

Xetra

A collection of insights from across the business and building materials industry, brought to you by **Artex Ltd, a Saint-Gobain company.**



Cost-of-living
crisis

UK
CA

UKCA
Compliance



A note from **Jason Smith,** Managing Director, Artex Ltd.

Welcome to Xetra. At the halfway point in the year, in what feels like a real British Summer.

The construction industry has seen a turbulent first half of the year. With private housing work plummeting to a 17 month low and drops in commercial and public sector building, but conversely infrastructure activity levels have increased alongside a consistent repair and maintenance market. With many consumers reluctant to request work due to the cost-of-living crisis and the usual seasonal fluctuations it is hard to navigate the evolving landscape.

One index will give one message and then you can read something contradictory that same week. The next 12 months is going to be about careful management within the RMI sector as there will be more room to grow if the industry gets behind retrofit opportunities for housing stocks that must improve their efficiency credentials and the government backs this with funding and simplicity.

As the supply chain pain reduces and post-pandemic availability of products continues to improve, May actually saw a modest upturn in overall construction output. The extension of the UKCA deadline to 2025 also provided relief for many coming into this year.

We have also seen an increased emphasis on sustainability, with net zero becoming a priority for many customers. The pace of change is increasing in this area, with reports

now saying that we will breach the 1.5°C threshold of warming within the next five years. There is much that we can do in our industry to contribute to carbon reduction, and in this issue, we explore exactly what net-zero means for construction, and how you can respond.

I wanted to talk about a real highlight for me this year which has been seeing how my colleagues within Artex have embraced our desire to be more inclusive and diverse as a business than we have been before. The conversations around the business, the change in thinking, the ways we are challenging ourselves to attract a more diverse group of people into our business. Never have we been as vocal across all departments as we are now with idea sharing, questions and honest feedback. There are so many signs that this really is becoming the business people love to work for that we have set out to create. Artex is a safe, inclusive, and sustainable business that I feel proud to be a part of.

I mentioned the evolving landscape within construction earlier and Saint-Gobain in the UK and Ireland has also changed, with the recent sale of Saint-Gobain Building Distribution. This creates opportunities for investment and growth aligned to our corporate Purpose and business strategy. I see this as an exciting time to be part of the Saint-Gobain Group. As for Artex without saying too much I know the next 12 months is going to be an exciting time for our business. We have recently announced internally some exciting developments that we will be sharing with you at the right time. We have a robust plan to see us through the next few years and I am really pleased with the new leadership team we have in place to take us through this next phase of development and the teams and colleagues around us are excited to play their part in making it a success. You can find out a bit more about our new leadership team later in this issue.

In this latest issue of Xetra we also look at UKCA; what it is and how it will affect businesses and we also spoke to a few customers about how they are tackling the cost-of-living crisis. We also gathered some insight from within the industry on how we can face challenges in diversity and inclusion.

We hope you enjoy our round up of news and insights in this issue, and as ever would be grateful to hear your feedback.

Thanks, Jason

How is the DIY sector responding to the cost-of-living crisis?

In this article, we look at the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the DIY sector in the UK, and how two leading companies have responded, focusing particularly on customers, staff, and supplier relationships.



The DIY industry faces a set of tough challenges thanks to inflation, supply chain issues, and the ongoing war in Ukraine. These pressures have already seen price rises, lengthening lead times, reduced product availability, and labour shortages.

On the one hand, consumers are feeling the pressure to reduce unnecessary spending. On the other, some personal finance experts think that when they do spend, consumers are focusing more on travel, clothing, and entertainment.

The current slowdown in the housing market is often a boon to the industry because consumers tend to upgrade their existing homes when they can't move. At the same time, the construction trade is coming off a Covid boom that saw some in the industry busier than ever. Not to mention the increase in new customers turning to DIY during the pandemic.

With such mixed signals, and signs of both positive and negative trends, we reached out to some industry insiders to see how their companies have been responding to the current economic uncertainty. What steps have they taken and why? And what lessons might there be for others in the industry who want to thrive even during an uncertain economy?

How the cost-of-living crisis has affected UK DIY businesses

The UK home improvement market is large, worth anywhere from

£9.1bn to over **£15bn** depending on how it's measured

The industry has grown by an average of **4.1%** annually between 2017 and 2022 – **and by 4.4% in 2022 alone.** So, it's also a **robust sector.**

That said, market growth of 4.4% was a lot lower than the rate of inflation in 2022, meaning that the industry has been hit by higher prices.

