

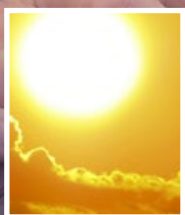
# Scaffolding Insider

THE VOICE OF SCAFFOLDING AND ACCESS

APRIL 2026

## A LIFETIME OF LEADERSHIP

Benchmark's Rob West in profile



### SUN DAMAGE

Time to take the risk seriously

### HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Important step forward in head protection

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## FROM THE EDITOR

You don't have to make a big noise to have a big impact, and our cover story this issue is a demonstration of that fact in the shape of Rob West, co-founder and Managing Director of Benchmark Scaffolding. We profile a man who has had an inestimable influence on the scaffolding sector over four decades, leading by example and by delivering on his values.

Rob founded Benchmark in 1995. It has gradually grown, through organic growth based on consistently outstanding delivery, from six employees initially to around 300 now. Read more about this key industry figure on pages 13-15.

Another familiar figure who is determined to change the industry for the better is Lee Marley. Lee's firm has taken up the Work Experience Pledge (covered on p19) and Lee sets out his stall on how far the industry has come and how far it still has to go in our Industry View this month on page 9.

The theme of things in the background quietly having a huge impact on the sector continues – but with rather less welcome results if we're not careful. On pages 9-10, we talk about working outside in the sun. While times have changed a little, there are still far too many scaffolders not taking the threat of the sun and ultraviolet (UV) rays seriously.

UV rays can be incredibly dangerous and damaging – and working at height further increases exposure as UV intensity rises with altitude, and reflective surfaces amplify radiation. The article points out some shocking statistics, including the fact that sun exposure causes 99% of non melanoma skin cancers and up to 65% of malignant melanoma cases worldwide, and between 2000 and 2019, deaths from occupational sun exposure increased by 88%. Such high risk – and it's so easy to do something about it.

On page 15, we look at how to spot the signs, and help break the stigmas, around mental ill health. Awareness is certainly much higher than it was but this is no time to relax on this issue.

Elsewhere we have our usual NASC News, Industry News and Training & Education News: there is a lot going on!

I hope you enjoy the issue.



**Nick Campion**  
Editor

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## CONTACT DETAILS

[editor@nasc.org.uk](mailto:editor@nasc.org.uk)

020 7822 7400

07958 695778

**National Access & Scaffolding Confederation**

4th Floor, 12 Bridewell Place, London. EC4V 6AP

[www.nasc.org.uk](http://www.nasc.org.uk)



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# CISRS CONSIDERS GLOBAL SCAFFOLDING TRAINING STANDARDS REFORM

CISRS has published a major review of its Overseas Scaffolder Training Scheme (OSTS), setting out a detailed analysis of the challenges facing the global scaffolding training landscape and proposing a phased programme of reform that would establish a single, unified standard for scaffolders worldwide by 2028.

The paper, co-authored by Clive Dickin, Group CEO of NASC & CISRS, and Paul Napper, NASC's Head of Training and Education, places the OSTS within the context of a rapidly evolving global labour market. Since its launch in 2013, the scheme has grown significantly and now accounts for more than 30,000 cardholders across 22 training centres in the Middle East, Caribbean and Africa. That growth, alongside increasing confusion among global employers about the differences between card schemes, has made the case for reform both urgent and necessary.

Clive Dickin said: *"The global scaffolding and access industry has changed significantly since the OSTS was introduced in 2013, and it is right that we take an honest and thorough look at whether the current framework is still fit for purpose."*

*"This paper sets out clearly why reform is both necessary and inevitable, and the three-stage programme we are proposing is designed to raise standards everywhere while protecting the integrity of the UK training pathway. We look forward to hearing the industry's views as we take this work forward."*

The paper is direct in its assessment of the current position. The two-tier system introduced in 2013, which created a structural divide between UK CISRS labourer and trainee routes and the overseas OSTS Level 1 and above routes, was driven largely by commercial considerations rather than long-term workforce strategy.

The consequences have included market confusion and a gradual erosion of confidence in the UK baseline standard. The paper acknowledges plainly that with hindsight, the two-tier system should not have been adopted.

The review draws on a stakeholder consultation carried out in the fourth quarter of 2025, involving training centres, written submissions and direct discussion at the CISRS Board.

Feedback was consistent across several key themes: the need to protect UK apprenticeship and early career routes,



Clive Dickin



Paul Napper

## CISRS CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SCAFFOLDERS RECORD SCHEME

concerns about compliance risk arising from misalignment between schemes, and widespread acknowledgement that the OSTS Level 1 already exceeds the UK Labourer Card in both duration and technical expectation.

Three strategic options are set out in the paper. The first is to retain the current two-tier system, which the paper argues effectively accepts lower standards at entry level and carries significant reputational risk for both CISRS and NASC. The second is global adoption of the UK standard, which would improve alignment but would not eliminate lower standards in all territories. The third, preferred, option, is to uplift the UK labourer standard to align with OSTS Level 1, creating a single global baseline standard supported by technology-enabled and modular training delivery.

The proposed three-stage reform programme would begin in 2026 with amendments to system scaffolding courses to align with TG30, the repositioning of the OSTS card as an industrial card, and the removal of the requirement for overseas training providers to hold a UK headquarters. A transition period would follow, with parallel operation of both schemes, before a combined global programme is released in 2028 enabling a single, globally recognisable entry point for the scaffolding and access profession.

## E-PORTAL PRICE INCREASES

Access to NASC's ePortal will see price increases from 1 June 2026. The new member price will be £90 and the non-member price will be £675 for a one-year subscription. Subscriptions can be renewed up to 30 days before expiry.



