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60 second interview

Envelope contractors fly flag for UK firms

A group of specialist cladding and curtain walling contractors has just got together to launch the Building Envelope Contractors' Association (BECA). Emma Crates talks to chairman Sean McGettigan.

How many companies are behind this initiative?

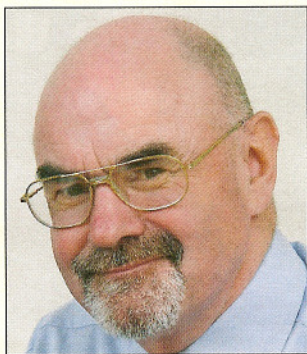
We have 16 members who are building envelope specialists with some manufacturers as associate members.

Why are you launching now?

Organisations representing our industry to date have only addressed specific issues. For example, the Council for Aluminium in Building and the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology at Bath University. But these have tended to be more technical. We are representing the contracting fraternity for the first time.

What approach will BECA be taking?

The industry has been dominated by contractors from the continent, particularly at the high specification end of the market. We want to raise the profile and capabilities of our



Sean McGettigan: "We have the core capabilities"

indigenous UK members.

Why do European companies dominate?

The system in the UK has evolved to the point where the contractor in the UK takes all the responsibility but relies on the design and supply from manufacturers. The Continental organisations will do all these things.

How do you plan to compete?

We are suffering from a skills shortage, so we are going to be putting together some relevant training programmes which will cover everything from design and manufacture to on-site installation.

Is there a case of needing to get the UK's house in order before you can complete?

No. There is a tremendous market for envelope contracting and there is a lack of capacity to deal with work coming on stream. We need to convince the architectural profession, as well as contractors, that we have the core capabilities.

Is this a perception problem?

When it comes to prestigious projects it is always the designers who have to sign off the building envelope, and the perception is that there aren't that many players in the market to do this. We want to challenge that assumption.

How will you be doing this?

Will be making representations through our committees to the industry. And we will be listening very carefully to what the industry is saying.

What are your targets?

Currently we have 16 members who represent £250 million of contracting work in the UK. By the end of this year we easily expect to double our membership and also the amount of money we represent.