

MARKETING INTEGRITY GROUP CONSTRUCTION PRODUCT INFORMATION SURVEY OUR INITIAL FINDINGS

Ridgisewer

PRODUCT INFORMATION P1

Management of a range of discoloured and greasy sewage issues and through drainages throughout the UK. The complete system includes a range of high-tech, multi-layer, junction, specialist components and cables.

The system is manufactured to conform to BS EN 12478 (part 1 & 2) as well as additional standards to give best quality of fit and a long life for a fixed or removable grate.



Key benefits

- 100% compliance with BS EN 12478 & BS EN 12479
- 100% compliance with BS EN 12478 & BS EN 12479
- 100% compliance with BS EN 12478 & BS EN 12479

Technical Support

For more information and product literature, please contact our technical support team on 0800 000 000 or visit our website at www.ridgidrain.com

Ridgidrain Inspection Chambers

PRODUCT INFORMATION P1

Ridgidrain Inspection Chambers are a range of 150mm and 300mm, modular and adaptable inspection chambers. All of the chambers are based on a pre-manufactured, multi-layer, multi-joint pipe system.

They provide a method of non-invasive access to manholes and surface water drains for inspection and maintenance purposes.



Performance

Ridgidrain Inspection Chambers are designed to provide a long service life. The chambers are made from a multi-layer, multi-joint pipe system, which is designed to provide a long service life. The chambers are made from a multi-layer, multi-joint pipe system, which is designed to provide a long service life.

Applications

The chambers are suitable for use in a wide range of applications, including:

- Manholes
- Surface water drains
- Sewer lines
- Stormwater drains

Technical Support

For more information and product literature, please contact our technical support team on 0800 000 000 or visit our website at www.ridgidrain.com

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Message from the Chief Executive

The Construction Products Association established the Marketing Integrity Group in the autumn of 2018, bringing together professional representatives from a broad range of Product Manufacturers and related organisations.

The work of this group is crucial as we seek to ensure that construction product information is provided in a clear and unambiguous way, such that it can be relied upon by all members of the construction supply chain. As we consider the possible wide ranging changes necessary to ensure buildings in future are as safe as possible and perform as intended, creating certainty in the bedrock that is product information is absolutely vital. We hope that this work will be a major contributor to achieving that goal.

I would like to thank Adam Turk (Chair of MIG), Richard Waterhouse (NBS), his team and the group for all the hard work in arriving at this critical point.



Peter Caplehorn,
Chief Executive

Construction Products
Association

Foreword from the Chair

Across a six week period during March and April 2019, some 524 industry professionals took around half an hour from their busy schedules to complete our online Call For Evidence. In particular, they provided us with some 181 pages of voluntary, free text comments, which, together with their answers to our multiple choice questions, have provided a rich background of data and understanding to inform our work. My personal thanks go to every one of you for your contributions.

This report is an overview of these responses, and provides a moment in time for pause and reflection as we seek to fulfil our commitment to the industry following the publication of The Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety by Dame Judith Hackitt.

My thanks also go to NBS, who ran the Call For Evidence on our behalf, and for their hard work in assisting us to compile this report.

The next stage in our work is to develop a set of recommendations for the industry, which will allow firms to maintain their competitive position and messaging, whilst providing certainty to those that use the information. The construction industry encompasses a broad and fragmented supply chain, and our challenge is to get the right balance for those that provide the information, as well as those that use it. We aim to have these recommendations ready for review before the end of 2019.



Adam Turk, Chair

Marketing Integrity Group,
Construction Products
Association

I. Executive Summary

This report summarises findings from the Construction Products Association's (CPA) Marketing Integrity Group's 'Call for Evidence on Construction Product Information'. The research, an online survey, aimed to help the CPA better understand current processes of providing and using construction product information, and to identify how these could be improved to ensure that consistent, unambiguous and clear product information is available to the wider supply chain. There were 524 responses to the Call for Evidence from a range of providers and users of construction product information.

The research showed that construction product information is provided in a number of formats across a range of sources. Users will utilise a combination of these formats and sources on a project. The technical product information required to complete a specification, certification information and information on the suitable applications of a product are particularly important to users. Providers recognise this and provide this information most often. However, the type of information users need does vary, depending on their discipline. The ways that providers make their information available is generally in line with users' preferences but there are gaps. Users also express a preference for information in digital formats.

The quality of product information varies considerably. Users provide examples of manufacturers who do this well and information that is easy to find. However, there are barriers to finding the information that they need. They need this information to be accurate, up-to-date, clear and transparent. Often it is, but users felt it was not always complete or of a high quality. They also need it to be in the specific format that they require. Manufacturer support and testing and certification information are important means of assessing the quality of the product information and ensuring that it is used correctly. This is especially important when the product is being used as part of a system.

Most respondents are aware of substitution occurring within the last 12 months. In more than half of the projects involving substitution, the substitution was not discussed and agreed among the project team, and the performance criteria of the replacement product were not compared to the original to ensure that they were equivalent. Users have mixed experiences of product substitution: in some cases negative, in others positive.

Nearly all respondents believe that it is important for the individual reviewing product information to be able to understand, analyse and interpret that information. They also believe that it is important for

them to understand the potential risks of misuse of a product. The majority of respondents would like to see minimum competence levels set for those specifying products or their performance, as well as for the proposal and approval of substitutions.

The research found support for the introduction of a 'code of conduct' to ensure the accurate provision and use of manufacturer product information.

A list of the members of the CPA's Marketing Integrity Group can be found below.

Chair: Adam Turk, *Baxi Heating UK*
Secretariat: Nicky Geary, *Baxi Heating UK*
 Hanna Clarke, *Construction Products Association*
 Leanne Davidson-Town, *Forterra*
 Kirsch Bowker, *Kingspan*
 Steven Heath, *Knauf Insulation*
 Stuart Nicholson, *Marley*
 Richard Waterhouse, *NBS*
 Catherine Fyfe, *Polypipe*
 Cheryl Douglas, *Sika*
 Martyn Kenny, *Tarmac*
 Lindsey Lewis, *MHCLG*

2. Introduction

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, the publication of the ‘Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety’ by Dame Judith Hackitt set several challenges for the UK construction industry. In response to the challenges set out in Chapter 7 of the report, which relate to communicating construction product information in a clear and unambiguous way, the Construction Products Association has established the ‘Marketing Integrity Group’, which consists of communications and technical professionals from across the supply chain.

In March 2019, to help inform their work, the group launched a Call for Evidence. The Call for Evidence took the form of a survey, carried out by NBS on behalf of the Construction Products Association’s (CPA) Marketing Integrity Group. It aimed to help the CPA better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current processes of providing and using construction product information, and to identify potential improvements or solutions to ensure that consistent, unambiguous and clear product information on construction materials is available to the wider supply chain.

The survey was available to be completed online between 8 March and 23 April 2019. The Construction Products Association and members of the Marketing Integrity Group publicised the survey through their websites, newsletters and social media. Additionally, NBS, professional institutes and other organisations promoted the survey, ensuring responses from a cross-section of the UK construction industry.

2.1. Survey Respondents

There were 524 responses to the Call for Evidence: 238 (45%) from providers of construction product information (including manufacturers, merchants and distributors) and 286 (55%) from users (such as architects, engineers, surveyors and contractors). This is a large and robust sample, representing a wide range of professionals, as shown in *Figure 1*.

Which of the following best describes your organisation’s type of business?

Base: All respondents (524)

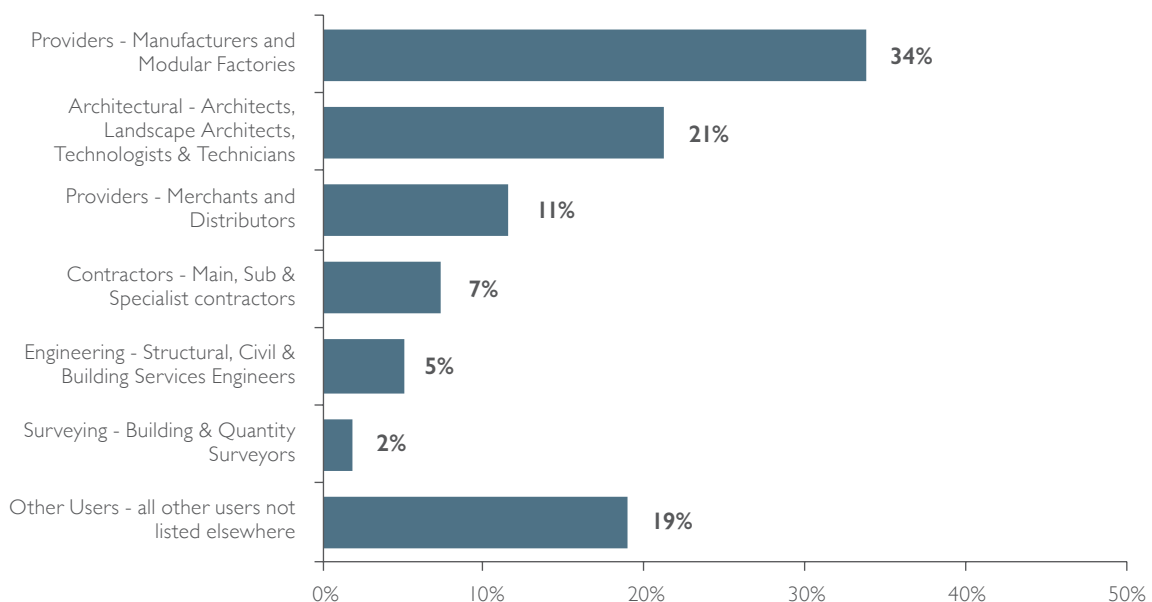


Figure 1: Organisation's type of business

Including yourself, approximately how many people are employed in your organisation?

Base: All respondents (524)

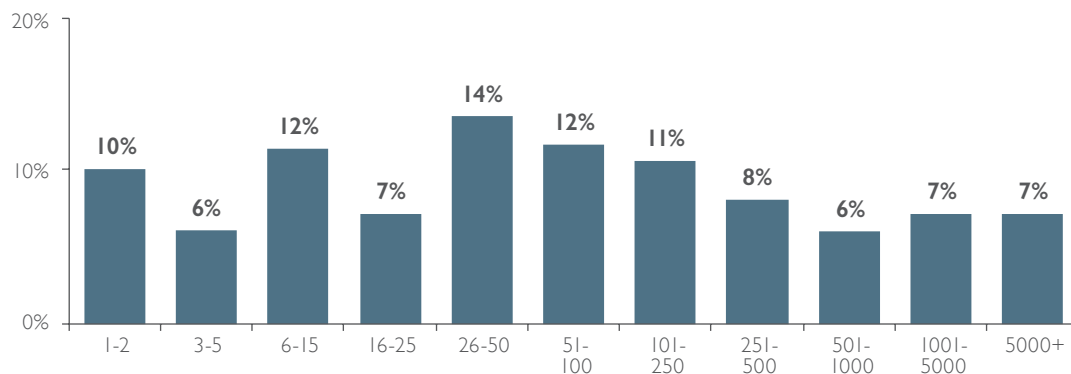


Figure 2: Organisation size (number of employees)

The sizes of respondents' organisations ranged from one or two people up to those with more than 5000 employees (*Figure 2*).

Individuals had a range of experience in the industry, from those who have worked in it for less than five years up to very experienced professionals who have worked in construction for over 40 years. Forty-five percent have worked in the industry for 30 years or more.

It is not unexpected to see a high proportion of very experienced professionals working within the construction industry. For several disciplines, it is a

vocation that requires them to spend several years studying, with their first spell of work experience coming during that period of study. In particular, users are very experienced: 54% have worked in the industry for over 30 years. However, providers are likely to have spent less time in the industry; little more than a third (34%) have worked in it for 30 years or more. Those who have worked in the industry for some time are likely to have a lot of experience of providing or using construction product information. It is useful to have the views of so many experienced professionals.

How many years have you been working in the construction industry?

Base: All respondents (514) Excluding 'prefer not to say'

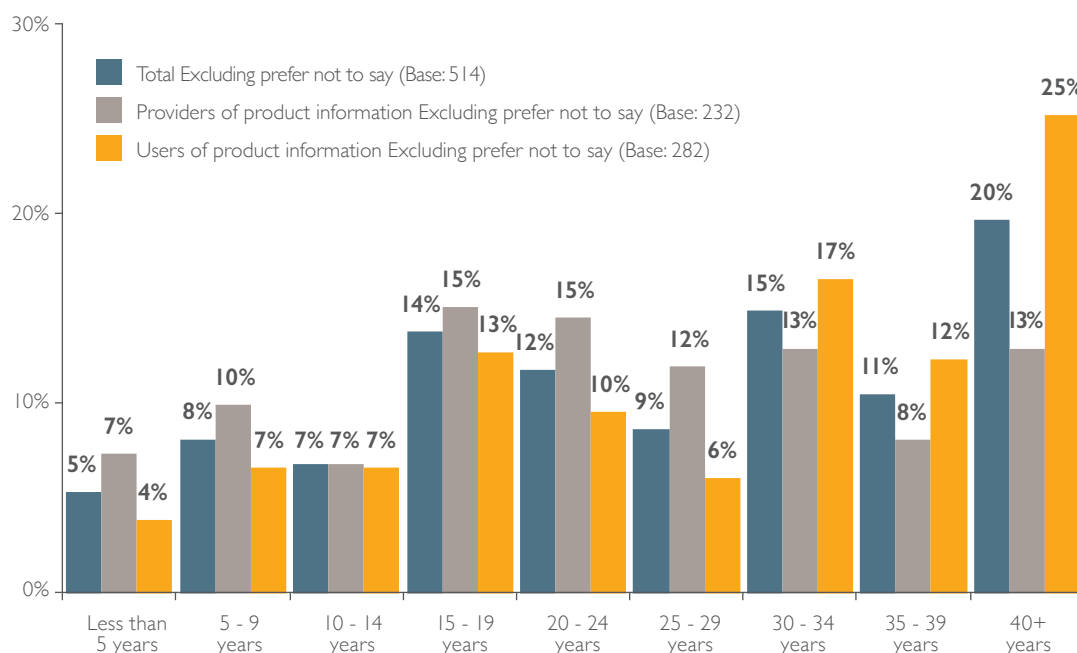


Figure 3: Years working in the construction industry

How many years has it been since you attained your first, relevant qualification?

