

Scaffolding Insider

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FEBRUARY 2026

BUILDING THE FUTURE

Workforce survey reveals challenges ahead



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FROM THE EDITOR

Skills, and the gap between where we are and where we need to be in the scaffolding sector, have been a hot topic for some time. Now, a new workforce survey by NASC puts statistical meat on the bone, offering a clear picture of the sector’s labour landscape and revealing both the scale of current challenges and the opportunities ahead. I’ve written about this in our feature on pages 13-16.

Over a third of NASC members responded to this important survey, giving a dataset that provides a detailed and credible view of staffing levels, skills needs, recruitment barriers and training priorities across the UK scaffolding industry. The findings paint a picture of a sector working hard to grow and professionalise, but increasingly constrained by shortages of qualified staff and the rising complexity of workforce development.

NASC has been banging the drum regarding skills for some time, both within the industry and to Government, and has launched several initiatives to increase both skills and intake into the sector. Current CISRS reforms are also designed to make a significant dent in the problem. But it’s clear that the road ahead is a long one.

In the survey, more than half of NASC full member organisations report at least one current vacancy, with an average of 4.4 unfilled roles per organisation. Demand for labour in 2026 appears set to intensify. Eighty three percent of organisations expect to recruit next year, with scaffolders at the top of the list.

NASC’s CEO, Clive Dickin, has written to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) regarding the skills gap and the role of overseas labour. The letter talks about the ongoing skills shortages within the scaffolding and access sector and how it is important to find a short-term, pragmatic response through the UK immigration system.

Elsewhere in this issue, we profile Lee Rowswell, Group Director of GKR Scaffolding. Lee has spent more than three decades shaping not only one of the UK’s most successful scaffolding businesses, but also influencing how the wider trade approaches safety, innovation and professionalism. On pages 10-11, read about his journey and the many initiatives he developed to benefit both his company and the industry at large – not to mention delivering some iconic projects.

It’s been a busy month for news, both within NASC and without. There have been significant developments internationally and at home. Catch up with everything in the news pages at the front of the magazine, then read a fascinating Industry View with JMAC Group’s CEO Luis McCarthy, who reflects on a crisis that hit his company and how he used it to learn, build and improve.

And there’s much more besides. I hope you enjoy the issue.



Nick Campion
Editor

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Cover photo:

Courtesy of Lyndon

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INTERNATIONAL ACCESS AND SCAFFOLDING DAY

**14
MAY**

The International Access & Scaffolding Association (IASA) has officially launched International Scaffolding and Access Day, which will be celebrated every year on 14 May. This marks the first fully independent global day formally recognised by IASA and its international membership.

International Scaffolding and Access Day will celebrate the essential role of the scaffolding and access industry worldwide, while at the same time raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. The day provides a unified platform for contractors, employees, manufacturers, educators and industry bodies to stand together in recognition of the professionalism, skill and courage of those who work in scaffolding.

To mark the introduction of the day, IASA has written to Presidents and Prime Ministers across the world, highlighting International Scaffolding and Access Day and the vital contribution the scaffolding sector makes to construction, infrastructure, safety and economic development around the world.

IASA is calling on all scaffolding contractors and their employees globally to celebrate International Scaffolding and Access Day every year by sharing a message of support in recognition of the industry and its workforce.

Speaking about the announcement of this new celebration of the industry, David Brown, Chairman, IASA, said: *"It provides an opportunity to highlight the vital role our industry plays in construction, infrastructure and safety, while also focusing on the challenges and opportunities that will shape its future. By coming together on 14 May each year, we can promote excellence, inspire the next generation of talent, drive innovation and strengthen standards across the world. This day is for everyone in scaffolding to stand with pride in the work they do and the difference it makes."*

International Scaffolding and Access Day will be centred around five key global challenges identified by IASA as fundamental to the future success and sustainability of the scaffolding industry:

- Improving the Image of Scaffolding: promoting professionalism, safety, skill and pride across the sector.
- Developing Global Talent: attracting, training and retaining the next generation of scaffolding professionals worldwide.
- Driving Innovation: encouraging new technologies, systems and methods that improve safety, productivity and sustainability.
- Strengthening Compliance: supporting high standards, ethical practice and effective compliance to protect workers, clients and the public.
- Standardising Training: working towards globally recognised training standards that enhance competence, consistency and workforce mobility.

For 2026, IASA has selected the day's theme as: **"Recognising the industry. Supporting its people. Shaping its future."**

IASA encourages organisations and individuals to mark 14 May by engaging with colleagues, clients and communities, and by sharing messages, images and stories that demonstrate pride in the industry and commitment to its continued development.

Since IASA launched with six members in September, it has now grown to 10 members (representing 11 countries), with a combined GDP of \$65trn and over 2 billion people. This includes the two biggest economies in the world (and three of the top five).



David Brown

David Brown was recently announced as its new Chairman, following the death of former IASA Chairman, Wayne Connolly. David Brown currently serves as Chairman and President of NASC and brings a wealth of leadership experience and a strong commitment to advancing safety, standards and international collaboration across the access and scaffolding sector.

"I am honoured to take on the role of Chairman of IASA at this difficult and important time," he said. *"Wayne was a highly respected leader whose passion for the industry and belief in international collaboration helped define IASA's purpose. I look forward to building on his legacy and working closely with the IASA Board to continue promoting safety, best practice and shared standards worldwide."*





TOP FIVE: TG27 CLADDING OF SCAFFOLDING

This month, NASC's Technical team focus on the top five messages to be taken from TG27 about the cladding of scaffolding.

1. Correct selection and installation of cladding is critical for safety

Different cladding materials – debris netting, reinforced plastic sheeting, and shrink-wrap – have distinct properties, fixing methods, and load bearing implications. Choosing the right type of cladding and installing it correctly is essential to maintain encapsulation and scaffold integrity as well as compliance with safety requirements.

2. Fixing frequency must be as TG20/TG30 or Design

Wind significantly increases the loads imposed on cladded scaffolds. Types and the frequency of fixings, scaffold tie loads, and scaffold configuration must be matched to suit applicable wind factors (low to extreme). Incorrect spacing or insufficient types of fixings can lead to failures of the cladding and overloading of the scaffolding.

