

# Riggingcall #6

A look at things (impartially, of course) from a rigging point of view.

## National Rigging Certificate

**You will have heard about the National Rigging Certificate if you've been reading your L&S. The idea was originally a joint scheme between Safe Working Ltd and Total Fabrications Ltd (Total Training) in 2003. The idea was to get all the rigging companies and players in the field to agree a common goal - the formation of one recognized certificate of competence to assist employers, venues and individuals to demonstrate competence in the field of entertainment rigging.**

The decision was taken by a show of hands in 2004 that PLASA should be the body to administer the scheme to ensure transparency and authority. Some time has passed, and quite a few people have been very busy.

In order to give the scheme national credibility, PLASA has worked alongside Tony Bond of TTTS and SkillScene to incorporate the original concept into an assessment framework that uses national occupational standards set by the rigging industry and acknowledges an increase in skills and responsibility. The scheme is now well and truly in motion. In October, the advisory group to PLASA was asked to define 'rigging' so that skills could be assessed in line with the occupational standards.

'Rigging' means different things to different people; if you work in theatre, it's concerned with hanging pretty much anything your trade uses. If you work in television it means much the same thing, but the things that are 'rigged' are quite different, as are the techniques and equipment used to do it. Film riggers may well use scaffolding, while exhibition and conference riggers may use a range of equipment from other sectors of the entertainment industry. One dictionary definition is "To make or construct in haste or in a makeshift manner". This may not be how we want to be thought of!

The essence of rigging is to position or move an item for production reasons using suspension or lifting apparatus, such that equipment used is in tension; however, it may include supporting things from below, like ground support systems. Difficult, isn't it? What do you think of as 'rigging'? Power cables, drapes, art or advertising material? Lighting, sound or AV equipment? Or a combination of these? The equipment used in the activity?

A primary differentiation is whether the rigging is temporary or permanent. I would argue that a permanent installation of say, a flying system, is undeniably rigging (read on), but being permanent it may also be regarded as a work of engineering construction. Subconsciously, many of us think of rigging as being essentially temporary in nature; creating something where there was nothing, because it isn't necessary or viable for the purposes of the event to make the rigging permanent. If you do something permanent, the main contractor or building owner will use systems that ensure an adequate degree of competence and know-how are employed by all the contractors on a project. Traditionally, shows have been put on by enthusiasts, paid or not, and as such have never been held up to the same scrutiny as part of a project in the way that an engineering or construction contractor would be. In the light of the compensation culture and the general maturing of the entertainment industry, those days are fast disappearing.

I contend that the easiest way to define 'rigging' is "to support objects from above using lifting or suspension techniques"; anything used to support equipment from below is ground support, scaffolding or stage engineering. Using a ground support tower involves rigging elements (the hoist and slings etc), but is basically a construction skill.

Scaffolding supporting a stage or scenery is not rigging. The activity exists in other areas in exactly the same way, although originally for other reasons, and can be certified by other bodies.

There is a need to recognise these skills and possibly to incorporate them into the skills base for the National Certificate. 'Rigging' as far as the entertainment industry is concerned is therefore means of lifting or suspension of any production-related equipment or effect, static or dynamic, or installing the equipment so used. This may include running power cables or draping off areas of venues or installing equipment for aerial effects or stunts. It may involve work at height and use of PPE, but it doesn't have to. The work may be in a theatre, concert or exhibition hall, arena, outdoor site or studio, but in all cases should relate directly to creative work, drama, dance, music or exposition.

Whilst we are thinking about standardization, consider the formalization of work at height training. The HSE Advisory Committee on Work at Height Training (ACWAHT) is

concerned with just that. Its maxim is: "To collect and evaluate data and provide guidance on training to achieve the competence required by law for all those involved with work at height."

The idea is to agree a syllabus that allows people who work at height to have a basic understanding of the law and how it relates to their work and workplace and to create a standard of competence. The committee has a broad industry representation, including the interests of PLASA, PSA and ABTT. The level of awareness of work at height issues in the professional rigging industry in comparison with other sectors is quite high, particularly with regard to access machinery and PPE. The theatre and corporate event market are lagging a little behind, but typically, the company or freelance rigger is at least the equal of his counterparts in say, the emergency services. That should give us some encouragement and help further the advances made in recent years.

I was concerned for some time that we would be overtaken by general industry and become the poor relations. That has not occurred, but we still have some way to go in terms of recognizing that we have to stand up to those seeking to cut corners for financial gain. Planning the work to ensure safety should never be allowed to be subjugated by commercial interests.

So we have some considerable recent advances to be aware of. Those involved in rigging and suspension work above stages have two British Standards (BS 7905 and 7906) to use in ensuring safety and in the way the equipment is specified and used. We will soon have a national assessment and certification scheme (the PLASA National Rigging Certificate) to measure the competence of those working as riggers. Those working at height in the industry will soon have a British Standard (the ACWAHT syllabus, eventually incorporated into a British Standard) to use in ensuring they have the understanding and basic competence in matters relating to work at height.

Interesting times. We are in the situation that many of us have been worried about for years, but, it seems that we may just be able (by the skin of our teeth) to tell 'them' before 'they' tell us.

If you are interested in registering to the PLASA National Rigging Certificate please visit [www.plasa.org/rigging](http://www.plasa.org/rigging)