

Finishes and Interiors Case Study:

Drylining Routes to Competence carding journey

Executive Summary

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the construction industry committed to ensuring that everyone working in the sector can demonstrate competence. The Industry Competence Steering Group (ICSG), established in 2017, brought industry together to develop clearer sector-led competence frameworks, building on Dame Judith Hackitt's call for more coherent standards.

In 2022 the Building Safety Act came into effect and defined competence as the appropriate Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviours (SKEB) and places a legal duty on individuals to be competent for their roles. Clients and contractors must ensure those working on their behalf meet this requirement.

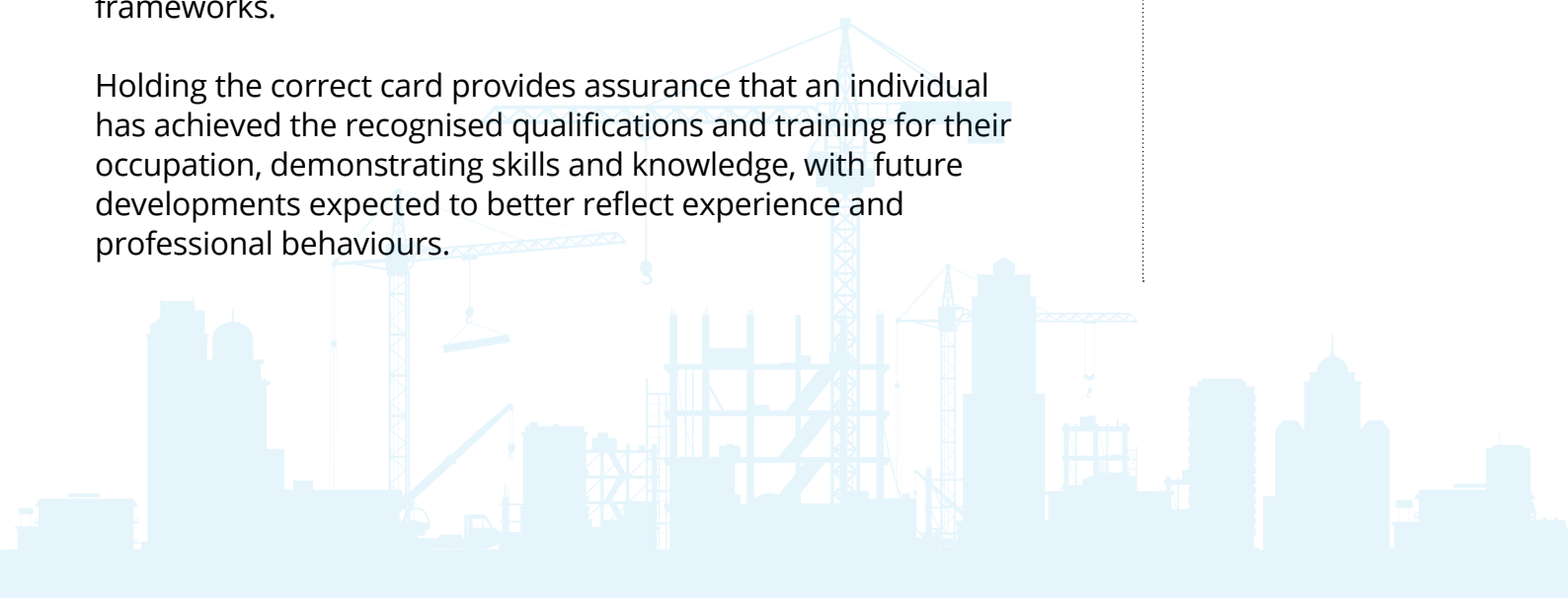
Through the ICSG and with the support of the Construction Leadership Council, industry agreed that all construction occupations are expected to have a clear Route to Competence, aligned with an agreed set of SKEB statements, with a link to obtaining and renewing a card carrying the CSCS logo where applicable. Once aligned with the relevant Standard Setting Bodies and Sector Representative Organisations, cards will only be issued when defined qualifications, training and health and safety requirements are evidenced.