3. Flame-retardant sheeting is required in many situations

Where flame-retardant sheeting is specified by the client or required by risk assessment, only sheeting which has been certified to TS or LPS standards should be used.

4. Flame-retardant sheeting will require flame retardant ink

Where sheeting is printed with images, logos or text, the flame retardancy of the material could be affected. It is therefore important to verify that the TS or LPS certificate refers to both plain and printed material.

5. Shrink-wrap requires enhanced design and safe installation

Shrink-wrap sheeting creates a non-permeable, drum-tight and water tight barrier around a scaffold. However, if it is not fixed to the scaffold at frequent and regular intervals it can impose high localised loads on the scaffold structure, for which it is not designed. It should therefore be attached with fixings as specified within TG27 or a bespoke design.

SCAFFEX26 – THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Since its initial, relatively small-scale launch in Belfast in 2024, ScaffEx has gone on to establish itself as a major moment in the global scaffolding calendar. Preparations for ScaffEx26 are now well underway.

Richard Cree, NASC's Head of Business Development, says the 2026 show is already incredibly popular. *"Even with a much bigger exhibition space, stand space for the expo is already selling out. We've gone up in size by over a third and there are very few large spaces left open. The response has been excellent."*

He credits this to ScaffEx25: *"The feedback from last year was exceptional. We sent out a visitor feedback survey and, while we were expecting it to be positive, we were all surprised by how much value visitors and exhibitors got from the event – and how much business was conducted. We also had anecdotal feedback of some pretty major deals being struck at some of the stands."*

The survey revealed:

- 89% of respondents rated their overall experience of the event as excellent (54%) or good (35%)
- Quality of exhibitors, the relevance of products and services on display and the quality of networking opportunities were all rated as 9/10
- 77% of attendees achieved their objectives of discovering new products at ScaffEx25, while 82% achieved their goal of meeting suppliers
- 88% were able to network with industry peers
- 55% were able to source materials for a specific upcoming project
- 49% made a purchase or placed an order at the show

With almost half of delegates reporting placing an order at the show, Richard Cree adds: *"There was a real sense that people were making the most of the opportunity to meet*



most, if not all, of their supply chain in one place. It really was the scaffolding and access world under one roof."

Plans for 2026 include a larger exhibition hall that will allow for a wider variety of exhibitors from across the scaffolding and access sector, with new suppliers coming on board and eager to take part.

Some of the favourite features from last year, such as the demo zone, will be back this year, but there will also be plenty of new features and more opportunities for delegates to try out or experience different products and services.

"We have many of our major supporters back," explains Richard Cree. *"For example, it's great to know that our principal sponsor, Layher UK, is back and looking to take what they deliver to new heights. That's really what it is all about. As much as the ScaffEx team is planning some amazing new features, this is really about suppliers across the industry taking advantage of a wonderful opportunity to shine. A lot of people were surprised by the show last year and what it delivered. Having seen and experienced it first-hand, they understand the potential of the venue better and I expect this year there will be innovation, new ideas and plenty of excitement right across the event."*

GLOBAL SCAFFOLDING SECTOR SET TO HIT \$16BN BY 2030

The global scaffolding and accessories market is set to grow by at least 8% a year between now and 2030, expanding from a total value of \$12bn today to \$16bn in four years' time. This is according to new research by data research firm Researchandmarkets.com which has published a new report, The Scaffolding and Accessories Market Report 2026.

The research looks at global statistics, considers competitor market shares in each region and analyses major industry trends. The report highlights that scaffolding and associated accessories has been on a steady growth path in recent years.

The authors put the steady growth down to "rising demand for temporary construction support, the adoption of modular scaffold systems, and expanded industrial construction projects, alongside growth in shipbuilding and the oil and gas sectors."

Clive Dickin, Group CEO at NASC and CISRS, said, "While the report's authors describe the market as 'soaring', I see

it more as a steady but expected expansion based on the hard work and innovation of those working in scaffolding around the world.

"Our work with the International Association for Scaffolding and Access (IASA) has shown us that, while the details and preferences of individual markets may vary, there is a consistent theme of growth and a growing recognition of the importance of scaffolding and access as a crucial part of all economies."

The report lists the factors propelling growth as, "Smart monitoring and automated solutions, adoption of adjustable scaffold components, and lightweight materials development." Other prominent trends identified include "AI-driven safety measures, operational controls, and the integration of smart material tracking systems on construction sites."



URGENT RECALL: RIDGEGEAR



Ridgear has issued an urgent Stop Use Notice for the following product:

- RIDGEGEAR Fall Arrest Block with Recovery Winch
- RGA4 & RGA4H
- Date of manufacture between 03/04/2020 and 30/01/2026

The company says: "A review of product conformity information has identified that the product cannot currently be confirmed as fully compliant with all applicable regulatory requirements for Category III Personal Protective Equipment, including the conformity assessment obligations under Regulation (EU) 2016/425 and the Personal Protective Equipment (Enforcement) Regulations 2018."

Ridgear advises anyone in possession of the affected product to:

- Immediately stop using the product.
- Remove the product from service and ensure it is not issued, supplied, or used.
- Secure/quarantine the product to prevent inadvertent re-use.
- Contact RIDGEGEAR at salesrg@unitex-uk.com or your RIDGEGEAR Area Sales Manager.

BSR GOES IT ALONE

As from 27 January 2026, the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) formally separated from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and is now a standalone regulator sponsored by, and reporting directly to, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The BSR was initially housed within HSE following the Grenfell Inquiry to enable rapid mobilisation using an established regulatory framework. However, governance and accountability were complex, and the move to a dedicated body is intended to provide clearer oversight and sharper accountability.

This change should help the BSR focus resources more effectively, supporting its recent operational overhaul and helping to ease the ongoing Gateway 2 approval bottlenecks affecting higher-risk building projects.

SCAFFCHAMP COMPLETES 20-TEAM LINE-UP

Scaffmag is reporting that ScaffChamp, which is sponsored by Layher, has confirmed the final list of 20 teams for its 2026 competition, following nearly five months of registrations and enquiries from around the world.

Oleg Abramov, CMO and PR lead at Layher Baltic, said the selection process was deliberately rigorous to maintain fairness and professionalism.