Base: All respondents (442) Excluding 'prefer not to say'

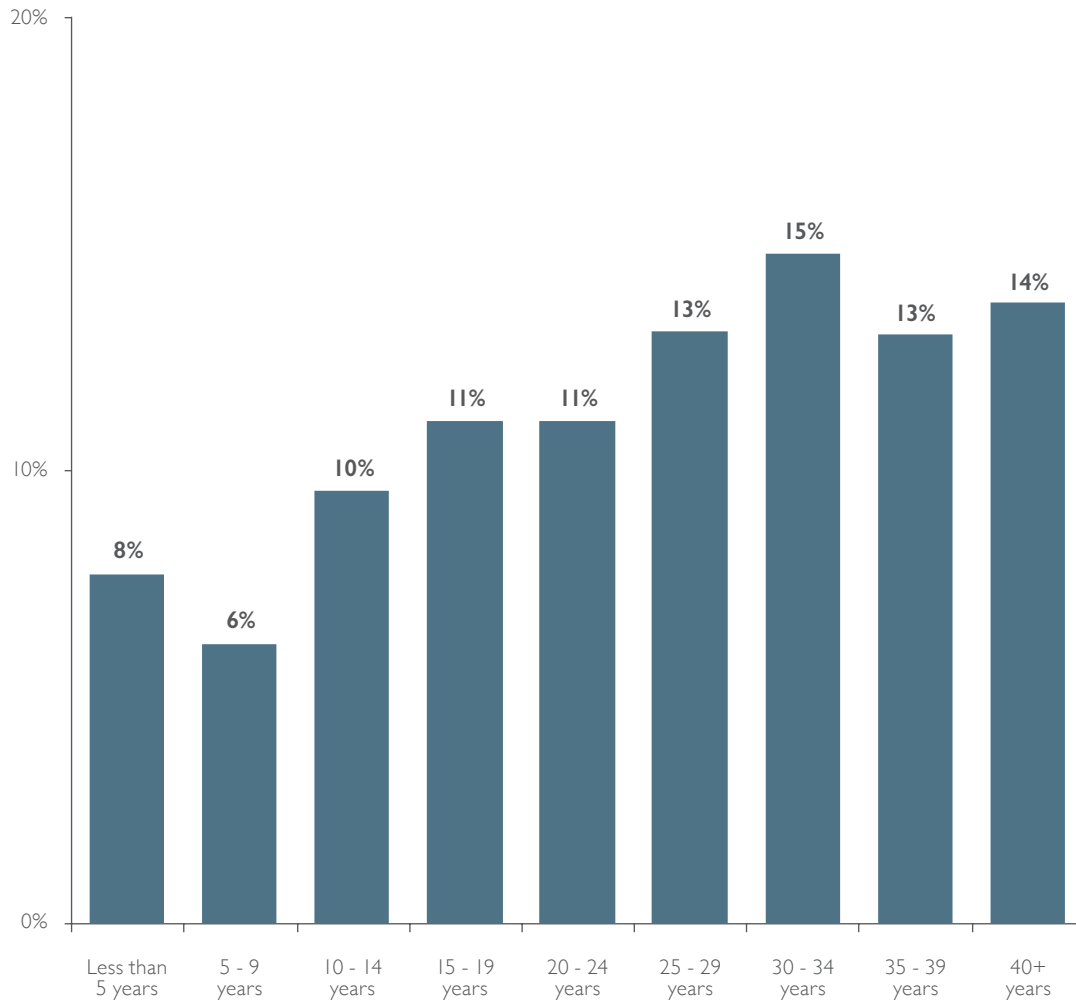


Figure 4: Years since first relevant qualification attained

For a number of respondents (42%), it is also over 30 years since they attained their first relevant qualification (*Figure 4*).

We also asked providers whether they had ISO 9001 'Quality Management' (or equivalent) certification; just over three quarters of providers (76%) had this certification.

2.2. Notes on Analysis

This report includes percentage responses for all multiple choice-type questions, key charts and some verbatim comments from survey respondents. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to rounding, or where respondents could select more than one response per question, percentages may not always add up to 100.

A comparison of results between providers and users of construction product information has been

carried out. Where each group was large enough, comparison has also been made between the different types of users. Where there are differences in results between these groups that are statistically significant, or where the pattern of response indicates a likely difference in views, they have been highlighted.

This research has been carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.



3. Findings

Which, if any, of the following tasks do you carry out as part of your current role?

Base: All users of construction product information (286)

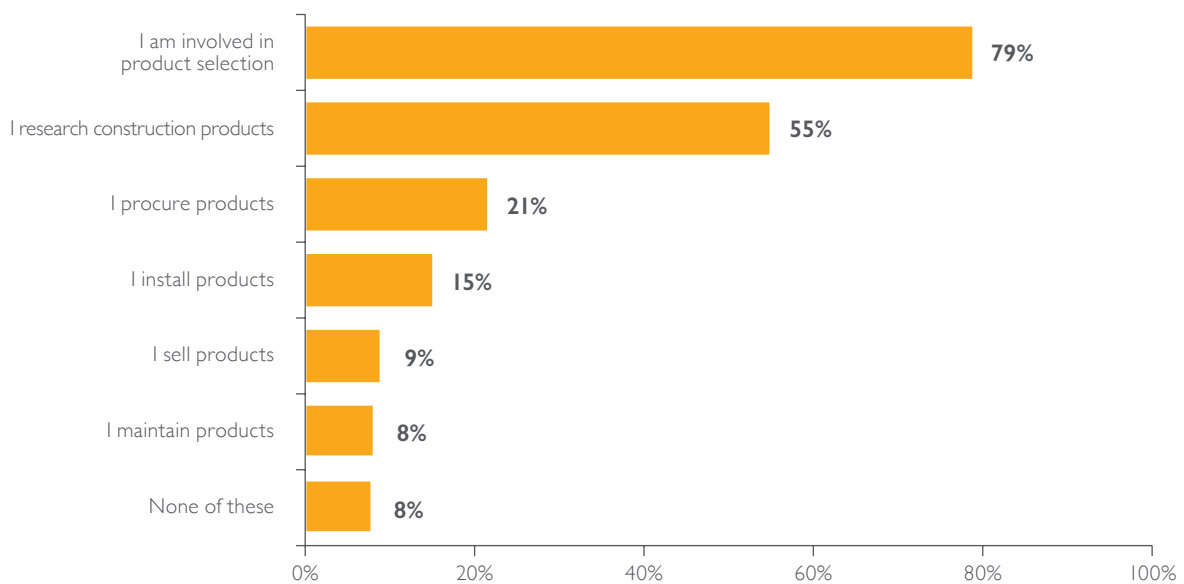


Figure 5: Users' involvement with construction product information

3.1. Sourcing/ Providing Construction Product Information

'User' respondents are heavily involved in product selection: 79% told us that they are involved in product selection, and more than half (55%) that they research construction products (*Figure 5*).

We wanted to understand where users go for construction product information, what type of information they require and what format they need it in. We have compared this to the information that

Which of the following do you use to provide/ when looking for construction product information?

Base: All respondents (524)

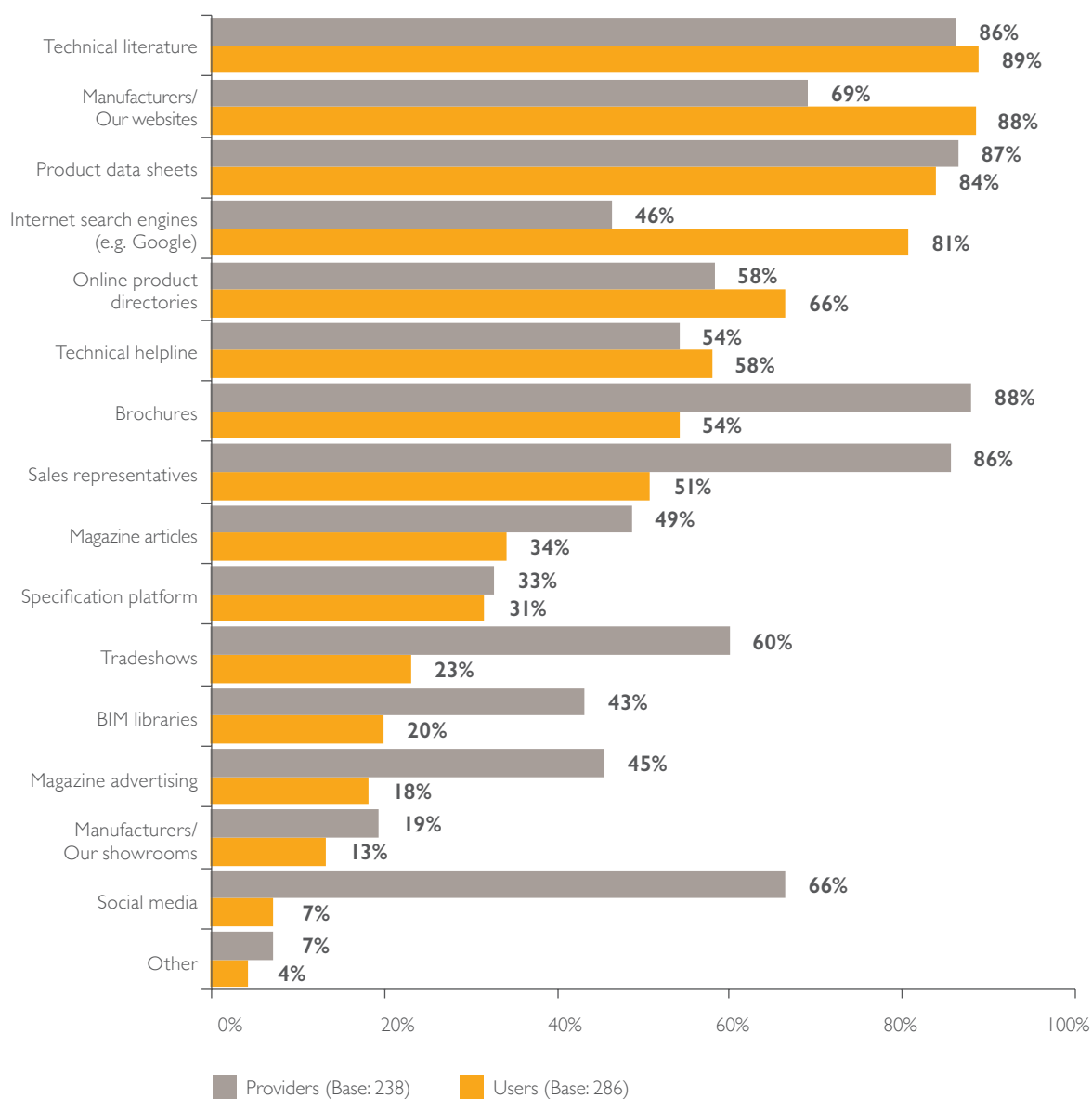


Figure 6: Construction product information sources used by providers and users

manufacturers, merchants, distributors and modular factories provide.

The main two sources of information are technical literature and product data sheets: 86% of providers and 89% of users utilise technical literature, whilst 87% of providers and 84% of users utilise product data sheets (**Figure 6**). However, there are some differences between users and providers. More than four out of five users source information from manufacturers' websites (88%) and through internet

search engines (81%), whilst only 69% and 46% of providers (respectively) said that they provide product information in this way. In contrast to this, 88% of providers use brochures, compared to half of users (54%). Similarly, 66% of manufacturers provide information through social media, but only 7% of users source information in this way. However, it is worth noting that although users may not actively source information from social media, it is likely to raise their awareness of a brand or product.

Which of these do you use most in order to communicate with the users of the information?

