

Grenfell Tower Enquiry Phase Two Report – Debate Briefing

The risks of poor project management

The Grenfell Tower Enquiry Report¹ evidences the outcomes when project management or those acting as project managers do not have the necessary competence. The lack of governance, contracts, accountability, and any form of project management all contributed to the tragedy:

- There were numerous failures to appoint competent project professionals with relevant training and experience of managing large projects.
- The scope of the work required was unclear and established before finalising the budget available, overall, there was a lack of clear focus on the project.
- There were insufficient project management capabilities, including unclear responsibilities, failure of information management and no change control.
- The project appointed sub-contractors and project teams who lacked relevant competence.

Driving competence in building safety

Addressing building safety requires designing guidelines which prioritise public welfare and liability in projects. We must move away from the ‘web of blame’ mindset evidenced in the Grenfell Report and ensure stakeholders are clear on the guidelines of the Building Safety Act, whilst continuously reviewing legislation.

APM has taken a leading role in this area, with a staff member co-chairing the Industry Competence Steering Group (ICSG), accountable to the Industry Competence Committee and the Building Safety Regulator. ICSG was set up in the wake of the tragedy, to provide businesses with access to appropriate expertise and support competent delivery. ICSG consults over 1,500 professionals, and over sixty professional and trade bodies.

APM has continued focusing on public welfare in line with the Building Safety Act and this year published a framework on competence for project managers in the built environment in England². This sets out core competence criteria, supporting better compliance with building regulations to ensure project experts have a clear understanding of how to make buildings safer throughout their lifecycles.

Enhanced frameworks and regulations alone will not suffice to improve standards and competence. We need to see a shared effort across the industry to assure the right levels of expertise from the onset. This collaboration has begun, and the requirements of the Building Safety Act are starting to embed, but it will take time to assess the impact of these changes and whether further regulation is needed.

Crucially, within the Building Safety Act, individuals must be competent and be able to prove this. There is no quick fix: more than half of organisations report barriers in recruiting individuals with the necessary project management expertise³, and there are high levels of skills shortages across the built environment industry.

APM’s recommendations

- 1) The Government must act to secure high levels of expertise in the built environment: Project managers working on high-risk buildings and complex projects must be registered Chartered Project Professionals, with at least 12 months of relevant experience in the built environment.
- 2) Address skills shortages across the built environment as paramount to public safety: we want to see an enhanced focus on fixing gaps in both project management and across the industry.
- 3) Government priorities cover many areas in the built environment, including net zero, sustainability, volume production and building safety. Industry needs to see a coordination of these areas, together with guidance on how they can respond to the Government’s demands.

About APM

The Association for Project Management (APM) is the Chartered body for the project management profession, with over 45,000 individual members and over 470 corporate partners. We aim for a world in which all projects succeed because, when they do, society benefits.

¹ MHCLG. 2024. Grenfell Tower Enquiry Report: Phase 2 report

² APM, CIOB and RICS. 2024. Competence Framework for Project Managers in the Built Environment in England.

³ APM. 2024. The Golden Thread: A Study of the Contribution of the Project Profession to the UK