

# Schemes are a benefit to us all

Steve Woollas, of HWA member RM Cylinders, looks at how Competent Person Schemes operate in the industry, the benefits they bring, and how recent changes to the Building Regulations will almost certainly require more installers to join them



Competent Person Schemes were introduced following changes to the Building Regulations in 2002.

All controlled work carried out within buildings must meet the standards required by Building Regulations. These schemes allow tradesmen to declare competency, giving them the ability to sign off certain aspects of installations and building work.

Competent Person Schemes relieve Local Authority Building Control (LABC) officers from having to inspect large numbers of relatively small and low risk jobs. They also have the benefit of saving the customer the cost of such inspections by official bodies.

Under the scheme, a Competent Person is someone who has undergone the required training, has demonstrated competence either by attaining qualification, supplying evidence of ability or through prior experience and knowledge.

Once proven, the person may join an independent certification scheme which includes insurance liability, code of conduct and a complaints procedure.

The technical detail of the Building Regulations is complex and therefore a greater understanding of the Building Regulations and their

implications is required. Since their introduction, Competent Person Schemes have improved the quality and safety of installations carried out in both domestic and commercial properties within the UK, and they have created uniform standards throughout the country.

The use of Competent Person Schemes to regulate controlled work within buildings does still incur an extra cost. However, costs are still significantly lower than those that would be charged by official bodies to carry out inspections.

With Competent Person Schemes, the government's intention was to ensure installer competence.

One suggested route is that a minimum qualification of NVQ Level 3, City & Guilds, or a similar level of qualification, should be the industry requirement.

Indeed, the most important aspect of any scheme which is designed to improve standards is education. Scheme providers can provide support through technical guidance for their registered operatives. It is essential that the changes in new and forthcoming legislation are passed down from government to the installer and tradespeople at grass roots level.

The organisation's website plays a significant role in making information available – usually without charge or

the restriction of formal opening hours.

The correct procedure is for the customer to advise LABC of any notifiable work to be carried out in England and Wales.

Where work notifiable to LABC is carried out, the preferred option is for the customer to use a Competent Person. This gives a cost inclusive of certification.

A Competent Person may self-certify that the work is affected to the required standard and submit the appropriate documentation to the Scheme Provider, who will report the relevant details to LABC.

Should such work be carried out by an enthusiastic DIYer or on a cash-in-hand basis, the appropriate documentation will not be provided. In those circumstances, LABC will levy an additional charge for the inspection by Building Control Officers. Also, in the instance of a non-Competent Person being used, there is a greater risk that the work may not meet the required standards, necessitating remedial work and further inspection costs.

During 2007, the government decreed Home Information Packs (HIPs) must be in place prior to the sale of a property. HIPs require demonstration that notifiable building work has been completed to the correct standard.

This requirement plays catch-up to uncertified



Competent Person Schemes benefit the industry

building work carried out by those who are not competent to do so.

Therefore, saving a few pounds when work is completed is a poor investment as it may cost several hundreds of pounds to inspect, test and issue the required certification in later years. Should serious defects be discovered, that small saving could ultimately cost thousands of pounds to rectify.

Competent Person Schemes are, undeniably, a benefit to the industry. The Schemes and their member operatives exist

to help the public ensure the installer or tradesperson they employ is competent and capable of carrying out the required work in a safe and professional manner.

There is a concern within the industry that there are insufficient numbers of installers registered to self-certify without causing a burden of unmanageable proportions to Building Control. Educating installers on the benefits of these schemes may help to improve this situation.

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