Base: All providers of product information (238)

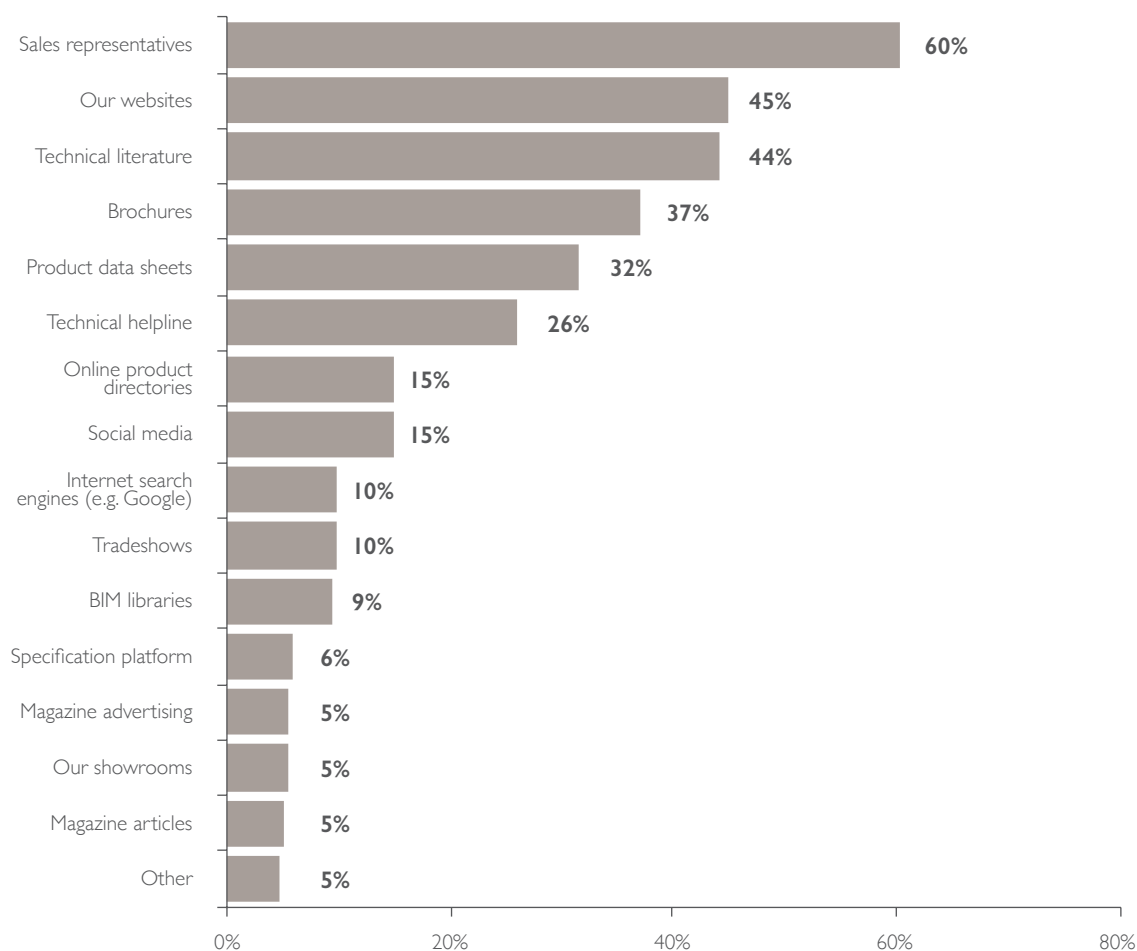


Figure 7: Information source used most often to communicate with users of the information

It is evident that multiple sources of product information are used by both providers and users. When asked about which of these they use most in order to communicate with users of the information, three out of five providers said that they utilise their sales representatives, followed by 45% using their own website. Despite it being the most popular means of providing information overall, only 44% of providers use technical literature most often to communicate with users of construction product information.

The information provided about construction products is vast, but what information do users require? Unsurprisingly, nearly nine out of ten users (87%) told us that they need technical product information to complete the specification, and a similar percentage of providers do offer that information (**Figure 8**). There is also a relatively even match between the use and provision of

information on certifications, applications for the product and installation guidance. However, there are differences in the need for and provision of performance information. 77% of users require information about a product's fire performance, whilst 61% of providers told us that they supply this information. Similarly, users view thermal performance information as important: 71% need this information. Thermal performance information is supplied by 47% of providers. In both cases, this may be due in part to the nature of the product that the manufacturer supplies, and whether fire or thermal performance information is relevant to it. Additionally, more users want warranty information, maintenance information, operation information and information about a product's sustainability whilst it is in use, compared to the number of providers sharing it.

Which of the following types of information do you provide about/ need when considering construction products?

Base: All respondents (524)

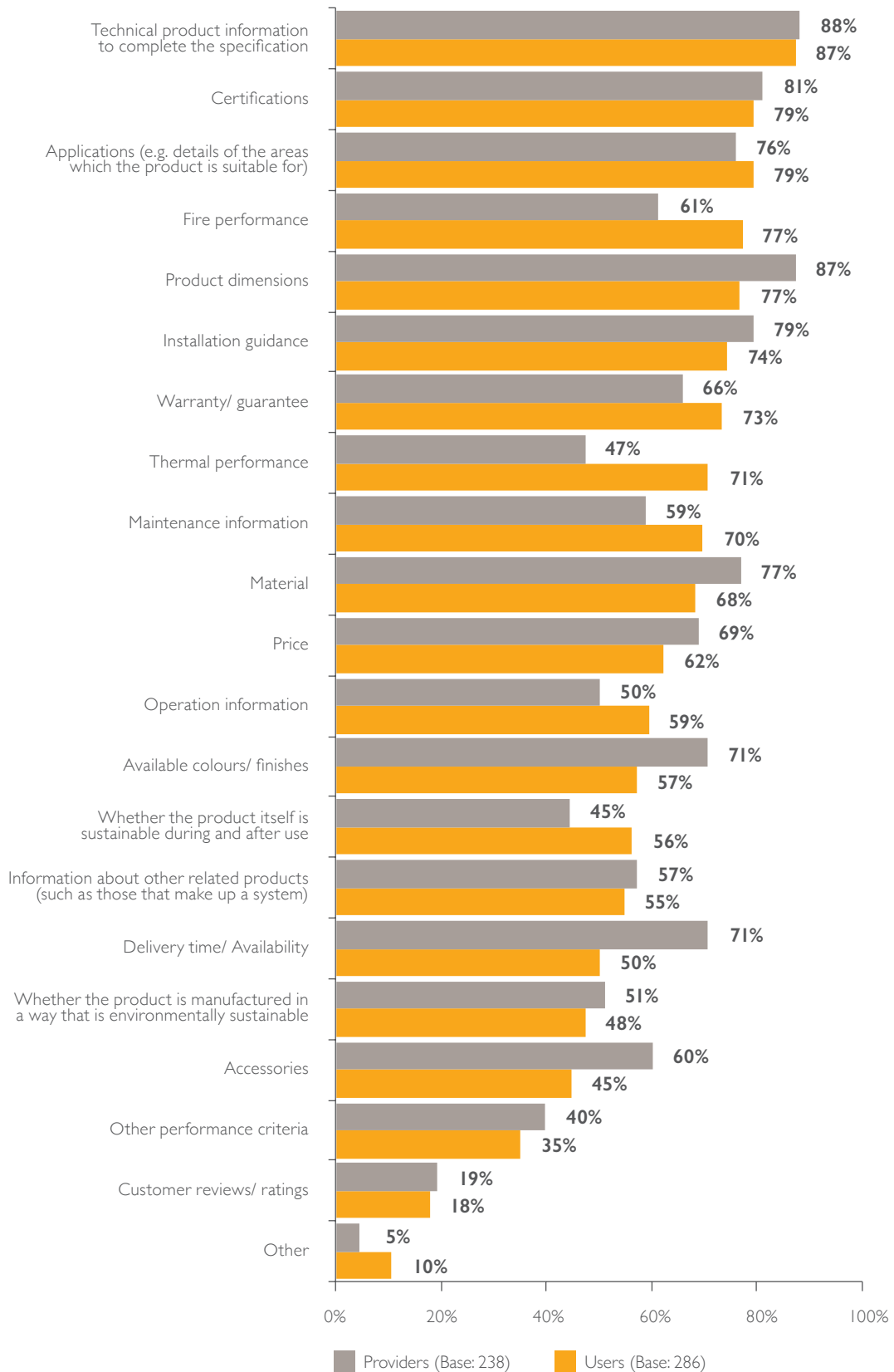


Figure 8: Type of product information provided/ required

The type of information users need does vary according to their discipline. For architects, design aesthetics can be important in realising design intent; therefore, it is not a surprise that they have a greater need for information about the material and available colour or finishes of the product. Similarly, architects are particularly concerned about fire performance, thermal performance, certifications and sustainability of products. This may be because they often take on the role of the lead designer, meaning they are responsible for ensuring that the final project meets the expected standards and aims

of the project. The surveyors who responded are particularly concerned about price, and contractors are more concerned about the delivery time/ availability.

When asked which of these types of information are most important, both providers and users agree on the top three (Figure 9). However, whilst providers put price at no. 4 and installation guidance at no. 5, these do not appear in users' top five. They consider fire performance information and product dimensions to be more important.

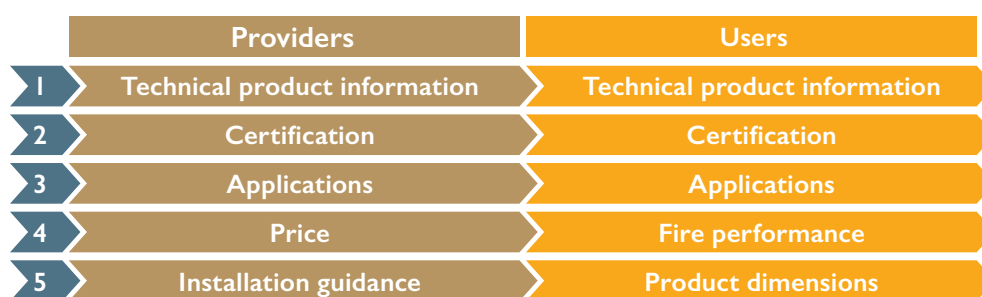


Figure 9: Top five most important types of information

What format do you provide/ need this information in?

Base: All respondents (524)

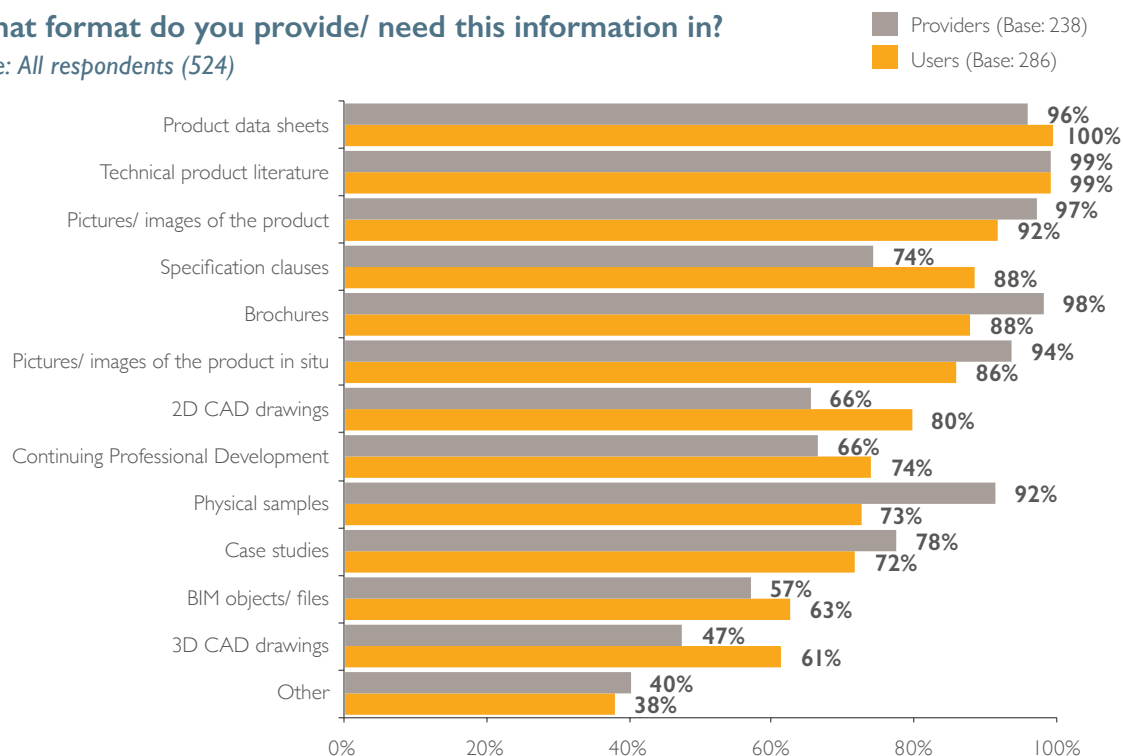


Figure 10: The format that product information is provided or needed in

Nearly all respondents provide or need information in the format of technical product literature, product data sheets and pictures/ images of the product (Figure 10). Nearly nine out of ten users (88%) also need specification clauses, although only three

quarters of providers use these to communicate with users of their product information. Physical samples are also important, but more so to providers than users.

What format do you need this information in?