However, as Rob Ashdown, Head of Trading - Building - Landscaping - Tools at Wickes says: "Much as we have to pass some of that on to our customer, it's important that there is still a competitive business to get our customers buying into."

In other words, DIY businesses have had to absorb some of the cost and still find ways to keep growing and staying competitive for their customers.



Customer impact

Customers are becoming increasingly value-conscious and looking for ways to continue their home improvement projects, as Rob makes clear:

"The cost-of-living challenge is very serious for some people, but not every customer that shops with us faces that challenge. We measure the expected volume of work with our trade clients, and it's normalised to pre covid levels, not below."

Rob points out that 2020 and 2021 were record years of growth in some parts for the industry. This is because many customers brought forward work, while other new customers discovered an affinity for home improvements through necessity, leading to a more diverse customer base than before which skews younger and more female than was more typical in pre-Covid times.

So, while many customers are tightening their belts, the customer base as a whole is broader and more diverse, meaning customers still want to shop even if they now prefer cheaper or better value products.

Supplier impact

Suppliers have been hit by shortages of certain materials, as well as rising prices. Just as Wickes must consider how much of the price rises to pass onto their customers, so suppliers face the same challenge. At the same time, carbon pricing – effectively carbon taxes on CO₂ emitting materials – meaning that many suppliers are struggling to deal with Net Zero charges that are pushing up costs even further.

What strategies have firms come up with to help them adapt?

Creating efficiencies and opportunity to boost customer value

At Wickes, the focus has been very much on making their products more cost-effective by using operational efficiencies and more digital technology to, for example:



- Offer 10% discounts for TradePro scheme members. By Q1 2023, membership of Wickes' TradePro scheme reached 750,000 – an 18% increase year-on-year.
- Launch new value ready-fit kitchen packages that include design for as little as £1,000.
- Help customers save energy and reduce their energy bills through their range of energy saving products and a new online sustainable house guide.

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Supporting suppliers to become more efficient

“At Wickes, we’re committed to upholding human rights, promoting positive working conditions and making positive choices that will reduce our impact on the environment throughout our supply chain and we want to work with suppliers who share these commitments,” Rob says.

In practical terms, this means that they:

- Measure and audit suppliers continually to understand their sustainability plans.
- Reach out to suppliers and offer support to help them reduce their carbon footprint.

How is the industry evolving to cope with high inflation?



Uniquely connecting you to construction product brands

Cement, Mortar and Concrete from Blue Hawk

For Rob at Wickes, the pandemic and current inflation created or uncovered several significant trends, and the key to sustained success for the industry is to be aware of and work out how best to use these trends:

- Most of the UK's housing stock is over 50 years old and is both energy inefficient and in need of maintenance. Helping homeowners with advice and the best value products that help them make their properties more energy efficient will create loyalty as well as help society save on energy bills in the longer term.
- In tough times people look to their homes as places of comfort and security, and it's up to the trade and retailers to help people feel better about their homes. Demand will always be there despite the costs.
- The pandemic ushered in a wave of younger DIY enthusiasts, as well as more women. The industry needs to work out how to best serve the needs of these new demographics to encourage their passion and make them feel welcomed.
- Digital technologies and the need to reduce carbon emissions will drive technological innovation, and those in the trade need to ensure they keep abreast of developments in these areas.



All Blue Hawk bags and tubs are made from at least 30% recycled plastic

Ideal for outdoor DIY jobs such as repairing concrete and masonry, brick laying and pointing, bedding slabs, setting posts or repairing steps, paths, drains or garden ponds



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Key takeaways for others in the industry on how to survive and thrive going forward

Based on the feedback from Wickes, here are the top suggestions for others in the building and DIY industry to help thrive during the current economic uncertainty:

- Think about how you can use technology to enhance the customer experience and make it easier for colleagues to supply outstanding service.
- Create a workplace and culture where everyone feels at home, has a voice and is empowered to share their ideas and is supported to be at their best. Happy colleagues lead to happy customers which leads to greater commercial success.
- Think about how to make your business more environmentally sustainable. This will reduce carbon taxes and strip out extra costs.

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Counting the business costs of Net Zero in construction

Net Zero is everywhere these days – social media, newspapers, TV news, our kids' schools. Wherever we turn, people are talking about carbon reduction and why it's needed to stop the planet overheating.

