



The Fibreoptic Industry Association

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LOVE ME TENDER, (LOVE ME TRUE), ALL MY DREAMS FULFILL

by

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The quality of tenders and the responses to them are a common source of complaint amongst installers, consultant and their clients. This has, of course, been going on for years. I remember huge tenders for telecommunications infrastructures, at least in terms of the pages they comprised, that were issued in the 1980s which detailed every last metre of trench to be dug and every floor tile to be lifted but then simply asked for "a fibre optic backbone". The reason for such mismatches between the practical and the technical in those days was quite simple - quantity surveyors and their like did not know how to specify the cabling so they focussed on items they could understand and control and hoped for assistance for everything else. It would be nice to think that such tenders were issued to caring installers would provide a technically appropriate bid which would allow an effective adjudication - and from memory this did happen, in the main.

The current situation is quite different. Today, many of those responsible for the development of tender documents tend to stand behind the published standards using them as either a barrier or a shield. Unfortunately there are many cabling standards, each one valid in its own way, to cover everything from the performance of components, infrastructure design (which components and where they go), infrastructure planning and installation and, finally, the commissioning of the end result. And although there are many standards they frequently conflict with each other or are found to be inappropriate for the application or nation in which they are quoted. The best example of these is ANSI/TIA/EIA-568-B - which is a very effective standard for the specification of telecommunication cabling design. However, a statement such as "provide cabling in accordance with ANSI/TIA/EIA-568-B" cannot be applied in the UK since the standard demands installation practices which are incompatible with other primary UK standards such as BS 7671: 16th Edition of the Electrical Wiring Regulations.

Certain non-UK based, but international, industry bodies that provide "industry qualifications" such as BICSI recognise these facts stating that "at all times, a designer is responsible for knowing the local standards and codes that apply". Unfortunately, this knowledge is not assessed. The FIA White Paper covering its relationship with BICSI addresses this specific issue (www.fia-online.co.uk/pdf/Whites/wp0307.pdf).

As a result the FIA is seriously considering a UK qualification which is targeted at those both creating tenders and responding to them. The qualification has the working title of "Specification of telecommunications infrastructure installations" and is being developed with a view to acceptance by City & Guilds or Open College Network organisations.

The principle purposes of this qualification are twofold. One key outcome is to ensure that those preparing tenders are able to understand the potential incompatibilities between the standards that they choose to reference for components, design and commissioning while highlighting the existence and contents of the applicable planning and installation. The other outcome is to teach those responding to tenders the correct forms of response when tenders are badly written - in order to minimise contractual difficulties, legal disputes etc. It should be highlighted that this qualification is not restricted to optical fibre - it will be written to apply to all telecommunications cabling technologies.

The development work for this qualification is only just beginning but is not expected to involve a lengthy gestation. If any readers are interest in either undertaking the qualification or becoming involved in its development then they should contact either the FIA Technical Director (mike.gilmore@btinternet.com) or the FIA Qualification Director (john@lucidos.co.uk).

If you wish to access the resources provided by the FIA go to www.fia-online.co.uk. Enquiries can be e-mailed to jane@fiasec.demon.co.uk.or, alternatively, you can contact the FIA Secretariat in 01763 273039.