The final line-up includes a record number of new regions. Australia and Peru will make their first appearances, while the United States returns to the competition, and there are new teams confirmed from Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Greece and Spain. Returning European teams include Romania, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Italy, the UK, Ireland, Sweden and Estonia. Asia will again be represented by Mongolia.

Tickets are on sale now.



PICTURE CREDIT: Scaffchamp



SQUARE MILE SKYLINE TO TRANSFORM

The City of London Corporation has revealed a new skyline CGI showcasing what the Square Mile's tall buildings will look like in around six years' time. The images show what the City of London's financial district will look like once all of the buildings that have either been granted planning permission, or are already under construction, are completed following a record year of planning approvals in 2025.

Over half a million square metres of office space was granted planning permission in the City in 2025, equivalent to more than ten Gherkins, with around half of this amount already under construction.

It means the Square Mile will be busy with building activity in the years ahead, with significant projects such as 1 Undershaft already underway, and with 85 and 60 Gracechurch Street starting imminently.

£14BN FOR WELSH RAIL

The Prime Minister has signed off a £14bn overhaul of Welsh rail, confirming seven new stations and almost £445m of immediate funding to get schemes moving. This should support 12,000 jobs across Wales and drive a decade of rail construction.

There will be seven new station projects: Magor and Undy, Llanwern, Cardiff East, Newport West, Somerton, Cardiff Parkway and a new stop serving Deeside Industrial Park. Ministers have also earmarked £60m to transform Cardiff Central railway station, and a further £40m to increase line speeds on the South Wales Relief Lines between Cardiff and the Severn Tunnel, creating capacity for additional passenger and freight services. Up to £30m more is being invested at Cardiff West Junction to allow more frequent Core Valley Lines trains.

In North Wales, upgrades around Padeswood will ease freight bottlenecks on the Wrexham–Liverpool line; and there are safety and service works on the North Wales Coast Mainline.



Kier Starmer

PICTURE CREDIT: Labour Party



FOUR ARRESTED OVER TEST CENTRE FRAUD



PICTURE CREDIT: Kindel Media

Four men have been arrested following a police probe into a suspected fraudulent construction test centre. Officers from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary's Economic Crime Unit raided the independent testing centre in Winchester over the weekend after an investigation following a tip-off from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) that the centre was accepting payment to help people fraudulently pass safety tests to help gain CSCS cards.

Detective Inspector Jamie Johnson, Head of the Economic Crime Unit said, *"Helping people fraudulently pass these tests puts not only the subject themselves, but also those working around them, at serious risk of harm, as they are entering building sites without proper training and understanding of how to carry out work safely."*

"To be knowingly involved in and profiting off of an operation that could, in the worse case scenario, cause serious injury or even death through malpractice is something that we take incredibly seriously, and we are working alongside the Construction Industry Training Board to ensure anyone involved in this criminal activity is brought to justice."

FORMER CARILLION CHIEF FINED £237,700

Former Carillion group chief executive Richard Howson has been fined £237,700 for his part in misleading statements issued by the failed contractor.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said: *"As group chief executive, Mr Howson was aware of serious financial troubles in Carillion's UK construction business. He failed to reflect this in company announcements or alert its board and audit committee, leading to poor oversight."*

The FCA found that Mr Howson acted recklessly and was knowingly concerned in breaches by Carillion of the Market Abuse Regulation and the Listing Rules. During the period in question, Carillion's group finance director was first Richard Adam and then Zafar Khan. They were fined £232,800 and £138,900, respectively, in January 2026.

INDUSTRY VIEW

This month, JMAC Group's CEO Luis McCarthy reflects on a crisis that hit his company and how he used it to learn, build and improve. It is testament to his style of leadership that he shares this challenge with the broader industry in the hope that others can learn from his experience. Read on to find out how Luis and his colleagues turned a crisis into an opportunity to be better than ever.



Leadership and Learning Through Crisis

In January 2025, JMAC Group experienced one of the most challenging moments in its history. CEO Luis McCarthy reflects on that period – not to revisit failure, but to share the leadership lessons that come when things go wrong.

Luis took over JMAC at just 23 years old in 2012. At the time, the business turned over £80,000 a year. Founded in 1981 by his grandfather, James McCarthy Senior, JMAC has since grown into a group of specialist companies, operating nationwide across industrial, access, and hire and sales services, with international manufacturing and distribution partners who sell its patented products around the globe. Luis takes up the tale: *“The growth of the business has been built on experience, accreditation, and innovation – but January served as a reminder that no business, regardless of scale or capability, is immune to crisis.*

“On 24 January 2025, a 42-metre temporary roof canopy collapsed at the Carlisle Sands Centre during Storm Éowyn. Thankfully, no one was injured, but the incident presented immediate risks to people, reputation, and performance.

“Leadership in moments like this comes down to five fundamentals. First, assess quickly. Facts must be gathered without assumption, and the situation viewed holistically; from site safety and engineering, to commercial, legal, cultural, and client considerations.

“Second, communicate clearly. In an age of instant media coverage, consistent and factual communication is critical, both externally and internally. Avoiding speculation protects trust.

“Third, mobilise teams. JMAC immediately established dedicated site, investigation, engineering, and client liaison

teams, each with clear responsibility.

“Fourth, act decisively. Immediate controls were implemented, progress monitored, and decisions taken without delay.

“Finally, review and adapt. Crisis management is not linear; it requires constant reassessment and the willingness to pivot.

“A visible site presence also proved vital. Being present built confidence with the client and reinforced accountability.

“The experience highlighted important learnings. Commercially, it reinforced the need for strong governance, contract risk categorisation, and assessment of liabilities – safeguards that proved to be invaluable.

“From a design perspective, the event highlighted the need for industry-wide improvement. This included clearer client design briefs aligned to BS5975, improved designer training and proven competence, recognising scaffolding design as a specialist discipline, alongside updated wind loading guidance. I also called for clearer direction within BS5975 for both main contractors and subcontractors, and for the inclusion of formal wind management planning within TG9 to better reflect the realities of temporary roof and suspended access works.

“Crucially, JMAC and the client chose collaboration over conflict; and support from consultants, engineers, insurers, suppliers, and even competitors, underlined the strength of the scaffolding community when it matters most.