# SCAFFOLDING EXCELLENCE AWARDS OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS



Submissions are now open for this year's Scaffolding Excellence Awards, inviting companies and individuals from across the sector to showcase their achievements and be recognised among the industry's best.

Building on the strong momentum of previous years, the awards return with the same categories and honours up for grabs, celebrating excellence in areas such as design, projects, products, services and individual achievement.

Year-on-year, the awards have continued to grow in stature, reflecting the high standards, innovation and professionalism demonstrated across the scaffolding and

access sector.

For this year, the submission process has been streamlined to make entering quicker and more straightforward. The updated online forms are designed to reduce administration while allowing entrants to clearly demonstrate what makes their work stand out.

All NASC members are encouraged to enter the Awards and mark themselves out as the best of the best. For more information and to enter, go to [https://nasc.org.uk/ems-event-calendar/enter-the-awards.html?\\_fr=3ed11181](https://nasc.org.uk/ems-event-calendar/enter-the-awards.html?_fr=3ed11181)

## INAUGURAL INTERNATIONAL SCAFFOLDING AND ACCESS DAY APPROACHES

On 14 May 2026, the scaffolding and access industry will come together to mark International Scaffolding and Access Day. NASC is throwing its full support behind this landmark occasion, which has been established by the International Access and Scaffolding Association (IASA) as an annual global celebration of the profession.

The day has been created to celebrate the essential role of the scaffolding and access industry worldwide, while raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. It provides a unified platform for contractors, employees, manufacturers, educators and industry bodies to stand together in recognition of those who work in scaffolding every day.

For the event, IASA has selected the theme: 'Recognising the industry. Supporting its people. Shaping its future.' It is a theme that resonates strongly with the work NASC has been doing in the UK, from tackling the skills gap and championing training standards to raising the profile of scaffolding as a skilled and rewarding career.

The day will be centred around five key global challenges

identified by IASA as fundamental to the future success and sustainability of the industry. These are:

improving the image of scaffolding, developing global talent, driving innovation, strengthening compliance and standardising training.

Since its launch in September 2025, IASA has grown to 10 member organisations representing 11 countries, with a combined population of over 2 billion people and a combined GDP of more than \$65 trillion. To mark the introduction of the day, IASA has written to presidents and prime ministers across the world, highlighting the vital contribution the scaffolding sector makes to construction, infrastructure, safety and economic development globally.

NASC is encouraging all members, operatives and industry stakeholders across the UK to mark the day on 14 May by sharing messages, images and stories on social media that demonstrate pride in the industry and show the world what this industry is all about.



## CISRS APPOINTS KATHRYN BOWE AS QAC CHAIR

CISRS has appointed Kathryn Bowe as the full-time Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee, marking a significant step in the ongoing development of the scheme's governance and oversight framework.

With over 25 years of senior and executive-level HR leadership experience across a diverse range of sectors including hospitality, FMCG, health, financial services, housing and latterly City and Guilds, Kathryn brings extensive experience to the role.

Adept at operating in regulated environments spanning both UK and global organisations, Kathryn has a strong track record in driving transformation, fostering innovation and delivering pragmatic, sustainable people strategies.

The Quality Assurance Committee plays a central role in maintaining the integrity and consistency of CISRS training and assessment standards across the UK and internationally. Kathryn's appointment as full-time Chair underlines the importance CISRS places on robust, independent quality assurance at the heart of everything it does.

Kathryn Bowe said: *"I am delighted to be taking on this role at such an important time for CISRS and the wider scaffolding and access sector. Quality assurance is fundamental to the credibility of any training and competence scheme and I look forward to working with the committee and the broader CISRS team to ensure the highest possible standards are maintained and continuously improved."*



Kathryn Bowe

## SCAFFPAL CONTINUES TO DEVELOP

ScaffPal is an app developed by NASC that is designed to serve as an all-in-one digital toolkit for scaffolders and scaffolding company owners. Developers are adding new features all the time but already the app provides instant access to the NASC ePortal and official scaffolding technical and safety guidance, as well as holding information on industry and NASC events. In time it will be the digital home for CISRS cards, allowing scaffolders to prove their qualifications on-site without needing a physical card.



*"For scaffolders, it's a genuine one stop shop – instant access to NASC guidance, regulations and, in time, their digital CISRS card on site. That alone will be a game changer."*

*"The variety of CPD being developed and delivered through the app will really help scaffolders take a more flexible, self directed approach to learning. For self employed scaffolders in particular, being able to*

*build CPD gradually, without taking time away from work, is a huge benefit.*

Steve Fellows, Managing Director of Malvern Scaffolding, said: *"I've used ScaffPal and can see its massive potential. Being able to track CISRS courses, qualifications and CPD, as well as access short courses and up to date legislation through one app, makes it an invaluable resource."*

*"Having everything at your fingertips, rather than guidance sitting unused in printed folders, will make a real difference on the ground."*

The app is available for download now on both the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.

## TOP FIVE: APG1 ASSET PROTECTION FOR THE SCAFFOLDING INDUSTRY

### 1. Strong stock control prevents losses and protects profit

Scaffolding contractors should only send what is needed to site, remove surplus quickly, and regularly compare physical stock with stock records.

### 2. Identification and marking of equipment deters theft

Tubes, boards and fittings should be painted, stamped, or otherwise marked so ownership is obvious and stolen items can be traced.

### 3. Secure yards, buildings, and consider security at client-controlled sites

Ensure doors, gates and locked and alarms are used properly, and challenge unidentified visitors. Consider risks of theft from client-controlled sites.