Regardless of whether you personally believe in the climate emergency, it's clear that the British government is taking it seriously. More to the point, they are regulating to make Net Zero a reality in construction, and this is where your business is affected.

Do you know what the government is aiming to do? Do you know how this will affect your business or how much it will cost you? In this article, we lay out some of the facts to try and clarify what's going on and how you can respond to avoid any unpleasant surprises.



Net Zero targets in the construction industry

Let's start with what the government is trying to achieve when it comes to Net Zero. First off, what do they even mean by "Net Zero"? The National Grid has a nice, clear definition for those of us who are too embarrassed to ask:

"Put simply, Net Zero refers to the balance between the amount of greenhouse gas produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere. We reach net zero when the amount we add is no more than the amount taken away."

So the idea with "Net Zero" is that the UK as a whole by 2050 will stop emitting more carbon dioxide than we remove. The British government has been one of the keenest internationally on setting binding legal targets for this, and published its Net Zero Strategy in 2021.

The government and parliament believe that buildings and infrastructure contribute “25% of the UK’s total greenhouse gas emissions.” According to this report from the UK parliament, “Emissions from the built environment must be reduced if the UK is to meet Net Zero by 2050.”

Most urgently, the government is committed to reducing carbon emissions by 78% compared to 1990 levels by 2035 – just 12 years from now. As the parliamentary report says, however:

“ There is little government guidance as to how these targets are to be met by the built environment industry. ”

“ Emissions from the construction process, maintenance and demolition of buildings, known as embodied emissions, have been ignored. ”

In summary then, the UK government has identified construction as a major carbon emitter, has committed to legally binding targets to slash those emissions, but has neglected to come up with a plan or even solid guidance on how to do that.

If you’re starting to find this all a bit frustrating, we can appreciate how you feel. Being given a tough target to meet and then not given any support or guidance on how to get there almost guarantees that businesses in our sector will end up with added costs and legal compliance issues. The smaller you are, the worse this is likely to be.

What can we do in response?

The good news is that there are things you can do to make sure you don’t fall foul of Net Zero rules and costs. Here are three steps you can take right now.

Step 1:

Make sure you’re following the rules

There are lots of rules we must follow. They’ve always changed regularly, and now Net Zero is another driver for those changes. The key things to keep track of in construction are the building regulations and the materials you use. Keeping your eye on these two key areas will take care of most of your Net Zero obligations without taking up too much of your time.

Step 2:

Know the updated building regulations

The building regulations were last updated in June 2022, designed to make buildings emit less carbon.

Step 3:

The key changes to be aware of are:

- New-build homes will need to produce “at least” 31% less carbon emissions. Installing electric heating systems combined with renewable energy sources such as solar is seen as a key enabler for this.
- New non-domestic builds will need to produce “at least” 27% less carbon emissions.
- New and replacement heating systems in both domestic and non-domestic builds must have a maximum flow temperature of 55°C.
- Existing non-domestic buildings must improve the efficiency of heating and hot water boiler systems through installation of new controls.
- New minimum efficiency standards have been provided. In all new domestic builds, the new U-value for walls will be 0.18 W/m², 1.4 for windows and rooflights and 1.4 for doors. In non-domestic builds there’s a lowered U-value of 0.26 for walls and majority of windows/curtain walling must achieve 1.6 W/m².



There’s a lot here to keep track of. If you want the full list of changes that came into law on 15th June last year, check out this government document

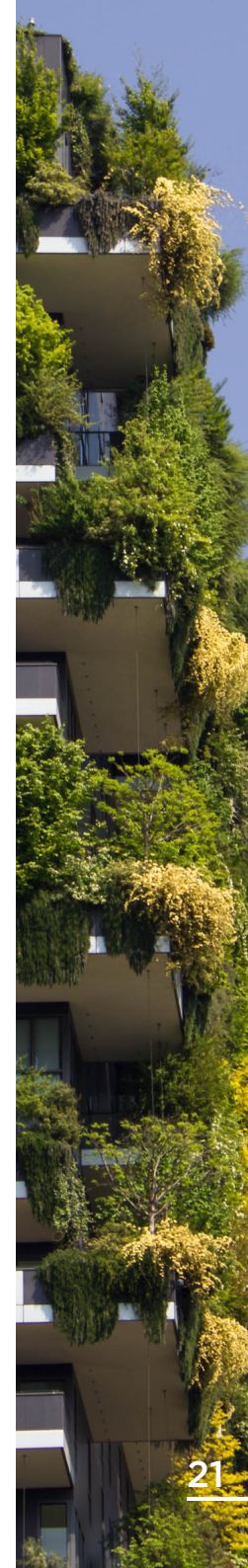
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1057367/Circular_letter_Jan_2022.pdf

It is helpful to know about regulatory changes as and when they occur.