“JMAC’s belief from this challenging situation is that every failing is an opportunity to build strength. The experience has sharpened JMAC’s systems, leadership, and resolve – reinforcing that true leadership is not defined by avoiding challenges, but by how you respond when they arise.”

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LEE ROWSWELL: A LIFETIME OF COMPETITION AND COLLABORATION

As Group Director of GKR Scaffolding, Lee Rowswell has spent more than three decades shaping not only one of the UK's most successful scaffolding businesses, but also influencing how the wider trade approaches safety, innovation and professionalism.

GKR Scaffolding was founded in 1993, operating from a modest yard in Gravesend with just two lorries. Rowswell took over the business from his father, Graham, with a clear focus on raising standards and proving what a specialist scaffolding contractor could deliver on complex, high profile projects. Today, GKR is the largest independently owned scaffolding company in the UK, employing more than 350 people and delivering work across more than 50 live projects at any one time.

Despite that growth, the business has retained a distinctly family run feel. For Rowswell, this has never been accidental. In an industry where reputation is earned on site, not in the boardroom, maintaining close relationships with operatives, managers, and clients alike has been central to how GKR operates.

That approach is reflected in the company's strong levels of repeat business and long standing client relationships. Trust, Rowswell believes, remains the foundation of successful scaffolding delivery - particularly in London's complex and congested built environment, where access challenges are rarely straightforward.

Rowswell's perspective is rooted firmly in personal experience. He began his career on the tools and understands first hand the physical demands of scaffolding work. That early grounding has shaped his leadership style and his long standing focus on health as well as safety: he knows how physically demanding scaffolding can be and he has constantly highlighted the need for more health focused initiatives in the industry - to put health on the same

footing as safety.

This belief has influenced many of GKR's operational decisions. While safety compliance has long been a given within the industry, Rowswell has consistently pushed for a broader view - one that recognises the cumulative impact of manual handling, fatigue and long term musculoskeletal strain on scaffolders' careers.

Innovation has played a major role in addressing these challenges. Under Rowswell's leadership, GKR has developed and delivered bespoke scaffolding solutions on some of the





UK's most technically demanding projects. At Battersea Power Station, the company erected what was once eight linear miles of scaffold tube. At Canary Wharf, GKR delivered a complex cantilevered scaffold that proved to be the only viable access solution during the tender process.

Perhaps the most widely recognised innovation associated with Rowswell's career came during work on The Shard. Faced with the risks associated with working at extreme height, GKR worked with developers to create the Elimin8 tethered scaffold fitting, allowing all components to be tethered when working at height.

Rowswell chose not to patent the product. Instead, it was shared across the industry so other contractors could benefit from the safety improvement. For many within the trade, this decision exemplified Rowswell's wider approach: competitive on delivery, collaborative on safety.

Training and development have been another consistent focus. GKR introduced an award winning virtual reality training platform designed to help operatives prepare psychologically for high risk situations before encountering them on site. The immersive system marked a shift away from traditional classroom based training and towards experiential learning.

This was followed by the launch of the GKR Academy, an internal accredited training programme aimed at upskilling project managers and operational leaders. Developed with a neurodiverse approach in mind, the academy reflects Rowswell's openness about his own neurodiversity and his belief that the industry benefits from recognising different ways of thinking and learning.

More recently, GKR became the first scaffolding contractor to implement artificial intelligence backed monitoring to improve health and safety outcomes, partnering with Soter Analytics to address manual handling risks. The technology provides real time insight into movement patterns, allowing early intervention to reduce musculoskeletal injuries across both yard and site operations.

The initiative has attracted attention from clients and

regulators, with Rowswell taking an active role in sharing lessons learned, including hosting webinars alongside the Health and Safety Executive.

For Rowswell, however, technology is only valuable if it delivers real world benefits and genuinely adds value to his people and his business.

Beyond health and safety, Rowswell has also positioned GKR at the forefront of sustainability within the scaffolding sector. Anticipating the implications of the Paris Agreement, the business achieved net zero across Scope 1 and 2 emissions and signed up to the Science Based Targets initiative, with a defined roadmap to achieve net zero Scope 3 emissions by 2045. GKR was the first scaffolding contractor in Europe to make such a commitment.

Rowswell's influence extends well beyond GKR. He has held senior roles within NASC, including four years as London and South East Regional Chair, and currently serves on the NASC Audit Committee. He regularly brings senior leaders together on major projects and is widely regarded as a go-to figure for advice on non standard or technically challenging scaffolding schemes.

Those who have worked alongside him point to his willingness to share knowledge and support others across the trade. In a competitive sector, Rowswell has consistently argued that raising standards collectively is essential to maintaining the UK scaffolding industry's global reputation.

Having navigated economic downturns, material shortages and the unprecedented challenges of Covid 19, Rowswell has led GKR through each period with consistency and long-term focus. The business has emerged stronger from each challenge, supported by loyal teams, trusted client relationships, and a reputation for delivering complex work safely and professionally.

For Rowswell, success is not measured solely by turnover or landmark projects. It is reflected in the careers built within the business, the safety improvements shared across the trade, and the professional standards he has helped embed within the industry.

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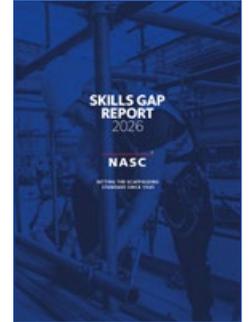
TG30 THE FUTURE OF
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BUILDING THE FUTURE:

INSIDE THE NASC SKILLS GAP SURVEY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE SCAFFOLDING SECTOR

As the UK construction industry continues to navigate tight labour markets, rising demand and increasing regulatory expectations, scaffolding firms find themselves under growing pressure to recruit, retain and develop the skilled workforce needed to deliver projects safely and efficiently. The new Skills Gap Survey from NASC offers a clear picture of the sector’s labour landscape and reveals both the scale of current challenges and the opportunities ahead.



With responses gathered from 151 full member organisations - representing a third of full NASC member firms - the dataset provides a detailed and credible view of staffing levels, skills needs, recruitment barriers, and training priorities across the UK scaffolding industry. The findings paint a picture of a sector working hard to grow and professionalise, but increasingly constrained by shortages of qualified staff and the rising complexity of workforce development.