### 4. Vehicle security depends on driver behaviour

Most thefts are opportunistic, so remove keys, lock vehicles, and secure fuel cards.

### 5. All thefts must be reported and documented properly

Theft of materials or vehicles should be reported to the police (and to NASC, using the standard form in the guidance).



## HSE LAUNCHES CONSULTATION ON WORKPLACE INJURY AND ILLNESS REPORTING

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has launched a public consultation on The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR).

RIDDOR potentially affects every scaffolding business, so it is important that any business with strong views puts forward its thoughts on the consultation.

HSE is consulting on clarifying definitions within RIDDOR where existing terminology has been identified as unclear or ambiguous.

HSE is also proposing to revise both the list of dangerous occurrences, to better reflect modern workplace risks, and update the list of reportable occupational diseases,

reintroducing some conditions previously removed from the list and adding new ones to ensure serious instances of work-related ill health are properly captured.

HSE is also seeking views on simplifying the online RIDDOR reporting form to improve usability and tackle both under-reporting and over-reporting – a longstanding challenge for the regulator and for businesses alike.

The consultation closes on 30 June 2026. The full consultation document is on the HSE website at <https://consultations.hse.gov.uk/hse/proposals-riddor-2013/>

For a broader understanding of RIDDOR and how it affects scaffolding businesses, see NASC's Guidance SG8 Reporting of incidents procedure and RIDDOR.



## HARD HAT INCLUDED

Tilbury Douglas has become the first tier one contractor to deploy a humanoid robot on a live construction site.



The robot, named Douglas, has been introduced to support and assist site teams by undertaking time-consuming, administrative data-collection tasks, enabling colleagues to focus on technical and operational responsibilities.

The robot is capable of autonomously navigating the construction site to capture 360-degree imagery and detailed progress reports. This data will also support health and safety monitoring and reporting processes. The initiative is expected to save an average of 40 hours per month, driving greater efficiency while maintaining high standards of compliance and oversight.

## HAKI REPORTS SHARP UK SALES DROP

HAKI Safety has reported a sharp decline in its UK sales during the first quarter of 2026, blaming extended approval timelines at the Building Safety Regulator for delays to new construction and property renovation projects.

The Swedish listed scaffolding and access safety group said UK revenues fell to £4.2 million in the three months to 31 March, down from £6.2 million in the same period last year.

Publishing its Q1 2026 interim report on 21 April, HAKI Safety said the fall in sales was driven by an unusually low level of activity in the UK property sector.

The company pointed directly to the Building Safety Regulator, which oversees fire safety approvals for high rise buildings and healthcare facilities. HAKI said extended processing times at the regulator had resulted in significant delays to the start of construction work.

HAKI Safety CEO Sverker Lindberg said the company remains 'well positioned in the UK market when the turnaround comes.' HAKI described the decline as temporary and said it expects processing times at the Building Safety Regulator to improve over time.

## INCONSISTENCY THREAT

Research from The Accountancy Partnership investigating the biggest challenges to self-employed construction workers has revealed that 42.5% of construction workers responding to the survey said that inconsistent construction work is the biggest challenge.

This reflects the unpredictability of workloads for many self-employed or freelance contractors, as economic uncertainty makes a precarious position even worse. The research also showed that 27.4% of self-employed construction professionals do not feel confident that they will earn more money than last year, as 46.6% agree that inflation and rising costs are affecting their work and 38.4% say that client budget cuts have reduced demand.

## BIG RISE IN WOMEN COMPLETING CONSTRUCTION APPRENTICESHIPS

The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) has released figures that demonstrate the increasing number of women pursuing construction training. CITB said that the number of women starting construction apprenticeships has jumped from 1,450 in 2018 to 2,410 in 2025. During the same period, the number of women completing a construction apprenticeship increased from 340 to 910.

Deb Madden, Executive Director, Customer Engagement and Operations at CITB said: *"Across the industry, we need to establish a culture that ensures it seeks to understand and meet the needs of people of all backgrounds. We need employers to establish clear and accessible pathways for a diverse range of candidates to learn and progress, making it more attractive for them to stay in the industry, and ensure all employees have a good work-life balance."*



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Lee Marley is the founder and CEO of Lee Marley Group, which is one of the UK's largest integrated masonry and scaffolding subcontractors. Lee suggests the culture in the industry has changed for the better – but still has a way to go.



I started out as a bricklaying apprentice at a time when apprentices were frowned upon, and scaffolding didn't even have a proper apprenticeship training route. Back then, scaffolding was treated as the end of the line in construction: if you couldn't do anything else, you became a scaffolder. Getting a ticket was almost impossible unless you already had a foot in the door.

When I first moved to London to be a brickie, I'll be honest, I was intimidated by the attitudes of the brickies – and other trades – on site. There was aggression, short term thinking, and too often the goal was simply to earn enough money to go home early, with no real thought for the job or the client or the future beyond that night.

That mindset never sat right with me. I didn't understand how you could turn up to a site without knowing what the building was for or who the client even was – and not care. When I set up my company, I made a decision to do things differently. If I was going to build a business, it would be one where people understood the job they were doing, who they were doing it for and why it mattered.

Today, we employ around 1,500 people across brickwork and scaffolding. From day one, we make sure everyone – brickies and scaffolders alike – understands the wider purpose of the project and buys into it. I want people to see scaffolding as a career, not just a way to earn a few quid before jumping ship for slightly higher wages down the road. In return, I ask them to think like businesspeople: do a good job, keep the client happy, win more work, keep earning, keep growing and developing – both as a business and as an individual. Of course there will always be some who live only for an early knock-off and a Friday night but they are the exception now, not the rule.

