

Future Trends: The Architects Profession

Alex Tait, Director of Practice
RIBA CPD Providers Network Forum, 9 April 2025

Future Trends: The Architects Profession

- Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report
- RIBA Response (Competence)
- Government Response
- Progress of Regulatory Regime

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report: General Findings

‘Safety of people in the built environment depends principally on a combination of three primary elements, **good design, the choice of suitable materials, and sound methods of construction**, each of which depends in turn on a large measure on a fourth: the **skill, knowledge, and experience** of those engaged in the construction industry.

Unfortunately, as our investigations have shown, at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire there were serious deficiencies in all four of those areas.’

The Architect's Responsibility

‘Studio E had primary responsibility for the design of the facade of Grenfell Tower, among other aspects of the refurbishment. We have concluded that Studio E fell well below the standard to be expected of a reasonably competent architect in respect of that work. Its failures relating to the design of the external wall and the selection of materials to be used in its construction had catastrophic consequences. Studio E therefore bears a very significant degree of responsibility for the disaster.’

The Architect's Role

‘As lead consultant it was responsible for advising on the need for, and the scope of services to be provided by, consultants, specialists, sub-contractors and suppliers and for monitoring the work of other consultants. As lead designer it was responsible for co-ordinating the design of all constructional elements, including work by consultants, specialists and suppliers and for determining materials, elements and components...

The Architect's Role

... However, Studio E appears to have laboured under a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of its obligations. As a result, it treated sub-contractors and consultants as solely responsible for their work and assumed, without enquiry, that it met the required standards.'

The Architect's Performance

The report details the contribution of the architect and explains poor performance in the following areas:

- Studio E's experience and expertise
- Design and specification
- Consultation with Exova (fire engineers)
- Selection of rainscreen panels
- Checking Harley's (cladding subcontractor) designs
- Selection of Insulation
- Cavity barriers design strategy
- Communication with building control
- Quality control and training
- "As-built" drawings

Recommendation on architects' general competence

‘Traditionally, the role of the architect has been fundamental to any construction project of significant size. Regrettably, the work of Studio E on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment fell significantly below the standard reasonably to be expected of it in a number of significant ways, in particular, in failing to exercise proper care in relation to the choice of insulation and rainscreen panels. The evidence, not least the fact that similar materials have since been found on hundreds of other high-rise buildings, suggests that there may be a widespread failure among the profession to investigate properly or understand the nature of the materials being chosen for that purpose.’

Recommendation for PD Role at Gateway 2

‘We recommend that it be made a statutory requirement that an application for building control approval in relation to the construction or refurbishment of a higher-risk building (Gateway 2) be supported by a statement from a senior manager of the principal designer under the Building Safety Act 2022 that all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that on completion the building as designed will be as safe as is required by the Building Regulations.’

Gov have responded to say they will consider applying this to all projects not just HRBs.

Recommendation for ARB and RIBA

‘We recognise that both the Architects Registration Board and the Royal Institute of British Architects have taken steps since the Grenfell Tower fire to improve the education and training of architects. We recommend that they should review the changes already made to ensure they are sufficient in the light of our findings.’

RIBA GTI Response on Competence

We have committed to undertake the review recommended by the report and will need to consider all education and CPD requirements:

- RIBA Validation Criteria for Parts 1, 2 and 3
- RIBA Mandatory Competences of Health and Life Safety, Climate Literacy and Ethical Practice
- Professional Experience Development Record
- CPD Core Curriculum
- RIBA Principal Designer register
- RIBA Code of Conduct and Code of Practice
- International equivalence – for membership

RIBA GTI Response on Competence

The emerging subject areas that we will explore improving within the various RIBA competence standards are:

- Routes to compliance with building regulations
- Specification writing
- Testing and certification of construction products
- Challenging poor behaviour
- Whole life carbon assessments
- Quality Assurance – for practices

RIBA Education and Professional Development Framework

Education Themes and Values	Mandatory Competences	Career Role Levels	CPD Core Curriculum	Advanced Study	Specialisms
E1. Health and Life Safety	M1. Health and Life Safety	R1. Student (Pre-part 1)	C1. Architecture for Social Purpose		Academic / Researcher
			C2. Health, Safety and Wellbeing	RIBA Principal Designer Course	Principal Designer
E2. Ethical and Professional Practice	M2. <i>Ethical Practice</i>	R2. Emerging professional (Part 1 and 2 Assistant)	C3. Business, Clients and Services		Client Advisers
			C4. Legal, Regulatory and Statutory Compliance		
E3. Structure, Construction and Resources	M3. <i>Climate Literacy</i>	R3. Established professional (Architect <5 years qualified)	C5. Procurement and Contracts		
			C6. Sustainable Architecture		Sustainability Consultant
E4. History, Theories and Methodologies	M4. <i>Research Literacy</i>	R4. Experienced professional (Architect >5 years qualified)	C7. Inclusive Environments		Access Consultant
			C8. Places, Planning and Communities		Urban Designer
E5. Design Processes and Communication		R5. Business leader (Director/partner)	C9. Building Conservation and Heritage	RIBA Conservation Course	Conservation Architect
			C10. Design, Construction and Technology		BIM Manager
E6. Business Skills				RIBA MBA	Sole Practitioner Practice Manager

Note: Mandatory competences shown in italic text are subject to future approval processes.