The Current Picture

Across all full NASC members, the typical organisation employs 54 directly employed staff and a further nine contractors or subcontractors, meaning outsourced labour accounts for around 14% of the total workforce. Scaffolders and supervisory grades dominate, making up 42% and 24% of the workforce respectively. Labourers and trainees together account for another 24%, while managers make up the remaining 10%.

Q5 Number of direct employees (average) / Q8 Number of contractors (average)
Base: All respondents answering; n= 148



Operational activity is not evenly spread across the country. The South East remains the busiest region, with 40% of respondents listing it as their most active area of work. The North West (23%), North East (17%) and East Midlands (15%) follow. This uneven distribution has implications not only for workforce deployment but also for recruitment pressures, which do not neatly align with demand.

Organisations estimate that around 7% of their directly employed staff are within four years of retirement. Extrapolated across all NASC full members, that equates to roughly 1,459 experienced workers who may exit the industry by 2029. A further 17% of staff have unknown retirement timelines, meaning the real short term attrition risk may be significantly higher.

For a sector that already struggles to recruit sufficiently skilled workers, the retirement cliff represents a significant long term challenge.

The Immediate Pressure Point

More than half of NASC full member organisations (56%) report at least one current vacancy, with an average of 4.4 unfilled roles per organisation. When extrapolated across the membership, this suggests a total of around 1,760 open positions.

Unsurprisingly, scaffolders are the single greatest area of unmet demand:

- 631 scaffolder vacancies (36% of total)
- 375 advanced scaffolders/supervisors
- 313 trainees
- 310 labourers
- 80 managers
- 51 specialist roles (drivers, administrators, designers, etc.)

Worryingly, scaffolders and advanced scaffolders are also the roles most commonly described as ‘hard to recruit’. Nearly half of respondents (46%) find scaffolder roles particularly difficult to fill, closely followed by advanced scaffolders and supervisors (43%).

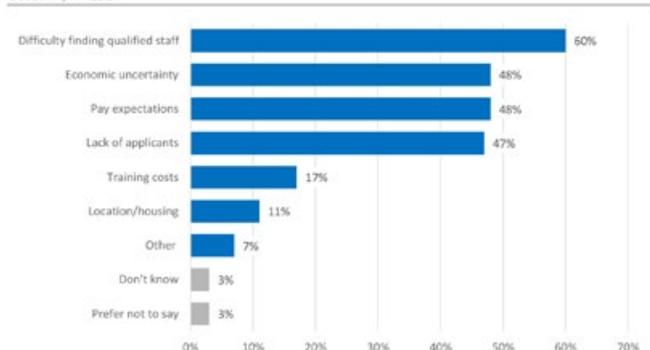
Vacancy rates vary widely by region. Organisations operating in Wales report an average of over nine vacancies each - more than double the UK average. Scotland also exhibits above average vacancy levels. By contrast, vacancy rates in most English regions sit close to the national average.



PICTURE CREDIT: Simian

Q20. What barriers, if any, could limit your ability to expand your workforce? Please select all that apply.

Base: All; n= 151



Interestingly, the regions with the busiest workloads are not always those with the highest vacancy rates, which suggest that labour may be flowing toward high demand areas, leaving less active regions undersupplied. This raises questions for national workforce strategy: localised shortages may not be fully visible unless organisations measure and report them consistently.

Appetite for Growth

Looking ahead, demand for labour in 2026 appears set to intensify. Eighty three percent of organisations expect to recruit next year, with scaffolders again at the top of the list.

The projected numbers are significant:

- 5.4 scaffolders per organisation (average across all respondents)
- Similar demand across advanced scaffolders (21%), trainees (19%) and labourers (18%)

Across all job roles, NASC members anticipate needing to recruit around 5,954 workers in 2026 – roughly three times the current number of vacancies, which serves as a reminder that recruitment reflects not only unfilled roles but ongoing sector growth and the regular churn that is familiar in construction labour markets.

Confidence Declines

If 2026 recruitment confidence is relatively strong, expectations weaken considerably for 2027 and beyond. Only 65% of organisations feel able to estimate next year hiring needs, and by the 2028–2030 horizon, nearly half (46%) cannot offer an estimate at all.

This decline in forecasting confidence reflects:

- The unpredictability of construction pipelines
- Uncertainty around economic conditions
- Limited long term workforce planning capability, especially among smaller firms

The survey identifies several key constraints on recruitment, with the biggest being:

- Difficulty finding qualified staff (60%)
- Economic uncertainty (48%)
- Pay expectations (48%)
- Lack of applicants (47%)
- Training costs (17%)
- Location/housing costs (11%)

The uneven experience of recruitment pressures means policy interventions must be flexible, acknowledging the different operating realities across firm sizes.

The Impact of Vacancies

Recruitment timelines provide further insight into the labour market’s constraints. Labourer roles are the fastest to fill: 35% of firms can recruit a labourer within two weeks. But for scaffolders, advanced scaffolders and managers, recruitment times lengthen considerably.

Managerial roles are the slowest to fill, with 60% of organisations taking two months or longer to fill a management vacancy. While operational roles are undeniably the biggest numerical challenge, management recruitment difficulties raise concerns about leadership succession, project oversight and compliance capability across the industry.

Average current vacancies per organisation by region:

Base: Universe; n= 404 (extrapolated from Base: All respondents; n=151)



Average vacancies per organisation, shown by regions of busiest operation:		
Region	Base size	Av. vacancies per org.
UK	151	4.4
Nett: England	137	4.1
Wales	12	9.3
Scotland	18	6.5
NW	34	5.6
Ireland	5	5.4
W.Mids	18	4.2
SE (inc London & East Anglia)	61	4.1
SW	36	4.1
NE	25	2.9
E.Mids	23	2.9
Channel Islands	0	-

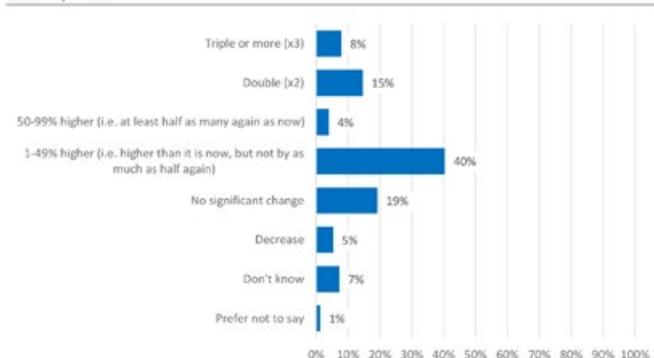
Eighty one percent of NASC members report experiencing operational and financial impacts from unfilled roles. The most common include:

