Introduction

Although the dual climate and biodiversity emergencies have long been recognised as an essential, and possibly existential, area of focus for the built and natural environment sectors, there has, to date, been no overall description of the competencies required to tackle the challenges ahead. A BSI Flex document, *Core criteria for sustainability in competence frameworks code of practice,* aims to start the process of remedying this by laying out a common and consistent arrangement for the development of sector specific competence frameworks.

As the competencies required for achieving sustainability in the built environment[*] are closely related to those needed to achieve building safety it is proposed to align the standard with *BSI Flex 8670: Built environment – Core criteria for building safety in competence frameworks - Code of practice* and to use it as a direct model. This will help ensure that the cross-industry skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours (SKEB) necessary for dealing with the pressing climate and biodiversity emergencies can be developed in parallel with those for building safety.

The Flex will be relevant to individuals and organisations across the built environment sector, including commissioning clients, funders, consultants, planners, contractors, tradespersons, product manufacturers and educators and trainers, as well as their representative bodies; indeed anyone involved in delivering sustainable solutions to a set standard.

Objectives

The proposed Flex will provide a framework for sustainability competence that:

a) sets core criteria for achieving sustainability, including on carbon emissions, pollutants, biodiversity levels, social outcomes, wellbeing and resilience, for all individuals working on the built environment, to achieve defined outcomes throughout their lifecycle;

b) facilitates consistent and objective development, evaluation or use of sector-specific competence frameworks by certification, licensing, accrediting, qualifying, and validating bodies, regulators, clients and employers;

c) supports progressive development of a more consistent approach in the development and use of competence frameworks across the built environment;

d) supports development of a robust oversight, monitoring and feedback process for sector-specific competence frameworks;

e) supports development of competence frameworks for key roles in delivering a sustainable built environment and equitable and just transitions;

f) identifies core sustainability criteria that are likely to be common to all sector-specific competence frameworks;

g) supports commonality and consistency in sustainability competence across sector-specific frameworks;

h) supports individuals and organizations working in the built environment to move towards progressively adopting an approach based on validation and periodic revalidation;
and

i) supports existing standards and guidance, including several competency frameworks already in place in the industry.

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[*] Note that the phrase 'built environment' covers (as defined in *PAS 2080:2023 Carbon management in buildings and infrastructure*) the 'collection of human-made or induced physical objects located in a particular area or region' and, when 'treated as a whole, typically is taken to include buildings, external works (landscaped areas), infrastructure, and the products of construction works within the area under consideration'.

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BSI Flex

The BSI Flex is "a sponsored fast-track standard" and "the result of an expert consulting service from BSI. It defines good practice for a product, service or process. It's a powerful way to establish the integrity of an innovation or approach." It sits in a family of BSI standards including PAS, BS and ISO Standards.

A BSI Flex is:
- "Sponsored by industry leaders, government, trade associations and professional bodies
- Developed by an advisory group of stakeholders, selected from relevant fields and led by BSI
- Co-branded with BSI
- A fast-track path to standardization
- A route to international standards" †

It will also be open source and freely available to download

BSI manages the process of developing the Flex through an iterative procedure of writing and consultation with an Advisory Group (12-20 persons), a Review Panel (several 100) and the wider public, before final publication and promotion. A Flex commonly is iterated 2 or 3 times and may take upward of year before being finalised and published.

Sponsorship and support

The Flex will be enabled by the Construction Industry Council (CIC), which will act as the formal sponsoring organisation. The work falls within the remit of Workstream 10 of the CIC's Climate Action Plan and will be monitored and managed by the CIC's Climate Change Committee. The Technical Author will be Simon Foxell of the Edge.

Development of a BSI Flex comes at a cost payable to the BSI for their organisational, administrative and communication services plus a fee to the Technical Author. It is proposed to share the costs 50-50 between the Government (linking together several departments) and industry (both professional and trade organisations and private companies). In order to maximise the number of organisations participating in supporting the development of the Flex it is intended to raise money from the industry in standard and affordable set amounts of £5,000 plus VAT. All supporters will be fully acknowledged in the final published document.

Proposals of support have already been received from CIBSE, RIBA, RICS, ICE and UCEM as well as several private companies. More supporters are required.

Programme

The formal process with BSI will only commence when the finances are in place to support it, but it is anticipated that this will be in January 2024.

A first draft of the Flex is expected in February, followed by meetings of the Advisory Group in March and April and with a first round of public consultation in May-June. Assessment of comments will lead to the development of a consensus-based document, which will be made available for further industry and public consultation, before a final version is realised for publication in early 2025.

