

Principal Designer (PD) Appointment

Q1. What is the purpose of the principal designer?

- A. The PD function is provided, primarily to project manage and control the design stages (including design changes and modifications) of a construction project from concept to completion to ensure health and safety risks are properly identified, considered and controlled.

Q2. Who can carry out the role of the principal designer?

- A. The PD must be a designer - an architect, consulting engineer or quantity surveyor, or anyone who specifies and alters designs as part of their work. They can also be clients, contractors and tradespeople if they carry out design work or arrange for or instruct persons under their control to do so. They must have the right mix of skills, knowledge and experience (SKE) or organisational capability to carry out all the functions and responsibilities assigned to them in Regulations 11 and 12 and have **control** over the pre-construction phase.

Commonly, the PD is likely to be:

- **for larger projects** - a design practice or a technical department of a principal contractor e.g. a principal contractor doing design and build;
- **for smaller projects** - a self-employed architect/technician, small design practice, a project management company, a client's internal estates management team, or even a specialist tradesperson such as an electrician where they lead on the design function;

so long as they meet the criteria of;

- i. being a designer;
- ii. having the relevant SKE or organisational capability, and;
- iii. being in control of the pre-construction phase.

Q3. Does CDM 2015 require the principal designer to be a member of the project design team?

- A. **No.** The PD must be appointed by the client as soon as it is established that more than one contractor is or is likely to be working on the project to plan, manage, monitor and control the design stages.

If the client gets it right and appoints the PD early at the concept stage, then the appointment should commonly take place before the project design team has been fully identified or assembled. The PD may provide their own design team, appoint a team or manage and control any team appointed by others.

Whatever the model, which provides maximum flexibility for the client, - the PD must be able to prove to the client that they have the SKE or organisational capability to fulfil all the functions - proportionate to the nature, size, complexity and risk profile of the project. Once in place, the PD should

be in control of the design team so that they, and the design team, can carry out their roles effectively.

Q4. Can a client carry out the role of the principal designer?

A. Yes. If a client fails to, or decides not to appoint a PD the law provides that the PD role is automatically assigned to the client.

Many clients will choose to take on the PD role themselves but irrespective of whether by choice or otherwise, the client must have the SKE or organisational capability to fulfil all the PD functions and responsibilities effectively.

Q5. What if a domestic client fails to appoint a principal designer?

A. It is recognised that a domestic client is unlikely to know that they are required to do this. Should this be the case, the role of PD will automatically be carried out by the designer 'in control'. In most cases this is likely to be an architect or architectural technician.

Further Information

HSE Construction webpages

[The Construction \(Design and Management\) Regulations 2015](#)

HSE legal series guidance

[Managing health and safety in construction: Construction \(Design and Management\) Regulations 2015 \(L153\)](#)