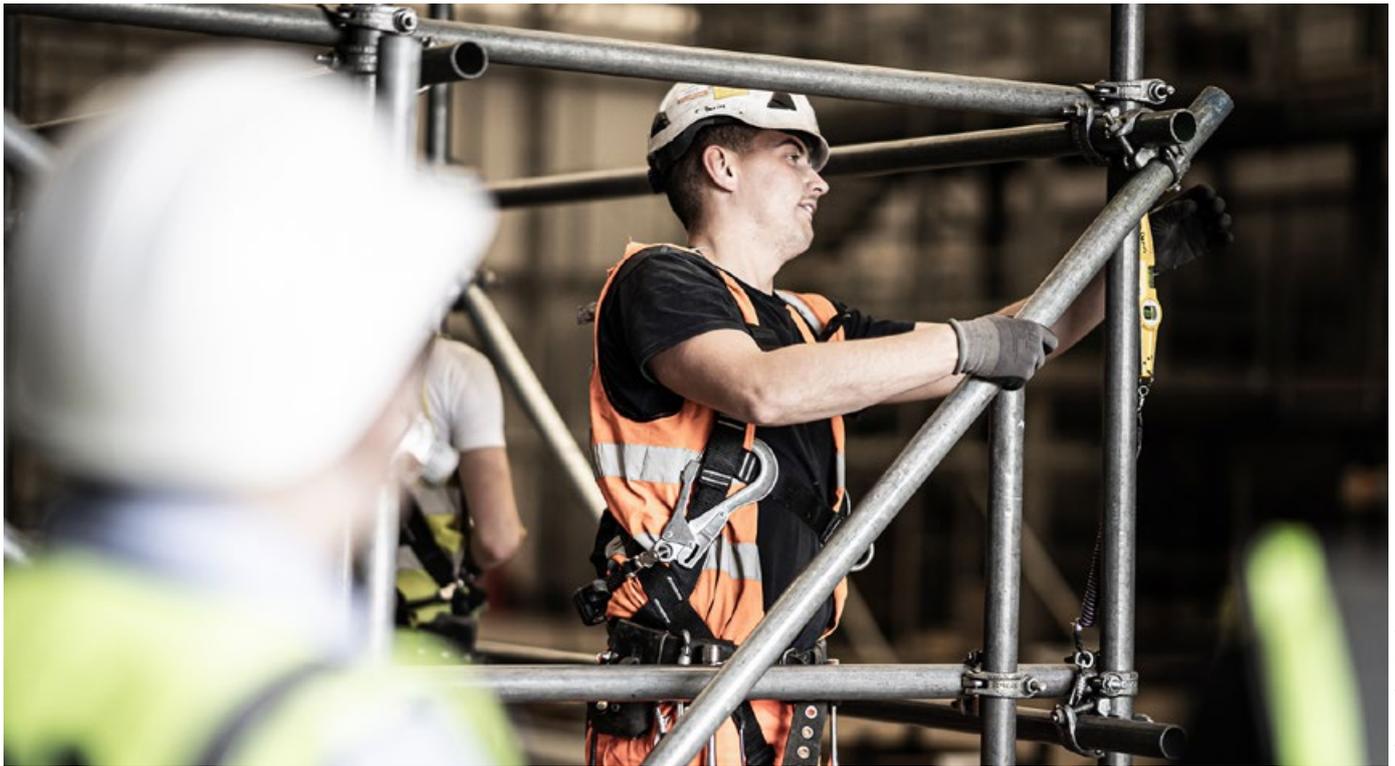
- Reduced capacity to take on new contracts (47%)
- Increased workload for existing staff (46%)
- Higher overtime costs (34%)
- Lost revenue/profitability (34%)
- Lower productivity (33%)
- Increased reliance on contractors (25%)
- Increased staff turnover or stress (21%)

The largest organisations report the widest range of negative impacts, which suggests that staffing shortages pose strategic risks, not just operational ones.

Q19. How do you expect your staff numbers to change over the next five years?

Base: All; n= 151

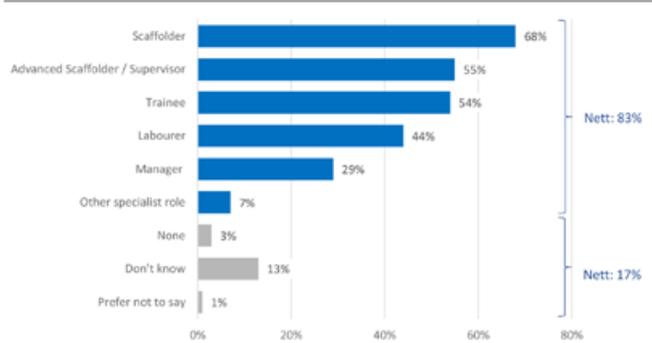




PICTURE CREDIT: Simian

Incidence of anticipated vacancies in 2026:

Q13. Looking ahead, do you anticipate needing to recruit additional staff in any of the following roles in the next year? Please select all that apply.
Base: All; n= 151



Most scaffolding firms continue to recruit locally. Forty three percent never recruit outside their local area, and only 7% do so frequently. International recruitment is even rarer, with 81% of firms never hiring scaffolders from outside the UK.

This limited reliance on non local or overseas labour restricts the sector’s ability to respond to localised shortages or sudden surges in demand.

Training next steps

Unsurprisingly, pretty much all NASC members provide CISRS accredited training, but members also have strong views on where training needs to evolve (a process that is indeed well underway). Scaffolding companies highlight:

- The need for more geographically accessible and affordable training
- Reforms to training structure and rigour
- Clearer progression pathways
- Earlier engagement with young people

- Stronger industry promotion
 - Better Government support and regulation
- Employers also express concern about the inconsistency of training quality and the risk of rushed or poorly sequenced training.