But that clocking-off obsession still frustrates me. I've worked hard to challenge the 'gone by 3:30' culture and to get site managers thinking bigger: how do we get the job done properly, not just quickly? The industry is becoming more professional, but the change is slow – especially the further you move outside London.

I have got some things wrong along the way. When we first trained scaffolders, they qualified quickly and then left. So we changed tack: stay for a year, and we won't charge for the training. In fact we'll train you some more, give you varied and interesting work, and a proper career path. Another important change is that we have put recently-qualified scaffolders into mentoring roles, pairing them with apprentices of a similar age. That peer connection made a real difference.

People are starting to see construction – and scaffolding in particular – as a trade worth getting into and one with prospects. Now we need more people at the top to change their behaviours. I don't blame those who have been running their businesses for 30 years carrying on doing it the same way: if it ain't broke, you don't fix it. But this is why we need young blood as well to balance it out, so we can move with the times.

It is worth noting that wages are getting a bit out of kilter at the moment, so there may be a correction due there soon: there's lots of scaffolders out there earning more than a doctor per hour right now. It's a great job with great opportunities and it's a safe trade to be in when we look to the future – but we're not saving lives.

As technology and AI dig deep into other sectors, scaffolding as a career is rock solid. But this doesn't mean we should stop striving to always be better.

# THE DANGER ABOVE

We all know the dangers inherent in scaffolding: falls from height, dropped tools and manual handling risks are well understood and heavily regulated. Yet one significant hazard often goes unrecognised: prolonged exposure to the sun. For scaffolders working at height, on exposed structures and often for long hours, sun exposure is a genuine occupational risk.

Regulators, medical authorities and industry bodies – such as NASC, the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the World Health Organization (WHO) – all highlight solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation as a serious workplace hazard for outdoor workers.

Unlike many construction trades, scaffolders frequently work:

- At height, with no natural shade
- On steel structures that reflect and intensify UV radiation
- For extended periods in fixed positions
- During peak daylight hours

Guidance from IOSH stresses that outdoor workers are typically exposed to solar radiation for many hours a day, day after day, often to the same body areas such as the head, neck, arms and hands. Scaffolders also face an increased risk of overheating, dehydration and reduced concentration, which can escalate other safety risks like slips or poor decisions.

## What Sun Exposure Does to the Body

Solar ultraviolet radiation is officially classified as a Group 1 human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the WHO. This places sun exposure in the same risk category as asbestos and diesel fumes.

There are three types of UV radiation:

- UVA, which penetrates deeply into the skin and contributes to premature ageing and cancer
- UVB, which causes sunburn and directly damages DNA
- UVC, which is blocked by the atmosphere

Even in the UK, where sunlight is often underestimated, up to 80% of UV rays can penetrate cloud cover. Working at height further increases exposure, as UV intensity rises with altitude and reflective surfaces amplify radiation.

The numbers behind occupational sun exposure are stark:

- Sun exposure causes 99% of non melanoma skin cancers and up to 65% of malignant melanoma cases worldwide
- In 2019, nearly 19,000 people in 183 countries died from skin cancer caused by working outdoors
- Between 2000 and 2019, deaths from occupational sun exposure increased by 88%

IOSH states that up to 90% of skin cancer deaths could be prevented by controlling UV exposure at work.

## Legal Duties and Industry Expectations

In the UK, sun exposure falls squarely within employers' responsibilities under health and safety law. The HSE makes it clear that employers must assess and manage risks to outdoor workers, including exposure to sunlight.

The HSE explicitly names construction workers as a high risk group and warns that long term sun exposure can lead to skin ageing, sunburn, eye damage and skin cancer.

It is worth noting that in the UK, there is no legal maximum working temperature. The HSE and GOV.UK are explicit that the law only requires workplace temperatures to be 'reasonable', with no upper limit. The most commonly quoted thresholds originate from the Trades Union Congress (TUC), which has long argued for clearer heat protections and suggests that employers should start taking action when temperatures exceed around 24°C, and consider stopping work at about 27°C for physically demanding jobs or 30°C for sedentary work; however, these figures are guidance and campaigning benchmarks only, with no legal force. In practice, UK law treats heat as a risk based hazard, meaning employers must assess conditions (including sun, radiant heat, workload and PPE) and take reasonable steps to control heat stress, regardless of what the thermometer reads.



## The dangers

### Short Term Risks

- Sunburn, blistering and heat exhaustion
- Dehydration and fatigue
- Reduced alertness and grip strength

### Long Term Risks

- Premature skin ageing
- Cataracts and eye damage
- Non melanoma skin cancer
- Malignant melanoma (the deadliest form of skin cancer)

The WHO notes that skin cancer often develops after decades of repeated exposure, meaning today's scaffolders may not see the consequences until later in life if protection is ignored.

Effective sun protection does not require complex systems or expensive equipment. Guidance from HSE, IOSH and WHO consistently recommends:

#### 1. Protective Clothing

- Long sleeved, breathable tops
- UV rated safety helmets with neck flaps
- Trousers rather than shorts where practicable

#### 2. Sunscreen

- Broad spectrum sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher
- Applied to exposed areas such as face, neck, ears and hands
- Reapplied regularly throughout the day

#### 3. Shade and Breaks

- Scheduled breaks away from direct sunlight
- Use of shaded welfare areas



PICTURE CREDIT: Oscar Salgado - Unsplash

#### 4. Hydration

- Easy access to drinking water
- Encouragement to drink little and often to prevent heat stress

Sun protection should be treated the same way as harnesses or guardrails: a normal and expected part of the job.

