

Tackling illegal workers in construction - Northern Gas Networks explains how it strives for workforce legitimacy

Section five of the Scheme Monitor's Checklist – 'Value their Workforce' covers a variety of ways constructors can provide a supportive and caring working environment.

Within this area of the Site Monitor's Checklist is section 5.5 – 'How does the site assess and monitor the legitimacy and competency of the workforce?'

In 2016, two additional prompts were added to the Checklist, flagging up the prompts of **illegal workers** and **spot checks**.

The issue of illegal workers is currently a key priority for the UK construction industry; the Home Office launched an enforcement campaign in 2015 to stamp out illegal working across the sector.

The operation recognises that illegal working undermines legitimate employers, harms the reputation of the industry, drives down wages and denies employment to UK citizens and legal UK workers.

Northern Gas Networks is just one of the Scheme's registered organisations which is taking this issue very seriously.

Katherine Lee, Customer Care Officer at Northern Gas Networks talks to the Best Practice Hub about how its sites are taking proactive action to tackle the issue of illegal immigrant workers:-

Before our site operatives begin work on any of our sites, their EUSR (Energy and Utility Skills) card is checked. Each operative holds a safety training record card which is updated regularly with the site manager. This is a robust way of verifying the abilities of the individual worker.

Our training record cards state which qualifications each operative has, the date the qualification was received, the card serial number and the date a renewal is required, to ensure this is done in a timely manner before expiring. The site manager has a record on site for his reference at all times.

I can confirm that ALL eligibility to work checks are completed prior to a new starter joining Northern Gas Networks – we aim to do these checks at interview stage.

We use the attached [Right to Work Checklist](#) to ensure that we are aware of what document is provided and to ensure we have the statutory excuse. ([The Statutory Excuse Checksheet](#) can be used by employers as a defence against a potential illegal working fine).

We do regular spot checks; last year our human resources team audited over 700 colleagues and found that we didn't hold documentation for some.

It was essential to ensure that these missing documents were urgently produced for our records. Spot checks are carried out on average three times per year.

It is a very successful process, as mentioned we ask candidates to bring these documents to interviews so we already have their statutory excuse prior to offering the job. If a candidate forgets to bring it at interview stage and they get offered the job we contact them and advise them that they need to bring it into a local depot/office before their start date (all HR colleagues and depot admins attended an accredited eligibility to work in the UK course).