That’s why you might also find it useful to become a member of a construction industry body that will keep you up to date with legal updates on a regular basis, such as:

- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)
- The Institute of Clerks of Works and Construction Inspectorate of GB Inc (ICWCI)
- Society of Construction Law (SCL)
- The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)
- Construction Industry Council (CIC)
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
- Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA)

If membership isn’t right for you then it could also be useful simply to bookmark these organisations’ websites and check their content for regulatory news once a month or so.



Ensure that your building materials are environmentally compliant

The last way you can ensure you're up to date with Net Zero compliance is to look at the material you use. To go back to the parliamentary report quoted earlier, this has a lot to say about building materials. In particular, it wants to encourage the use of more sustainable and natural material over the likes of concrete and steel, which are more energy-intensive to produce.

As the report says:

“Ministers have committed to exploring a range of policy options that can support this ambition, including improving the transparency of embodied emissions data, product labelling, product standards, and changes to public and private procurement approaches.”

As a construction business, you don't have control over a lot of this.



When policy changes come in, you need to make sure you know what they mean for you and use the appropriate materials.

However, one thing that can help you in this regard is using a materials supplier that you know to be compliant. That's where we come in. At Artex, we make sure that all of our building and construction materials are compliant and fit for purpose. In fact, we spend a lot of time and money on making sure that's the case.

With recent inflationary pressures and the rising cost of raw materials, this does mean that from time to time we have to pass price increases on to you. However, what you get in return is the absolute peace of mind that we're dealing with all of your material compliance for you – so you don't even have to think about it.

We like to think this is one worry off your mind, because we're dealing with it for you. If you have any queries about how Net Zero rules affect the materials you're using, or what certifications you should be looking for, feel free to drop us a line and ask. We're here to help wherever we can.

You can follow us on social to hear our latest environmental updates...



UKCA compliance: what is it and what do you need to do about it?

You're probably aware of the new UKCA regulations regarding construction products and building materials. That, as a result of changing rules post-Brexit, the UK has been bringing in the new UK Conformity Assessed (UKCA) standard to replace the old CE mark.

But did you know that the result of all this regulatory change was that we almost had to stop selling Gyproc EasiFill?

Given that Gyproc EasiFill is probably our bestselling product, this outcome would have been pretty disastrous. But it was taking so long to get our products through the relevant testing and approval stage that the time was ticking down as we approached the 2022 end-of-year deadline...

And then the government extended its UKCA deadline until mid-2025!

If ever there was a way to sum up the chaos of regulatory change in a few words, that's it right there. But wait, you might not know very much about UKCA compliance, what it is, or how it affects your business. So let's do a quick recap of the situation.

UKCA explained

UKCA stands for United Kingdom Conformity Assessed. It's the new mark that shows products have been assessed as safe and appropriate by an accredited body. It replaces the old CE mark that was first introduced in 1993, and which has been the standard mark for products sold across the European Union since then.

The UK is making this change as a post-Brexit measure, although UKCA standards are likely to be on par with CE standards on most products at least for the foreseeable future.

Why is UKCA an issue for the industry?

The issue with this change, as many within our industry have been saying for a while, is that the change is unnecessary, time consuming, and costly. To quote from one article on the subject:

"Last year, industry figures publicly warned that the amount of work needed to be carried out at British testing facilities – which for some products simply do not exist – will cause items to disappear from the British market. Infrastructure, net-zero ambitions and post-Grenfell safety improvements could all be at risk, they said."



One major unforeseen impact of the change and the need for testing was that companies based outside the UK importing products into the country were looking at reducing the range of products available in order to reduce the cost and time of compliance.

Indeed, the point about testing proved to be a key one for our products at Artex. In our case, it was taking so long to get products tested that we risked missing the original deadline.

Clearly, this was a problem that affected many other businesses too, which is why the deadline was extended. Despite this extension, we managed to get most of our products UKCA certified before the deadline ended.

What are the new rules?

By mid-2025, all products sold in the UK must have been tested by an appropriate facility and passed as fit for sale. They will then carry the UKCA mark. Unless they are sold on both the UK and the EU when they must carry both UKCA and CE marks.