Toolbox talks, site inductions and seasonal reminders can all reinforce the message that sun safety protects not only long term health, but also day to day performance and safety at height.

Protecting scaffolders from the sun is not just about comfort - it is about safety and about preventing serious, life changing disease.

## NASC Guidance

NASC Guidance Document SG46 Adverse and Inclement Weather Conditions says:

*Working on scaffolds in the sun and warm temperatures can cause various problems, including health risks and bright glares or reflections off services and equipment. Workers should stay hydrated throughout the day and take frequent breaks in a cool area, preferably indoors. Workers are encouraged to cover skin, wear lightweight breathable clothing, take regular drinks of water and monitor team members to mitigate risk. If skin sun protection is required, the workers should provide their own. This will ensure employers do not issue skin protection that may have an adverse effect or reaction on an individual's skin.*

*Extreme hot temperatures are a significant summertime hazard, as they can cause heat stroke, rash, cramps, dehydration, heat exhaustion and sunburn, conditions that often lead to errors or accidents. Signs of heat related illness include:*

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

- Muscle cramps
- Skin irritation or pain
- Fast or weak pulse
- Muscle pains or spasms
- Standalone or clustered blisters
- Clammy or hot skin
- High body temperature
- Passing out

*Should a worker experience any of the above symptoms, stop work immediately and find a cool place to rest. Contact medical personnel if necessary. Note: heat stroke should be considered as a medical emergency. Medical assistance must be summoned urgently, or the victim must be taken to a hospital without delay.*

*Clients, principal designers, principal contractors, designers, scaffolding contractors, and other contractors may want to consider scheduling work during cooler hours if possible.*





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# ROB WEST: A CAREER BUILT ON INTEGRITY, SAFETY AND PROGRESS

Few individuals have influenced the UK scaffolding sector as quietly yet as enduringly as Rob West. With more than four decades in the industry, his career has been defined by the strength of his values and the consistency of his delivery. As co-founder and Managing Director of Benchmark Scaffolding, West has helped shape standards of safety, professionalism and workforce development that extend far beyond his own business, influencing practice across the wider scaffolding and access sector.



Rob West

**BENCHMARK SCAFFOLDING**



*Setting the Standards*

Those values are recognised by clients and peers alike. Mike Barford, Project Director at Mace, describes West as someone who can 'always be trusted to act with complete integrity,' noting that he is unwaveringly reliable and consistently focused on doing what is right for projects and stakeholders. That trust has been earned over decades and is a key reason why Benchmark has been retained on many complex and high profile schemes.

West's path into the industry began early. At just 17, he attended Bircham Newton Civil Engineering College, combining formal education with hands on site experience. By 18, he was already managing projects for SGB, demonstrating an aptitude for leadership that quickly set him apart. At 22, he moved into an office based supervisory role with SGB before becoming a Depot Manager by the age of 25. These formative years grounded his leadership approach in practical experience and a deep understanding of site realities.

That grounding has remained a defining feature of his career. Reflecting on their long professional association, Bob Young, former Technical Director at Benchmark Scaffolding, notes that West is 'still the same nice man he was all those years ago' as a keen 18 year old, adding that he always sees the good in people and brings out the best in them, 'more as a friend than a boss.' This consistency of character has become a hallmark of his leadership style.



In 1988, West joined PHD and became a Director the following year, where he led the landmark Victoria Tower Project in 1989. Later that same year, he moved to Formscraft UK, serving as Director until 1995. During this period, he developed extensive experience in technically demanding and strategically important projects – experience that would directly inform the business he went on to build.

Benchmark Scaffolding was founded in 1995 with a clear mission: to set, and continuously exceed, standards in scaffolding through safety, professionalism and technical excellence. The company began modestly, operating from a rented flat above a chemist with just six employees. Growth was deliberate and values-led rather than rapid. A second operational hub was established in Barnsley in 1999, supporting the transition from a regional start up to a nationally respected provider working across commercial, rail, residential and heritage sectors.

Former Mace Chairman and CEO Stephen Pycroft recalls Benchmark's early inclusion as an approved commercial scaffolding contractor on major Mace projects, noting West's close involvement in the development and design of challenging scaffolding solutions, including iconic schemes such as Café Royal. As projects became more complex, both West's reputation and that of Benchmark grew, built on technical capability and dependable delivery.

Central to Benchmark's growth has been West's people first philosophy. His leadership is grounded in fairness, accountability and a deep commitment to workforce safety and development. In 2010, he launched the Beckton Training Centre to support the London Olympics and Westfield

projects, upskilling large numbers of workers at a critical point in the capital's construction boom. This proactive investment in skills helped meet demand while reinforcing Benchmark's reputation as a responsible employer.

Innovation has also played a significant role in West's career. He established Benchmark Hoists as a specialist division, growing it into a highly successful business that was sold after ten years for £2.4m. Under his leadership, Benchmark Scaffolding was also among the early adopters of the Real Living Wage, reflecting an ongoing commitment to fairness and social responsibility rather than simply meeting minimum requirements.

Beyond his own organisation, West has contributed meaningfully to wider industry and economic discussion. He is a member of the Bank of England Decision Makers Panel and a regular contributor to the Deloitte Construction Market Survey, sharing insight grounded in day to day operational experience. He also remains actively involved with the Institute of Directors, helping shape broader thinking around leadership and governance in construction.