Respondents offered extensive suggestions to NASC, which can be summarised as:

- Improve access and affordability of training (More funding, localised delivery, bootcamps, weekend or in-house options.)
- Build a stronger pipeline of young entrants (Engage schools, colleges, pre-18 programmes, and apprenticeships.)
- Reform training structures and raise standards (Better sequencing, longer competence periods, clearer pathways.)
- Improve retention and workforce quality (Address poaching, pay structures, and employment status issues.)
- Promote the industry more effectively (Modernise scaffolding’s image and communicate career progression.)
- Lobby Government and influence policy (Funding for training, levy reform, regulatory clarity.)
- Broaden recruitment (Engage women, veterans, ex offenders, care leavers and international labour.)

In its entirety, the NASC skills gap survey highlights a sector with strong demand, high growth expectations and a clear commitment to training and professionalism. But it also exposes systemic weaknesses: if the scaffolding industry is to meet the demands of future construction programmes, it must strengthen its talent pipeline, professionalise its training pathways, and broaden its recruitment reach. The next five years will be critical.

A LETTER FOR CHANGE



Clive Dickin

CEO of NASC and CISRS, Clive Dickin, has written to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) on behalf of NASC and CISRS in direct response to the consultation currently being undertaken by the Department for Business and Trade regarding the skills gap and the

role of overseas labour. MAC is an independent public body that advises the Government on migration issues.

The letter sets out clear, evidence-based findings that point to significant and ongoing skills shortages within the access and scaffolding sector and how it is important to find a short-term, pragmatic response through the UK immigration system.

The letter calls on the research contained within the Skills Report commissioned by NASC and CISRS, giving MAC a comprehensive rundown of the statistics contained within it, which evidence a clear and acute shortage of scaffolders.

The letter explains that the research does not factor in the additional labour capacity that will be required to deliver the Government's strategic ambitions for increased house building, major infrastructure programmes, energy transition projects and long-term asset maintenance. Any acceleration in housing

delivery or infrastructure investment will place further and immediate pressure on an already constrained scaffolding and access workforce. As such, the scale of the shortage identified in the report should be regarded as a conservative baseline rather than a worst-case scenario.

The letter explains that CISRS and NASC recognise their responsibility to address these challenges through domestic skills development, and huge changes are underway. However, the research indicates that these measures will take between three and six years to deliver meaningful improvements in workforce availability.

Therefore, NASC is seeking a short-term, pragmatic and flexible approach to scaffolding and access-related immigration. The organisation specifically requests that the scaffolding and access role be recognised by the Migration Advisory Committee and added to the Shortage Salary List. This would provide a targeted, temporary mechanism to stabilise workforce capacity while domestic training reforms take effect and while industry scales up to meet increased national demand.

This is a necessary transitional measure to protect safety, maintain productivity and ensure the timely delivery of housing, infrastructure, energy and maintenance programmes that depend on safe and competent scaffolding and access provision.

NASC CEO, Clive Dickin, has requested meetings to explain the proposals in more detail and to support the Department for Business and Trade and the Migration Advisory Committee with further technical evidence as required.

What the industry says

Addressing the skills gap is a critical issue in scaffolding and the broader construction industry. Here are just a few views on an issue that provokes strong opinions:

"The reality is that the UK simply does not have enough trained construction workers to meet the scale of our ambitions. We are already short of tens of thousands of skilled people, and it takes years to train them. If we want to build the homes, hospitals and infrastructure the country needs, then we have to accept that migrant labour is not just helpful – it is essential. Without it, projects will slow down, costs will rise, and targets will be missed."

Mark Reynolds
– CEO, Mace Group

"We have set ourselves extremely demanding housing and infrastructure goals, but we have not matched those ambitions with a workforce strategy. The

construction sector has been warning for years that it cannot recruit enough people domestically. If we are serious about delivering 300,000 homes a year, we will need significant numbers of workers from overseas. This is not a political point – it is a practical one. The maths simply does not work without migration."

Lord Kerslake
– Former Head of the Civil Service

"Major infrastructure projects depend on a steady supply of skilled labour, and at present that supply is not coming from within the UK. We can either accept delays and cost overruns, or we can accept that migrant workers are part of the solution. The idea that we can deliver everything we have planned without them is simply unrealistic."

Sir John Armitt
– Chair, National Infrastructure Commission

"For too long, employers in sectors like construction have relied on immigration as a quick fix for labour shortages. That

approach is not sustainable. It depresses wages, discourages investment in training, and leaves the country vulnerable to external shocks. We need to break this cycle. The answer is not to import more labour, but to train British workers, improve productivity, and build a resilient domestic workforce."

Suella Braverman
– Former UK Home Secretary

"We cannot keep building an economy that depends on importing labour while failing to invest in our own young people. Construction is a perfect example. There are thousands of young people who could thrive in these jobs if we gave them the right training and support. Instead, we have allowed skills shortages to develop and then filled the gaps with migrant workers. That is not a long term strategy – it is a sticking plaster."

Andy Burnham
– Mayor of Greater Manchester

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A BUYER'S GUIDE TO SCAFFOLDING INSURANCE



Luigi Maggio

Having the right insurance is a vital part of good business management. Here, Luigi Maggio, Chartered Insurance

Broker and Director at McCarron Coates, explains his top tips for buying insurance.

Insurance is a costly expense for any business. The only way to ensure you get genuine value for money is to make sure you achieve the best offer in terms of cover, premium and service. It's more complex than simply picking the cheapest or finding something that's reassuringly expensive. Following the few simple steps below will help you get the best value.

Prepare properly

Treat the purchase of your insurance the same as you would when undertaking a contract of your own. Approach it in a timely manner with a broker who will represent your business to its full potential and one that understands NASC's standards of practice, demonstrating how you operate at the highest levels. But at the same time, it is important not to approach multiple brokers, as this is counterproductive when the insurance firms receive your opportunity. Limit yourself to a maximum of two brokers you have confidence in.

Agree a strategy with your broker

It's important to agree the best approach for how you engage with insurers and which ones are the most suitable for your company. Many insurers specialise in different areas of scaffolding, depending on the locations you work at and the type of customers you serve. You should be advised on which insurer is best suited and where they currently stand in terms of strategy, competitiveness and so on.