Base: All users of product information (286)

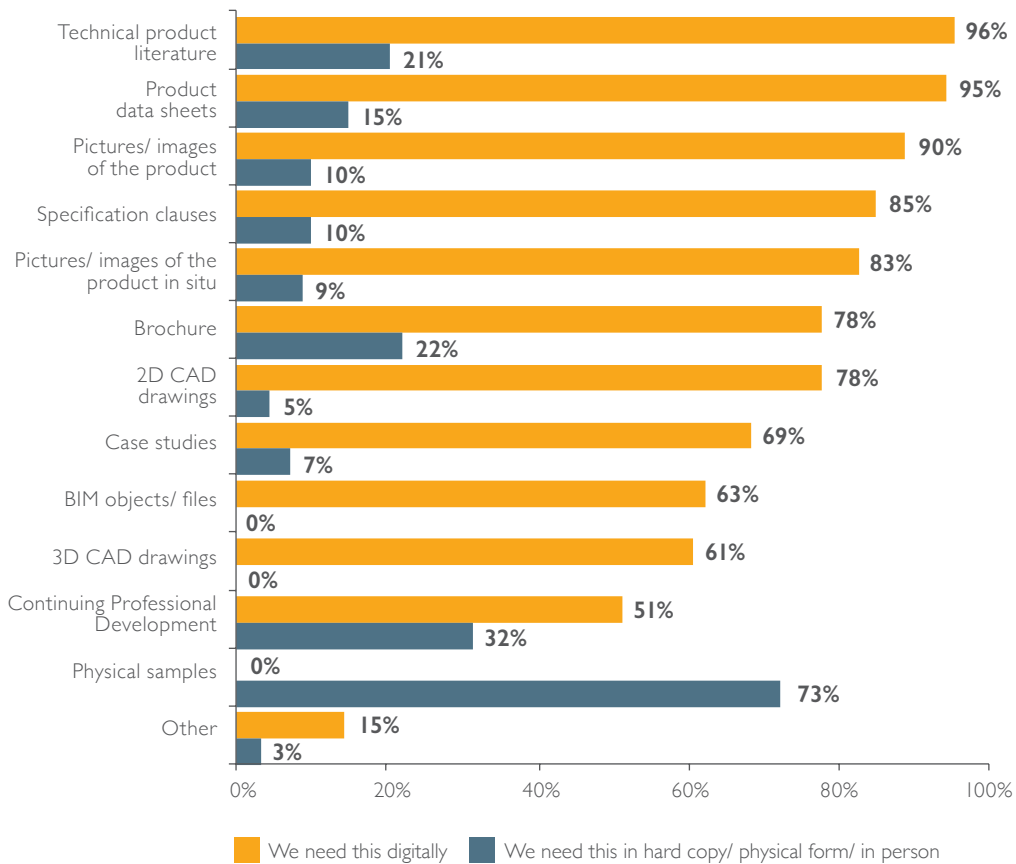


Figure 11: User preference for digital information

Often this information is available digitally, as well as in hard copy/ physical form (with the exception of physical samples and BIM objects/ files, which

are only available in physical form and digitally respectively). However, users have a clear preference for this information to be in digital form (Figure 11).

How easy or difficult is it to find the manufacturer product information you need?

Base: All users of product information (286)

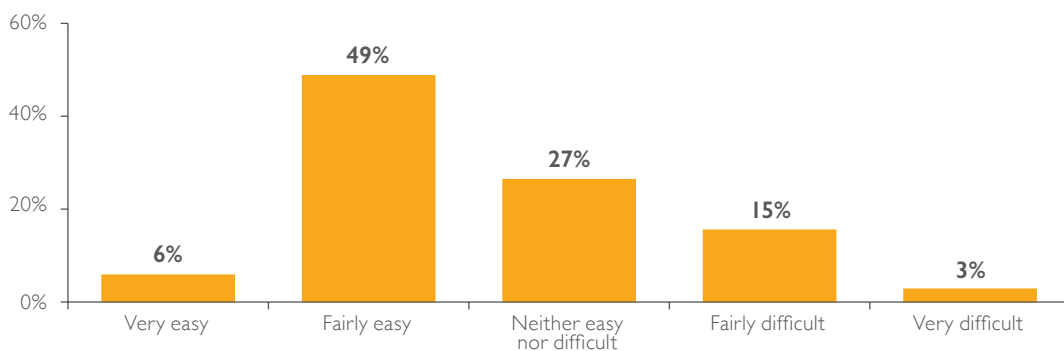


Figure 12: Ease of finding construction product information

Overall, 55% of users find it very or fairly easy to find the construction product information that they need but, as shown in Figure 12, only 6% find it very easy.

Users of construction product information were given the opportunity to explain more about when information is easy or difficult to find. It is evident from their comments that the quality of the information varies greatly, with some users' responses giving examples of providers that are very good at communicating with them.

“If the Design Team’s specification is ‘open’ it is very hard to find suitable product, but if the specification names a product and adds ‘or equal & approved’ it is very easy for suppliers to find it or an equivalent”

Contractor

“Some manufacturers claim to have a type of certification using wording like in ‘accordance with’. They have never tested these products correctly but then by using a BSI/ ISO or similar certification suggest that they must be compliant. Anyone whose products are not fully tested should not be able to achieve a BSI or ISO cert.”

Other user

“Vapour permeability is rarely available for materials. Fire performance classifications are confusing since there are multiple parallel standards, and manufacturers try to play up the capabilities of their products.”

Architect

There are however barriers to finding that information that users need, such as missing information or an emphasis on a product's strengths. Additionally, users can find it difficult to find all the correlating information that they need to make an objective comparison between alternatives, and sometimes the information caters better for some users than others.

“Price is rarely given, so informed choice is tedious to obtain and requires detailed discussion when time is a cost to the specifier. Budget cost ranges are very helpful in early decision making.”

Architectural user

“The competitive environment/ free market economy we operate in has (understandably) driven industry to promote the positive and beneficial aspects of the products they produce, ‘selling the superlative’ - and this information is easy to get hold of. What is not made freely available/ so easy to get hold of, is any negative sides to material/ product use.”

Other user – local authority

“For major brands/ manufacturers it can be very easy but for other products it can be impossible to find info online as most sites are geared to DIY and direct sale not technical support.”

Architectural user

In particular, users can have difficulty accessing the test data that they need. Often they can see that a product has been tested, but they have difficulty obtaining more specifics about the test, such as the tested configuration (which combination of products was tested, and how they were installed for the test) and the limitations of that test. This is important information that will help them make informed decisions about the suitability of a product for the application concerned.

“Sometimes it is difficult to get actual proof of fire test performance... It is however often very easy to get marketing material which can significantly overstate or oversell the performance of a given product. The fire test information often does not back up the claimed performance.”

Other user – fire engineer

3.2. Quality of Construction Product Information

Respondents' comments tell us that the quality of product information varies considerably. It is important to understand users' perceptions of the quality, as well as to understand how both users and providers ensure the quality of that information.

Many users (81%) believe that the product information provided by manufacturers is accurate all or most of the time, but only around half think that it is complete (50%) or of a high quality (48%), at least most of the time (**Figure 13**).

Thinking about the product information provided by manufacturers, how often is it...

Base: All users of product information (274-284) Excluding 'don't knows'

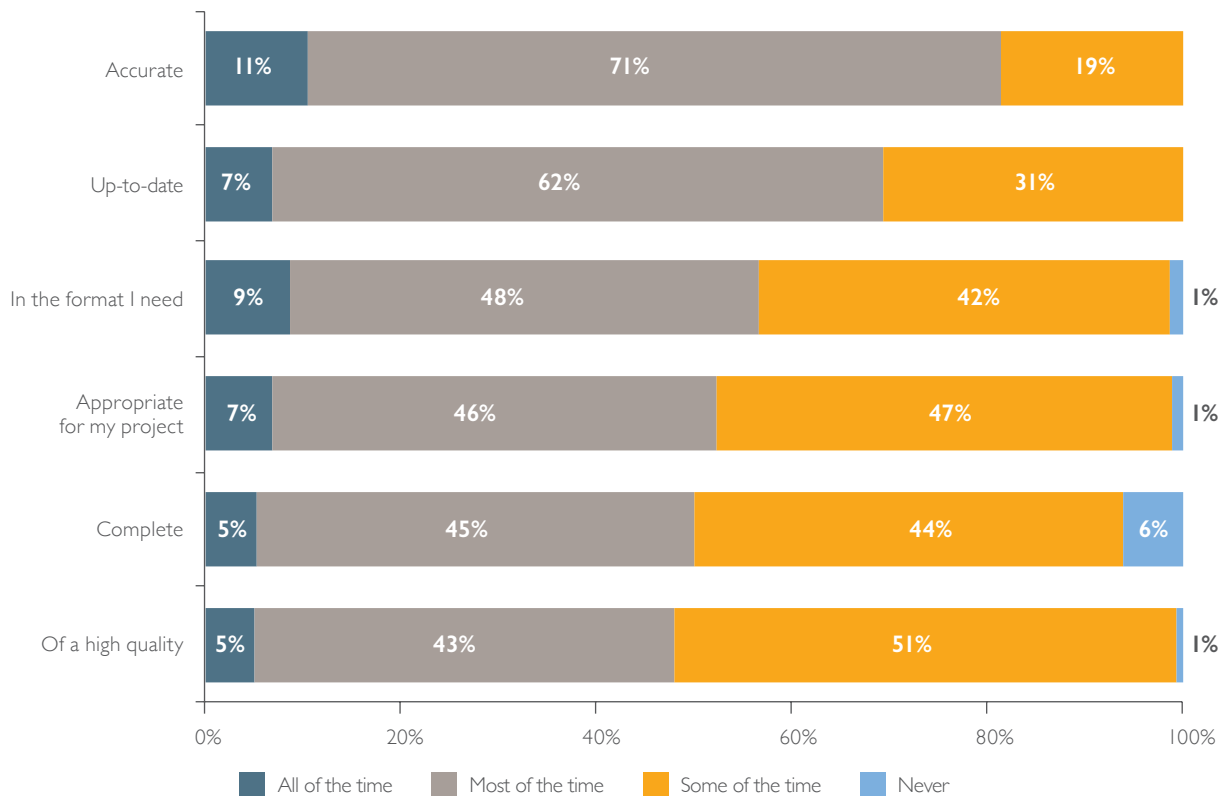


Figure 13: Users' perceptions of construction product information

Architects were less likely than other users to tell us that they find the information in the format they need, at least most of the time.

Many people can form part of the design team on a project. To an extent, all of them will be involved in ensuring that the product information used is correct, but we wanted to understand who respondents thought primarily responsible for this and whether opinion differed between groups of

respondents. Both providers and users agreed that the designers are primarily responsible for ensuring that the information is correct, followed by the manufacturer, and then the main contractor (**Figure 14**). However, users' views are firmer on this, whilst providers were less likely than users to consider the designer primarily responsible and more likely to view the main contractor as having this responsibility.

Thinking about those involved in a construction project, which discipline do you believe is primarily responsible for ensuring the product information used is correct?

Base: All respondents (524)

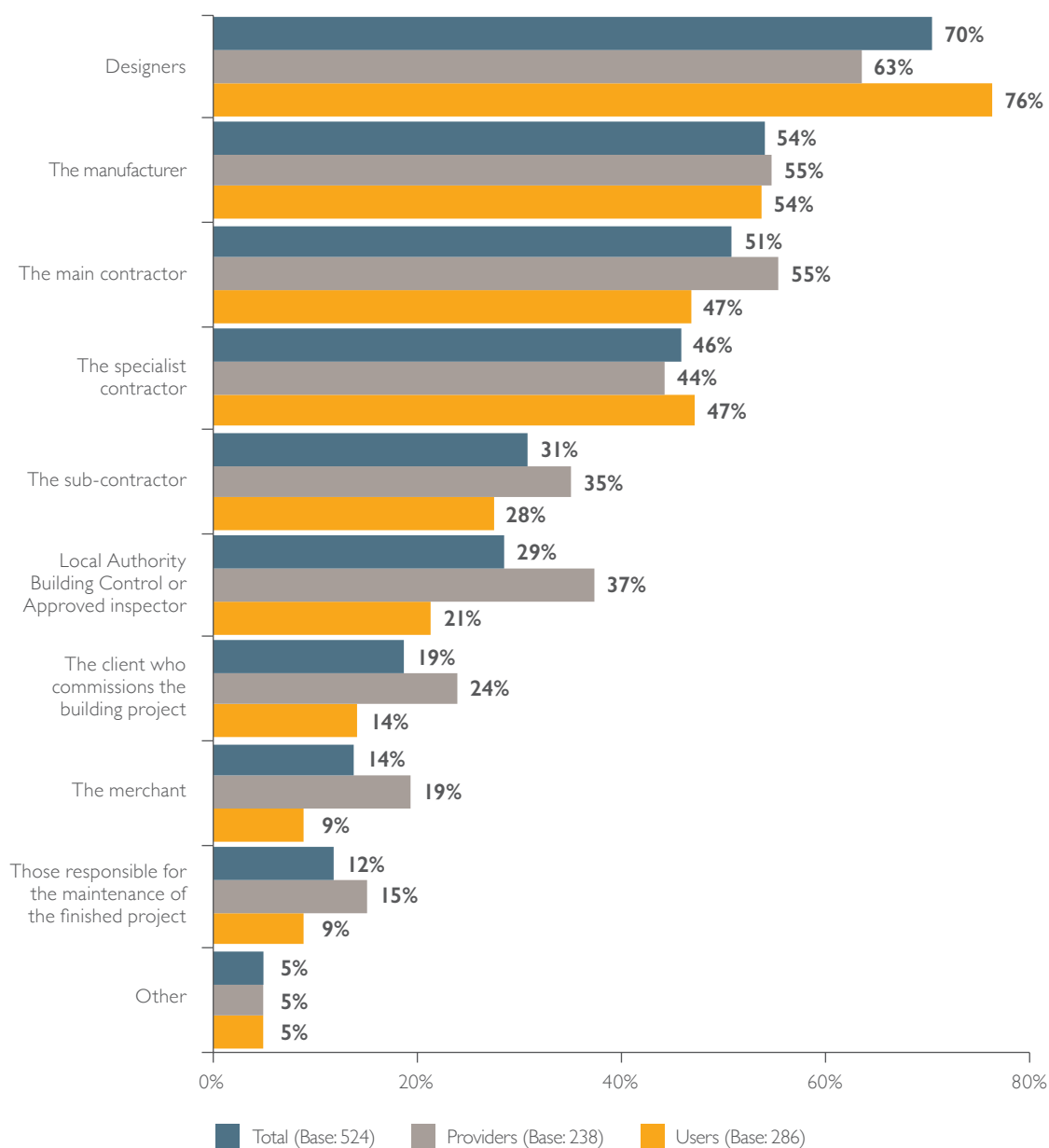


Figure 14: Primary responsibility for ensuring that the product information used is correct

Both providers and users have mechanisms and processes in place to help ensure the quality of the product information provided and used. Users will often turn directly to the manufacturer or supplier if they need additional information, or have any queries or further questions.

