the industry is perceived by young people and, crucially, by the parents and teachers who influence their choices. One of the key

ways to do this is through setting out clear, long-term career pathways. For example, a Level 2 Interior Systems apprentice currently has no structured Level 3 or Level 4 progression route, despite the increasing skill and competence required across their career. Without visible progression through formal qualifications, we make it harder to outwardly demonstrate the value and importance of our trades.

“Fundamentally, we must showcase the skill involved, articulate progression routes and shift perceptions at a family-level, so they understand that construction apprenticeships offer credible, rewarding careers. This is key to widening our talent pool and improving diversity.”

The next question was posed to Sam, **“I’ve heard it said by Mark Reynolds, who chairs the Construction Skills Mission Board (CSMB), that we don’t have a recruitment problem, we have an absorption problem. Sam, you’re on the front line of this, do you think that’s a fair assessment?”**

"Yeah, I do think that's fair. From what we see every day, there's definitely no shortage of people interested in construction or signing up for courses. Plenty of candidates come through training wanting to get into the industry, so the appetite is absolutely there. The problem is what happens afterwards. Too many people gain a qualification but never actually make it into proper site work, or they don't stay long once they get there. A lot of that comes down to the way training is delivered.

"Too much of it is still classroom-based and doesn't reflect what a live site is really like. So, people complete a course, then walk onto a site and feel unprepared, overwhelmed, or unsure whether the job is really for them. On top of that, the system is still far too focused on churning out qualifications rather than ensuring people are genuinely work-ready. So yes, we can attract people, but absorbing them into real jobs — and supporting them to stay there — is where the industry is struggling," said Sam.

Jade was asked, **"Measom are certainly a leading light in the drylining sector when it comes to taking on apprentices. Why do you think more employers aren't following suit, and what needs to change?"**

Jade responded: "At Measom, apprenticeships are part of our culture — we see them as the only sustainable way to grow our future workforce. Many employers don't follow suit because the true cost and resource demands of running a high-quality apprenticeship programme are far higher than the current support available.

"Using the Level 2 Interior Systems apprenticeship as an example, employers receive £10,500 over two years, yet delivery costs far exceed this when you factor in wages, tools, materials, training managers, on-site mentoring and so on. Almost half of that funding is only released at the end of the programme, despite a 47% drop-out rate, which makes the financial risk even higher and reduces the incentive to recruit.

"Quality delivery also requires daily supervision, structured mentoring and an internal training capability — far more than simply sending apprentices to a training provider a few days a month. Employers must also maintain a steady pipeline of work and manage the inevitable productivity dips while apprentices learn.

"In short, the barriers are delivery costs, funding distribution, and the significant resource required. To increase employer engagement, we need funding that reflects the real cost of delivery and is structured in a way that supports employers."

The Chair put the question to Mark, **"Can you give us some insight into where and how the CSMB can help, and the progress made so far?"**

Mark shared his thoughts and said: "The CSMB has been established as a strategic collaboration between industry and Government to create a demand-led skills system that delivers more workers into the construction workforce by the end of this parliamentary term.

"The current skills system isn't bridging the gap between training and employment meaning a significant number of learners are missing out on sustained jobs in construction each year.

"The CSMB's aim is to develop a responsive, demand-led skills model that connects education and training with real labour market needs and employer investment. This means better job outcomes, stronger partnerships, and a future-ready workforce.

"To deliver this the CSMB is focusing on four strategic objectives:

- Skills intelligence: Creating a data-driven view of construction skills demand across England.
- Employment-led training: Reshaping training to align with employer needs and prioritising job outcomes.
- Strategic and local coordination: Connecting national programmes with local initiatives to meet workforce demand.
- Employment investment and delivery: Encouraging more employers to invest in training and recruit new talent.

"John, you are on the CSMB, how are you feeling about it all? Do you think it's going to help?" asked Iain.

John responded by saying: "The CSMB is still relatively new, but the encouraging aspect is that all sectors of the construction industry are represented. Alongside industry, it includes training providers, local authorities, and Government.

"So, we have all the pieces of the jigsaw. Our challenge now is to fit them together to help solve the problem. It is still early days, but there are very positive signs. The will is there, which is half the battle. The next step is ensuring that good intent doesn't get lost. We've got the right people around the table, and now we need to turn that into action."

Iain put the question to Sam, **"Is training provision evolving to meet the challenge? How are you structuring journeys into the industry and supporting both individuals and employers?"**

Sam stated: "Yes, training is starting to evolve, which is encouraging. Bootcamps have shifted the focus toward actual job outcomes rather than just qualifications. Candidates are now assessed on interviews, work experience, and job starts, which pushes providers to focus on what really matters. The CITB Onsite Experience Fund is also significant, as it allows people to train safely on live projects, which improves retention.

We're also looking beyond entry level. In areas like interior systems, pathways currently stop at Level 2. Working with Measom and FIS, we're developing a Level 3 to create progression, raise standards, and give people clear goals. It's early days, but it's the direction the industry needs."

The Chair looked to John, as a manufacturer, for insight on how their problems differ and what role manufacturers play in supporting contractor training.

John explained: "From a manufacturer's perspective, it varies by the type of role. For example, it is relatively easy to recruit for office based or sales roles at almost all levels. However, when you move into plant based roles, especially engineering, it becomes much more difficult. Recruitment and retention are two very different challenges. Getting people through the door is one thing, keeping them developing is another. What we're seeing in manufacturing is not far off what is happening on site. The pressures are similar: skills gaps, competition from other industries, and the need to show that construction is a viable career."

John continued: "We almost always have open engineering positions. Both recruitment and retention in this area are difficult, and I hear the same from other manufacturers. When it comes to our role in contractor training, there is a wide range of involvement. It starts with the simple but important support of providing materials to colleges for students to use in classroom sessions. From there, it extends to supporting colleges with presentations and CPD seminars, all the way to putting people through training at manufacturers' own facilities. Generally, across building materials manufacturing, we take this type of support very seriously.

"We should also not forget the merchants and distributors who play a part in providing materials and training. At the end of the day, the industry — whether manufacturers or merchants and distributors — needs skilled, well-trained operatives on site to install our products. We have to make people feel part of something they can grow with. →

“If we want more young people trained and employed in construction, we must start by supporting the employers who take them on.”

The next wave of talent gives us the opportunity to build competency into the foundations of the industry from day one, and manufacturers have a real stake in making that happen.”

The Chair said to Sam and Jade, **“You have heard what John has to say. What message would you like him to take back on behalf of the FIS Community?”**

“The key message is that qualifications need to be outcome-driven and genuinely shaped around employer needs. We also need more funding going directly to employers, not just providers, so they can mentor, support, and properly invest in new entrants. The hidden costs of taking on apprentices are real: time, pastoral support, supervision, and mentoring. If we want employers to play their part, we have to back them. Give them the tools and the funding, and they will take people on, train them properly, and help fix the retention problem,” responded Sam.

Jade said: “If we want more young people trained and employed in construction, we must start by supporting the employers who take them on. High drop-out rates mean employers lose significant time, → money and resource — and without better-structured funding, many simply can’t afford to keep recruiting. That’s why millions spent on bootcamps and training initiatives risk leading nowhere if employers aren’t in a position to offer real jobs at the end.

“With 71% of contractors saying they want to invest in apprenticeships but can’t afford to, funding distribution needs urgent review. We also need stronger support to get formal apprenticeship pathways approved. At Measom, we’ve invested heavily in creating a Level 3 programme, yet face unnecessary barriers in getting it recognised as a formal qualification.

“If the industry is serious about solving the labour crisis, we must make it easier — not harder — for employers to train, retain and progress the next generation.”

Mark, was asked to share his thoughts with the audience on how the CITB should evolve to effectively support this work.

