



Consultation to the Industry: Construction product assessment relating to Higher Risk Residential Buildings

February 2021



Foreword from Dame Judith Hackitt

February 2021

It is approaching 3 years since the final report of Building a Safer Future was published. In my report, I highlighted many areas for improvements, including a clearer, more pro-active product certification process that delivers safer buildings. In particular, I expressed concern about products being used in the construction of Higher Risk Residential Buildings (HRRBs).



I am pleased to see that the British Board of Agrément has now invested in a programme of reform in order to play a more pro-active role in improving product safety, and is now embarking on a consultation with the construction industry to improve product safety. Using the existing Agrément certification offering first introduced in 1966, the BBA is looking to develop an Agrément Plus offering to meet the higher safety standards required for HRRBs.

This initiative aims to focus on improving safety performance in four areas:

- An earlier, more pro-active involvement in the client product development process, bringing extensive experience to new product development processes to improve safety and performance;
- Enhancement of the testing regime, since this forms the basis of much of the BBA's product assessment and certification process;
- The introduction of sample analysis and characterisation – also referred to as 'fingerprinting' – to improve traceability of materials and to maintain quality standards;
- The introduction of ongoing, post-certification testing to maintain the highest safety standards.

This consultation comes at a time when there are a number of other developments taking place in relation to Construction Products, including: an **Industry-led Consultation on Better Data**, Safer Buildings launched by the CPA and the Marketing Integrity Group, as well as the announcement of a new **Construction Products Regulator**. This consultation by the BBA is intended to complement and support these developments. I have always been clear that it will be a combination of more robust regulation and culture change from industry that shows much more responsible behaviour that will be required to rebuild confidence in the UK construction industry.

I therefore urge all parties involved in the design, manufacture and specification of construction products, as well as users of construction products to participate in the BBA's consultation. I have no doubt that the new regulator and other stakeholders will welcome a collective effort to improve the safety of construction products. The time to act is now.

Message from BBA CEO Hardy Giesler

February 2021

The publication of Dame Judith Hackitt's final report 'Building a Safer Future' has been an important reference document to me since joining the BBA a year ago. Providing safe, fit-for-purpose and affordable housing for all in the UK remains a challenge and product certification has an important part to play. Part of this challenge is dealing with the specific requirements of Higher Risk Residential Buildings - both existing structures and newbuilds – and this consultation paper on Agrément Plus is focused on addressing this need.



The BBA Agrément certification scheme has served the industry well for over 50 years. Yet it is widely recognised that Higher Risk Residential Buildings have specific requirements to address. This is the reason why we are launching a consultation to determine how best the industry can agree specific certification needs for construction products used in HRRBs.

I would like to thank Dame Judith, the Infrastructure Steering Group, MHCLG, BEIS, clients and colleagues across the industry for the support already experienced in bringing Agrément Plus to market. We encourage others to join this consultation process and to help us deliver long-term solutions for the construction of HRRBs.

The BBA Agrément Plus Consultation Process





Introduction

For almost 55 years the BBA's Agrément product certification scheme has supported the Construction industry. With thousands of certificates and associated product sheets in circulation, the industry has become accustomed to the benefits of using Agrément certificates across a broad range of construction product applications.

In June 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire took the lives of 72 people and the subsequent impact has affected many more. Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety was published in May 2018. Although the report's findings are wide-ranging, it does task the industry to review the construction product assessment and certification process, especially for high-risk areas such as Higher Risk Residential Buildings (HRRBs).

As a major supplier of construction product certification services in the UK market, the BBA is launching a consultation process to secure consensus on the changes required to address the risks identified. The Consultation is being championed within the business by recently-appointed Technical Director Bill Hewlett. We are seeking the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders across the industry, including, amongst others:

- Suppliers of construction products
- Those involved in the design and specification of HRRBs
- Those involved in the construction of HRRBs
- Asset managers with responsibility for the safety and maintenance of HRRBs
- Financial partners, including insurers, lenders and investors
- Local authorities, their agencies and central government

Objective of the Consultation

The BBA wishes to lead an industry-wide response to the construction products challenges posed by HRRBs. For over five decades, the BBA has supported a wide spectrum of stakeholders in the UK construction industry. We see this as an opportunity to deal with the safety concerns of HRRBs.

Our objective is to generate a solution that has broad support across the diverse stakeholders in the UK construction industry. The BBA will also be working with Dame Judith, the Industry Safety Steering Group and the recently announced Construction Products Regulator, to ensure a fit-for-purpose outcome with industry support.

The scope of the Consultation

This consultation is focused on the needs of Higher Risk Residential Buildings only. The BBA Agrément certification scheme, which has been in use for 55 years, is seen as a solid basis on which to build an enhanced certification scheme that deals specifically with the additional safety needs of HRRBs. The existing Agrément certification will continue unchanged for construction products designed for applications in structures other than HRRBs. The scheme for HRRBs will be clearly differentiated – its working title is Agrément Plus but this will be finalised as part of the consultation process.

The Proposal

The following changes are proposed to the existing Agrément offering. While the details will no doubt be the subject of much debate, we propose the following changes to the construction product assessment and certification process to address the safety requirements for HRRBs:

1. An earlier involvement in the client product development process

The BBA will seek earlier engagement with our clients' product development cycle. We will support clients with our knowledge and expertise to ensure that consistent, evolutionary progress is made throughout the development and testing cycle.

2. Enhanced testing regime

The BBA will actively seek involvement in the range of testing typically engaged in during product development cycles. We will seek to review the results of all test results made, as well as BBA observation of tests submitted for assessment and certification purposes. This will include fire testing.

3. A sample analysis / characterisation, sometimes also referred to as 'fingerprinting'

Sample characterisation, or 'fingerprinting', is a developing science and not without its challenges. However, there are two good reasons for persisting:

- There is value in storing original samples used for testing and assessment as reference material. Storing actual samples may not be physically possible due to bulk, deterioration over time and other factors. Instead, a product sample DNA or 'fingerprint' can form a viable alternative;
- Post certification, lifecycle testing and referencing will be simpler and more accurate.

4. A regular and ongoing testing regime post-certification

Currently, all construction product testing is carried out pre-certification. It is possible that a product may never be submitted for additional testing throughout its lifecycle, a period that can run into decades. The BBA proposes a regular testing programme with randomly-selected material, to be carried out unannounced at regular intervals.

Next steps

The success of this consultation process is dependent on a broad level of participation across the UK construction industry. The BBA is seeking to engage with all stakeholders and seeks consensus on the way forward. Success will be measured by the level of participation and finding a solution that has support across the construction industry, including the newly announced Construction Products Regulator. This Consultation is currently active and runs until Friday 19th March 2021.

To get involved, simply register your interest via the form that can be found on our website www.bbacerts.co.uk/getinvolved, and our team will be in touch with you.



Find out more here:
<https://www.bbacerts.co.uk>

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