



University of the
West of England



NASC membership adopted as a core competency requirement by The University of the West of England

I joined the University of the West of England (UWE) in Spring 2008 as their Construction Safety Manager. During the Summer projects of that year I observed scaffolders (working as sub-contractors to Principal Contractors) operating to two completely different standards. Some were performing work in a blatantly unsafe manner and further investigations found that their documentation was typically unsuitable and out-of-date. In one instance, a high-profile project was halted half way through for several months due largely to concerns about the scaffolders competency. In contrast, other scaffolders had written arrangements and safe working practices that complied with SG4: 05 ("preventing falls in scaffolding and falsework"). When I delved further into the documentation of the best performing scaffolders, I found that they were members of the NASC.

Although all UWE Principal Contractors have procedures to ensure the competency of sub-contractors (a legal requirement under the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2007) I formed the impression that these were not always sufficiently robust in relation to scaffolding contractors.

Due to the high visibility and potential risks involved in scaffolding operations it was essential to me that I had confidence in the scaffolders working on site.

Consequently, in January 2009 I started to establish an approved list of scaffolders. They were all sourced from the NASC database as the first and most important criteria I set was full membership of the NASC. As NASC is the author (or contributor) to a range of guidance such as TG20: 08 and SG4: 05 I had every confidence in the technical and safety guidance to which its members would be expected to adhere. I also valued the work by the NASC to develop more innovative ways of disseminating best practice, particularly their instructional videos.

I asked for an array of other information from the scaffolders in order to complete a 'stage 1' competency assessment and select the approved list. This list is now named in all relevant tender documents. Principal Contractors are still responsible for 'stage 2' competency assessments (verifying that scaffolders have the capability to manage a specific project) and are responsible for the appointment and management of the scaffolder.

An alternative approach would have been to stipulate the selection criteria, such as membership of the NASC, which Principal Contractors would be required to use in the appointment of scaffolders.

However, an approved list allows UWE to establish longer term relationships with 'our' scaffolders who will have the opportunities (and motivation) to take on board the particular challenges and requirements for working on UWE sites. We shall soon be meeting to discuss better-than-minimum standards for scaffolding operations, including the UWE preference for stairs (rather than ladders) and an agreed approach for safely unloading wagons (as standards are still variable). I could not have hoped to have had these discussions before.

The most obvious result is that a large, complex (designed) scaffold has been erected on time and to a high standard in the midst of an active site without a single incident or near miss by scaffolders who conducted themselves in a professional manner throughout.

The effort was worth it.



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