Mark said: “CITB fully supports the aims and objectives of the CSMB. We are already strategically aligned with their vision. Our 2025–2029 strategic plan recognises the

challenges within the skills system and sets out how we will develop training and skills to meet both current and future needs.

Mark explained that, to support the CSMB, CITB has been developing skills forecasting, modelling, and analysis to ensure workforce planning reflects the needs of construction employers as accurately as possible. He said: “We’ve also been working with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to shape local collaborative action, bringing together partners, aligning interventions and directing funding based on workforce demand.

“The CITB New Entrant Support Team (NEST) will support CSMB and industry to find, train, and retain more apprentices and new entrants. NEST will work with employers to remove the barriers to employing and retaining these individuals.

“In addition, we are supporting industry in developing sector-specific skills plans to address the distinct needs of various segments within the construction sector. Plans for homebuilding and infrastructure have been launched with Repair,

Maintenance, and Improvement (RM&I), and commercial sector plans are currently in development.”

Completing the framed questions, Iain asked John, **“What would be your ask on behalf of the Construction Skills Mission Board of the FIS Community?”**

John remarked: “This one is really simple to answer! My ask is that you get involved, challenge the status quo, and even demand what you believe the industry needs to change and how we can attract more people into our sector.

“Work with the FIS to feed into the CSMB what you, the people on the ground, believe is genuinely needed. Challenge us on how we approach training, and make sure we create somewhere for people to land once that training is complete.

“And let’s not dodge the harder parts of the conversation, particularly around diversity. Some of this won’t be comfortable, but progress rarely is — think of it as growing pains before the next step forward. Ours is a proud industry — in what we make, in how we build, and in who we bring along on the journey — and the more we share that pride the more the wider world sees of why it’s earned that status.”

In conclusion, Mark said: “This is about more than just putting shoes in boots, the challenge is about shaping a workforce to reflect the world it’s building.”

The FIS Skills Board

Chaired by Jade, the FIS Skills Board is made up of volunteer representatives from the FIS membership who act as a scrutiny and advisory board. Their role is to help ensure that FIS deploys its resources effectively and delivers against its three core goals: recruit, qualify, and develop. The Skills Board includes representatives from both industry and training providers, and plays a pivotal role in coordinating work on qualifications and competence. It also contributed to the development of a skills manifesto for the FIS community, which supports the wider skills agenda through a set of key recommendations.

If you would like to get involved and support this collective effort to improve the skills landscape, please email beenanana@thefis.org

The Construction Skills Mission Board

The CSMB is a UK Government and industry initiative aimed at tackling the construction sector’s workforce shortages and boosting skills development nationwide. This involves the recruit of 100,000 new construction workers annually by the end of the current Parliament. The Board will develop specific initiatives and actions to deliver the mission, while supporting the Government to shape, develop and deliver skills policy. The actions will focus on five key areas to drive increased recruitment. They are:

- Confidence to employ and invest
- Clear new entrant pathways
- Access to provision and support to train
- Funding that works
- Reliable and rewarding careers.

To find out more visit: <https://tinyurl.com/yfw9z8mx>

PLASTERBOARD SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP

Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion takes a look at the Plasterboard Sustainability Partnership (PSP) which was established in 2009 to improve sustainability across the plasterboard lifecycle. After losing momentum in 2019, it was relaunched in 2024 to raise awareness, reduce waste, and foster collaboration across the supply chain.



Flavie Lowres, FIS Sustainability Champion

The Plasterboard Sustainability Partnership (PSP) was established in 2009 as an outcome of a Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) programme to develop a Plasterboard Roadmap, which identified the environmental impacts of plasterboard throughout its lifecycle. The PSP comprised a broad range of stakeholders involved in the production, installation and disposal of plasterboard, as well as the relevant government departments and regulatory agencies.

One of the main outputs of the PSP was the publication of the Plasterboard Roadmap Action Plan, which was part of a series of publications called "Resource Efficiency Action Plans" (REAPs).

The objective of the PSP was: To improve the sustainability of plasterboard across the product life cycle by stakeholders working together on barriers and gaps, so going further and faster than the parties acting alone.

The PSP remained active until 2019 but then lost momentum. With sustainability rising up the industry agenda, the Gypsum Products Association (GPA) decided in 2024 to relaunch the PSP and identify potential areas of collaboration with stakeholders. A workshop, organised by the GPA and supported by FIS, was held in October 2024 in London. Forty-five individuals attended, representing a range of stakeholders from tier 1 contractors to manufacturers,

installers, demolition contractors and distributors, who came together to create a common understanding of key sustainability topics. The aim of the workshop was to gauge the level of engagement the PSP might receive if relaunched and to identify the sustainability areas on which it should focus. The number of attendees and the feedback from the workshop clearly demonstrated strong support for relaunching the PSP.

The intent of the relaunched PSP is to improve awareness and understanding among all stakeholders of existing knowledge about the role plasterboard plays in construction and of the sustainability issues throughout the supply chain, and to use this knowledge to develop practical and coordinated strategies for sustainability. This includes economic and social impacts as well as environmental ones.

Two immediate areas for attention were identified: the need to understand the availability of information regarding the life cycle of gypsum products, and the need to gather support for reducing waste in the value chain. Guidance has been drafted outlining how to minimise waste in the design, specification, and supply of plasterboard, as well as its installation and end of life. FIS members were part of an initial consultation during the FIS sustainability leadership group meeting, and a full draft will be circulated in early 2026.

Collaboration across the supply chain is important to deliver more efficient solutions. Responsibilities for reducing waste do indeed sit with different stakeholders, for example:

- Manufacturers can reduce waste in their factories, provide bespoke sizes to avoid offcuts on site, and set up take-back schemes to recycle both pre-consumer and post-consumer waste.

- Contractors can ensure products are stored properly on site to avoid damage and can plan installations carefully to minimise rework.
- Demolition and strip-out contractors can better segregate waste on site to avoid contamination of plasterboard and other materials.

The Partnership is an open forum for any company or trade association involved in the production, distribution, installation, and disposal of plasterboard and gypsum, as well as the relevant government departments and regulatory agencies.

The Secretariat will be provided by FIS and is aligned with the FIS Sustainability Leadership Group, which feeds back on the findings of the PSP's work and provides data and evidence where necessary.

The Secretariat is responsible for maintaining the list of PSP members and their contact details, liaising with the Chair to set meeting agendas, and circulating relevant papers and minutes of meetings.

A steering group, including representatives from all GPA members, will meet annually to agree a programme of work and in advance of PSP events. There may also be a requirement to attend other events and sector forums as appropriate. The Partnership will appoint a Chair and Deputy Chair, who will report to the GPA Management Committee.

Oliver Cripps, Head of Sustainability, Etex UK&I and Member of the GPA Sustainability Committee, says: "Increasing efficiency, encouraging innovation and reducing waste will benefit the entire plasterboard value chain. The Plasterboard Sustainability Partnership is for all stakeholders and we want to hear from you!"

For further information regarding the PSP, please contact admin@the-gpa.org or visit www.the-gpa.org

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION: ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON AVOIDING CONFLICT THROUGH BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

Marc Preston, Dip Adj MRICS MCIOB and CEO at Vertice Development Management and New Foundation Counselling, discusses collaboration in construction which requires trust, good faith, and practical measures like risk management, fair payments, and wellbeing, not just contractual intent or meaningless words.



Marc Preston, Dip Adj MRICS MCIOB and CEO at Vertice Development Management and New Foundation Counselling

Collaboration in modern construction contracts

The new 2024 editions of the JCT have moved the option to adopt collaborative working practices into a fundamental obligation. Article 3 of the JCT in full says: "The parties shall work with each other and with other project team members in a co-operative manner in good faith and in a spirit of trust and respect. To that end each shall support collaborative behaviours and address behaviour which is not collaborative."