The 37 card schemes carrying the CSCS logo - the CSCS Alliance - are focused on aligning card requirements with these industry-defined frameworks.

Holding the correct card provides assurance that an individual has achieved the recognised qualifications and training for their occupation, demonstrating skills and knowledge, with future developments expected to better reflect experience and professional behaviours.



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The Finishes and Interiors Sector: Drylining Case Study

The Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) has taken a proactive, industry-led approach to defining Routes to Competence for Drylining, supported as a member by Build UK.

By mapping the required SKEB and translating this into a practical carding journey, FIS is ensuring that the relevant CSCS Alliance card scheme, CSCS Cards in this case, reflects the standards as set by the industry. This includes a growing focus on maintaining competence through renewal requirements, health and safety testing and fire safety training.



The Challenge: Making Competence Work in Practice

Defining SKEB is only the starting point. For a Route to Competence to succeed, it must be practical, understandable and workable on site - for both workers and employers.

FIS focused on turning theory into delivery by addressing a set of clear, practical questions:

1. What are the correct entry routes into Drylining?
2. How does an individual progress from entry level to skilled status?
3. What qualifications, training and evidence are required at each stage?
4. Which one of the 37 CSCS Alliance card schemes is responsible for carding Drylining?
5. What is required at CSCS card renewal (typically every five years)?
6. How are experienced workers aligned with updated standards?

By taking this approach, FIS moved beyond setting standards and focused on embedding them in practice - with an emphasis on supporting employers and the workforce by providing clarity, structured progression and site-ready implementation.

FIS's Step-by-Step Approach

Step 1: Define Competence Using SKEB

Working with industry, FIS mapped the Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviours required to carry out Drylining safely and competently. This provides the foundation for all progression and carding decisions.

Step 2: Create Clear Pathways - Avoid Dead Ends

A key principle is ensuring that Drylining demonstrates the multiple routes to a recognised training pathway. For a new entrant, this might be the Apprenticeship or Vocational route. For an existing worker, this might be the Experienced Worker route. This Route to Competence highlights the entry point, the route to gaining the appropriate competence and identifies the appropriate demonstration of this competence.

Linked to this is a carding journey, to support the appropriate entry to site.



FIS's Step-by-Step Approach

Step 3: Translate Competence into a Clear Carding Journey

Working with CSCS Cards, FIS developed a structured Drylining carding journey that shows:

1. Entry routes
2. Training and qualification pathways
3. Progression to skilled status
4. Alignment with the correct CSCS cards

This ensures the new occupational standards connects directly to CSCS's carding requirements.

Where someone intends to progress to a skilled Drylining role, the correct starting point is an entry training route with a recognised red CSCS card (Apprentice, Trainee or Experienced Worker). The Labourer route is not the appropriate route.

The Labourer card is not a recognised training pathway that leads to competence in Drylining - if you currently hold a Labourer card, you need to move onto the appropriate red CSCS card to undertake training and you must not undertake training whilst holding a green card.

Starting on the appropriate red CSCS card demonstrates to employers that the individual is on a structured pathway leading to competence and career progression.



FIS's Step-by-Step Approach

Step 4: Avoid the big bang - Implement in Phases

FIS and CSCS cards recognised early that a 'big bang' introduction of new requirements would risk confusion, capacity issues and potential unintended consequences. Instead, the Drylining Route to Competence is being implemented in structured phases. This approach prioritises what is agreed, deliverable and enforceable, while allowing time to develop and refine longer-term elements - such as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) expectations and enhanced renewal requirements.

Requirements and plans are expected to be in place by December 2026, with details still to be confirmed on optional and mandatory stipulations for CPD, although any changes will be communicated with industry with plenty of notice.

Phased implementation:

1. Supports employer readiness and workforce understanding
2. Aligns with training provider capacity
3. Allows systems and evidence requirements to bed in
4. Enables clear, consistent communication at every stage

By raising the bar progressively rather than all at once, the sector strengthens standards while maintaining stability and confidence across the supply chain.