“Usually involves contact[ing] the supplier directly to ask for a specific detail/ performance, particularly fire test reports as the classifications given on technical data sheets are not usually sufficient.”

Other user – multi-disciplinary

“If I am unsure I will always check with the sales rep from the manufacturers or technical helpline.”

Contractor user

They will also carry out additional research such as reviewing data, cross-referencing the information with other sources and considering what details competing manufacturers are providing about their products. Having a date on product information is key to users understanding its currency and reliability.

“Firstly, I check the publish date on the document. Where there is none, I look for references to British Standards that I know to be current.”

Architectural user

Providers of construction product information recognise the importance of up-to-date information; ensuring that they have processes in place to keep their information current is a common way for them to ensure their quality. Many also refer to systems and processes they have in place to help manage the product information, including those required for their ISO 9001 certification, version control, and links between their website and their product information management (PIM) systems.

“By having a clearly defined set of data sets held within a Product Information Management (PIM) platform, workflows & user controls ensure the correct person is updating this data and the customer facing outputs flow from a single ‘version of the truth.’”

Provider – manufacturer





Both providers and users rely heavily on data to ensure the quality of information and satisfy themselves that it is to the required standard.

“If the product has not [been] independently certified I will not specify and would not accept [it] if put forward as an “alternative” by a contractor.”

Architectural user

“We apply for third party accreditation where relevant to demonstrate compliance with standards.”

Provider – manufacturer

It is of some concern that a small number of users tell us that they do not check the quality of the information, either because of difficulties doing so or because of a lack of time.

“We cannot check the ‘quality of manufacturers’ information, we have to trust it is accurate.”

Contractor user

“To some extent you have to rely on the information, but if one finds out it isn’t (reliable) then tend never to go back to them.”

Architectural user

There are additional considerations that both users and providers need to take into account if the product is to form part of a system. Primarily, they are looking at the compatibility of the products that are being combined to form a system.

“Material compatibility (e.g. chemical corrosion, dissimilar metal corrosion etc.). Interaction with other systems and components (e.g. differential movement).

Product performance evidence documenting system compatibility.”

Other user – fire engineer

“That all parts are compatible and that any substitutions made by others for whatever must meet the same performance standards and not be detrimental to the overall system in any way. If the product forms part of a system where all components are not manufactured by us, then it is critical that compliance standards are met.”

Provider – manufacturer

They also look at what exactly has been tested or certified: has the exact combination of products that they are being specified, as part of a system, been tested? If not, this may affect the use of those products.

“Validity of testing/ certification - if part of the system is changed this would usually invalidate a test result - but has the manufacturer bothered to test all the permutations? Some rely on ‘equivalence.’”

Architectural User

“How was the system tested, to what standard and in combination with what other products. Who is the system owner, person/ organisation having carried out the test and brought it to the market, have they verified the acceptability of the intended use and that it maintains the required performance and suitability for use in the specific intended environment?”

Provider – Manufacturer

When you have found a product that you may want to use, what do you generally do next?

Base: All users of product information (286)

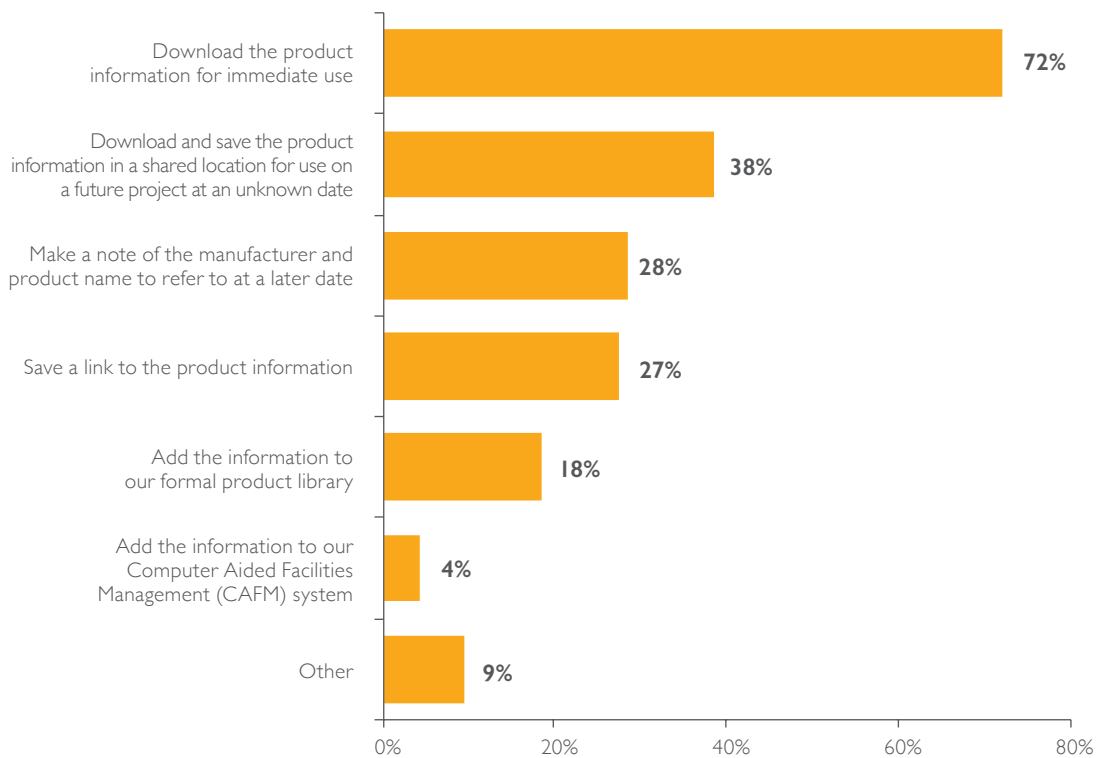


Figure 15: Users' actions after finding a product they like

When considering products for systems, users primarily go directly to the manufacturer for any additional information that they need. Respondents also tell us that the application of the product, system or material being considered can have a large effect on the information that they need, but this varies significantly between projects and products.

Once users have found a product that they may want to use, many (72%) will download it for immediate use. However, more than a third (38%) will download it for future use at an unknown date, potentially risking the information being out-of-date when it is used (Figure 15).

3.3. Product Substitution

Product substitution is a known issue in the construction industry; it is one that can bring both advantages and risk, depending on which processes are followed. Most respondents are aware of substitution happening, at least occasionally, within the last 12 months (*Figure 16*).

In the last 12 months are you aware of your product being substituted out of or into a specification/ the substitution of a product originally specified at an earlier stage in the project?

Base: All respondents (524)

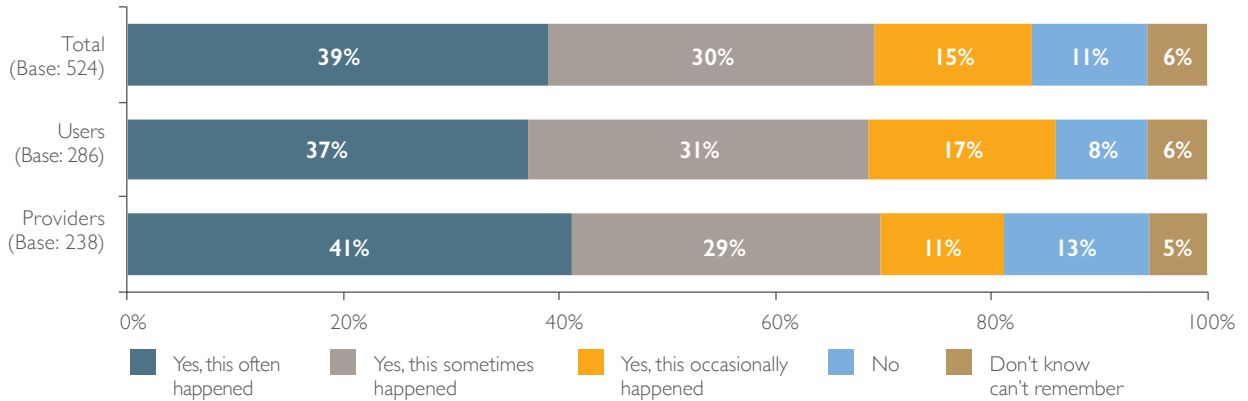


Figure 16: Awareness of substitution within the last 12 months

To understand the scale of substitution, we asked providers to estimate the proportion of projects where their product has been substituted into, or out of, a project in the last 12 months. Seventeen percent of providers told us that their products have been substituted in on more than 50% of projects in

the last 12 months, with a further 24% on between a quarter and half of all projects. Similarly, 9% have been substituted out of half of the projects that they know they were originally specified in, with a further 35% substituted out of between a quarter and half of all projects (*Figure 17*).

In the last 12 months, as far as you are aware on what proportion of projects has your product been...

Base: All providers aware of substitution and choosing to answer the question

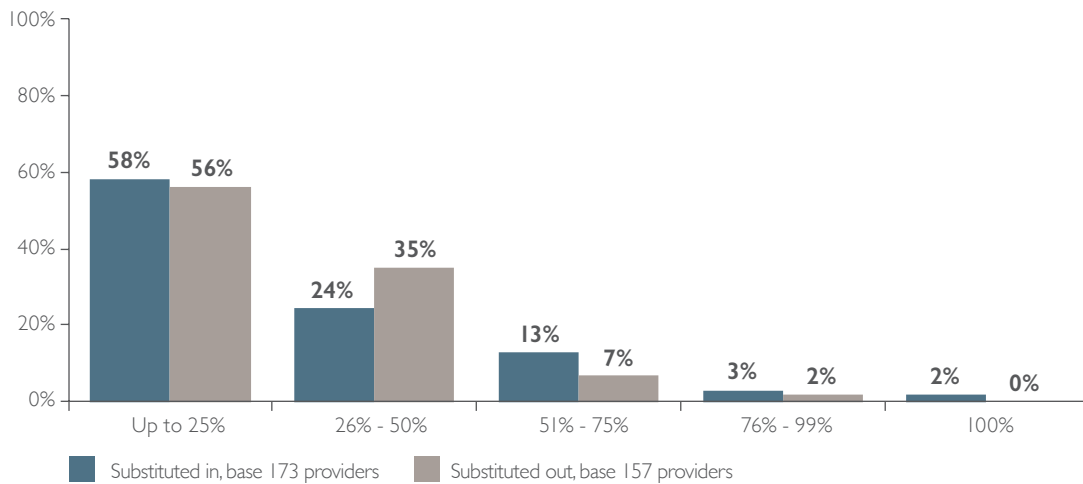


Figure 17: Proportion of projects where providers' products have been substituted in or out



What are the main reasons that substitution was made, if you are aware of them?

Base: All those aware of substitution (439)

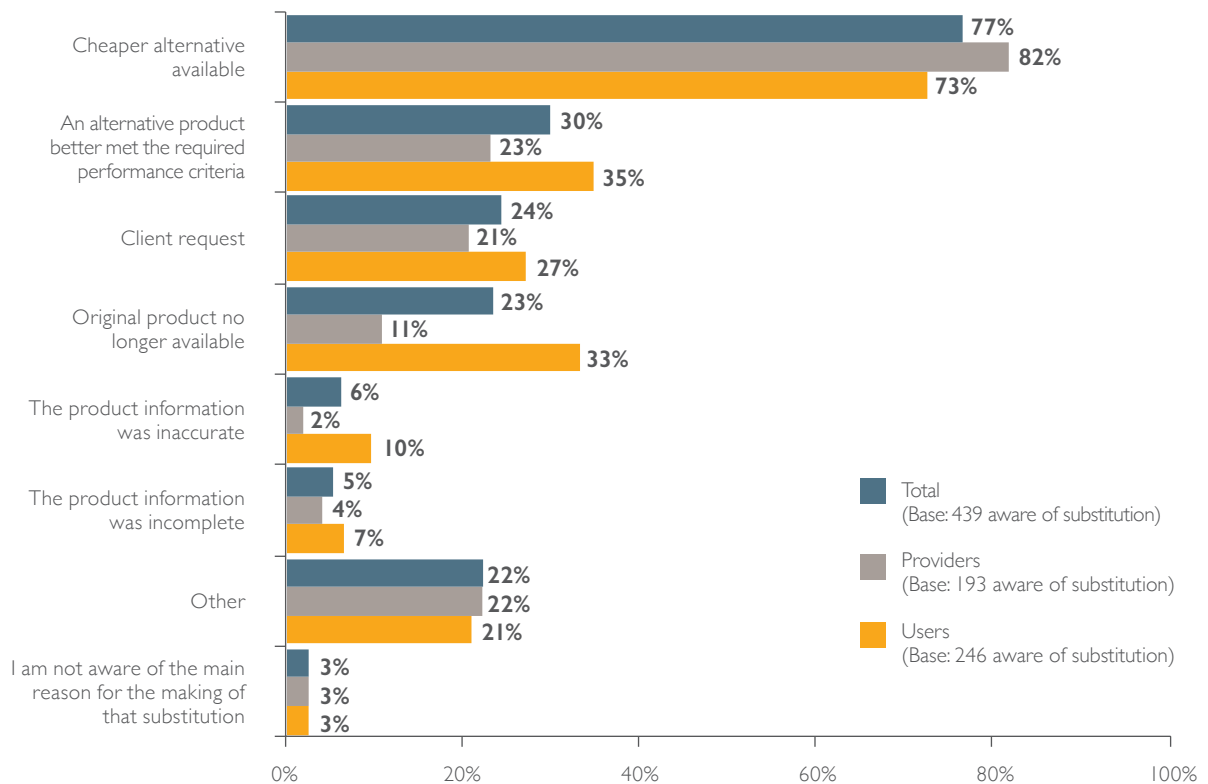


Figure 18: Main reasons for substitution

The primary reason for the substitutions was a cheaper alternative being available (Figure 18). However, some substitutions were made due to issues with the original specified product no longer

being available (23% overall), the accuracy of the information (6% overall) and the completeness of the information provided (5% overall).