This adjustment in obligation of the parties recognises that culture needs to evolve, it supports the guidance in the Government's Construction Paybook¹ and its private sector equivalent² and quite frankly is common sense

Other standard and template contracts are following suit, the newly launched FIS Standard Conditions [for contracting] simply require that "The Buyer and Supplier will work together in a spirit of trust and co-operation".

The NEC3 contract talks of "mutual trust and co-operation".

Arguably, none of these variations on a theme require the parties to do anything other than follow everything that the contract requires in a trustful, collaborative manner. If the parties get on well together, this should **not** be at the expense of blindly following what the contract says. Adhering to the contract terms should aid the understanding and awareness of the needs of the parties, which should naturally support the "mutual trust and cooperation" process. But it does stand as a helpful reminder that behaviours are fundamental to fulfilling our duties set down in the competence requirements now enshrined in the Building Regulations.

The dictionary definitions of collaboration and co-operation are strikingly similar, being the process of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing. So, to a degree these are interchangeable terms.

Deeper definitions distinguish between

the terms. Co-operation is when individuals work together to achieve a common benefit, but with a limited level of interaction and shared ownership, while collaboration involves a more intensive, mutually engaged process where participants share responsibilities, ideas, and work to jointly create a new outcome.

Key differences include the level of trust, sharing of work, and the nature of the outcome, where co-operation can be a connective process of mutual support, whereas collaboration is a collective process aimed at a shared creation.

The Courts have examined what these terms mean

In *Costain Limited v Tarmac Holdings Limited* [2017] EWHC 319 (TCC) the judge provided some useful guidance on the concept of mutual trust and cooperation. Reference was made to the Australian case of *Automasters Australia PTY Ltd v Bruness PTY Ltd* [2002] WASC 286, which says:

1. What is good faith will depend on the circumstances of the case and the context of the whole contract.
2. Good faith obligations do not require parties to put aside self-interests; they do not make the parties fiduciary.
3. Normal reasonable business behaviour is permitted but the court will consider whether a party has acted reasonably or unconscionably or capriciously and may have to consider motive.
4. The duty is one 'to have regard to the legitimate interests of both the parties in the enjoyment of the fruits of the contract as delineated by its terms'.

The Judgement included the observation that whilst the parties can maintain their legitimate commercial interests, they must behave so that their words and deeds are



'honest, fair and reasonable, and not attempts to improperly exploit' the other party.

In the Court of Appeal case of *Re Compound Photonics Group Ltd* [2022] EWCA Civ 137, the committee summarised the case as authority for the proposition that a clause requiring parties to act in good faith gives rise to: a core duty to act honestly and not in bad faith; and (subject to context) the prohibition of conduct that reasonable and honest people would regard as commercially unacceptable, but not necessarily dishonest.

Notwithstanding the consideration of the Courts there is a degree of subjectivity as to what "acting in a spirit of mutual trust and co-operation (and therefore collaboratively) is. This can simply be the act of being truthful, not deceitful, responding as quick as possible to challenges, rather than trying to get away with things."

Legal perspectives and practical implementation

All the above has no meaning whatsoever and is potentially unhelpful unless the parties adopt tangible and meaningful processes to give life beyond the theory. It is essential that pragmatic collaborative processes are introduced into the project cycle at the earliest possible time. Team selection should be skewed strongly in favour of those parties showing an understanding of and existing collaborative culture in their day-to-day working practices.

Guidance can be found both construction playbooks and also in BS 11000, the first standard for collaborative working. The BS 11000 provides an eight-stage structured model for collaboration designed to add value and therefore profit in the construction process. Some of the playbook and BS recommendations are geared to framework and longer term / repeat business arrangements. As we know a significant amount of work is of a one-off nature, but the key recommendations and guidance can still be incorporated in the working practices in one off project scenarios.

In the longer-term arrangements, there is a focus of creating a cycle of continuing improvement through developing and using KPI's. However there is nothing to prevent an individual firm from developing their own KPI's for use in external promotional literature and also for creating efficiencies and profit enhancement for the benefit of employees and shareholders.

For most specialists, collaboration, for all practical purposes, starts with the agreement of mutually acceptable beneficial contracting arrangement. Key to this is the fair allocation of risks such that no party



takes responsibility for aspects outside their gift to manage. Connected to this is the agreement to implement a live risk management process. This requires team identification of risk, management plans for all risks, allocated to a person able to deliver the risk mitigation. The process must be regularly reviewed and lessons learned recorded for future use.

Central also to collaboration are payment friendly terms. Consideration should be given to the use of Project Bank Accounts. All levels of the supply chain should also be considered in the payment process. Poor payment practices are one of the more frequently cited causes of poor mental health by people working below tier 1 contractors in the supply chain. Upside / downside incentivisation schemes can be explored but these can be difficult to administer.

Building collaborative teams and resolving disputes

Collaborative environments can be created through team building events. Creating a no fear, no blame culture (central to the success of baseball in modern day cricket). This can be achieved through active consultation with individuals in the team delivering work at the coal face. Focus on mental health and well-being, backed by improved welfare provision will also promote the collaborative environment as everyone feels valued and incentivised to contribute to the team effort.

Another central component of collaborative contracting is the facility for rapid dispute resolution.

The Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) has become the first trade association in the UK to be awarded 'gold status' by the

Conflict Avoidance Coalition (CAC), a group working to change how disputes are managed in construction and engineering. A formal system for escalating disputes is important to avoid roadblocks in the collaboration journey. The RICS first established the Conflict Avoidance Process (CAP) to: encourage "a fast, cost-effective, and collaborative way to resolve issues early. It focuses on preserving relationships, keeping parties in control, and providing impartial guidance without the commitment or cost of formal proceedings". To find out more visit: www.rics.org/dispute-resolution-service/conflict-avoidance/conflict-avoidance-process

If the Main Contractor has not taken the initiative, there is nothing preventing the specialist from including some or all of these requirements in the tender proposals and contract terms.

Regardless of a stated intention to collaborate, simply understanding what this means is not sufficient to achieve the desired goals. Insight into the necessary behaviours is also important, as past models of practice may need to be broken.

If you do the same thing in the same old way, you will get the same result. Change has to occur through a mix of different approaches but only by introducing practical measures to create a collaborative team will the real benefit be felt.

Source

1. *The Construction playbook Government Guidance on sourcing and contracting public works projects and programmes Cabinet office 2022*
2. *Trust and Productivity The private sector construction playbook 2022*

HIGHER EDUCATION

In a recent onsite vetting visit, **Nigel Higgins**, Technical Engagement Manager at FIS, shared his eagerness to see how Arena Point in Leeds, such a complex and high-profile high-rise project, was being delivered to the highest standards.



The impressive 46 storey Arena Point



*Nigel Higgins,
Technical Engagement
Manager at FIS*



*Kirk Shrimpton,
Managing Director of
BW Shrimpton*

Onsite vetting is a cornerstone of FIS membership for contractor members. It ensures that our members uphold the principles of our Code of Conduct¹, from being conversant with and adhering to the relevant current British, European and International Standards, as well as other technical standards, regulations and practices that underpin compliant working to conducting business in a manner that reflects credit on the FIS community. It also ensures that organisational and workforce competence can be demonstrated, that members hold the required levels of statutory or appropriate insurance, and have the systems in place to deliver high quality, compliant projects.

Although members are vetted on application and every three years to ensure that they continue to meet the high standards expected by FIS, the vetting process is more than a compliance check; it is a valuable opportunity to engage with our members, understand their challenges, and share the full range of FIS resources, from technical guidance to contract management tools and our Product Process People (PPP)² Quality Framework.