Diagram 1. Standard development process, from Develop a fast-track standard, bsi, 2020

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† Develop a fast track standard, bsi, 2020
  https://www.bsigroup.com/globalassets/localfiles/en-gb/pas/brochure/bsi_develop_a_fast_track_standard.pdf

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Structure of the Flex

The Flex will set out the structure and potential content areas for sector- and discipline-specific frameworks with individual frameworks being required to define:

1. Their scope and any specific exclusions
2. Settings and types of organizations within which they are likely to be subject to the provisions of the framework
3. The types of activity and/or tasks in scope.
4. The levels of expertise, qualification and/or certification relating to and promoted by the sector or discipline under various formal titles
5. The categories and degrees of knowledge, skills and experience to be acquired and made available at different levels of expertise, qualification and/or certification
6. The behaviours expected to be enacted in different settings and for the different levels of expertise, qualification and/or certification
7. How the levels and standards of competence have been developed and their relation to relevant recognized qualification standards
8. Requirements for continued training and experience necessary for the maintenance and development of competence
9. Procedural arrangements and criteria for competence assessment
10. Remedial and sanction procedures should assessment reveal inadequacies or failure
11. Revalidation procedures for regaining qualifications or registration after sanction
12. Arrangements for maintaining information on assessments and details on how to make the information accessible to regulators, responsible persons and the general public
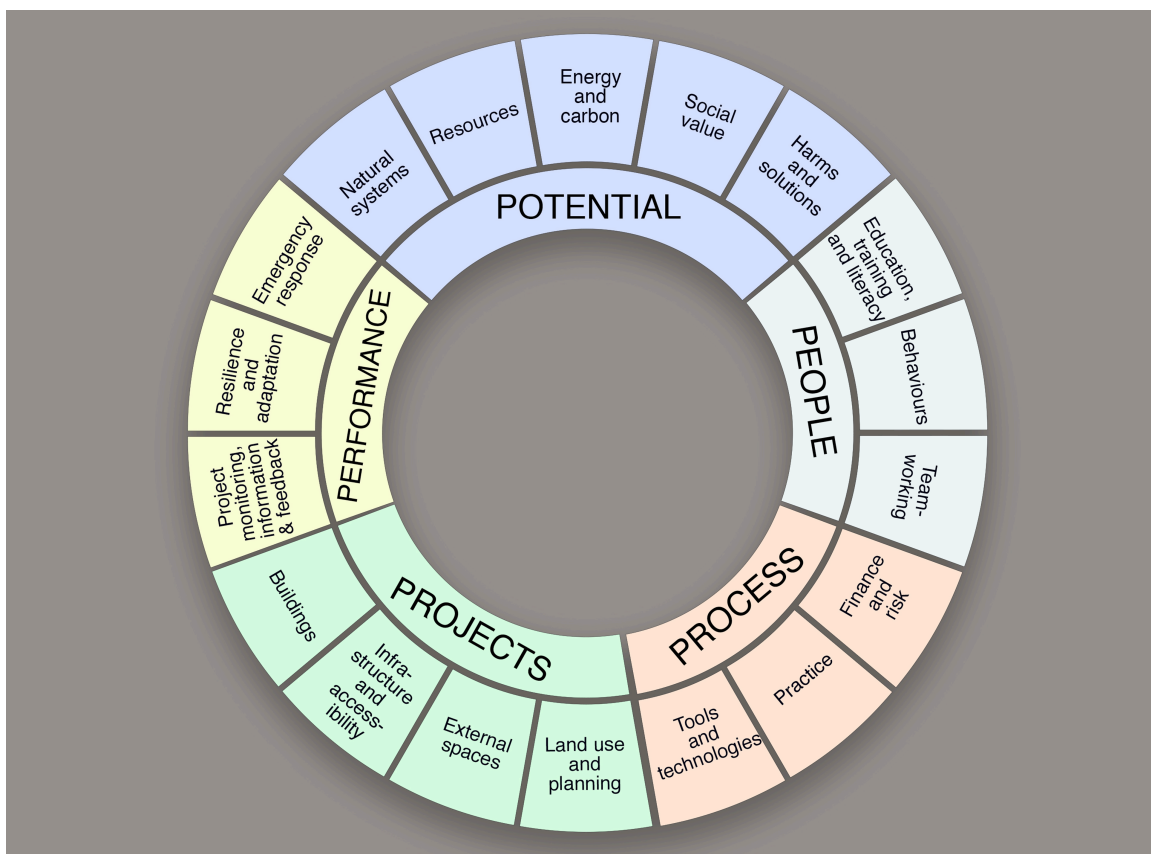

Diagram 2. Preliminary proposal for categories of skills, knowledge and behaviours

Getting involved

Involvement from the wider industry will be critical to the success of the Flex and there are a number of ways this is can be achieved, while keeping the process as streamlined as possible.

- Financial support (see above) – this is essential to getting the process up and running and will be formally recognized in the published document.
- Joining the Advisory Panel. The Panel is required to be independent and will be recruited by the BSI on that basis and to be as wide ranging and representative as possible.
- Becoming a member of the Review Panel. This will be a much larger group who will be contacted directly by email and asked to comment on drafts of the document or to provide direct input.
- Responding to the public consultation

Your involvement as an organisation or in person would be much appreciated. Please get in touch if you are interested in contributing to this work.

For more information please contact Simon Foxell at the Edge (contact@edgedebate.com).

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