Understand why you are providing the information you are

Apart from the obvious financial information required to secure your insurance, you should be asked to provide examples of risk management, Health & Safety, and site management. The aim of your broker is to highlight that you have strong processes in place and therefore represent a reduced risk to the insurer. An understanding of how you manage your team, contracts and supporting documents will always deliver you the best outcome.

Consider the proposition presented to you

An understanding of the market cycle will help you to consider the various options presented. The misconception is that you must approach all insurers every year to secure the best terms - but this is not the case. Be aware of anything in your current policy that will affect your decision when moving insurer. For example, is your policy on a 90% minimum and deposit and, if so, what does this mean? Do you have ongoing claims with your current insurer, and are you considering moving while these are ongoing? What conditions are attached to any new offer, and is the new cover the same or more restrictive?

By preparing properly and asking yourself some simple questions, you can make sure you get the best insurance for you and your business, and the best news of all is that it doesn't have to cost the earth.

Visit <https://www.nascinsurance.com> to find out more or call 0113 298 3489 to speak to a broker who really understands the industry and your business needs, and discover how NASC Insurance Services can help.

14 INTO ONE: NEW TRAINING MANUAL LAUNCHES

CISRS is launching its brand new CISRS Training Manual, a significant step forward as the organisation seeks to consolidate, clarify and enhance current training provision. In the past there were individual CAP (CISRS Accredited Publication) booklets for every course; now CISRS has amalgamated all of these booklets into one comprehensive training manual, which is the single point of reference for the whole CISRS framework.

The new training manual was launched to the training centres, who have continuous access to it via the CISRS website, last month. It will be updated every June with updates being planned and executed in a much more coherent way, and with future planned updates being flagged in advance. From the next iteration in June 2026, there will be new photography to help illustrate the information.

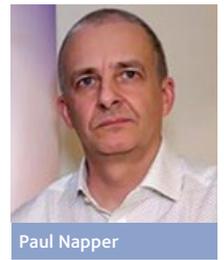
The new training manual also incorporates information about all other relevant elements of training, such as pricing, the learning management system, information on the new training centre specification and so on. It brings everything together in one coherent manual, rather than all the previous CAP booklets having different and variable information in them. Previously, different booklets would not only have had much repetition but also confusing or contradictory information because they had developed organically and piecemeal. Now that the 14 CAP booklets have been brought into one training manual, all information has been consolidated, deduplicated and with any remaining variations

in advice clearly noted.

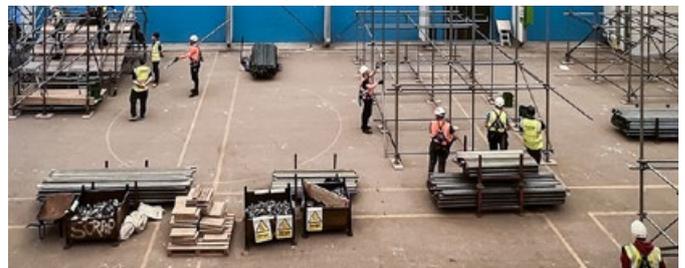
This is a key step in the move towards all training centres offering the same training in the same way and to the same high quality, so trainees do not experience variability across centres or regions.

Paul Napper, Head of Training and Education at NASC and CISRS adds:

“The scale of the project was huge, which is why it has taken a while – and I know it can still be improved. But the new training manual is a critical step forward for CISRS and for every scaffolder who wants to train. I already have many positive changes for the manual’s second iteration in June, and I also welcome feedback from any stakeholder who spots any inconsistencies or simply sees ways in which we could improve the manual: please do get in touch with me.” Email Paul at paul.napper@nasc.org.uk



Paul Napper



PICTURE CREDIT: Simian

MALAYSIA DEBUT FOR TRAIN THE TRAINER PROGRAMME

A new Train the Trainer programme, created by CISRS, is being developed and a pilot will be delivered for the first time on behalf of the Malaysian Occupational Scaffolding Association.

Paul Napper, Head of Training and Education at NASC and CISRS says: *“This is a hugely important step and we are looking forward to this first opportunity to deliver the programme. We will learn from this process and continue its development, following stakeholder feedback, before we deliver it in the UK.”*

The three-week training programme is designed to train trainers who will deliver CISRS courses. Paul continues:

“We need more trainers and more training centres both in

the UK and globally. The current scheme of training trainers is based on a somewhat outmoded shadowing process, which restricts people from training because it is slow and relies on the presence of willing trainers. There was some regional variability regarding the availability of instructors to shadow. This new system frees up availability and capacity without dumbing down the system. The programme is rigorous, with up-to-date tech, still totally focused on safety of course – which should be the case for Advanced Scaffolders anyway.

“The new programme includes animations, videos and a wealth of other information to help learning. This will all be delivered through our learning management system.”

The Train the Trainer programme will be for Advanced card holders with at least five years’ experience as an Advanced Scaffolder only. There will be two new cards available: one for trainers, who can deliver courses – and this will include existing trainers; and also an instructor card, for those who can train the trainers by carrying out this programme. Eligibility for this card is being finalised. CISRS will be in touch with existing trainers on their new card soon.

“One important element to note,” says Paul, “is that you don’t have to come off the tools to become a trainer. You can keep working and deliver training at the same time. This gives people flexibility in their work and gives CISRS flexibility around capacity – and also ensures that trainers have real hands-on, current knowledge.”

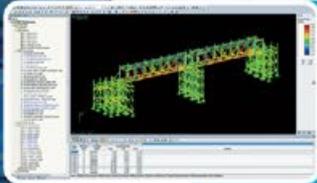
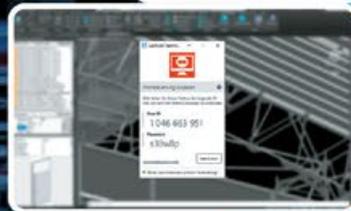
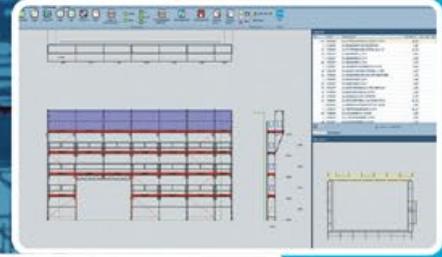


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