Mandatory Competences Timeline

Health and Life Safety



Autumn 2020: handbook published

Spring 2021: pilot test

Autumn 2021: CPD available

2024: new regulations, test and book updated

2025: roll out of mandatory test (3,289 so far)

Climate Literacy and Ethical Practice

Autumn 2021: initial CPD available

2023: handbooks and further CPD available

2025: pilot tests (summer and autumn 2025)

2026-7: mandatory testing

Gateway 2 Fire Strategies and Fire Engineers Competence

GTI recommendation for **registered** fire engineers to complete a fire safety strategy for Gateway 2, considering the needs of vulnerable people, including the additional time they may require to reach a place of safety, which should be reviewed and re-submitted at Gateway 3.

GTI recommendation for registration of fire risk assessors too though government have indicated competent person schemes is preferred.

RIBA recommend that all professional bodies be registered instead of individuals to ensure high quality and consistency.

Recommendations on Technical Guidance

GRI Recommends revised versions of ADB should be published ASAP and these should contain a clear warnings that compliance with the guidance will not necessarily result in compliance with the regulations.

RIBA support the inclusion of such a warning but technical guidance that sets definitive boundaries for certain key issues (such as travel distances, evacuation lifts and numbers of staircases) should result in compliance with the relevant functional requirements.

Gov will consult on further ADB changes in autumn 2025.

ADB Coming into Force Now and in the Future

Now: sprinklers in care homes and many references to BS:476 series removed (including for roofs and for fire resistance) and replaced with BS EN: 13501 series.

2026: second staircases in 18m-plus residential buildings (with further 18 month transition)

2029: Remaining references to BS:476 removed in relation to fire resistance – fire doors critical

BS 9991:2024 – Fire Safety in Residential Buildings

Key changes from the 2015 edition:

- Standard only applies to residential buildings up to 100m.
- Sprinklers should be included over 11m (formerly 30m)
- New guidance on evacuation lifts
- Enhanced smoke control in common corridors, lobbies and stairways
- At least two stairs above 18m
- Structural elements should meet A2-s1, d0 or better

BS 9991:2024 – New Transition Note from CLC

- Planning applications made after 17 March 2025 should follow the relevant recommendations made within BS 9991:2024.
- Gateway 2 applications where the scheme has used BS 9991:2015, prior to the publication of BS 9991:2024, must clearly state how the building work remains compliant to Part B of Schedule One of the Building Regulations and why. Applicants are also encouraged follow recommendations from BS 9991:2024 where reasonable.
- From 30th Sept 2026 Gateway 2 applications following the BS:9991 route to compliance should use BS 9991:2024.

Construction Products Reform Green Paper ([consultation](#))

1. Comprehensive regulatory coverage
2. Mandatory compliance for products with designated standards
3. Improved enforcement mechanisms
4. Enhanced product information and transparency
5. Digital solutions for enhanced traceability
6. Strengthening third-party testing and certification
7. Enhanced coordination among regulatory bodies
8. Sustainability and environmental considerations
9. A strengthened accountability framework
10. Strengthening route to redress
11. Continuous improvement and adaptation

Building Safety Regulator Gateway 2 Progress (Jan 2025)

• Applications on new HRBs	130
• Approvals on new HRBs (in transition)	9
• Approvals on new HRBs (new regime)	2
• Rejected	7
• More information requested	11
• Applications on existing HRBs	1449
• Approvals on existing HRBs	249 (17%)
• Rejected	66
• Deemed invalid	403
• More information requested	189

Building Safety Regulator Gateway 2 Progress (Jan 2025)

