

Could lack of skills be the Achilles' Heel of planned cladding remediation work?

Submitted by: Vivalda Group

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Vivalda Group chairman thinks the £3.5bn fund and loans for cladding remediation is a step in the right direction – but recommends urgent investment into training for contractors tasked with making repairs.

On Wednesday 10 February Robert Jenrick, the UK's housing minister announced that the government would foot the £3.5bn bill to repair unsafe cladding on all flats of over 18m or six stories in height. It also confirmed plans for a new loan for leaseholders living in medium-rise flats affected by unsafe cladding. Under this scheme, those living in this category will not pay more than £50 per month to replace defective cladding.

Peter Johnson, chairman of Vivalda Group - the UK's largest independent fabricator/distributor of non-flammable cladding, said: "While I broadly welcome this as a step in the right direction, this figure still falls a long way short of the £15bn fund that the select committee recommended to fix unsafe cladding on all high-rise buildings. Nevertheless, there remain challenges to implement such a plan. Right now, the cladding sector is pretty much working at full capacity – in terms of the skilled workforce available to fix cladding safely onto buildings. Installing cladding is a skilled job and without a significant increase in trained, qualified people, I can't see how the industry can deliver such a huge project at scale.

"I understand various training schemes have been discussed and may well be in process, using tried and tested organisations such as the CITB and NFRC. However, it appears they have been put on hold due to lockdown. I urge the government to re-engage these training organisations and construction bodies as soon as a safely possible to get these training schemes up and running with great urgency.

"Clearly, it is only right and proper for the government to be putting adequate funds in place to fix this national disgrace, but it should also be focusing on the barriers to delivery, such as skills shortages. Lack of available skilled labour could be the Achilles Heel of the remediation work."

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Photo caption: Peter Johnson, chairman and founder of Vivalda Group.

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