How does all this affect you and your business?

Put simply, you need to ensure that the products you use in your business all carry the UKCA mark by the 30th June 2025. This does sound a long way off. But it's worth taking stock of what you use in your business and noting how many of those currently carry the UKCA mark.

Typically, building and construction products that have been tested and comply with the new standards will have a UKCA mark printed on them. Certain other products that are still in the process of transitioning to the new regime will still have a CE mark printed on them and a UKCA label overlaid on top.

What you need to look for are those products which have no UKCA marking at all. In this case, you will probably want to get in touch with your supplier and ask for details of when they're intending to make the transition.



What steps have Artex taken?

Any products you buy from us at Artex have effectively already transitioned or are in the process of transitioning. As a result, all of the products we supply will have the UKCA mark printed on them or carry a label.

This is the long way of saying that you don't have to worry about the compliance of Artex products. We have already taken care of it on your behalf.

Any products we send out with labels will already have been tested as compliant, but you will be receiving supplies that were printed before the new accreditation was granted. All packaging of those products will soon have the UKCA mark printed on them.

To reassure you, below is a complete list of products we sell that require UKCA approval. They have all received this as of 1st January 2023:

- Artex Textured Finish 25kg & 5kg
- Artex Ready Mixed Textured Finish 5L
- Blue Hawk Angle Bead
- Blue Hawk Mini Mesh Bead
- Blue Hawk Mortar Mix 5kg, 10kg & 20kg
- Blue Hawk MultiPurpose Concrete 20kg
- Blue Hawk Quick Set Cement 2.5kg & 5kg
- Blue Hawk Standard and Heavy Grade Roofing Felts
- EasiFix Cove (all)
- GypFrame Metals (all)
- Gyproc Board Finish 25kg
- Gyproc Bonding 60 10kg, 12.5kg & 25kg
- Gyproc Bonding Coat 25KG
- Gyproc Corner Tape 30m
- Gyproc Cove Adhesive 5Kg & 12.5kg
- Gyproc Cove and Cornice (all)
- Gyproc Driwall Adhesive 10kg & 25kg
- Gyproc EasiFill 20 5kg & 10kg (paper)
- Gyproc EasiFill 20 5Kg (plastic)
- Gyproc EasiFill 45 10kg (paper)
- Gyproc EasiFill 60 5kg & 10kg (paper)
- Gyproc EasiFill 60 5kg & 10kg (plastic)
- Gyproc EasiFill 60 5Kg (plastic)
- Gyproc EasiFiller Finish 3L
- Gyproc Hardwall 25kg
- Gyproc Joint Filler 12.5Kg
- Gyproc Joint Tape
- Gyproc Magnetic Plaster 25kg
- Gyproc MultiFinish 25kg
- Gyproc Performance Plasterboards (all)
- Glasroc Specialist Plasterboards (all)
- Gyproc Standard Plasterboards (all)
- Gyproc ProMix Finish 15L
- Gyproc ProMix Lite 17L
- Gyproc Quicksand 25Kg
- Gyproc Ready Mix Joint Cement 12L Tub
- Thistle Finishing Plaster 7.5Kg & 12.5kg
- Thistle One Coat Plaster 7.5Kg & 12.5kg
- Thistle Thin Coat Angle Beads
- Thistle Undercoat 7.5Kg&12.5kg
- Weberend OCR 25kg
- Weberpral M 25kg (all)

If you'd like more general information about the UKCA mark, what it's for, and when to use it, take a look at this government website

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/using-the-uk-ca-marking>

Otherwise, if you'd like more information about how these rules affect Artex or the products you buy from us, please drop us a line. We'll be happy to help.

You can also find more information on UKCA here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/using-the-uk-ca-marking>



on the road



With covid-19 making it impossible for many trade shows to go ahead over the past few years, we were more than ready last year to dust off our branded shirts, dig out our free tape measures and get back out on the road to see our customers face-to-face. And as busy as last year was, 2023 is proving to be even more of a bumper year for Artex!



We've loved getting back out there to speak with our customers and the people who use our products. Feedback is always a blessing, and events are a perfect opportunity for those deeper conversations to get to the heart of what people love (or don't!) about our brand.

We started the year off by visiting Selco, CCF and Travis Perkins colleagues at their business conferences to find out more about what they have planned for the year, to explore how we can support as a supplier, and to highlight the great range of products they can order through our flexible service options – really handy for just on time deliveries and managing working capital and stock.