A towering example: Arena Point, Leeds

One recent vetting visit took place at Arena Point in Leeds, where long-standing and award-winning FIS member BW Shrimpton is delivering the drylining works. At 46 storeys, Arena Point is the tallest purpose-built student accommodation block in the world and the tallest building in Yorkshire. According to the site team, it is clearly visible from planes approaching Leeds Bradford Airport.

I was eager to see how such a complex high-rise project was being delivered to the highest standards. On site, I met with **Kirk Shrimpton**, Managing Director of BW Shrimpton, to walk the project and carry out the vetting process.

From family business to industry leader

BW Shrimpton began as a family run plastering business in 1980, founded by Kirk's father. Since taking over in 2010, Kirk has steered the company towards large scale, complex drylining projects.

Kirk proudly recalled winning the FIS Project of the Year in 2021 for Buxton Crescent and delivering multiple high-rise projects, including PBSA and BTR schemes for the RG Group.

When asked where preparation begins for a project on the scale of Arena Point in Leeds, he said: "It starts at the tender stage. We work closely with designers, the main contractor, our manufacturers, and distributors to resolve complex details and plan logistics. On Arena Point, for example, the floor loading limits meant we had to use

split pallets, so early input from our supply chain was essential."

On this project, BW Shrimpton is collaborating with fellow FIS members Siniat and CCF.

Logistics at height

Arena Point is a tight urban site with limited ground space. Deliveries must be swiftly loaded via crane or a specially designed side opening hoist, which eliminates the need for board trolleys.

The height of the building adds further complexity. Kirk explained that the biggest factor is the weather. He said: "High winds can halt both crane and hoist operations. Last winter, we even had to shovel snow off the floors where it had blown in through open sections of the building envelope.

"Welfare facilities are extremely important, so to reduce downtime, the main contractor has provided facilities on levels 14, 21, 28, and 35, with a canteen on level 21 to minimise the need for workers to return to ground level. Water for taping and jointing is pumped up overnight and stored in bowsers on each floor."

Experience and innovation

This is not BW Shrimpton's first high-rise project. They recently completed a 38-storey student accommodation building next door for the same contractor, strengthening relationships and gaining valuable experience.

The vetting process began at the top of the tower, where we inspected works in progress to assess structural details such as head deflections and fixing centres. As we descended, we reviewed

boarded areas and discussed their quality assurance systems.

BW Shrimpton uses the Fieldwire app to manage site information and ensure quality checks are completed throughout the build. I was able to share FIS's latest recommendations for record-keeping in line with the Building Safety Act and encouraged the team to take advantage of our free BSA training module³.

Quality, compliance, and continuous improvement

The team has created a fully finished mock-up area, approved for quality, which serves as a reference point for all stakeholders. At ground level, we concluded the vetting by reviewing Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS), materials handling, health and safety protocols, and waste management processes.

As part of every vetting, we ask members about the key challenges they face and how FIS can help. Recruitment remains a common concern. For BW Shrimpton, a particular issue is the lack of drylining training provision in Yorkshire colleges - a gap we have noted and passed on to the relevant FIS teams.

My report concluded that this complex project is being delivered to a high standard. The only recommendations were enhancements to the existing QA process to futureproof compliance under the Building Safety Act.

A badge of quality

The entire vetting process took around 90 minutes. It's always a pleasure to meet our members, learn from their methods, and share best practices. I genuinely believe our members are among the best in the industry - committed to excellence and looking to FIS for support, guidance, and that all adds to the credibility and importance of FIS membership as the badge of quality.

www.bwshrimpton.co.uk



(L-R) Kirk Shrimpton and Dave Farrell, Contracts Manager at BW Shrimpton, on the top of Arena Point

The FIS vetting process

Membership is not automatic and applicants are subject to strict vetting procedures (built around the concept of organisational capability and the FIS Product Process People (PPP Quality Framework). Not only are members vetted on application, but they are also vetted every three years to ensure that they continue to meet the high standards FIS demands. Ongoing vetting comprises an on-site assessment, plus a detailed documentary review.

The Code of Conduct

FIS members have signed up to deliver acceptable standards of workmanship and ethical trading.

On application each member company agrees to a focussed business audit to ensure that they are operating in a compliant and ethical manner. In the case of contractors, construction sites are visited to assess quality of supervision and workmanship. Members are periodically re-audited to ensure that standards are maintained and that they continue to uphold the FIS Code of Conduct.

As part of the audit, guidance and resources are offered in key areas such as Health and Safety, Technical Compliance and Contract Management.

The aim is to:

- Maintain standard for responsible working within the community and help members to achieve it
- Promote and encourage standards and quality in the industry
- Ensure the FIS logo is recognised as a mark of quality, so that customers can specify FIS members with confidence.

The FIS code of conduct requires members:

- To ensure they are conversant with and adhere to the relevant current British, European and International Standards and other relevant technical standards, regulations and practices that underpin compliant working.
- To conduct business in a manner that will reflect credit on the FIS Community.
- To adhere to acceptable standards of customer care and reasonable and responsible supply chain management.
- To adhere to the requirements of the FIS complaints process.
- To adopt and commit to the principles and practices laid down in FIS guidance and exercise high standards of business practice and workmanship communicating them effectively within their team.
- To ensure organisational and workforce competence can be demonstrated.
- Ensure that products or systems are tested and/or comply with the recognised standards specified by the client or statutory authorities.
- Not knowingly mislead others by fact or implication as to the performance of products or systems.
- To hold required levels of statutory or appropriate insurance.
- To operate an effective health and safety policy and have a current health and safety policy statement.
- To keep records of all RIDDOR reportable accidents and provide annual accident statistics to FIS when requested.
- To have and implement an appropriate environmental policy statement.
- To display wherever practical the FIS Accredited Member Logo or FIS Associate Member Logo (as applicable) on its premises, website, business stationery and brochures.
- To make this FIS Code of Conduct available for inspection.

To find out more visit: www.thefis.org/about-us/the-fis-code-of-conduct

Email: info@thefis.org

Telephone: 0121 707 0077

Source

1. www.thefis.org/about-us/the-fis-code-of-conduct/
2. www.thefis.org/knowledge-hub/product-process-people/
3. <https://www.thefis.org/skills-hub/training-offers-for-members/fis-training-modules/>

SPARTA SYSTEMS: BUILDING STRONGER MINDS AND SAFER SITES

Mathew Bates, Commercial Director at Sparta Systems, shares the positive impact of having a general and mental health nurse who amongst other things visits their sites monthly, runs structured workshops, and provides an ongoing informal on-site presence.

SPARTA SYSTEMS **A**t Sparta Systems, we believe that people are at the heart of every project. Our workforce is made up of skilled operatives (mostly subcontractors), labourers and managers, operating across Yorkshire and the North East, and every individual is considered part of the same team.

In an industry where deadlines are tight, standards are high, and the pressure is constant, it's easy for wellbeing to slip down the list of priorities. Like many companies, we had already taken a proactive step by training Mental Health First Aiders on our sites. However, despite their commitment and effort, we recognised some limitations.

When someone was struggling, those first aiders could only signpost them towards a GP or external services and too often, that meant long waiting lists and very little immediate support. We knew we needed to do more to make mental health care accessible and meaningful for our people. More importantly, we recognised a need to take a more preventative approach not just reacting when someone said they were struggling.

Building a culture of wellbeing

That's when we partnered with Cavalier Health, led by **Lizzie Crofts**, an ex-Royal Navy, dual-trained nurse (mental health and physical health) with first-hand experience of high-pressure environments. Lizzie now visits several of our sites each month, alternating between structured workshops and informal on-site presence days. The workshops cover a variety of topics that impact mental health, offering hints and tips for improving your own wellbeing and recognising signs that others may be struggling.

