

**Understanding
competence frameworks:
Supporting Scotland's
construction SMEs**



Why do I need a Competence Framework?

UK legislation and industry standards are increasingly requiring businesses to prove that their people are not just trained, but competent at their work as well.

A competence framework helps you:

- ✓ Clearly set expectations for skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviour
- ✓ Demonstrate compliance with current and emerging legislation
- ✓ Show clients and regulators that you take safety and quality seriously
- ✓ Recruit, train, develop, and retain competent people at every level

This competence framework is aligned with:

- Building Safety Act 2022
(England-based but influential across the UK)
- BSI competence standards and codes of practice
- HSE guidance
- Industry best practice
(CITB, CIOB, SSIP, Construction Leadership Council, etc.)

While the Building Safety Act mainly applies in England, many national contractors already expect the same standards in Scotland, and that's unlikely to change.

But once set up and used properly, the framework provides you with a powerful business tool, not just a compliance exercise.

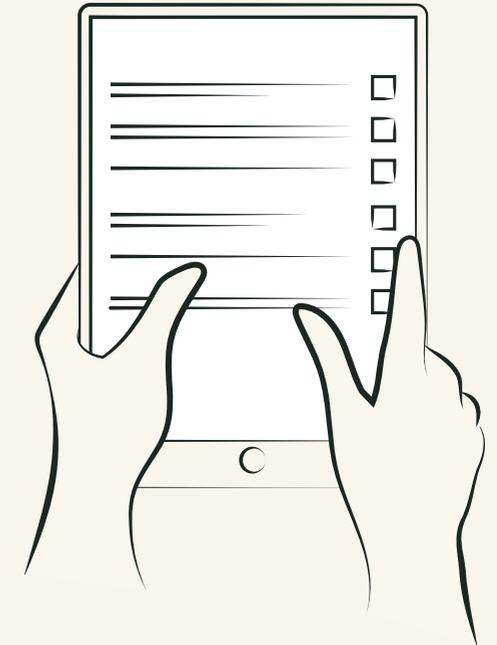
What is a Competence Framework?

The BS 8670 defines a competence framework as:

Procedures and requirements for developing, assessing, and maintaining the skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours required to perform work safely and effectively over time. ”

In simple terms, it's about how you prove your people can do their jobs properly, and can keep doing them properly.

Competence in construction isn't simple, especially for safety-critical roles. But a competence framework helps bring everything together in one place.



What does competence include?

A strong competence framework ensures anyone carrying out work has the right:

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Experience (including training)
- Behaviours

You may already have much of this covered and recorded (training records, CSCS cards, qualifications etc) but it's the behaviours element, such as communication, awareness, and safety attitude, that is usually the missing piece.



Why competence matters to your business

- 1 It's essential to how you operate**
Competence underpins safety, quality, productivity, and importantly, your reputation.
- 2 It's achievable for all SMEs**
You don't need to be a large contractor – competence works at any stage of business maturity.
- 3 It's to be shared across the supply chain**
Clients, subcontractors, and suppliers all have a role. Transparency benefits everyone.
- 4 It protects you legally**
Poor competence management increases risk, liability, and exposure if something goes wrong.
- 5 It needs to be lived, not shelved**
The framework should be used, updated, and talked about, not filed away.



What your Competence Framework should cover

Organisational culture

This shows how your business manages work safely and effectively and should include:

- Mission, vision, and values
- Organisational structure and reporting lines
- Quality, Health & Safety, and Environmental systems
- Supervision arrangements and site ratios
- Links to client and regulatory requirements

Occupational competence (knowledge and skills)

This ensures everyone has the technical ability for their role and should include:

- Job roles and minimum qualifications
- Required skills and experience
- Training and certification routes
- Professional memberships where relevant

Typical evidence:

- Job role and qualification matrix
- Training pathways
- CPD plans
- Trade certificates, CSCS cards, licences

Behavioural competence

This covers how people behave at work, their attitudes and soft skills and includes:

- Teamwork and communication
- Safety culture and awareness
- Attitude, accountability, and professionalism

And the ways to record and monitor behaviour can be:

- Site observation scores
- Appraisals that include behaviour
- 360 feedback
- Review of incidents and near misses
- Behaviour isn't pass/fail, but it can be monitored and managed

Routes to competence

This shows how someone develops from a new start, to becoming fully competent and should include:

- Training plans and milestones
- Mentoring and shadowing
- Apprenticeship and early career routes

Simple evidence could be:

- Role-based development plans
- Apprentice progression framework
- Competence milestone trackers

This demonstrates that competence doesn't happen by accident, it's planned.

Assessing competence

This confirms people are competent before they start work and should cover:

- Employee, agency, and subcontractor checks
- Onboarding assessments
- Approved contractor criteria

Helpful tools:

- New starter competency checklist
- Subcontractor pre-qualification forms
- Approved contractor register

Competence records

This keeps everything auditable and up to date and shows how you manage:

- Training matrices and expiry dates
- Certificate storage
- Refresher training alerts

Most businesses already have this; just make it clear and consistent.

Monitoring competence

This ensures competence is maintained over time and should include:

- Performance reviews
- Site inspections and observations
- Action plans where gaps are identified

Some examples:

- Appraisals linked to competence
- Incident reviews tied to training needs
- Targeted mentoring or retraining

Succession planning

This protects the business if key people leave or move on and should cover:

- High-risk or critical roles
- Internal development plans
- Recruitment and contingency planning

Evidence may include:

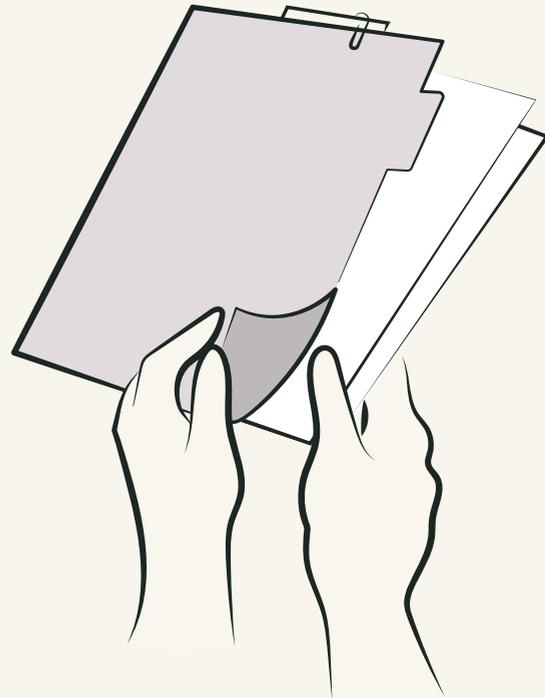
- List of key roles
- Identified successors
- Mentoring and knowledge transfer records

Final thought

For most SMEs, this isn't about creating loads of new paperwork. It's about pulling together what you already do, and showing it clearly.

With the right approach, meeting future competence requirements shouldn't be difficult, regardless of how regulations evolve.

Additional guidance and resources can be accessed here:



This Understanding competence frameworks: Supporting Scotland's construction SMEs report is being promoted by the Construction Leadership Forum's Supply Chain Development Working Group to support the outcomes and the shared vision of the Scottish Construction Accord. The Scottish Government support the Construction Accord and collaborate with industry across the work of the Transformation Action Plan; however, collaborative output does not represent Scottish Government Policy or Guidance. Any changes to Scottish Government policy or formal endorsements resulting from this work will be published through Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers.

Construction Leadership Forum

SUPPLY CHAIN DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

www.scottishconstructiontransformation.scot