



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

The professional voice of the
UK Fire & Rescue Service

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Consultation on the information document that highlights the necessary competency for those managing high-risk buildings, including a summary of the recent British standard, publicly available specification.

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is pleased to respond to the consultation published on 30 January 2023 *Competence information for managing building safety on higher-risk buildings*.

NFCC is the professional voice of the UK fire and rescue services (FRSs) and is comprised of a council of UK Chief Fire Officers. This response was put together by NFCC's Protection and Reform Unit (PRU).

This response was drafted in consultation with our members across FRSs and reflects their expertise and competence on the subject matter.

General Comments

The PAS competency standards are detailed documents that serve various audiences. While NFCC understand that the aim of the BSR document is to provide an easily accessible summary of the key messages on managing High Risk Buildings (HRBs), we have concerns about its scope. This document should not be seen as a comprehensive guide on meeting the competence requirements for managing safety in residential buildings. Managing building safety is a complex task, and the level of detail provided in PAS 8673 is crucial.

We believe that the key messages and PAS summary must include a disclaimer or statement clarifying the document's scope. It should explicitly state that this document does not replace the need to read and understand the PAS itself. We also believe that is important to create a direct link to the PAS document rather than redirecting to the BSI landing page. This will facilitate easier access to the PAS without unnecessary data collection or commercial redirection.

NFCC would like to remind Government about the origin of the PAS was in relation to the Building Safety Manager (BSM) statutory role. Although the role is no longer a requirement, the responsibilities associated with the position should not be disregarded and are still apt.

We agree that the information for managing HRBs should primarily outline the broad principles for demonstrating competence. However, we note that the current PAS does not provide specific details on how to achieve this. While Appendix B goes into more detail, it does not provide more concrete guidance beyond the broad principles.

Considering the diverse routes available to acquire and demonstrate competence, we believe it is beyond the scope of this document to provide comprehensive information on all potential pathways. We would recommend monitoring the situation and incorporating any universal methodologies for demonstrating competence in managing HRBs into future versions of this document.

We fully agree that the guidance should highlight means to manage and monitor the competence of contractors. We understand the challenges involved in summarising documents like PAS 8673, but it is important to strike the right balance between maintaining the document's scope and providing practical information. While the PAS acknowledges the importance of managing and monitoring contractor competence, it does not provide specific methods for achieving this. We would urge Government to recognise the procurement process to investigate and assess contractor competence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Coombe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nick Coombe
Head of Protection
Protection and Reform Unit
National Fire Chiefs Council

Organisation Information

Q1: Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes

Q2: Please tell us your name.

Nick Coombe

Q3: Please give us your email address.

PPRUAdminTeam@nfcc.org.uk

Q4: Do you wish for your details to be available to be public?

Yes

Q5: As part of this consultation HSE may want to contact you again to clarify or get further information on the responses you provide. Are you happy for HSE to contact you?

Yes

Q6: Please select the region you work in

Other – The NFCC is a UK-wide organisation, and our members include Chief Fire Officers and other senior members from fire and rescue services across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland

Q7: Please select the size of your organisation

100-249

Q8: Which category best describes you or the organisation you represent?

Professional body

Questions

Question 1

The PAS competency standards are detailed documents that serve many audiences (building owners, managing agents, training providers and scheme authors etc). As some users (particularly SMEs audiences) may find it difficult to navigate the PAS detail, the BSR has designed its document to be an easily accessible summary of the key management of HRB messages.

Sub-question 1

Do you agree this information is best presented as focused key messages and a summary of the PAS?

Partly

If you chose no or partly, please add additional areas the guidance should cover

NFCC fully supports the need to ensure that information is readily available to relevant parties in a suitable format and at an appropriate level. This document needs to be clear with the level of information it is providing. We have concerns that this document only serves as a concise summary and a guiding reference to the PAS, rather than a comprehensive guide on meeting the competence requirements for managing safety in residential buildings.

We believe that this distinction is crucial as managing building safety is inherently complex. The level of detail provided in PAS8673 is not excessive or unnecessary. It is crucial to clearly understand the purpose of this new guidance and ensure that it does not lead those who need it to believe that it can replace the need to consult the PAS.

Sub-question 2

Are there any areas missing from the key messages and PAS summary?

Yes

If you chose no or partly, please add additional areas the guidance should cover

NFCC believes that there should be a disclaimer or statement to clarify the scope of this document. It should specifically state that this document should not be seen as a substitute for the PAS nor remove the need to read and understand it.

There should also be a direct link to the PAS document itself, rather than redirecting to the BSI landing page, this will reinforce the need to read the PAS and not use this guidance as comprehensive. A link to the BSI landing page often requests unnecessary data and may serve commercial purposes unrelated to accessing the PAS. These additional steps can discourage people from accessing the PAS directly and increase the reliance on this document to provide a more comprehensive summary.

We also believe that it is important to specifically address the two key principles outlined in PAS 8673:

- Behaviour and Ethics: Individuals responsible for managing safety in residential buildings must adhere to the prescribed behaviours and ethical practices defined in this PAS.
- Limits of Competence: Those managing safety in residential buildings must recognise their own limits of competence. When the need for expert advice arises, they should be aware of reliable sources and take necessary steps to obtain such advice.

Prior to the removal of the Building Safety Manager (BSM) statutory role, many APs were already hiring and developing individuals in those roles, with some already having employees with the title of BSM. We would like to remind Government how the PAS came about in relation to these circumstances and emphasise that although the role is no longer a requirement, the responsibilities associated with the BSM position remain intact.

Question 2

There are likely to be multiple routes to acquire and demonstrate competence depending upon competency gaps, requirements for a given building and choice in the marketplace. On this basis, the document does not seek to set out these multiple potential pathways, but instead highlight the key elements that should be considered when increasing and demonstrating competence.

Sub-question 1

Do you agree that the information for managing HRBs should set out the broad principles for demonstrating competence?

Yes

The PAS currently only outlines the broad principles for demonstrating competence and does not provide specific detail on how that function should be achieved. Appendix B goes into this in more detail but its only concrete contribution beyond broad principles is the inclusion of a 3-year timescale for assessment revalidation.

More specific information on demonstration of competence is outside the scope of this document given that not even the PAS goes into such details. The routes through which such competence can be demonstrated are too varied to be captured in a useful way. Government should monitor this situation and, if universal methodologies for demonstrating competence in managing HRBs emerge, we believe that they should be incorporated into future versions of this document.

Question 3

We anticipate that many principal accountable persons (PAPs) and accountable persons (APs) will bring in others (contractors, agents and experts) to help them manage their buildings. It is therefore important that PAPs / APs have arrangements in place to ensure third-parties are performing in a competent manner and providing a quality service.

Sub-question 1

Do you agree that the guidance should highlight means to manage and monitor the competence of contractors?

Yes

NFCC is concerned about the challenges inherent in summarising documents like PAS 8673. It is essential to strike the right balance between maintaining the document's scope and providing additional practical information on how to achieve the goals outlined in PAS 8673. The parent document contains detailed information on relevant issues that are difficult to condense. Although the PAS acknowledges the importance of managing and monitoring the competence of contractors, it does not prescribe specific methods for achieving this. For instance, the procurement process can be utilised to investigate and assess contractor competence.