FIS's Step-by-Step Approach

Step 5: Card Renewal: Maintaining and Demonstrating Competence

Skilled card renewal is not simply a repeat of applying for a CSCS card. It is a structured checkpoint that ensures individuals continue to meet the recognised standard for their occupation. Within the Drylining Route to Competence, stated to be in place by the end of 2026, renewal currently requires evidence of:

1. The relevant recognised qualification
2. CITB Health, Safety and Environment Test, passed in the two years prior to applying.
3. Fire Safety training within the last two years for new applications, renewals and those moving from a temporary to a skilled card.

Together, these elements confirm that the individual remains qualified, maintains up-to-date core safety knowledge, and understands the heightened focus on fire performance and risk management under the Building Safety Act.

Looking ahead, the sector expects CPD to form part of card renewal. FIS is actively exploring what appropriate, proportionate CPD should look like for Drylining and will work closely with CSCS Cards to ensure that, once defined, CPD can be:

1. Clearly evidenced
2. Reliably verified
3. Displayed on (or accessible through) the CSCS card or My CSCS app.

This approach ensures that renewal continues to evolve from a basic compliance exercise into a meaningful demonstration of ongoing competence.





Outstanding Considerations

Even in a leading sector such as Drylining, important issues remain to be resolved. These are common across construction and provide a useful checklist for other sectors.

- 1. Defining and Evidencing CPD:** If CPD becomes mandatory, as is planned by the close of 2026, sectors must define what counts and how it is evidenced, verified and displayed on a CSCS card.
- 2. Delivery Readiness:** Any mandated training must be matched by training provider capacity, realistic timescales and clear communications.
- 3. Fair Transitional Arrangements:** A competence-led system must include clear and proportionate transitional arrangements where individual workers cannot meet the new renewal requirements.

Where evidence is incomplete, there should be fair and transparent processes that protect both standards and employment. For example, an individual may temporarily move onto an appropriate Experienced Worker route while identified training or assessment gaps are completed within an agreed timeframe.

This approach maintains the integrity of the competence framework while recognising the practical realities of workforce transition - ensuring that raising standards does not create unnecessary disruption or unintended exclusion.





Outstanding Considerations

- 4. Managing Legacy Competence:** Adopting a similar approach to point 3 - many experienced workers qualified under earlier standards. Sectors must establish proportionate ways to align existing competence with updated expectations – how do the competence gaps get filled, verified and displayed on the CSCS card?
- 5. Getting the Detail Right:** Effective implementation depends on consistency. Occupation titles must be accurate and up to date, the correct level of Health and Safety test must be specified, and sector-defined competence requirements must align clearly with CSCS card's carding rules.

These details directly affect what card is issued, how it is checked, and how it is understood on site. Maintaining this alignment requires ongoing collaboration between FIS and CSCS cards to ensure standards are applied consistently and remain current.





Checklist for Other Sectors

1. Define competence clearly - Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviours (SKEB).
2. Engage early with the appropriate card scheme to ensure your competence framework translates into clear, enforceable carding requirements that can be verified and display on the card.
3. Design entry routes that support progression - avoid defaulting to Labourer cards where a recognised training pathway is more appropriate.
4. Set renewal requirements that genuinely maintain competence and can be consistently evidenced and verified by the appropriate CSCS card scheme.
5. Work with the card scheme to translate your framework into a simple Route to Competence flowchart that employers and workers can easily follow.
6. Implement changes in phases, introducing what is deliverable now and strengthening requirements as systems and capacity develop.
7. Address legacy competence and transitional arrangements early, as these are the most complex elements.
8. Communicate clearly and consistently with the carded workforce to support understanding and adoption across the sector – the card schemes can lead on this for you.

This Drylining case study shows how a sector can move from defining competence to delivering a clear, structured and practical carding journey. It provides employers and clients with confidence that individuals working on their sites meet industry-defined occupational standards and that the workforce aligns with the legal competence requirements set out in the Building Safety Act.

Drylining Competence Framework CSCS Card Journey

