

Safety Schemes in Procurement – www.ssip.org.uk

Pre Qualification – A step in the right direction

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In April 2007 HSE published the revised Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (CDM 2007) and a new Approved Code of Practice. (The CDM 2007 ACOP). The CDM 2007 ACOP includes guidance in Appendix 4, which spells out specific Core Criteria for assessing the health and safety competence of organisations. The aspiration of HSE in doing this was that the industry would respond by modifying its practices at the prequalification stage, at least in relation to Health and Safety. The CDM 2007 ACOP spells this out, an expectation that suppliers might only need to prepare a single package of information, to be used and updated repeatedly, as evidence of meeting the Core Criteria, at the first stage of the procurement process.

However, progress was not so simply made, and by the summer of 2007 it was clear from where I was working, in HSE's Construction Sector, that simply publishing the Core Criteria would not be enough. The feedback from contractors was clear, the emphasis on competence was being taken on board, but many clients were insisting on different prequalification schemes for health and safety, and even major contractors were insisting on bespoke questionnaires for their supply chains. This leads to duplication and a waste of effort by the contractor. This feedback was keenly felt by us in HSE, we understand that excessive paperwork brings health and safety into disrepute as a topic, but even worse, can consume resources that should be spent on preventing accidents and ill health on site.

There is no requirement in Law for third party accreditation of health and safety in procurement. Suppliers and clients alike choose voluntarily to use the services of a third party accreditation scheme for health and safety, with the purpose of helping them to manage their tendering or procurement needs.

HSE Construction Division began, in 2007, to meet with a group of businesses supplying third party accreditation services to the industry at the pre qualification stage. These businesses included CHAS, Safecontractor, Exor, NHBC, Achilles and Constructionline. The Safety Schemes in Procurement Forum was created, with the express intention of establishing an umbrella group of independent accreditation organisations who would mutually recognise each others health and safety assessments.

Agreements have been made by the members of the SSIP Forum, to enable the mutual recognition of each others health and safety assessments. A key element in this agreement is that each of the participating schemes has agreed to an independent annual audit by an Auditor appointed by SSIP, but agreed with HSE. Currently John Lacey, chair of the IOSH Construction group is fulfilling this role.

The outcome of this work is that the SSIP website is now live, and describes the mutual recognition arrangements which are in place between the three schemes, Exor, CHAS and NHBC which have persevered through the process, and become the founder members of the SSIP Forum. Constructionline remain committed supporters, and participate by a voluntary arrangement where their members may choose to be assessed by an SSIP scheme.. The SSIP Forum is open to any health and safety assessment scheme which meets its requirements, and has recently welcomed a new member, Safety Management Assessment Services Ltd of Plymouth.

In simple terms this means that any contractor or supplier who has their Health and Safety Competence assessed by an SSIP member scheme, knows that that scheme applies the CDM 2007 Core Criteria in a proportionate, consistent and thorough manner, and that that scheme is subject to an annual audit under arrangements approved by HSE. Any client looking at engaging a supplier who has been assessed by an SSIP member will benefit from this, but also from knowing that the SSIP schemes operate mutual recognition. In effect, do not think of a “CHAS” or “NHBC” or “EXOR” or “SMAS” assessed supplier, think of an SSIP assessed supplier. In this way clients have a larger pool of suppliers to choose from and contractors only have to undergo one assessment process.

This as a first step. We now need to help clients and suppliers alike to understand what SSIP can offer. No individual member scheme benefits from SSIP in any commercial sense, except where suppliers opt to use the assessment services of that member scheme. There are costs involved in operating the SSIP Forum, these are borne by the member companies and trade association supporters. SSIP is a genuine partnership between the industry third party accreditation schemes, HSE, Trade associations and Client groups, in order to meet a market need, to simplify prequalification.