

The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)

◆SIM 2/2003/10

Target Audience:

All FOD Construction Inspectors

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SUMMARY

This SIM gives guidance to staff on the CSCS scheme and the implication of the industry decision to work towards a single standard of competence

INTRODUCTION

- 1 The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) has come to prominence due to the commitments variously given by the industry at the Deputy Prime minister's Health and Safety Summit in February 2001 towards achieving a fully competent on-site workforce. The industry chose the CSCS scheme as the basis for its initiative, given its current track record and the traditional links between the industry and CITB (which extracts a levy from the industry to provide training grants).
2. The Major Contractors' Group (MCG) set a target of 100% compliance by 31 December 200003. The Civil Engineering Contractors' Association (CECA) set a 60% target by that same date with 100% by the end of 2007. Both organisations are members of the Construction Confederation whose other members have made a 100% commitment by the end of 2010. These organisations have elected to use the CSCS scheme as the core means of demonstrating competence.
3. The BCG target is challenging and considerable effort has been expended towards achieving the targets, not least in determining the way forward with the many trades for which no CSCS card was initially available and in providing for mutual recognition for equipment schemes. While the MCG is unlikely to achieve the 100% target by the set date, major advances contributing to raising on-site standards will have been made.
4. Detailed information can typically be found in MCG and CECA documents available on the web at:

Construction Confederation Website

- For the MCG Health and Safety Strategy
- For the MCG Accepted Record Schemes
- For the MCG's Subcontractor health and safety prequalification requirements relating to competence

CECA – Health and Safety Action Plan and Strategy

- For the CECA Health and Safety Plan and Strategy

CSCS

5. CSCS was introduced by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) in 1995 following the success of the plant operators' Certificate of Training Achievement (CTA) card scheme. The latter scheme was believed to have attracted over 90% of plant

operators, whereas the CSCS scheme had around 100,000 members out of a working population of almost 2 million, before the industry initiative to promote it..

6. CSCS aims to register every competent construction operative within the UK not currently on a skills registration scheme. Operatives get an individual registration card (similar to a credit card) which lasts for three or five years. The 5 year card is the “full” card; a 3 year “link” card is issued to those who can show skills and experience, and agree to obtain a S/NVQ during the period. The scheme is administered by CITB.

7. The mechanism adopted by the CSCS scheme management is to offer affiliation to those schemes which predate CSCS, provided they go down the S/NVQ route. This therefore excludes more recent schemes and those who do not wish to follow the S/NVQ route. Cards issued to affiliated operatives have both the CSCS and affiliate’s logo on the front and the qualifications on the back.

8. Various card types are issued to operatives to distinguish between trainees (red), skilled workers with NVQ level 2 or Industrial Accreditation (IA) grade A qualifications (blue) and skilled workers with NVQ level 3 or IA grade B qualifications (gold). Construction management professionals will also be able to apply for Gold (supervisor, NVQ level 3), platinum (manager, NVQ level 4) or black (senior manager, NVQ level 5) cards. The advantage of S/NVQs is that they are validated (audited) by the Quality and Curriculum Authority.

9. In each of the 155 occupations represented, Industry Accreditation over a two-year period is available, allowing those with experience but no formal qualifications to apply if an employer, or former employer, will vouch for their competence. It is estimated that 80% of the workforce fall into this category. To speed up the process of formal qualification, CITB and the Learning and Skills Council are introducing the On-site Assessment and Training (OSAT) initiative, which will result in candidates gaining S/NVQ 2 or 3. Candidates are referred to OSAT centres by their employer and must also pass the construction health and safety test to obtain a CSCS card. This is known as the “Experienced Worker Route” and IA will be gradually phased out in favour of this route.

10. The health and safety test was introduced in April 2000 to overcome the criticism of larger employers who felt that formal health and safety training would duplicate their own; also the previous system of issuing a CSCS card following *attendance* at a health and safety training course did not provide a suitable assessment of *competence*. The original requirement for CSCS health and safety training has therefore been abandoned, though the courses are still available.

CURRENT POSITION

11. CSCS is aware of the increasing likelihood that forged CSCS cards will become more widespread. They are looking at the inclusion of a hologram on the cards to make forgery more difficult.
12. There are currently over ½ million operatives holding CSCS and affiliated cards., including 250,000 plant operatives affiliated to the Construction Plant Certification Scheme (CPCS – previously CTA, but now also including NPORS and LANTRA).
13. Details of affiliates are difficult to list because they change regularly. The MCG's paper on Accepted Record Schemes is regularly updated and puts the current position into the public domain. The CSCS website provides further up to date information.
14. Few affiliations have been confirmed, the majority being at a late stage of negotiation. The position with construction professionals (e.g. designers) is currently unresolved, though progress is being made. Also, some major utility companies have reservations about participating in the scheme. However, the scheme does allow Visitor Cards to be issued, which will allow access to site by designers and others in the interim.
15. There is currently an active debate on whether there should be separate elements in the health and safety test to take account of the different trades, particularly amongst the affiliates. This is a matter for CITB and CSCS to decide, although HSE is represented on the health and safety test subgroup which regularly reviews the question sets.
16. HSE also has observers on the CPCS, CSCS and CITB Health, Safety and Environment Management Boards.

➔ ADVICE TO INSPECTORS

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¹ Exemption 2b – Internal discussion and advice: Information whose disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion (internal opinion, advice, recommendation, consultation and deliberation)