Her role isn't just to "tick the mental health box" it's to be a visible, trusted part of our workplace culture. Whether she's delivering training or simply walking the site, Lizzie's

presence gives our team the opportunity to open up, ask questions and access professional support without stigma or delay.

The impact has been tangible.

- Conversations about mental health have become open and genuine.
- Team members are requesting one-to-one sessions to manage stress, personal loss, and life changes.
- Site morale and cohesion have noticeably improved.

What's been most rewarding is how naturally this support has integrated into everyday working life. It's not about stepping away from the job to talk about mental health; it's about building a culture within the business where wellbeing is part of how we work.

Partnering with Cavalier Health has shown

that investing in mental health isn't a nice to have ... it's a business decision that improves trust, retention and performance.

We're proud to be talking about this and showing that when we invest in stronger minds, we build safer, more resilient sites — and a stronger industry for the future that is welcoming to younger generations to come into.

We have reached a point in the construction industry where the benefits of genuinely valuing and supporting the workforce are becoming increasingly clear. While efforts to address the sector's skills shortage continue, attracting and retaining top talent remains critical. Sparta's decision to partner with Cavalier Health has enabled us to achieve this to an exceptionally high standard.



Lizzie Crofts, Company
Director and Mental Health
Practitioner, Cavalier Health



Lizzie speaking to the Sparta Systems staff on-site



Two employees of Sparta Systems were keen to share their thoughts on how Lizzie had supported them.

"I have met with Lizzie a few times now. Being in construction can be extremely stressful at the best of times. The time she takes to sit and talk things through and try to find ways of making the day at work and life in general go a little bit better is invaluable to me and especially my son who works with me. My son has learning difficulties and finds most things tough but after only a couple of weeks of getting to know Lizzie he is showing massive signs of improvement already and for that I cannot thank her enough. Her ways of getting us to open up are amazing too and it does not feel like a session it just feels like you are talking to a friend over a cuppa. All in all, she is a breath of fresh air and this industry will be a better place with Lizzie helping us along the way," said **Adam**.

Site Manager, **Mark**, who has spent 35 years working in construction across all kinds of companies and sites, said: "For the last two years I've been working with Sparta Systems as a Site Manager and a Mental Health First Aider, and even before Cavalier came on board, I genuinely felt Sparta already had a strong support system in place.

"But I can honestly say that when Cavalier partnered with Sparta, it took our mental health support to a whole new level. The difference has been felt right across the company. We have had proper, meaningful resources, from toolbox talks and mental health sessions on all sorts of topics, to monthly workshop coffee mornings where Mental Health First Aiders like me can share experiences, get guidance, and learn from people from completely different backgrounds. It has opened doors for networking, peer support, and it has given us the tools we

need to actually help our workforce in a practical way.

"And on a personal note, this partnership has helped me in ways I did not expect. I have had several one-to-one sessions to help me through the grief of losing my wife, and that support has meant more than I can put into words. Knowing that kind of help is there, not just for me, but for anyone in the business, says everything about what this partnership really brings.

"After three decades in the industry, I have never seen mental health taken this seriously. Cavalier and Sparta together have set a new standard, and I am proud to be part of it."

When asked about working with Sparta Systems and how she became a trusted part of their workplace culture, Lizzie said: "As a new business finding my feet in the construction industry, I've faced my share of challenges. But working with Sparta Systems and other companies in the sector, I realised something very early on: the environment might be different, but people are people. Everyone is a complex character with their own story, and understanding that, that's the part that comes naturally to me.

"I've developed and delivered several workshops in all kinds of settings, from heated boardrooms with a presentation screen, to cafés with none, and even standing on plasterboards in the middle of a site. Wherever I am, the message stays the same: mental health doesn't need to

be a taboo subject. It should be something we can talk about as freely as 'what did you have for your tea last night?' Running sessions on-site keeps disruption low but engagement high, and that's where the real conversations happen.

"We're often told that 'men don't like to talk about mental health', and that may be true in some cases, but in my experience, they do talk, when the environment and the people are right. The Sparta team have shown me the power of being present, being approachable, and being human. It's created a space where people can say, 'I'm struggling' and know they'll be met with honesty, kindness, and the support they deserve.

"My workshops cover a wide range of topics, from understanding stress and spotting the signs of burnout, to tackling banter and bullying, grief and loss, and even financial wellbeing. Every session is designed to spark conversation, build confidence, and leave people feeling more equipped to look after themselves and each other.

"I pour a lot of energy into what I do, I am exhausted by the end of the day – but I believe the people on-site deserve the best level of care and commitment, as they show for their role on site. I just need to make sure I practice what I preach at the end of the day and take the appropriate rest.

"Seeing the shift when a group that starts off quiet ends up talking, laughing, and sharing openly that's what drives me. It's proof that when you show up with passion and authenticity, real change can happen."

Find out more

If you would like to discuss Sparta Systems' experiences further, please contact Natalie at: nmcdermott@spartasystems.co.uk

If you would like to discuss with Lizzie how Cavalier Health can support your business, please contact her at: lizzie@cavalierhealth.co.uk

www.spartasystems.co.uk

FROM FIREFIGHTING TO FREEDOM

We take a look at how a new FIS initiative, the Freedom Programme, is helping business owners step out of day-to-day operations and become excited about their businesses again.



*Dave Drimmie,
Chartered Quantity
Surveyor turned
successful business-
growth consultant*



*Iain McIlwee,
Chief Executive, FIS*

It's Friday evening — but the week isn't over. The inbox is overflowing. Two sites are behind schedule. One client still owes £100k. The contract for next week's job sits unread, and you're still short of a plasterer in London.

For many construction business owners, this is the reality. Long hours. Constant firefighting. Sleepless nights. The business that was meant to provide freedom, instead becomes a cage of chaos and cash-flow strain.

This is the trap that a new initiative from the Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) aims to break.

No more weekend calls. No more firefighting. Instead: financial clarity, stronger systems, empowered teams — and the breathing space to work on the business rather than in it.

The FIS Freedom Programme has been developed exclusively for FIS members by **Dave Drimmie**, a Scottish chartered quantity surveyor turned successful business-growth consultant with a genuine passion for helping others.

Dave has spent the past six months creating the programme, but in reality, it is the culmination of 40-plus years of learning, gained from working with companies ranging from multi-million-pound tier one outfits to cash-strapped start-ups just beginning their journeys.

Recently discussing the initiative with **Iain McIlwee**, FIS Chief Executive, Dave explained that a lot of business owners are running towards the horizon without ever getting there. After decades on construction sites and in boardrooms, I kept seeing the same pattern — owners trapped in survival mode, working harder than ever but getting nowhere and the FIS Freedom Programme is my answer to that.

Dave said: "My focus has been on documenting and digitising the core processes that help contractors scale — helping business owners think like CEOs, not tradesmen, by embracing digital tools, AI, and repeatable systems to build companies that can run without them.

"I am passionate about helping these business owners reclaim their time and their lives.

"When you have financial clarity, robust systems, empowered teams, and a clear purpose, that is true freedom.

"The sector has faced relentless pressure in recent years, and in my opinion 2026 promises further uncertainty."

He went on to explain that conversations with FIS members, have helped identify three critical barriers to growth:

- **Cash flow management:** Profit on paper but not in the bank.
 - **Hiring and retention:** Finding and keeping quality staff.
 - **Work-life balance:** Owners burned out and short on thinking time.
- However, beneath those operational problems lie three deeper challenges:
- **Resistance to change.**
 - **Fear of making the wrong decision.**
 - **Not committing enough time to work on the business.**

"The programme tackles those head-on, giving owners a practical roadmap to grow smarter, not harder, and to move beyond the scourge of day-to-day firefighting, which seriously impacts their ability to move the company forward as much as they would like.