Average time taken to
determine an application is
18 weeks

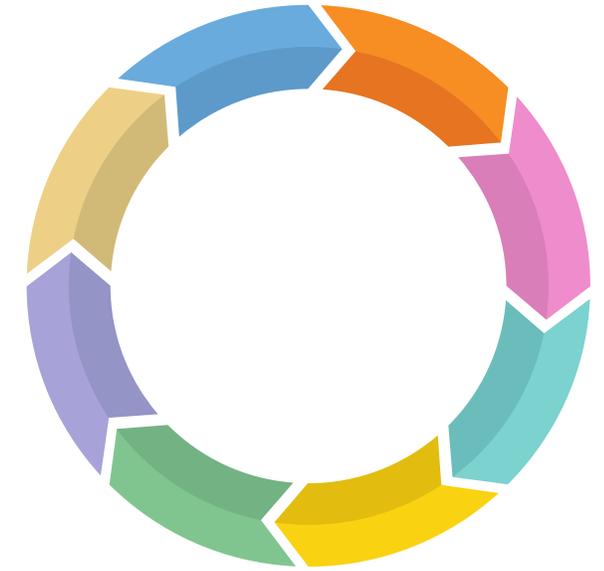
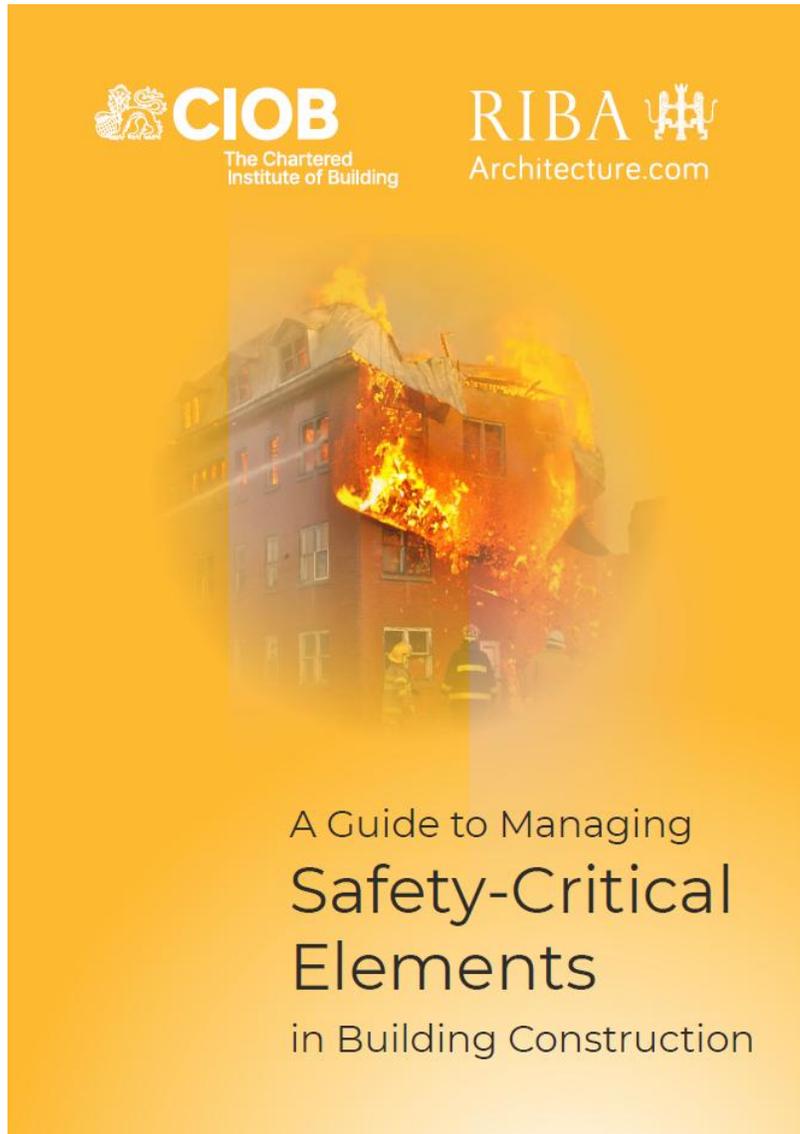
Liability concerns

- Defective Premises Act now has a 15 years limitation (30 for works prior to 28 June 2022), URS Corporation Ltd v BDW Trading Ltd Supreme Court's ruling is due soon.
- Section 38 of the Building Act may still be activated following recent consultation, meaning a breach of building regulations duties that results in harm will have a civil liability with 15 years limitation from the completion of the works.
- Lots of myths about the new regulations and many architects are still nervous about the BRPD role. Key myth is that PDs will take responsibility for others design work, which is untrue.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Market has softened a little and fire safety cover is now available for most practices but with only for work undertaken after November 2018 when the regulations changed require A2-s1, d0 products in external walls.

Industry Guidance – more needed



Process Changes Needed

- Clients understanding of compliance – RIBA Guidance coming in Autumn
- Design responsibility needs mapping up front – RIBA standard Design Responsibility Matrix coming in Winter
- Key technical design/specification is coming in too late, need for product safety information related to compliance early in design – Architects and others need your help so they can document compliance.

Thanks

Alex.Tait@riba.org

RIBA 
Architecture.com