We were also excited to launch our new POS units at the Travis Perkins conference! Our 'Gyproc have it covered' display pallet and floor standing display units are the perfect addition to create extra shelf space in branch and position popular Gyproc products right in front of the tradesperson. If you're interested in adding a unit to your branch, you can get in touch with our sales team at artexram@saint-gobain.com to enquire.

Not long after, we were on the road up to Scotland to visit painters and decorators at the Scottish Decorator's Federation annual conference and gala dinner.

Our Technical Product Manager Karl enjoyed showing off our plasterboard patches which are perfect for quickly and easily patching over damage to plasterboard or single socket and spotlight holes – every decorators dream!



Most recently we visited the Wickes conference to chat with their colleagues about our Weber range. Saint-Gobain Weber are our sister company and we've built an excellent partnership to be able to offer stockists the same product but in smaller quantities to suit the branch. Rather than having to buy a full or half load of product, we supply as little as one pallet, or can even combine Weber products onto a mixed pallet with any of our other products that are eligible for this service including Gyproc, Thistle and Blue Hawk.



Later on this year we'll be at Professional Builder Live, UK Construction Week and the Painting and Decorating Show – **come along and say hello if you're attending!**

And we're not done there! Trade Decorator Live was held in June at Bolton University Stadium where painters and decorators could see our Gyproc EasiPatch Plasterboard Patches in action. We'll be busy touring the UK in the Artex Demo Van for a series of B&Q Trade Days over the summer. Our van opens up with a demo and training area, allowing us to demonstrate application of our products and engage with both tradespeople and B&Q staff to help increase their product knowledge.



Our next event was a little closer to home; the NMBS Exhibition in Coventry. It was fantastic to be back in a big exhibition hall for the first time this year and great to catch members from our various NMBS customers to explore how we can help support their business, particularly through our Gyproc Express 48-hour delivery service. It was another opportunity to show off our 'Gyproc have it covered' floor standing display units which are ideal for smaller branches with their compact footprint.



New Leadership Team paving the way at Artex



We have recently appointed three new members to our Senior Leadership Team: The new leadership team will bring a fresh organisational approach that seeks to be open, fluid, and adaptable; unleashes the collective energy, passion, and capabilities of its people; reimagines strategy; and focuses on delivering greater value to all stakeholders.

All three additions within the new leadership team are internal Saint-Gobain personnel progressing successfully through the internal mobility and personal development programme.

Julie Le Pape as Operations Director, Effi-Svende Dammenhain as Customer Value Chain Director, and Mark Jeffreys as Finance Manager.



Julie Le Pape
Operations Director

Operations Director and Customer Value Chain Director are two new roles for Artex, created to support continued growth and sharpen our service propositions as we look to expand our business over the next few years.

Taking on the role of Operations Director, Julie brings a wealth of knowledge in Supply Chain and Distribution, with over 17 years' experience within the Saint-Gobain group. Julie joined British Gypsum in 2006 as an Export Administrator, progressing her career within the business to hold roles in both Supply Chain and Logistics. Most recently she worked at Artex as Supply Chain and Distribution Manager, where she led the team to ensure a full supply of products to customers.

As Operations Director, Julie will focus on delivering improvements to our flexible service proposition, as well as managing our EHS and sustainability roadmaps to achieve net zero carbon by 2050.



Effi-Svende Dammenhain
Customer Value Chain Director

Effi-Svende joins us from Saint-Gobain Weber, bringing a wealth of experience after 8 years in Supply Chain and Logistics. Effi joined Weber in 2017, progressing through their Supply Chain team to the position of Head of Supply Chain and Logistics where she managed end-to-end supply chain processes and operations.

‘After my MSc Supply Chain Management, I started at Saint-Gobain Weber as stock controller. From this role I had the opportunity to develop my career further within the group, building more knowledge in supply chain and logistics. I am grateful for all opportunities given as it was always my goal to work for an international corporation due to the many benefits, e.g., international mobility and best practices from different business units and cultures.’

In her newly created role of Customer Value Chain Director, Effi will oversee our end-to-end supply chain, underpinning this with strong customer experience and sustainability to ensure a focus on driving out inefficiency, reducing our carbon footprint and delighting our customers along the way.