"Contractors who succeed don't just work harder; they work smarter.

"They have to learn to let go if they want to grow and break through that glass ceiling," said Dave.

Dave continued to explain that the reality is that most contractors operate in one of three modes:

- **Survival:** Firefighting daily, short on cash and control.
- **Stationary:** Steady but stagnant; the owner is the bottleneck.

- **Scalable and saleable:** Structured systems, empowered teams, and freedom to grow or exit on their own terms.

"The programme is designed to guide FIS members through that transformation step by step.

"Time is a gift," said Dave. "The programme gives it back. Sure, there will be problems, but simply dealing with problems, being stuck on the back foot, shouldn't be the norm."

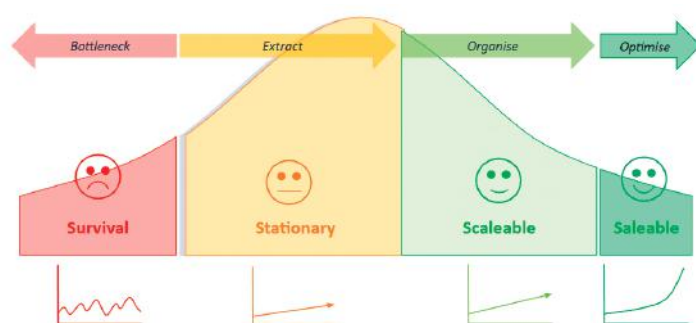
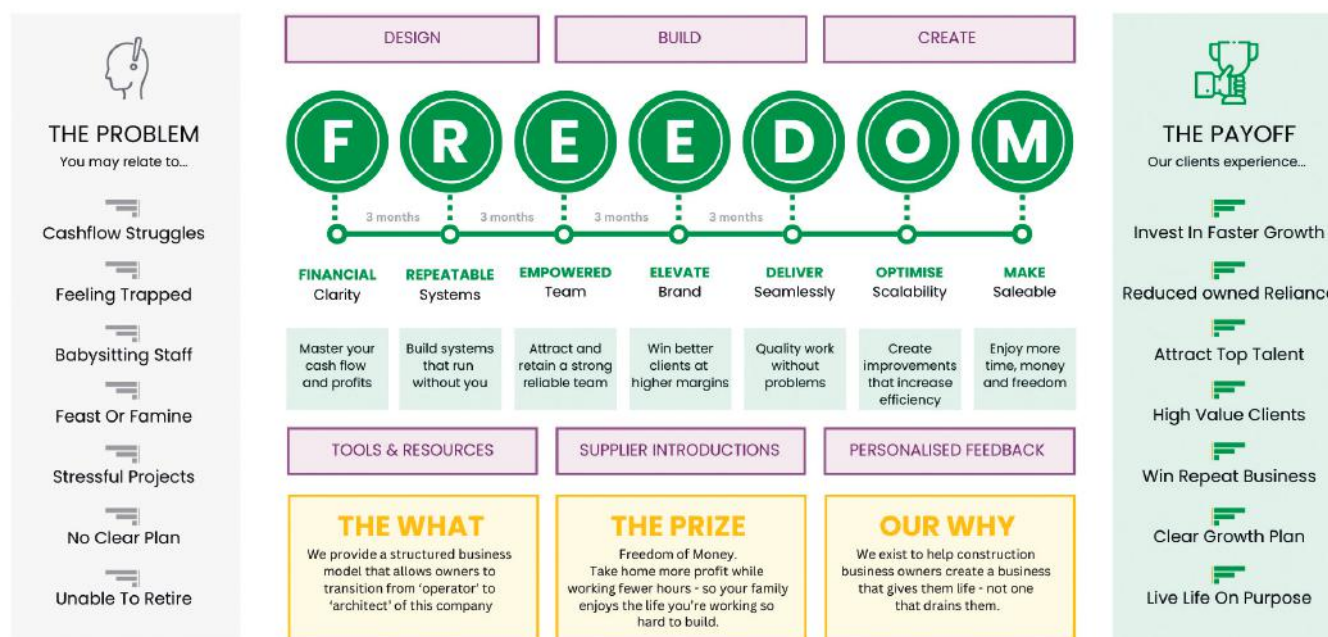
The Freedom Programme: Training course overview

A 12-week, hands-on initiative combining workshops, practical templates and peer accountability. Each 90-minute session focuses on a key pillar of business transformation:

- **Financial clarity:** Take control of cash flow and profitability.
- **Repeatable systems:** Extract what's in your head and document what scales.
- **Empowered employees:** Attract, train and retain five-star team members.
- **Elevation:** Win high-value clients at higher margins.
- **Deliver seamlessly:** Streamline projects, reduce rework and improve profit.
- **Optimise with AI:** Use digital tools to save hours every week.
- **Make saleable:** Create a valuable asset that isn't owner-dependent.

In between sessions, the team build out the systems so that the owners can delegate operations, with the average time saved expected to be over 40 hours per month, thus allowing them the freedom to focus on strategy and growth.

"When you have financial clarity, robust systems, empowered teams, and a clear purpose, that is true freedom."



The created framework has been proven to help owners build scalable, saleable businesses and to reclaim their freedom across four fronts: financial, time, relationships, and purpose.

The pilot and rollout

Backed by CITB funding, a pilot cohort of eight FIS members was launched in late 2025. Early feedback has been exceptionally positive: participants reporting greater clarity, stronger team engagement and renewed confidence in their direction.

One contractor described it as “the first time in years I’ve had space to think strategically.”

Based on the pilot’s success, FIS plans a full membership rollout in 2026, a phased approach supported by a set of “connected learnings” that will be shared across the industry.

Phase One is focused on helping owners extract themselves from the day-to-day operations and once that has been successfully completed, Phase Two concentrates on automation and AI to streamline the business, improve productivity and increase profit.

Find out more

The FIS Freedom Programme is already helping contractors reclaim control of their

businesses and rediscover why they started in the first place.

Are you a company owner who feels stuck in survival or stationary mode? If so, this is your invitation to break through and start building a scalable — and ultimately saleable — business.

To find out more and register your interest, visit: <https://buildingfreedom.co.uk>

Dave concluded by saying: “The Freedom Programme is much more than a training course; it is a blueprint for how the next generation of construction companies can grow sustainably.

“Working with FIS has been a privilege. It is an organisation that genuinely looks after its members. The positivity from the pilot has been very encouraging — people are talking about renewed hope, and that really resonates with me.

“I truly believe this can be a game-changer for the sector at a critical time for the industry.

“I am clear about what freedom really means. Freedom is not about walking away; it is about building something that works seamlessly — with or without you.”

Speaking about Dave’s credentials and the programme he has created, Iain explained that

it is aimed at construction businesses with an annual turnover of £1m–£10m, could not be arriving at a better time.

He said: “Dave is a construction man through and through. Not only do we know him, but he knows us. He understands the environments our members work in and has made the programme practical, not theoretical. It is grounded in real-world experience, knowledge, and evidence that it makes a difference.

“I acknowledge how many members find themselves stuck, wanting growth but struggling to achieve it due to an inability to escape operational pressures — as I speak daily with business owners who are feeling trapped.

“They have built solid firms through sheer effort, yet that effort can become the very thing that holds them back.

“We want to give them hope and a vision of a better way of working in the future. We can channel their energy from survival into sustainable growth.

“For FIS, the Freedom Programme aligns perfectly with its wider mission.”

Iain went on to say: “Our members are among the most resilient and hard-working people in construction, and this initiative gives them the structure and clarity to turn that effort into long-term value.

“Business is competitive, but we are not all in competition all of the time. Collaboration is our strength, and helping each other is something we exist for.