Safety has long been a non negotiable priority for West. At a time when outdated practices were still prevalent, he was an early advocate of site-specific risk assessments and behavioural safety initiatives. He introduced safety stand down days well before they became common practice and, more recently, steered Benchmark toward digital safety audits and real time reporting. These initiatives were implemented years ahead of wider adoption and have contributed to consistently low accident rates and multiple safety awards.



West has always viewed safety and technical innovation as collective responsibilities. Under his leadership, Benchmark has actively supported employees to contribute to sector wide improvement. Benchmark's Health & Safety Manager Peter Booth served on the NASC Safety Committee from 2006 to 2011 and again from 2018 to 2025, helping shape national safety standards and contributing to the latest edition of SG4. Bob Young represented Benchmark on the NASC Technical Committee between 2006 and 2010, contributing to technical guidance that remains influential today. Their involvement reflects West's steady, enabling leadership.

Mentorship and workforce development have been constant themes throughout West's career. He has personally mentored scaffolders from apprenticeship through to senior roles, launched in house development programmes for supervisors, and championed NVQ and apprenticeship pathways. Particular emphasis has been placed on supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Benchmark's exceptional retention rates are widely attributed to this long term investment in people. NASC's 2024 Apprentice of the Year award, won by Albie Cooper, highlights the tangible outcomes of that commitment.

The company's achievements have been recognised through numerous industry awards. In 2021, Benchmark Scaffolding won the NASC Health & Safety Award, with judges praising its safety practices, technical excellence, training programmes, sustainability agenda and digital innovation - a clear endorsement of the culture West has cultivated over three decades.

Despite these successes, West has never sought titles or public platforms. Instead, he focuses on enabling others to

pursue leadership roles, technical specialisms and passion projects within the business. His contribution closely aligns with NASC's aims of raising standards, improving safety and encouraging collaboration across the sector. Long before diversity and inclusion became mainstream industry topics, he consistently recruited from underrepresented groups and promoted women into operational roles, helping build a more inclusive workforce.

West's collaborative spirit extends beyond his own organisation. He regularly shares innovations, ranging from bespoke scaffold designs to pilot digital safety systems, with clients and peers, reflecting his belief that progress is driven by shared learning rather than competition. He remains actively engaged with clients, competitors, training providers and industry bodies, often in informal advisory roles.

Even after more than 30 years as Managing Director, West remains hands on. It is not unusual to find him on site, speaking directly with scaffolders, or visiting clients to personally resolve commercial or safety issues. His approachability, work ethic and humility have earned loyalty across the workforce and client base alike. As Barford observes, managing all of this 'with enthusiasm and grace' sets West apart.

From a rented flat with six employees to a business employing around 300 staff and achieving a cumulative turnover of more than £400m over 30 years, Rob West has built far more than a successful company. Through quiet leadership, shared innovation and an unwavering commitment to people, he has helped deliver safer sites, more skilled workers and higher standards across the scaffolding industry - and there is every indication his contribution is far from finished.



PICTURE CREDIT: Leach's

# HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

What scaffolding contractors need to know about updated helmet standards

## Mark Collinson, Head of Technical at NASC, writes:

The introduction of EN 397:2025 and EN 50365:2023 marks an important step forward in head protection. For the UK scaffolding industry, these updates don't signal a dramatic change, they formalise a shift that has already been happening on sites across the country.

Over recent years, scaffolders have steadily moved away from traditional hard hats towards climbing-style industrial helmets, which offer better fit, retention and enhanced all-round protection. The new standards reinforce that direction.

### A Move to Enhanced Impact Protection

EN 397:2025 now classifies helmets into two types:

- Type 1: Protection from vertical impacts only
- Type 2: Protection from impacts to the top and sides

Given the nature of scaffolding work, there are often risks of impact to the side of the head which are present.

This means that Type 2 helmets, similar in design to climbing-style helmets already used on many sites, are likely to become the expected standard for scaffolders.

### Improved Retention with Chinstraps

The updated standard also strengthens chinstrap requirements, ensuring helmets stay secure during work at height.

Again, this aligns closely with the climbing-style helmets already adopted across parts of the industry, where secure fit and retention are required.

Wearing a helmet is no longer enough, wearing it correctly is essential. Chinstraps must be fastened and properly adjusted, not unbuckled or loose.

### Electrical Protection

Electrical performance now sits under EN 50365:2023, rather than within EN 397 with key implications:

- only non-vented helmets can be electrically rated
- they are required where there is risk from live electrical sources

This means that scaffolders working near overhead lines or temporary site electrics may need dual-certified helmets. Vented climbing-style helmets won't always be suitable.

### PPE Compatibility Matters

Helmets must now be tested and approved with accessories such as visors, ear defenders, insulated liners and head torches as a complete system.

This means that mixing helmet accessories from different manufacturers may no longer be compliant; scaffolding contractors will need clearer control over compatible safety helmet set ups.

### What Should Scaffolding Contractors Do?

- review your procurement process
- review risk assessments, especially for work at height tasks
- involve your scaffolders in selection and carry out trials
- check compatibility of PPE, and begin transitioning towards Type 2 helmets where appropriate
- supervise, monitor and take feedback on safe helmet use

There is no immediate legal requirement to replace existing helmets, but equipment certified to the new standards will quickly become the expected benchmark.

### An opportunity for review

These updated standards don't introduce a completely new direction, they formalise the scaffolding industry's move towards more secure, better-performing helmets.

For scaffolding contractors, it's an opportunity to review PPE and stay ahead of rising expectations. For scaffolders, it means suitable head protection that reflects the real risks of the job.