When choosing to make a substitution which, if any, of the following processes were typically followed when that substitution was made?

Base: All those aware of substitution (439)

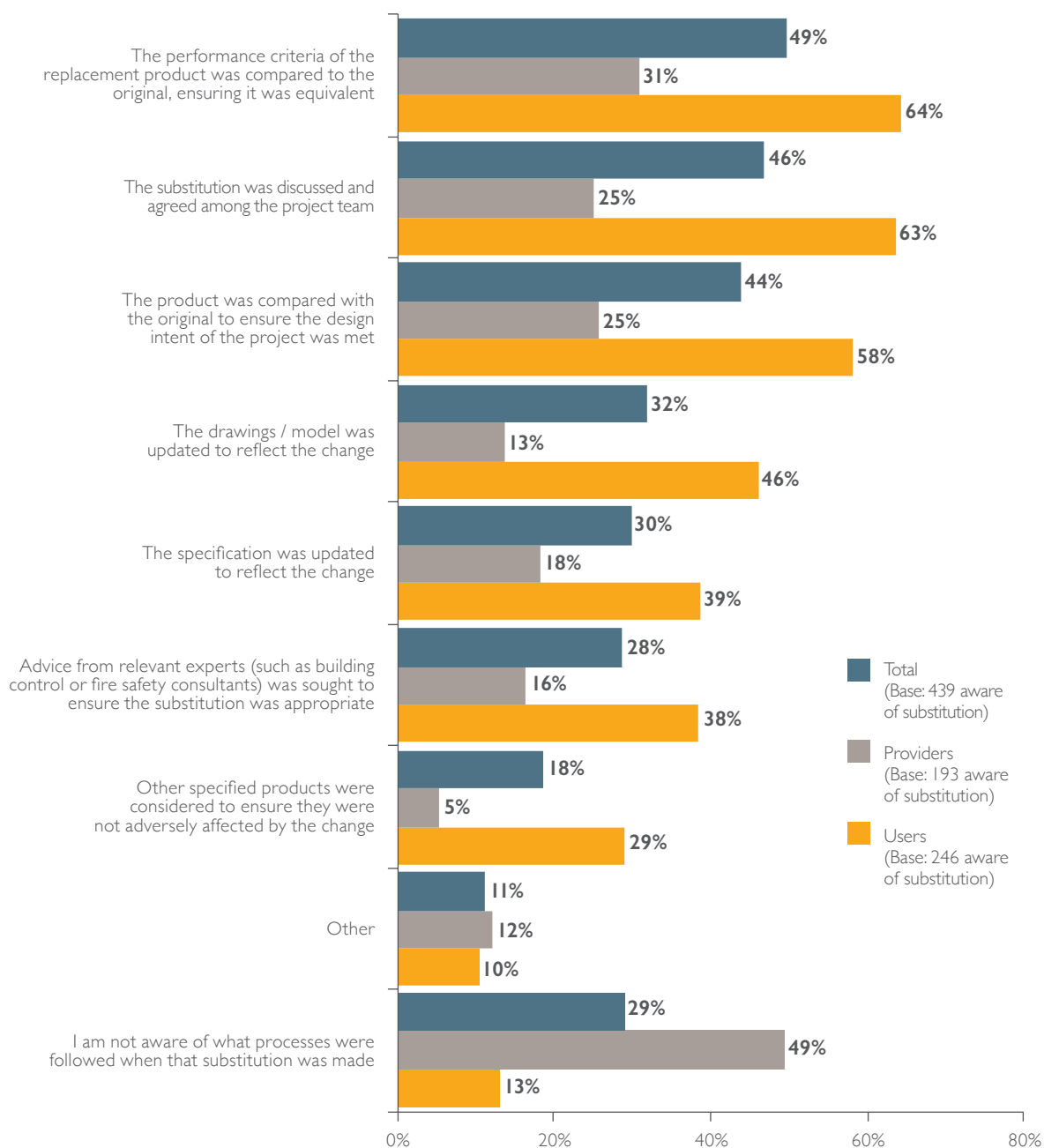


Figure 19: Typical substitution processes respondents follow

Just under half of respondents told us that these substitutions were discussed and agreed among the project team, and that the performance criteria of the replacement product were compared to the original, ensuring that they were equivalent (Figure 19). However, this means that on up to half of all projects where substitution took place,

these key processes were not followed. Architects and engineers, in particular, are likely to compare the performance of products before making a substitution. Around half of providers (49%) were not involved in the substitution process, and therefore do not know what processes were followed.

Prior to the substitution being made, was authority for the substitution sought? And if so was it given?

Base: Users aware of substitution and who then sought authority, excluding don't know

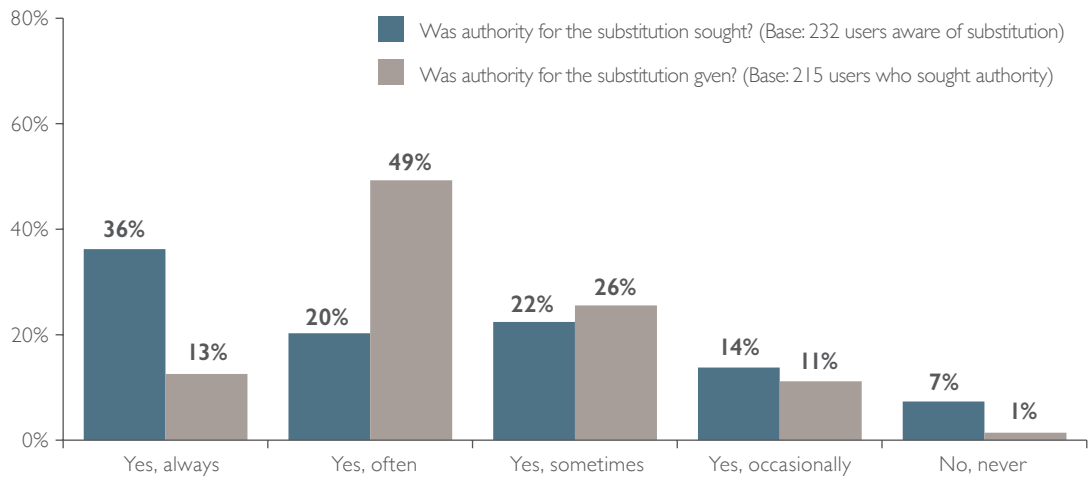


Figure 20: Authority for substitution

The majority of users told us that prior to a substitution being made, authority for that substitution was sought; but only around a third of them (36%) told us that this always happens (Figure 20). When authority is sought, it is often given, but not always.

How easy or difficult was it to get the authority to approve that substitution?

Base: Users aware of substitution and where authority for substitution was sought and given (206)

Excluding 'don't knows'

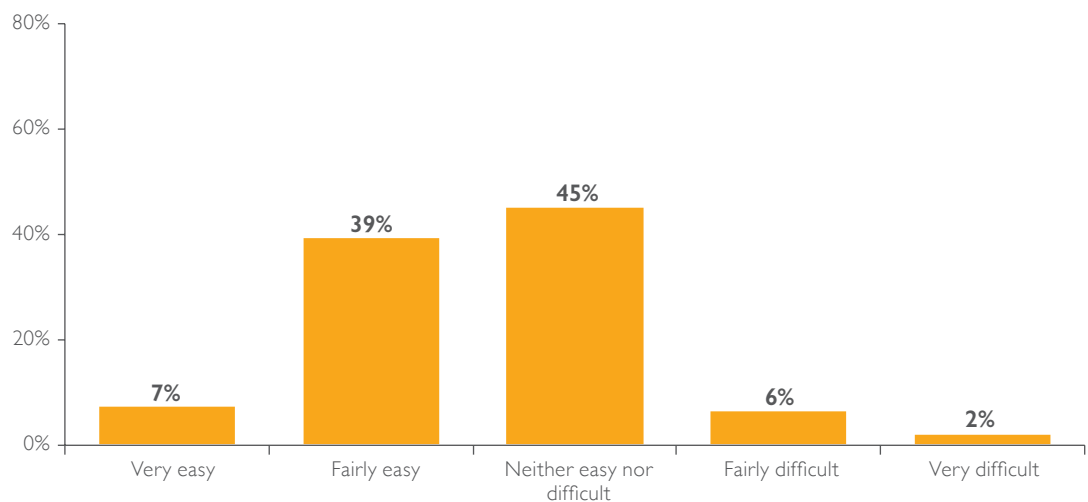


Figure 21: Ease of gaining authority to make a substitution

Amongst those who said that authority for a substitution was given, almost half (45%) told us that they found it neither easy nor difficult to get the authority to approve that substitution.

It is clear from respondents' comments that users have had mixed experiences of product substitution. In a number of cases, users' experiences of substitution have been negative, adversely affecting the performance of a product or the design intent.

“Product substitution in isolation can often be perceived as adding value, however what is often overlooked is the consequential impact on other parts of the building design which may negate the benefit of product substitution.”

Contractor user

“As a consultant I disagree totally with substitution as it never offers positive value just cheapens the job and causes more work for the consultant. i.e. if the boiler is changed this will impact on boilerhouse layout, [flues], pump selection, controls. The only person who benefits on substitution is the contractor whose sole aim is to install cheaper inferior product.”

Engineering user

For some, the substitution has had little effect, and for others a positive effect. For example, respondents highlight instances where the replacement product offered benefits such as improved performance or better delivery times, meaning that the project was delivered on time. Others also observed that situations can change between a specification being written and a project being constructed: a product may be withdrawn, a manufacturer may go out of business or a new product may emerge which performs better than the original specified product.

However, it is clear that when substitutions are suggested, it is important that appropriate processes are in place to ensure that the relevant merits of the products are considered and evaluated. It is also important to ensure that the right people are involved in making that decision.

“Any substitution is discussed with the design team to ensure its suitability before presenting to the client. If the client is not 100% happy the substitution will not proceed.”

Architectural user

“Product substitution is only made when all parties involved with the project are satisfied that it meets the original design, performance, and specification criteria.”

Contractor user

Many providers are realistic about substitution. They acknowledge that it happens, and they often view it as a 'you win some and you lose some' situation.

“It is a case of you win some you lose some, so in the end it tends to even itself out.”

Provider – merchant

“Products may have been substituted due to an improved solution being available or required by the user. Health & safety requirements for technology such as anti-vibration/ noise reduction/ cordless alternatives may have been preferred by the contractors.”

Provider – manufacturer

Providers do have ways of trying to ensure that they win more specifications than they lose, often concentrating on the information they provide about the products that they manufacture or supply, emphasising the quality of them and their performance criteria.

“It has become normal practice when cheaper alternatives are available. We take it on the chin & carry on confirming the benefits of copper over cheaper alternatives.”

Provider – manufacturer

“We are trying to provide more technical performance information about our products and have these written into the specification to make it more difficult to switch us out. Our biggest concern is that a product used instead of ours will not perform to the same level but that the person making the change does not have sufficient competence to understand this.”

Provider – manufacturer

“We try and sell on quality of product, accreditations, and test data to back up our offer. As we gain more than we lose currently it seems the quality/ accreditation route is more successful.”

Provider – manufacturer

Others also focus on building relationships with designers, contractors and other specifiers, and providing them with the appropriate training and support that they need.

“We try to increase the number of specifications and actively maintain them working with design teams where possible”

Provider – distributor

“We react by working harder on our relationships in order to succeed next time around.”

Provider – manufacturer



3.4. Competence Levels

Within the survey, we considered the competence of the person reviewing the product information. Nearly all respondents believe that it is very or quite important for the individual to be able to: understand the information that they are reviewing; analyse the information and interpret it to ensure that it is used correctly (Figure 22). Additionally, nearly all respondents believe that it is important that they understand the potential risks associated with misuse of the product. Greater discrepancies occur between providers' and users' perceptions of the importance of the competence level of

the person reviewing the product information, in terms of their understanding of test processes and the implications of using a product on a new build project or a refurbishment project. In both cases, users are more likely to consider them important.

More experienced respondents (those who have been working in the industry for 30 years or more) are more likely to acknowledge the importance of being able to understand the nuances of the technical information's language and how it is normally expressed: perhaps as a result of issues that they have encountered throughout their career.