‘The training and development opportunities given within Saint Gobain enabled me to become a leader and grow and develop with my team. In Supply Chain we never say “this is not my job” but try to support and learn from one another and implement change that makes the job easier for everyone – which automatically positively affects the customer.’



Mark Jeffreys
Finance Manager

And joining us as Finance Manager with 11 years’ experience in Finance, Mark is also progressing his career within the Saint-Gobain Group. Mark joined the central Saint-Gobain Finance team in 2019 as a Senior Financial Accountant before taking on the role of Financial Services Manager to manage the General Ledger team for 16 of Saint-Gobain’s brands in the UK and Ireland. Now in his role of Finance Manager at Artex, Mark will manage delivering and analysing key financial information to support our business health and continued growth.

Mark, Effi and Julie join our Commercial Director Rob Stewart who has over 16 years’ experience in the industry, and who has been with Artex for two years. Rob leads our Commercial team to deliver new products and services to the market, with two exciting launches pending later this year.

Completing the leadership team is Amy Marshall, leading our HR function. Amy previously worked in the Public Sector and Not for Profit sector before coming to Saint-Gobain.

‘I wanted to work in a commercial environment and for an organisation who put people first and strived forward. From my first interview, I knew this was a company I wanted to be part of and haven’t looked back since! Since joining Saint-Gobain, I have had continual opportunities to grow, develop and push myself outside of my comfort zone and the opportunity to collaborate with some great people and teams.’



Top left to right: Julie Le Pape, Jason Smith, Amy Marshall.
Bottom left to right: Mark Jeffreys, Robert Stewart, Effi-Svende Dammenhain.

Leading the team is our Managing Director Jason Smith, who has also had a varied career at Saint-Gobain.

Jason said, "These are fitting examples of how colleagues can progress their careers and continued development at Artex and within the wider Saint-Gobain group. With the creation of two new roles in our leadership team, we are excited to develop our customer experience, strengthen our service proposition, and continue our sustainability journey to further support our customers."

"It is important to acknowledge that Saint-Gobain have a long history of advancing possibilities for employees within our business, between business units, nationally and around the world. We are building a resilient supply chain solution for the industry to access quality construction products flexibly, but we also want to reflect Saint-Gobain's commitment to conscious inclusion, diversity, and empowering women. In 2022 less than four in 10 new leadership roles were secured by women, I am pleased to say that my leadership team is achieving gender equality. We are on this journey, and I am hoping that it is just the beginning of a ripple effect across the industry in the pursuit of conscious inclusion and authentic diversity."

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10 ways DIY companies can improve their diversity and inclusion

DIY retail (RMI) organisations are still struggling to be places that encourage diversity, yet many companies are working hard on their D&I initiatives.

This article explores some of the common D&I challenges facing businesses in the industry, as well as highlighting the steps many of our clients are taking to improve D&I in their businesses.

Diversity and inclusion statistics specific to this trade are hard to come by. But the UK retail and construction industries both seem to be experiencing a diversity deficit.

We wanted to find out how our clients have been dealing with these D&I challenges, and what is working for them when it comes to solving these challenges.

D&I challenges in the retail and construction sectors

Only 15% of construction industry workers are women, with only 2% of onsite workers being female, according to the CIOB. Meanwhile, only 6% of employees are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and only 6% have disabilities. At the same time, 60% of LGBTQ+ employees say they've experienced homophobia at work.

Even in retail, where more than 64% of the workforce is female, only 9.6% of chief executives, 11.4% of chief financial officers and 4.3% of chairs are women. That's according to research from the British Retail Council and MBS Group, who add that just 4.5% of board members and 5.8% of executive committees are from an ethnic minority background compared with 12.5% of the wider UK population.

Getting more representation in leadership positions is a challenge, we conducted our own research amongst our customers earlier this year and at an industry-wide level one of the biggest challenges is that women and people from ethnic minorities are not often working in the more senior roles in the industry and therefore are not realising their full potential.

We also found that businesses within the industry and more broadly need to create the conditions where everyone, regardless of their individual characteristics, values, beliefs, and backgrounds has equal opportunity.

From the heads of D&I and HR specialists we spoke to, the impression is of an industry that struggles to recruit females or people from ethnic minorities due to persistent stereotypes. People traditionally see DIY firms as male and white spaces, making it more challenging to attract diverse talent into the business.

DIY still struggles to attract as many female employees as other parts of the retail sector. This limits the talent pool the company can draw from when it comes to training and promoting the leaders of the future.

