

Competent Person for Fixed Ladder Inspections - Qualification Requirements

Legal Basis

Under the **Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)**, fixed ladders must be inspected at appropriate intervals by a **competent person**. This document outlines what qualifies someone as competent to carry out detailed visual inspections of fixed ladders.

HSE Definition of "Competent Person"

A **competent person** for fixed ladder inspections is someone who has:

1. **Sufficient knowledge and experience** of the type of equipment being inspected
2. **Necessary level of competence** appropriate to the specific equipment and its use
3. **Information and knowledge** of what to look for during inspection
4. **Ability to recognize** what is acceptable and what constitutes a defect
5. **Been formally assigned** the task of carrying out ladder inspections

Source: [HSE Web Communities - Competent to Inspect Ladders](#)

Key Principle: No Prescribed Qualifications

Important: HSE does **NOT** require specific qualifications, certifications, or training courses to be a competent person for ladder inspections.

Competence is determined by a **combination** of:

- Training (formal and informal)
- Practical experience
- Theoretical knowledge
- Demonstrated ability

This means: A competent employee within your organization can carry out detailed visual inspections - you do not necessarily need to engage external inspectors or certified professionals.

Source: [HSE Training and Competence](#)

What Makes Someone Competent?

1. Knowledge Requirements

A competent person must understand:

Technical Knowledge:

- Types of fixed ladders and their components (stiles, rungs, fixings, cages/hoops)
- Relevant standards (BS 4211:2005+A1:2008, BS EN ISO 14122-4:2016)
- Legal requirements (Work at Height Regulations 2005, PUWER 1998)
- Manufacturer's specifications and maintenance instructions

Defect Recognition:

- Common defects and failure modes
- Difference between acceptable wear and dangerous deterioration
- Critical vs. non-critical defects
- When equipment must be withdrawn from service

Safety Requirements:

- Height thresholds for safety cages/fall protection (2.5m)
- Rest platform requirements (9m vertical rise)
- Load capacity requirements
- Clearance and spacing specifications

2. Experience Requirements

The competent person should have:

- Practical experience with fixed ladders
- Understanding of how the equipment is used in your workplace
- Knowledge of the working environment and conditions
- Familiarity with the specific ladders being inspected

Level of Experience:

- Varies depending on complexity and risk level
- Simple fixed ladders may require less experience than complex industrial installations
- More frequent or critical use may justify higher competence level

3. Training Requirements

While no specific qualifications are mandated, appropriate training should cover:

Core Inspection Skills:

- How to conduct systematic visual inspections
- Use of inspection checklists and record-keeping
- Identification of specific defects (see below)
- Assessment of defect severity
- When to withdraw equipment from service

Ladder-Specific Knowledge:

- Components to inspect (stiles, rungs, fixings, welds, rivets, stays)
- Testing methods (visual examination, physical checks where appropriate)
- Manufacturer's instructions for the specific ladders
- Documentation and reporting requirements

Training Can Include:

- On-the-job training from more experienced personnel
- Manufacturer's training courses
- Industry training (e.g., from ladder associations or safety organizations)
- In-house training programs
- Review of HSE guidance documents

Specific Defects to Recognize

A competent person must be able to identify:

Structural Defects

- **Stiles (side rails):** Twisted, bent, dented, cracked, corroded
- **Rungs/Steps:** Cracked, worn, bent, loose, missing
- **Welds:** Cracked, damaged, corroded
- **Rivets:** Loose, missing, damaged
- **Fixings:** Loose bolts, damaged anchors, inadequate attachment

Safety Feature Defects

- **Safety cages/hoops:** Damaged, loose, corroded, missing sections
- **Self-closing gates:** Not functioning, damaged, missing
- **Rest platforms:** Damaged, unstable, inadequate guardrails

General Condition Issues

- **Corrosion:** Surface rust vs. structural corrosion
- **Paint/coating:** Protective coating failure exposing metal
- **Clearances:** Obstructions reducing required clearances
- **Environmental damage:** Impact damage, weather damage

Source: [HSE Safe Use of Ladders - Inspecting Condition](#)

Assessment of Competence

How to Determine if Someone is Competent

Employers should assess competence based on:

Knowledge Assessment:

- Can they identify the components of a fixed ladder?
- Do they understand relevant regulations and standards?
- Can they explain what constitutes a defect?
- Do they know when to withdraw equipment from service?

Practical Assessment:

- Can they conduct a systematic inspection?
- Can they correctly identify defects in practice?
- Can they assess whether defects are critical?
- Can they complete inspection records accurately?

Experience Verification:

- What relevant experience do they have?
- Have they conducted inspections under supervision?
- Do they understand the specific workplace context?

Building Competence

For someone who is not yet competent:

1. **Provide appropriate training** (formal or informal)
2. **Allow supervised inspections** until competent
3. **Review inspection reports** for accuracy
4. **Provide feedback and coaching**
5. **Formally confirm competence** before allowing independent inspections

Can Internal Employees Be Competent Persons?