The industry shift towards climbing-style helmets wasn't a trend, it was a response to risk. These new standards simply confirm it was the right one.

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# SCAFFOLDING AND MENTAL HEALTH: SPOTTING THE SIGNS AND BREAKING THE STIGMA

Mental health is no longer a peripheral issue in the construction sector — it is a core safety and wellbeing concern. That message came through clearly during a recent NASC webinar, *Mental Health in High Places: Spotting the Signs*, which focused specifically on the scaffolding industry and the unique pressures its workforce faces.

The session brought together industry leaders and mental health specialists to shine a light on a subject that is still too often hidden behind bravado, long hours and a culture of ‘just getting on with it’.

Scaffolding is demanding work. Tight deadlines, physically taxing conditions, working at height, time away from family and unpredictable weather all combine to place sustained pressure on workers. During the webinar, polling of attendees highlighted the scale of the challenge: nearly three quarters said they or a colleague had experienced mental health difficulties, while only just over half felt help was easily accessible.

Although awareness is improving, the stigma surrounding mental health remains deeply embedded, particularly among men in construction, where admitting a problem is still often perceived as weakness.

## Lived experience

Guest speaker Ian Hines, a former scaffolder who became a mental health professional, working with the Lighthouse Construction Charity among others, spoke candidly about his own journey. Having experienced addiction, imprisonment and later post traumatic stress disorder, Hines understands first hand how easily mental health issues can go unrecognised, even by those trained to support others.

His message was clear: stigma is one of the biggest killers in construction. When people feel unable to speak openly about how they are feeling, problems are compounded until they reach crisis point.

Hines stressed that having suicidal thoughts does not mean someone is broken or beyond help. What matters is creating the space for honest conversations and knowing where to turn next.

## Warning signs

A key focus of the webinar was helping employers, supervisors and colleagues recognise when someone may be struggling. Warning signs can include:

- Sustained low mood or emotional withdrawal
- Loss of confidence or self esteem
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions

- Changes in sleep or eating habits
- Loss of interest in things that once mattered
- Chronic fatigue or lack of motivation
- Pessimistic views of the future

While everyone experiences ups and downs, the message was that multiple signs persisting for more than a couple of weeks should prompt concern and action.

## How to help

One of the most powerful takeaways from the session was simple: ask the question. Whether it is something as simple as ‘Are you okay?’ or, in more extreme circumstances, the more direct ‘Are you thinking about harming yourself?’, asking shows that someone cares and it can be life saving.

Hines emphasised that you do not need to have the answers. Your role is not to fix someone, but to listen, show concern and signpost them to professional help.

Throughout the webinar, the Lighthouse Charity was highlighted as a vital support system for the industry. Its services span emotional, physical and financial wellbeing, recognising that these challenges are often interconnected.

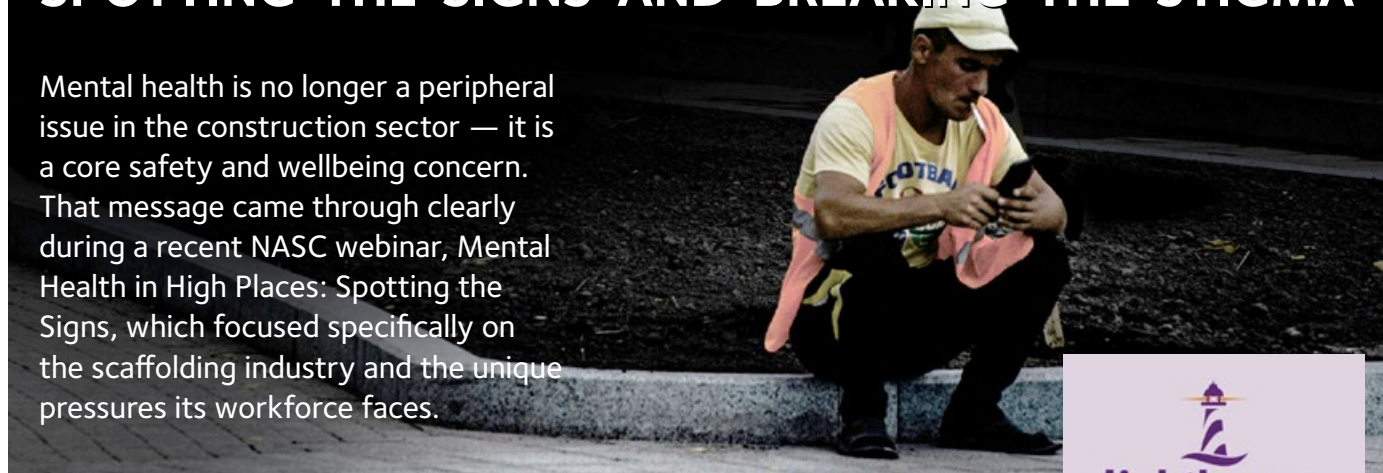
Support includes a 24 hour helpline, text based support, counselling, financial assistance, wellbeing courses and an app that prompts users to check in with themselves daily. Support is available not just to workers but to their families too.

Hines shared case studies where timely intervention, often triggered by a colleague noticing something was ‘not quite right’, helped individuals step back from crisis and begin recovery.

The scaffolding industry has made progress, but the webinar made it clear there is more to do. Mental health is not a box ticking exercise; it requires sustained commitment, training and cultural change.

By investing in Mental Health First Aid training, promoting open dialogue and normalising help seeking behaviour, companies can create safer, more resilient workplaces. No-one in the industry should suffer in silence.