That is changing as some companies are aiming to become more widely recognised for the strength of their inclusion and diversity work. Some are appointing more women onto their boards and leadership teams, while many work hard to promote more from diverse groups and to celebrate the achievements of these diverse managers in the media and on social media. So, what are the key takeaways when it comes to what works for our customers?



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Creating and nurturing an inclusive and diverse workplace plays an important role in creating real competitive advantage.

Jason Smith, Managing Director, Artex Ltd.

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1. Recognise the value of diversity

Companies which recognise the value and importance of D&I specifically, and of employee inclusion and satisfaction more broadly, are more likely to improve it. They are also more likely to perform better as a business.

According to Korn Ferry, companies in the top quartile for racial and gender diversity enjoy 70% more growth, 36% better profitability and 19% higher innovation than their respective industry counterparts.

70%

higher growth

36%

higher profits

Experienced by companies in the top quartile for racial and gender diversity.

Source:
Korn Ferry

“

There is far greater value in difference than there is in similarity and any business can reap the rewards by creating an environment that celebrates difference and everyone can excel and grow. Having diverse minds, opinions and ideas makes for more innovative thinking and finding new and successful ways to do things.

Effi-Svende Dammenhain,
Customer Value Chain Director, Artex Ltd.

”

2. Embed D&I into your company culture and values

Companies who are serious about D&I add goals around diversity and inclusion to their company values and mission statements. This can vary from having specific goals, say around increasing the proportion of women in management roles, to drafting a mission statement calling for equal treatment and ensuring that everyone feels safe to bring their whole selves to work.

3. Communicate the importance of D&I regularly

Many companies now host regular meetings and online sessions and internal events around D&I issues. These can vary from being more understanding of colleagues from more diverse backgrounds, to holding events around key themes like Black History Month, Mental Health Awareness week, or International Women's Day.

Other firms send out regular weekly, fortnightly, or monthly e-newsletters and updates to keep employees informed of any D&I initiatives or events coming up. They may also organise regular campaigns, for example around supporting female colleagues going through the menopause, to being aware of LGBTQ+ challenges during Pride Month, etc.

4. Celebrate the achievements of diverse employees

Companies are increasingly posting success stories about diverse employees on their social media and blogs. These range from news of ethnically diverse employees achieving success through mentoring and training programs, to articles written by more senior diverse colleagues to talk about their experiences working at the company.

5. Consider setting up employee resource groups to promote inclusion

Another element common to many companies – especially larger organisations – is to set up employee resource groups (ERGs). Some may have ERGs specifically around diversity, though most go a step further and have themed ERGs, with one for gender issues, one for ethnicity, one for disability, one for mental health issues, one for LGBTQ+ issues, and so on. Still others may have local groups open to all employees that cover multiple topics on a regional basis.

The point of these groups is to operate as an employee-only safe space where employees can raise issues without fear of reprisals. The groups can raise these issues with management or else discuss them within the group and produce potential solutions to suggest to management. These groups tend to work better when given resources and sponsorship from senior leaders within the company.

6. Follow the Rooney Rule when hiring for senior roles

The Rooney Rule is a practice in the US National Football League which dictates that all teams in the league must interview at least one minority candidate for head coaching positions. Several companies have now adopted this for all leadership positions to ensure a more diverse slate of candidates.

7. Be accountable for diversity in your annual report and report your gender pay gap

Most publicly traded companies now report on their D&I as part of the company's annual report, while all companies of a certain size should publish statistics on their gender pay gap.

8. Look at how to promote future business leaders from more diverse groups

Many companies have developed programmes aimed specifically at promoting women into middle management or into senior management from middle management roles. Such programmes may focus on developing business skills or soft skills to help those women to advance in their careers.

Some companies are also doing this for internal candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds, while others are working with organisations such as Diversity in Retail, which runs an annual Ethnic Future Leaders Programme. Companies that are members of this organisation can put forward candidates from their business to take part.

9. Focus on training and development

Courses focused on promoting aspects of diversity awareness can help managers to manage an increasingly more diverse workforce. Courses could be around understanding, around management, around unconscious bias, and so on.

10. Review and update company policies to make them more inclusive

Policies on parental leave should be equal for men and women, not just to help working fathers' bond more with their children, but also to support same sex couples when raising families. Extending this kind of consideration across all benefits and policies to ensure equal treatment goes a long way towards increasing inclusiveness, which in turn helps to make your workplace more attractive for a more diverse range of people.



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