Percentage of respondents who believe the individual's ability to do the following is very or quite important.

Base: All respondents (511 to 519) Excluding 'don't knows'

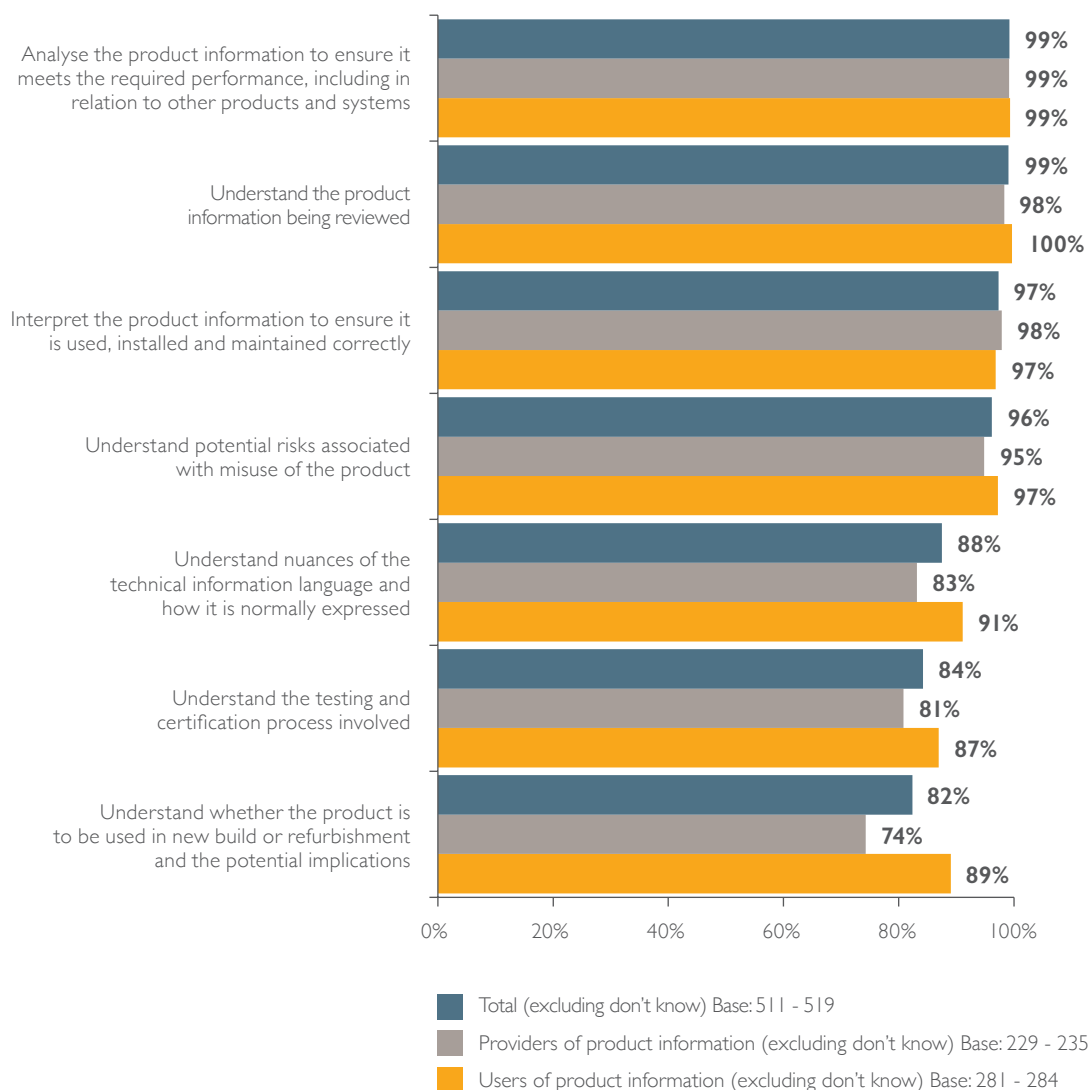


Figure 22: Importance of an individual's ability to understand, analyse and interpret product information

Percentage of respondents who rate their own ability to do the following as very good.

Base: All respondents (507 to 516) Excluding 'don't knows'

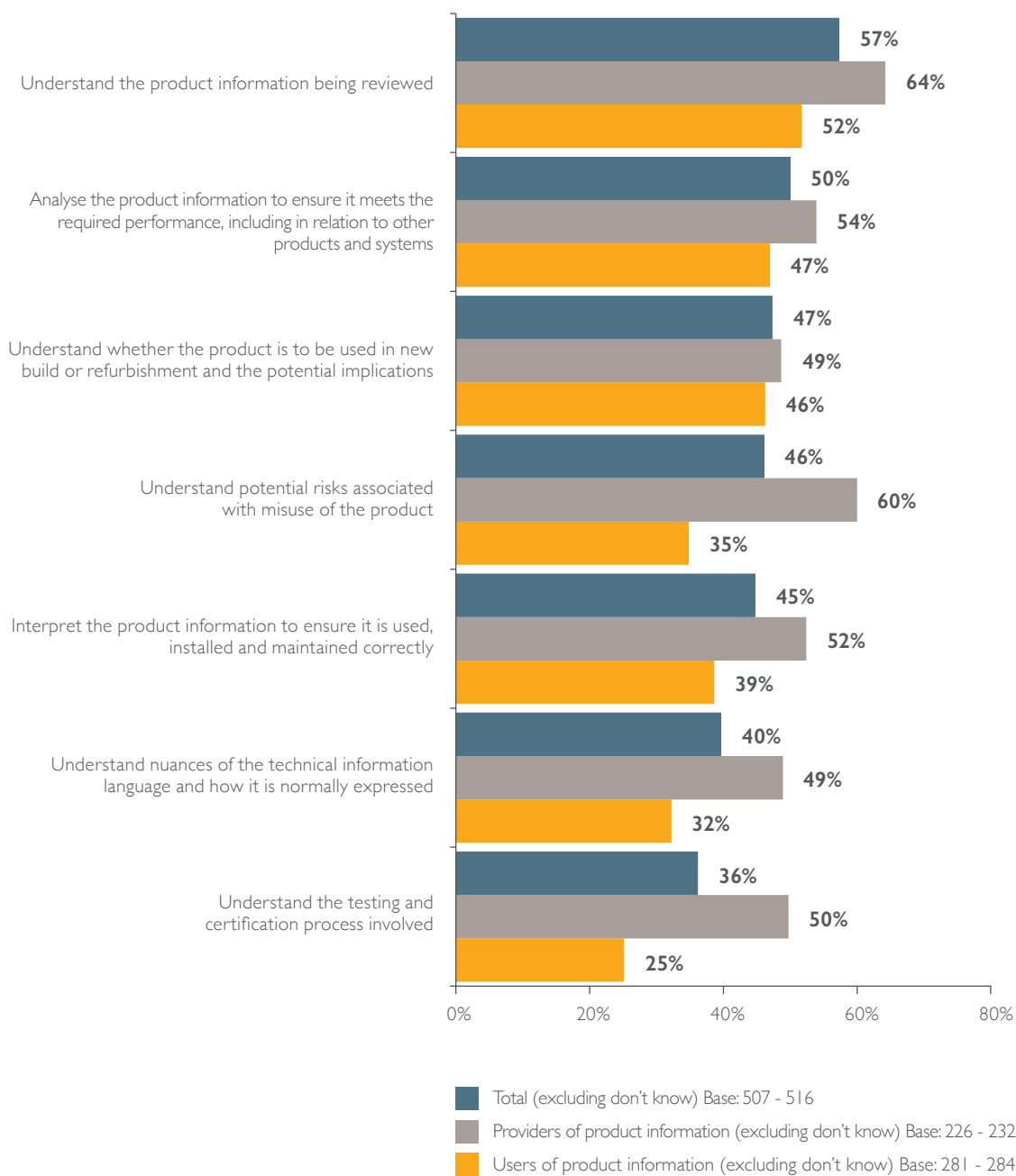


Figure 23: Respondents' ratings of their ability to understand, analyse and interpret product information

When we ask respondents to rate their own ability to do all of these tasks, we see a pattern emerging: providers are consistently more confident in their own ability, with more of them rating their ability as very good (**Figure 23**). This is, at least in part, likely to be a reflection of providers knowing their own products well and specialising in a small number of these, as opposed to users who can

often be considering numerous different products for a project.

Only 25% of users and 50% of providers rate their understanding of the testing and certification process as very good. This is a concern, given how much both groups rely on testing and certification to ensure the quality of the products that they use.

Percentage of respondents who think a minimum competence level should be set for the person carrying out the following tasks within a project.

Base: All respondents (488 to 503) Excluding 'don't knows'

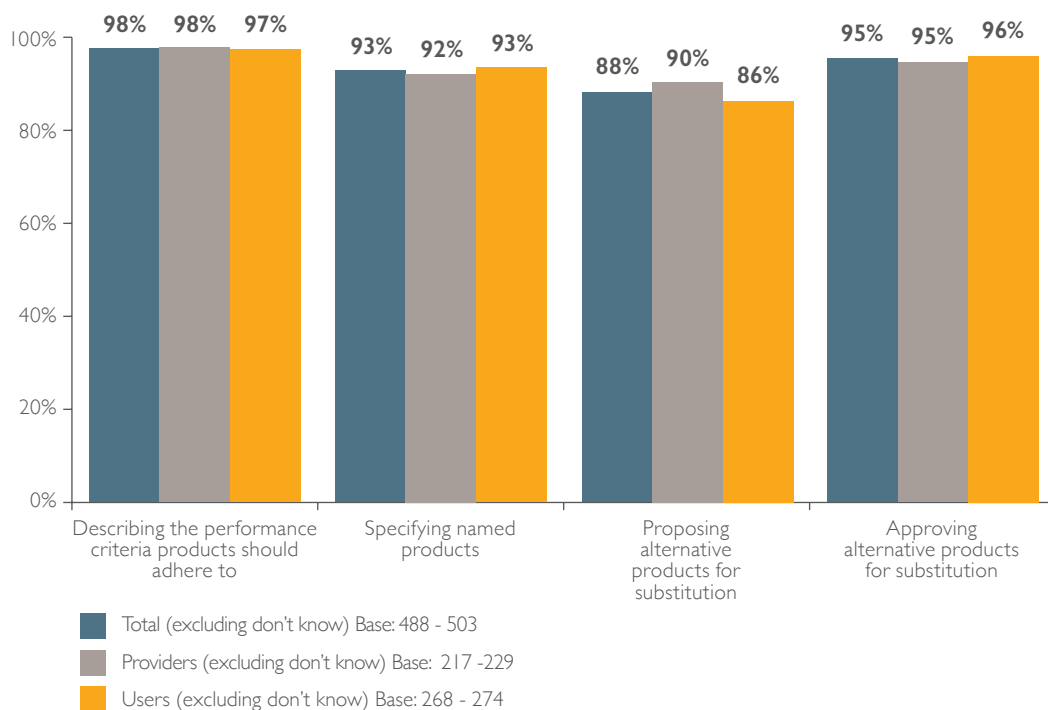


Figure 24: Setting minimum competence levels for key tasks

There is near-universal agreement that a minimum competence level should be set for those describing the performance criteria that products should adhere to, as well as for approving alternative

products for substitution (*Figure 24*). Most would also like to see them set for any specifying of named products, and when proposing alternatives for substitution.

Respondents had the opportunity to tell us more about their answers, in order to help explain what level of competence they thought that the person should have, and how they felt that this could be implemented. For respondents, it is generally about the person having an appropriate level of training and knowledge, and the relevant qualifications. This might be knowledge that they have gained from a specific qualification they have achieved or through experience in the industry.

“It is different for the different individuals. Registration as a professional does not necessarily mean they are competent to evaluate the issues associated with a task. Contractors suggesting substitutions should hold some type of manufacturer’s certification based on training by the manufacturer’s technical group/ person.”

Other user – consulting engineer



“Persons dealing with projects of critical infrastructure or dealing with products affecting people’s life safety (e.g. structural, fire, hygiene) should be very skilled in reviewing product information and selecting products. Regular assessments may be required as the products and technologies are constantly evolving and skills and knowledge gained on a project 2 years ago may no longer be relevant or applicable.”

Other user – fire engineers

“They should be required to pass an Online Training Module & this should result in a Certificate of competence”

Provider – merchant

“They should be fully aware of compliance and standards, and the key risk of allowing falsified claims on performance and regulation, my concern is no one cares”

Provider – manufacturer

3.5. Improving Construction Product Information

Almost two thirds of users (66%) are satisfied with the available manufacturer product information (Figure 25). Similarly, 63% are satisfied with manufacturer support available to help users understand manufacturers’ product information. Users are less satisfied with the current process for making product substitutions: little more than a third (34%) told us that they are very or quite satisfied with this process.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?