Find out more about the Lighthouse Charity at: <https://lighthousecharity.org/> and read NASC’s SG38 Guidance on Mental Health Wellbeing.



PICTURE CREDIT: Viktor Talashuk - Unsplash

# COMING SOON: SCAFFACADEMY



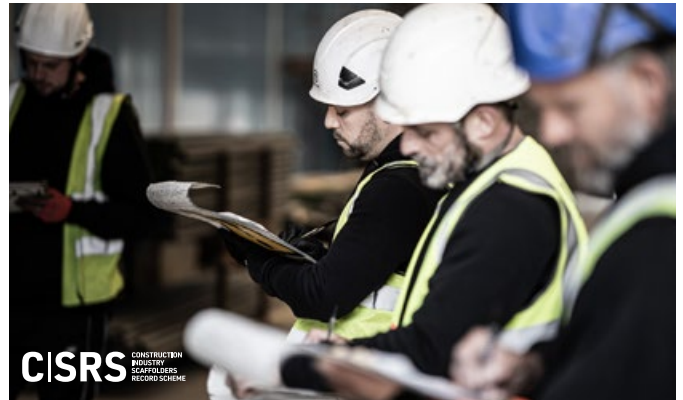
Paul Napper

In June, CISRS will launch Scaffacademy, which is set to transform how CISRS cardholders learn, develop and stay ahead.

Scaffacademy will be a fully quality-assured learning experience, delivered through the trusted CISRS network of training centres, giving cardholders direct access to high-quality, industry-

approved content wherever they are. Every module will be carefully controlled and curated, ensuring that what you're learning is accurate, relevant and aligned to the standards expected on site.

Designed with today's workforce in mind, Scaffacademy will offer a dynamic mix of content to keep learning engaging and practical. From bite-sized videos and interactive scenarios to technical deep-dives and knowledge checks, there's something for every learning style. Whether you're refreshing core skills or building new ones, the platform will make it easier than ever to stay competent and confident.



PICTURE CREDIT: Simian

Accessibility is at the heart of Scaffacademy: cardholders will be able to access learning in a way that fits around their work, without compromising on quality. Combined with centre support, it will deliver both flexibility and structure.

"This will be the future of CISRS training," says Paul Napper, Head of Training and Education at NASC. "Smarter, more accessible, and built for the modern scaffolder."

## IDEAS PLEASE

As part of the new digital learning platform for CISRS cardholders, Scaffacademy (as described above), CISRS will be building a library of short courses designed to reflect real industry needs. That means content aligned to NASC guidance, current regulations, and the practical challenges faced on site every day, but also broader, non-technical topics that support professional development across the workforce.

CISRS is asking employers, supervisors, instructors and scaffolding professionals to put forward ideas for new short courses. What gaps are you seeing? Where do operatives need clearer guidance, refresher training or more accessible learning? This could include updates linked to new or revised NASC publications, regulatory changes or areas such as leadership, communication or site culture.

All content on Scaffacademy will be strictly controlled, ensuring that every course meets CISRS standards and delivers real value to cardholders. Your input will help to directly influence what's developed and rolled out across the network.

This is your opportunity to shape the future of training in the industry.

If there's something you think every scaffolder should know, now's the time to say it. Email Paul Napper, Head of Training and Education at NASC, at [paul.napper@nasc.org.uk](mailto:paul.napper@nasc.org.uk) with your suggestions.

## CALLS FOR MORE TO TAKE PART IN WORK EXPERIENCE PLEDGE

Late last year, NASC, in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, launched its Work Experience Pledge - an ambitious initiative to create 5,000 structured placements across the scaffolding sector by December 2026. Designed to tackle the industry's growing skills shortage, the pledge aims to raise awareness of the diverse career opportunities available, from site-based roles to design, estimating, administration and manufacturing, while helping employers build sustainable talent pipelines.

Now, NASC and CISRS are calling for more NASC members to throw their weight behind it and join in the fight to secure the future of the scaffolding industry.

Leading the way is Lee Marley Group, the first organisation to formally support the pledge. As part of their commitment, Lee Marley Scaffolding will host an 'Intro to Scaffolding' insight session at their Leven Road site. This session will offer participants a hands-on introduction to the industry,

including a practical workshop and guided site tour, showcasing the skills, teamwork and professionalism that underpin modern scaffolding.

The Work Experience Pledge is designed to be flexible, enabling NASC members, suppliers and designers to offer placements that suit their business - whether short-term insights or longer experiences - throughout the year. By encouraging multiple placements across a range of disciplines, the initiative ensures that all aspects of the industry are represented.

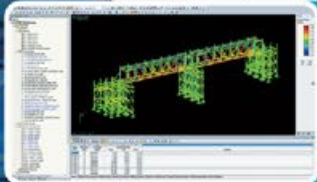
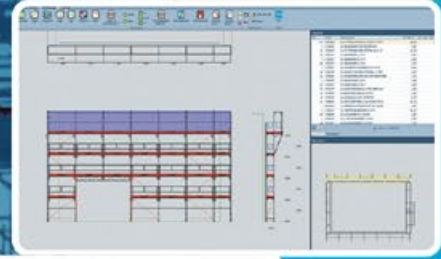
Ultimately, the pledge is about opening doors. By connecting jobseekers of all ages and backgrounds with meaningful, real-world experiences, it creates pathways into apprenticeships, training and long-term employment, helping to secure the future of the scaffolding sector.

To join in or to find out more, email: [rebekah.jardine@nasc.org.uk](mailto:rebekah.jardine@nasc.org.uk)

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