“By sharing what works and embracing the digital tools ahead — including AI, which will be front and centre in the way we all work — we can prepare our sector for the next information age.”

DIGITALISING PARTITIONS FOR AUTOMATED AND RELIABLE PROJECT INTEGRATION

Charlotte Garrett, Head of Industry Strategy, at KOPE, shares how their software platform automates partition design by connecting BIM models directly to verified manufacturer data, eliminating errors and ensuring buildable accuracy.



Charlotte Garrett, Head of Industry Strategy at KOPE

The Finishes and Interiors sector relies on the successful delivery of specific performance requirements by converting design intent into buildable reality. Yet, the current process for creating the system design remains a significant source of project risk. This is because the critical information, the manufacturer's tested build-ups, is still managed manually, leading to delays, costly errors, and constant risk of interpretation.

At KOPE, we are fixing this by digitising the fundamental intelligence of partition systems, moving design from a risky manual task to a reliable, automated digital process that connects the design model directly to the supply chain.

The challenge: Interpretation and inconsistency

For partition specialists, every element of a build is rooted in a manufacturer's defined system. These systems dictate the exact components and assembly required to meet certain standards (e.g., acoustics, fire resistance). The friction in the process creates risk and inefficiency for everyone, but particularly for the specialist contractor:

1. Architects typically start with generic BIM objects and rely on manual interpretation of static PDF details. They look up standard manufacturer details, interpret them, and copy them into the model to a low level of detail, and 2D detail overlays. This means the 3D model reflects abstract geometry, not the true, buildable design, introducing early risk of clash or incorrect costing and scheduling.
2. The detailing process involves the designer exporting 2D information (drawings, sections) from their 3D model to the specialist subcontractor. The specialist must then re-interpret and re-model this data using their own toolsets to apply proprietary product logic. This back-and-forth, often returning 2D information, ensures project teams never work from the same source of truth. This constant manual translation is the reality of the industry, not the digital world we aspire to.
3. The supply chain is further behind in digitalisation, leaving the defined product logic and data trapped in siloed, separate documents. The specialist is then tasked with manually translating generics into

specific, proprietary system designs. Being sure of identifying, capturing, and applying the correct configuration of components for every single junction scenario is risky, error-prone, and time-consuming, leading to costly delays when an assembly is found to be non-compliant or unbuildable on site.

This inconsistency is the main hurdle to efficient, risk-free project delivery.

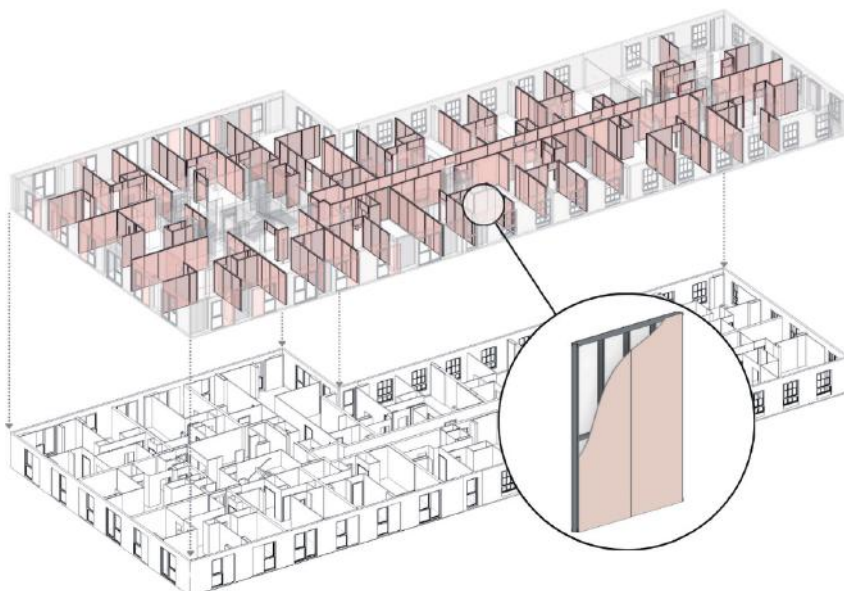
Digitalising your system logic

At KOPE, we aim to provide better BIM objects, and digitalise the logic and rules of a manufacturer's defined systems so that you can automatically generate the key systems (BG, Knauf, Metsek etc) you use directly into a design model. This ensures the output is always based on their specific, validated assemblies.

1. Coding the defined rule-set: We work with manufacturers to translate their detailed documentation into a digital rule-set. This code represents the definitive "if/then" rules: If you need a wall type that meets specific performance criteria, then you must use these exact components (studs, boards, screws, fixings) in this specific configuration.

2. Automated integration and generation: Our platform reads the architectural BIM model, identifies all partition junctions, and applies the digitalised system logic. The result is the automatic generation of the exact, configuration of components that aligns with the manufacturer's defined system spec.

3. Flagging deviations: If the BIM model specifies a condition or requirement that falls outside the coded rule-set (i.e., a detail the manufacturer has not documented), we do not guess. It simply



flags the geometry as unbuildable, skipping the detail generation and highlighting the exact conflict for the design team to resolve.

If a designer could automate the integration of partition systems much earlier, they could identify those areas that fall outside of the defined system and inform them on what they can change to remove that conflict and align to the defined information. This capability transforms design from a reactive error-checking process to a proactive design-alignment tool.

Case study in action: Automating partitions for Platt Riley

In a recent project with Platt Riley, KOPE's digital workflow reduced modelling and coordination time from 30 hours to just two. Using our platform, they were able to quickly identify the 18 different wall specifications and automatically generate layouts for each of them within the design model, with their corresponding board and framing assemblies, generating build-ready outputs aligned to their defined system logic.

The result was immediate. Faster coordination, earlier identification of

design conflicts, and instant generation of accurate quantity take-offs and installation information. What once required manual redrawing and interpretation was delivered digitally within minutes, enabling the contractor to validate wall types and their specifications and share verified results with the client the same day.

This project demonstrates how automating system logic through KOPE turns partition detailing from a time-consuming manual task into a fast, reliable, and transparent design assurance process.

When asked about using the KOPE platform **Michael Reilly**, Operations Director at Platt Reilly, said: "Having seen KOPE work so well on InteWall, we were keen to explore what it could do for traditional drylining and framing. The speed was incredible, it took only a morning to quantify an entire building and immediately highlighted opening-coordination risks. It's seriously impressive."

The value: Consistent and reliable product integration

This automated, logic-driven approach provides a level of certainty essential for efficient project delivery:

1. Zero interpretation risk: The layouts are generated directly from the manufacturer's digitally coded rule-set, eliminating manual guesswork. It's consistent and reliable, every single time.

2. Confidence for specialists: By reading the architect's model and only generating geometry covered by the manufacturer's defined system, you gain maximum confidence that the information you base your procurement and installation on is fundamentally sound.

3. Accelerated workflow: By automating the correct layouts and flagging conflicts early with actionable feedback, the time spent on detailing, coordination, and redrawing is drastically reduced.

KOPE provides the digital bridge that ensures the architect's vision is perfectly matched by the manufacturer's documented reality, making every project detail instantly buildable.

Contact us today to see how KOPE's logic engine can instantly codify your tested systems and deliver verifiable, automated details on your next project.

www.kope.ai

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FIS: Interiors Insight Live

Business Design Centre, London
25-26 February 2026

Workspace Design Show

Business Design Centre, London
25-26 February 2026



(L-R) Collecting the Sustainability Innovation Award 2025 was Paul McIntosh, Founder & CEO of XFrame from David Crowson, Editor of SpecFinish and Iain McIlwee, CEO of FIS. The audience then determined XFrame was the 2025 Innovation of the Year.