Base: All users of construction product information (277-283) Excluding ‘don’t knows’

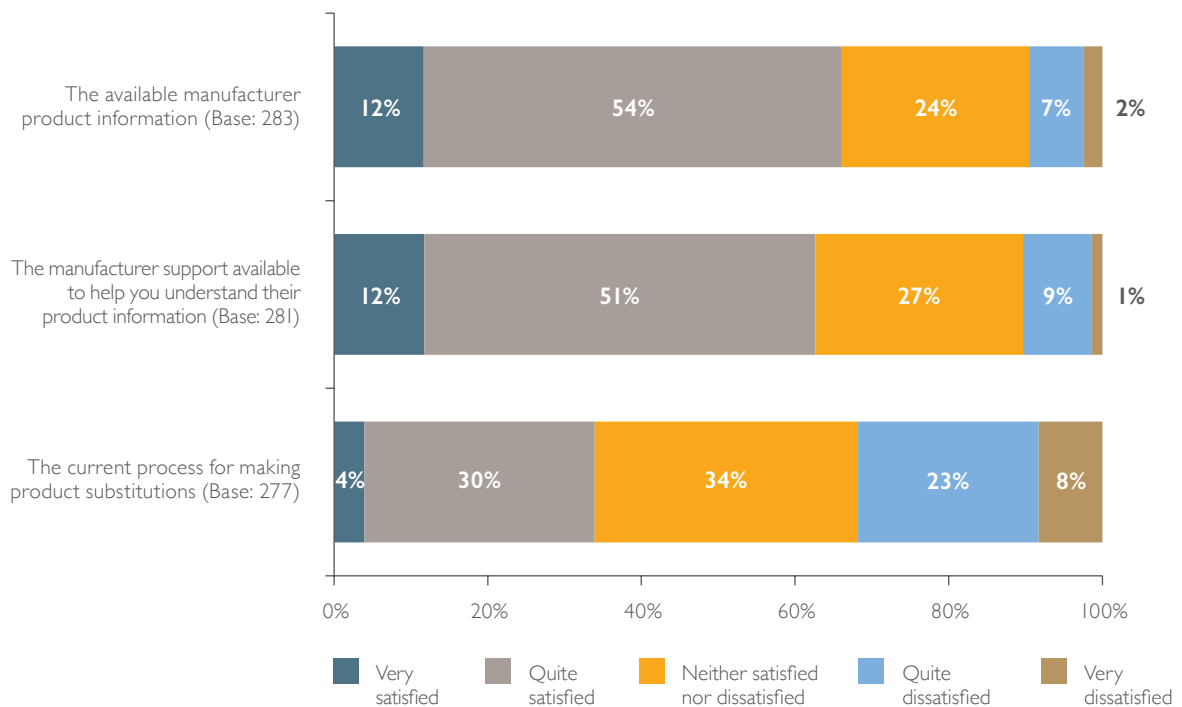


Figure 25: User satisfaction with product information and the substitution processes

In all cases, satisfaction is linked to users' ease of finding the information that they need and the perceived quality of that information: is the information accurate, complete, up-to-date and of a high quality? Where users find information in the format that they need and consider it appropriate, they are more likely to be satisfied with the current substitution process.

We put two solutions to respondents to help ensure the accurate provision and use of manufacturer product information:

- an industry code of conduct; and

- legally binding regulation.

As shown in **Figure 26**, overall, 83% of respondents (83% of users and 84% of providers) agreed that an industry code of conduct should be introduced. Seventy-one percent of users and providers would like to see legally binding regulation introduced. Agreement about the introduction of a code of conduct is particularly strong: overall, 46% said that they strongly agree (40% of users and 53% of providers). This is compared to 37% who strongly agree that legally binding regulation should be introduced.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All respondents (514) Excluding 'don't knows'

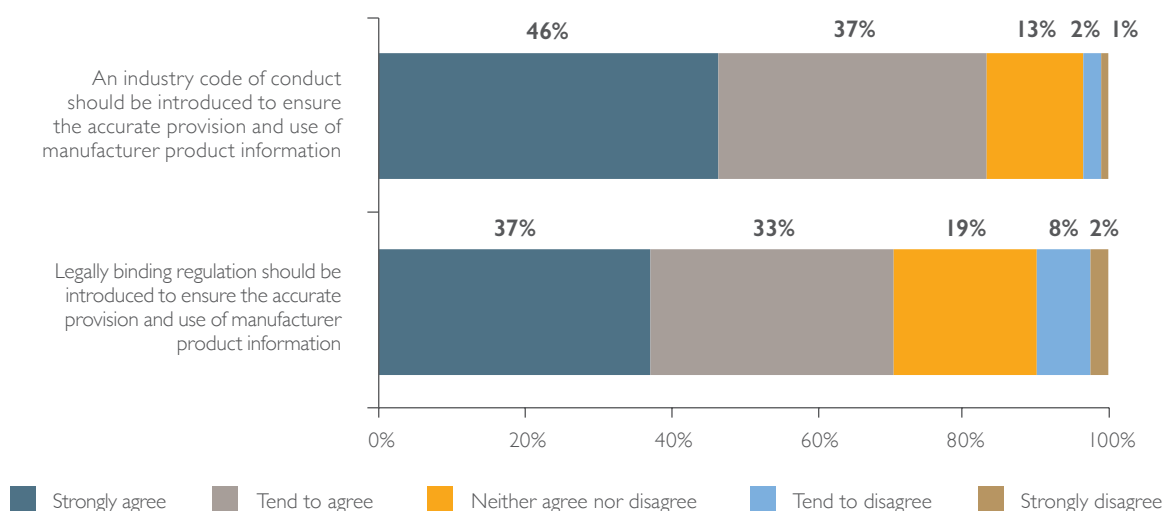


Figure 26: Introducing a code of conduct and/ or legally binding regulation

Respondents who would like to see legally binding regulation introduced are more likely to think that there should be minimum competence levels for those specifying named products and describing the performance criteria that products should adhere to.

Respondents had the opportunity to tell us more about their answer. Many of them recognise the importance of using product information correctly and ensuring that the information used is accurate, standardised and up-to-date. For them, a code of conduct and, in a number of cases, legally binding regulation may help ensure this, and therefore help to improve the safety of buildings for users.

“Any publicly displayed information needs to be accurate and subject to change based review.... It is the manufacturer’s responsibility to provide accurate and tested information at the point of specification, but the specifier’s responsibility to ensure that they use the correct information.”

Provider – manufacturer



“I feel strongly in agreement with both of the above, we have a moral obligation to people using the building we design and build... Currently only mandatory standards seem to be adhered to on most projects and these generally are seen as a target not a minimum. Bringing in an independent regulation on products test data, systems warranties and how we approach the market would possibly be the only way to change behaviour at a broad level.”

Provider – manufacturer

Should a code of conduct or legally binding regulation be introduced, respondents tell us that it would need to be enforced by qualified, independent people.

“Legally binding & enforced regulation is the only way forwards. There is no point in having regulation without extensive and country-wide enforcement.”

Provider – manufacturer

“Unless there is a legal requirement such as through building regulation... then a code of conduct will not stand up. Voluntary codes are fine, but if they are purely voluntary, it will only be the smaller minority who will adhere. Sadly the construction industry does have a race to the bottom attitude with product selection and if changes are to be made then they must be enforceable.”

Other user - trade association

However, some respondents do not think that additional legislation or a code of conduct will help. Instead, they would prefer to see existing regulations being enforced.

“There are already fundamental requirements in the provision of products and product information concerning obligations and responsibilities. There isn’t a need for more rules and regulation. What is needed is better enforcement and scrutiny of the requirements that already exist. The action should be in ensuring that those formulating specifications and acting as specifiers in the purchase and supply chain... are more competent to exercise their purchase and specification decisions through better technical awareness and knowledge. Competency along the supply and specifier chain is important.”

Provider – manufacturer

There are improvements that respondents would like to see to the ways in which product information is communicated and used. For users, the primary issue relates to the quality of information: they would like to see this improved to ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date, and easy to identify the relevant facts about the product, including both the positive and the negative aspects in relation to the product’s applicability for the job.

“Providing clear technical information with pros and cons and risks rather than glossy brochures which pretend there are no potential issues.”

Engineering user

“Reduce sales spin/ marketing material focussing instead on facts/ data regarding independently verified performance.”

Architectural user

Users would also like the information that manufacturers provide to be standardised, enabling them to easily compare the product information.

“If datasheets all followed a common format and included the same information, comparison and understanding would be far simpler.”

Architectural user

“Standardisation of performance criteria - similar to food labelling - for ease of quick overview of performance.”

Architectural user

Providers would also like to see a standardised format for providing their information.

“Regulation that requires the same information to be presented in the same way across the board. By way of illustration: I won’t eat from any food establishment that doesn’t have four stars or higher and if they don’t display it, I don’t make a purchase. We need something similar for construction.”

Provider – manufacturer

They also recognise that training and knowledge may be a barrier. Therefore, they would like to see knowledge sharing and training in the form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to help educate the industry.

“More training programmes and a greater focus from manufacturers on ensuring products requiring advice or having special characteristics clearly show this on the packaging.”

Provider – merchant

“I think often the issue lies in the technical knowledge and terms being understood by the end user. If it’s assumed that someone using the product will understand specific and detailed terms, they may not find the information helpful or easy to understand. Making the technical specifications easier to understand could be improved.”

Provider – manufacturer





4. Summary of Findings

The survey represents the views of 524 construction industry professionals; 238 of them provide construction product information, and 286 are users of the information (such as architects, engineers, surveyors and contractors). Many are experienced professionals who are heavily involved in product selection and/ or research into construction products.

The survey suggests that there is strong support for the introduction of:

- Minimum competence levels for those involved in:
 - establishing the performance criteria products should adhere to;
 - specifying named products;
 - proposing and approving alternative products for substitution.
- An industry code of conduct to ensure the accurate provision and use of manufacturer product information.
- Legally binding regulation (to a lesser extent).

Users are relatively satisfied with the available manufacturer product information and the support that manufacturers provide to help users' understanding of it. There are, however, some differences in users' preferred way of accessing product information and the way in which providers share it. Users show a strong preference for digital information.

Perceptions of the quality of this information are important. It is clear from users' comments that the quality of manufacturer product information can vary considerably between manufacturers: some are seen to be very comprehensive, whilst others are considered vague.

Users want the information that they access to be of a high standard. They need it to be accurate, complete, up-to-date and easy to understand. Users tell us that in many cases it is. However, they highlight that it is not always high quality or complete. They acknowledge that providers are trying to sell their products and are therefore promoting their positive aspects, but they need the information to be clear and transparent. For example, highlighting applications where the product may not be suitable, or other limitations about its use. Access to this type of information will help them to make fair comparisons between products. Additionally, users would like to see standardised product information to help them make those comparisons.

Manufacturer support, and testing and certification information are important means of assessing the quality of the product information and ensuring that it is used correctly. This is especially important when the product is being used as part of a system.

Providers are often keen to help and support users of their information, providing support through technical helplines, knowledgeable staff and product information in a range of formats. They find it frustrating when users do not ask for help if they need it, and are keen to share their knowledge with them. They would also like to see standardised product information, both to help users utilise that information correctly and so that they themselves can understand what information users need.

Substitution remains prominent. More than four out of five respondents are aware of substitution happening within the last 12 months, often because a cheaper alternative was available. In some cases, the substitution has had a positive effect, resolving issues with the original specified products or improving performance. However, in other cases the substitution has been negative, resulting in performance issues and (in some scenarios) the need for remedial works. The processes followed when considering substitution vary. Some respondents told us that the project team discussed and agreed the substitution, and the performance criteria of the products were compared to ensure that they were equivalent – but this does not always happen. Nor is the authority for the substitution always sought. This has left two thirds of respondents unhappy with the current process for making substitutions.

It is clear that respondents have strong opinions and are keen to see improvements made, to ensure that customers have trust and confidence in the buildings and other assets that are being designed and constructed for their use. Even those who disagree with the proposed solutions recognise that improvements are needed and, in some cases, would like existing regulations to be better enforced. A number of respondents also highlighted examples of best practice from other countries around the world which the Marketing Integrity Group could review.

About CPA



The Construction Products Association (CPA) is the leading voice to promote and campaign for construction product manufacturers and suppliers.

This vital UK industry defines our built environment, providing the products and materials needed for homes, offices, shops, road, railways, schools and hospitals. The sector directly provides jobs for 337,000 people across 24,000 companies and has an annual turnover of more than £60 billion.

We are committed to raising the profile of our industry and members' businesses, helping grow the market and reducing regulatory risk.

We champion our members' interest across both manufacturing and construction industries. Because we are product-neutral, the CPA speaks for the construction products industry as a whole with one strong, united voice.

We provide our members with unique expertise and support, including:

- Tracking and assessing government policies
- Interpreting those policies and regulations and providing expert advice
- Producing authoritative economic, technical and sustainability publications
- Leading consensus with members and the wider construction supply chain on major issues
- Representing our members across industry-wide organisations and alliances
- Supporting and lobbying policy makers in the UK and EU to develop effective, evidence-based policies and solutions

About NBS



NBS is a technology and information platform used both by specifiers, and manufacturers. We maintain a level of technical knowledge and expertise that is unrivalled within the construction industry.

Over 4,000 architecture and engineering practices rely on our cloud-based system to create specifications, find manufacturer products and develop their digital models. For building product manufacturers, we help them structure their product information and expose it to specifiers within our platform.

Our roots lie in the National Building Specification, which has been helping the construction industry build better and with lower risk for over 40 years. Our future lies in cloud-based technologies and connected data.

NBS is backed by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), which gives us unique knowledge

of the architecture and design communities. We also play an active role in many cross-industry bodies and groups.

In addition, we carry out research on key industry issues, consulting with construction professionals representing roles from across the project team. Through our research programme we regularly consult with designers, specifiers and manufacturers on subjects such as BIM, specification, sustainability and technology. We share the knowledge from this research via our industry reports, such as the BIM Report, which we have published each year since 2011. From time-to-time, we use our expertise to carry out research in partnership with other construction industry organisations, like the CPA.

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