

## **Helen Soulou, CQP FCQI, quality manager at Heathrow Airport, explains the role quality professionals play in reducing on-site errors**

### **The Challenge**

Since the 1988 Egan report, *Rethinking Construction* suggested that up to 30 per cent of construction is rework, a lot of research and effort has gone into improving rework and defects at handover.

However, the progress is slow and clients in the industry are still experiencing quality issues at the point of handover. In some cases, these quality issues are so significant that they impose visible and invisible costs to the clients' organisations, preventing them from operating efficiently and safely.

They are creating inherent risks that could potentially lead to incalculable operational and reputational damage if these risks materialise.

The construction industry is complex. Client's mistakes during the definition of the project requirements and designer's omissions have an impact to the contractor and then to their subcontractors.

Understanding the construction industry as a system and not in a fragmented way, will help everyone in the chain improve. The client, architect, designer, contractor and subcontractor need to work collaboratively in long term partnerships in order to understand and improve the whole process.

Quality in construction cannot be really improved only by intervention and improvement on-site. A more holistic approach needs to be used. Especially as the impact of errors during construction and defects after handover means that the UK industry spends £5bn pa on reworking on-site errors and further £15bn pa on total project errors, as was calculated during research of the "[Get it right Initiative](#)".

### **Investigating systemic issues**

The improvement opportunities that quality management of the whole of the project management process offers can be huge. The construction industry should not accept that there will be snagging lists at the end of each job and that there will always be change from the original design.

Every problem on-site should give the opportunity to the team for proper root-cause analysis that investigates the systemic issues and goes into the analysis of how the whole process should be improved.

The client should enable the whole of the supply chain to succeed by focusing the suppliers' efforts on learning from their mistakes, conducting proper root cause analysis, being open to recognise responsibility and improve the underlying systemic issues that would support continuous improvement.

In order for clients to recognise the importance of their role in the improvement of the whole industry, they need to be brutally honest about how their decisions affect quality in the project and consequently during the lifecycle of the assets that are delivered. They

need to consider the changes in the whole process from design to completion required to drive consistent delivery.

The contractors need to understand that when issues arise they need to feedback any learning to the designer and client, even if that slows project delivery in the short term, as it will pay dividends to all parties in the long term.

### **The benefits**

The benefits for the industry will be huge. The "Get it right Initiative" estimate that the cost of rework in the UK (£5bn) is about 5 per cent of the value of every project. This is higher than the average profit levels across the industry. This together with other research that shows a clear link between health and safety incidents and rework, show clearly the urgency for focus in quality management of the whole project management process.

This requires an industry transformation - I argue that the best placed role to do that in the whole of the chain is the quality professional.

**Helen Soulou, CQP FCQI, is quality manager at Heathrow Airport**