Yes - **absolutely**. HSE guidance confirms that a competent person:

- **Can be an employee** within your organization
- Does **NOT need to be external** (though external inspectors may be used)
- Does **NOT require formal certification** (though training is important)
- Should have appropriate knowledge, experience, and training for your specific equipment

Advantages of Internal Competent Persons:

- Better familiarity with specific equipment
- Understanding of workplace context and usage patterns
- More frequent and responsive inspections possible
- Cost-effective for organizations with multiple fixed ladders

Source: [HSE Web Communities Discussion](#)

Documentation of Competence

While not legally required, it is good practice to document:

Training Records:

- Training courses attended
- On-the-job training provided
- Manufacturer's training completed

Competence Assessment:

- Date competence was assessed
- Who assessed the person as competent
- Basis for determining competence (knowledge, experience, training)
- Scope of competence (types of ladders they can inspect)

Ongoing Development:

- Refresher training provided
- Updates on new regulations or standards
- Review of inspection quality

Purpose: Demonstrates due diligence and provides evidence that inspections are carried out by appropriately qualified personnel.

Level of Competence vs. Equipment Complexity

The required level of competence varies with:

Simple Fixed Ladders

Example: Short fixed ladder (under 6m) with cage, used occasionally, good environment

May be competent with:

- Basic training on ladder components and defects
- Understanding of HSE guidance
- Supervised experience conducting inspections
- Ability to use inspection checklist

Complex Fixed Ladders

Example: Tall industrial ladder (over 9m) with multiple rest platforms, high frequency use, harsh environment, integrated fall arrest system

Requires higher competence:

- More extensive training
- Greater technical knowledge
- Experience with similar complex installations
- Understanding of fall protection systems
- Ability to assess structural integrity

Employer Responsibility: Match the competence level to the risk and complexity of the equipment.

Practical Recommendations

For Employers

Identifying Competent Persons:

1. Review existing staff with relevant experience (maintenance, facilities, safety)

2. Assess their current knowledge of ladders and regulations
3. Provide appropriate training to fill gaps
4. Start with supervised inspections
5. Formally confirm competence before independent inspections

Training Investment:

- Consider manufacturer training for your specific ladder types
- Use HSE guidance as training material
- Develop in-house inspection checklists
- Provide refresher training periodically

Multiple Competent Persons:

- Useful to have more than one competent person
- Provides backup/redundancy
- Allows peer review of inspections

For Competent Persons

Maintaining Competence:

- Stay updated on HSE guidance changes
- Review manufacturer's instructions regularly
- Learn from defects identified
- Seek additional training if encountering unfamiliar equipment
- Consult more experienced inspectors when unsure

When to Seek Additional Expertise:

- Structural concerns beyond visual inspection capability
- Damage requiring engineering assessment
- Compliance with complex standards
- Major modifications or repairs needed

Common Misconceptions

Misconception 1: "You need a qualification/certificate to inspect ladders"

Reality: No specific qualification is required. Competence is based on knowledge, experience, and training - not certificates.

Misconception 2: "Only external inspectors can be competent persons"

Reality: Internal employees can be competent persons if they have appropriate knowledge and experience.

Misconception 3: "Anyone can do a visual inspection"

Reality: While anyone can do pre-use checks, detailed visual inspections must be done by competent persons with appropriate training.

Misconception 4: "Competence is permanent once established"

Reality: Competence should be maintained through ongoing experience, refresher training, and keeping up with regulatory changes.

Misconception 5: "The same competence level applies to all equipment"

Reality: Competence requirements vary with equipment complexity and risk level.

Summary: Essential Criteria for Competent Person

A competent person for fixed ladder detailed visual inspections must have:

✓ **Knowledge** - Understanding of ladder types, components, regulations, and standards ✓ **Experience** - Practical familiarity with fixed ladders and their use ✓ **Training** - Appropriate instruction on inspection methods and defect recognition ✓ **Ability** - Can systematically inspect, identify defects, assess severity, and make decisions ✓ **Assignment** - Formally given the responsibility to conduct inspections

No mandatory qualifications or certifications required. Internal employees can fulfill this role. Level of competence should match equipment complexity and risk.

Key References

HSE Guidance:

- [Safe use of ladders and stepladders - Inspecting Condition](#)
- [Training and Competence](#)
- [Inspection of Work Equipment](#)
- [HSE Web Communities - Competent to Inspect Ladders](#)

Regulations:

- [Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 \(PUWER\)](#)
- [Work at Height Regulations 2005](#)

Document Created: December 2025 **Based On:** HSE guidance on competence and PUWER requirements **Review Date:** Annually or when guidance updated

IMPORTANT NOTE

This document provides general guidance on competence requirements. Employers should:

- Assess competence requirements for their specific equipment and circumstances
- Provide appropriate training and supervision
- Document competence assessments for due diligence
- Seek professional advice for complex or high-risk installations
- Ensure competent persons are genuinely capable of making safety-critical decisions

The determination of competence is ultimately the employer's responsibility under health and safety law.