FIS Awards Lunch

Royal Lancaster Hotel, London
4 June 2026

For further information of these events visit: www.thefis.org/events



Angela Mansell shortlisted in Top 100 Most Influential Women in Construction 2025

Angela Mansell, Managing Director at Mansell Building Solutions has been recognised as one of the Top 100 Most Influential Women in Construction in 2025.

A spokesperson for Mansell said: "We are thrilled that Angela has been recognised among this incredible group of trailblazers shaping the future of construction."

"As a female-led construction business striving to do things differently, both Angela and Stephanie Mansell's leadership, innovation, and impact continue to inspire us all at Mansell."

To read more about the event and category winners visit: <https://tinyurl.com/e29rrk5x>

David Crowson, Editor, recently had the privilege of speak to Angela about her 24-year journey with Mansell Building Solutions, championing the business, the construction industry, social value, and wellbeing. To read the article in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/3b6vnx62>

An innovative product: B-Post

Betan (sister company to Brebur) has recently announced the launch of its new product B-Post.

John Walker, Business and Compliance Manager at Betan, explained that on two key projects, Brebur faced repeated issues with heavy door openings, service penetrations, and poor coordination. The root causes were unclear responsibilities, untested details, and a lack of joined-up thinking across trades.

These challenges exposed a wider industry problem — conflicting standards, design assumptions, and gaps that left installers struggling. That realisation led to the creation of Betan, with a focus that if the solutions didn't exist, Betan would create them.

After rigorous testing and product development the B-Post was born. An engineered Laminated Veneer Lumber (LVL) timber post system, which sits neatly within the partition cavity, protected by plasterboard linings.

John explained: It's light enough to be handled by one person, strong enough to carry doors up to 130kg, fire tested to 60 minutes, and supplied in simple kit form.

He said: "Crucially, it reduces defects by being installed at first fix by dryliners — no extra trades, no awkward workarounds, no costly delays. And with a fraction of the embodied carbon of steel, it's better for the planet too."

To read the journey behind the B-Post in full visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/828avyfc>



DSP to elevate firm's future with turnkey HQ fit-out in Leicester

DSP (Interiors) has secured a contract to help elevate a Leicester firm's future, transforming a 20,000 sq ft site into its new headquarters.

The 12-week project will see DSP transform a vacant industrial shell at Gorse Hill Industrial Estate into a bespoke office and production facility for Elevator Equipment.

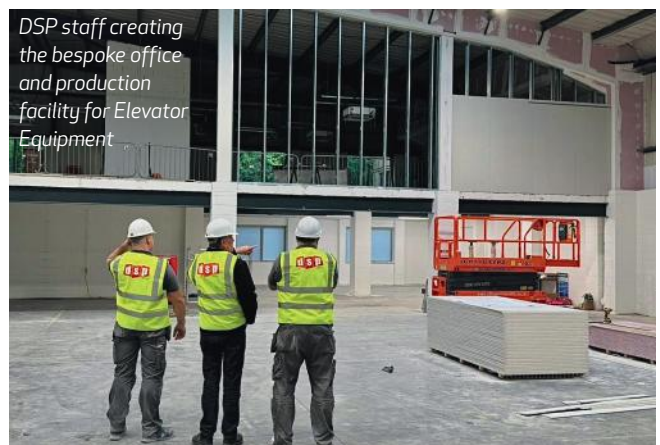
The scheme will create a modern, purpose-built environment tailored to support the lift parts supplier's growth and future ambitions.

The project includes the installation of a storage mezzanine and the ground floor development will house a production area, office and trade counter.

The creation of a first-floor office block will incorporate a boardroom, an open-plan breakout area and toilet block.

DSP (Interiors) is responsible for all the mechanical and electrical works, as well as building control coordination to ensure compliance and efficiency.

To read the story in full visit: <https://tinyurl.com/2dx8xakw>



GA Interiors (Drylining) secures £15m contract

GA Interiors has secured a package of works on a 21-week health and leisure regeneration scheme in Kent. GA Interiors will be responsible for delivering the full design, supply and installation of SFS systems as well as drylining and ceilings packages.

This contract includes full design responsibility for the SFS package, leveraging GA Interiors' in-house design expertise, robust plant capability, skilled labour force, and secure material supply chain.

This major regeneration scheme brings

together advanced technical delivery and a strong commitment to creating sustainable, modern community facilities that will benefit the local area for years to come.

gainteriorsltd.co.uk

Industry leaders challenge outdated practices to deliver meaningful and lasting change

A formidable force of industry leaders including **Michael Riley**, BDP (Building Design Partnership Ltd), **Geoff Wilkinson**, Wilkinson Construction Consultants Limited, **Stephen Hamil**, NBS | Powered by Hubexo and **Iain McIlwee**, FIS recently came together for a roundtable event at Komfort Partitioning's London showroom.

This event was about more than discussion — it was about action. The mission is clear: to enforce robust compliance, embed a true best-practice approach across the construction industry and foster accountability, education, standardisation and measurable improvement. Together, the panel challenged outdated practices to drive meaningful, lasting change.

Iain said: "This was a really well-framed discussion organised by **Priti Gadani** and **Suzanne Walter**. We didn't disagree on much, it's clear that we need a better design process and clearer standards aligned with the information management protocols that BIM hasn't yet fully brought into the market." A full white paper detailing the insights of the event is available by visiting:

<https://tinyurl.com/4hf2x57e>



Lucia Di Stazio reigns Master of the Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants

Lucia Di Stazio, Group Marketing Strategy & Communications Director at Encon Nevill Long and FIS Board Member has been installed as the Master of the Worshipful Company of Builders' Merchants for the year ahead.

Guests gathered at the Merchant Taylors' Hall which saw

Lucia installed as the new Master. The Court also welcomed 13 new Liverymen to the Company, and installed this year's Senior Warden **Kevin Fenlon** and Junior Warden **Steve Durdant-Hollamby**, as well as new Keeper of the Role **Julian Milligan**.

Lucia said: "It is an incredible honour to be installed as the new Master of the Worshipful Company of Builders' Merchants at the stunning Merchant Taylors' Hall.

"Many congratulations also to the 13 new Liverymen who were also installed on the same day and to Senior Warden Kevin Fenlon and Junior Warden Steve Durdant-Hollamby.

"It was a truly amazing and memorable day celebrating one of the main occasions of our Livery year with so many from across our industry and with distinguished guests. Thank you for all the support and kind words from so many, I could never have imagined the day or the opportunity."



Lucia Di Stazio centre in her ceremonial robes at the Merchant Taylors' Hall

Training Awards 2025: Recognising the accomplishments within our sector

The Awards Lunch was held on 25 November at Plaisterers' Hall in London.

The event celebrated the achievements of apprentices and students who have exceeded expectations, training delivery by

colleges and training providers, training delivery by a FIS member company, mentors, and others who have supported sector training, rising stars forging careers in the sector, and lifetime contributions to sector training.

Guest speaker **Philippa Tuttiatt**, the face of Welsh Women's rugby, led the proceedings, in which winners across 10 categories were announced.

To read about the event and winners visit: <https://tinyurl.com/yzn22vb>



Congratulations to all the winners



JC

Hey, have you seen the sessions FIS are running in February?

No, what are they going to be discussing?

Day One's agenda is

- Value-driven sustainability
- Opening the door to a circular future with better design
- Measuring the impact of fit-out
- Putting reuse first

Sounds great! What about day two?

Day two

- FIS Project Reuse
- Nature-driven design for better workplaces
- Tech that improves sustainability and productivity
- Ska workshop: wellbeing as a design driver

I'm going to book on to all of them, do you want to join me?

👍 How do I book?

www.thefis.org/interiors-insight-live



FIS

INTERIORS INSIGHT LIVE

25 - 26 February 2026
Workspace Design Show
Business Design Centre, London

BOOK HERE

