

IStructE: responding to the RAAC crisis

The Institution explains how it has been engaging with government and the media to provide insight and advice on the RAAC crisis engulfing the UK's schools.

On 31 August 2023, the UK government's Department for Education (DfE) issued a news release titled: *New guidance for schools impacted by RAAC* (www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-for-schools-impacted-by-raac).

This communication advised that any school space or area in England with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) should no longer be open without mitigation measures in place. Coming just as schools were returning for the new term, it hit the headlines immediately. The Institution issued a statement on RAAC with FAQs (www.istructe.org/resources/news/istructe-statement-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-c/), and engaged proactively with the media about this material – what it is, why it was used and how it can be managed.

IStructE President, Matt Byatt, and Technical Director, Patrick Hayes, conducted many media interviews, including BBC Two's Newsnight, BBC One Breakfast, LBC, Sky News, BBC Scotland, BBC national and local radio programmes, and newspapers including the *Financial Times*.

We also engaged proactively and at a high level with relevant UK and devolved-nation government departments about RAAC. We'll continue with this important policy work to ensure that decision-makers have the relevant and timely technical information they need.

The Institution's expertise in RAAC is clearly in demand and will be for the foreseeable future. This knowledge and guidance have been informed over recent years by our RAAC Study Group, which Jane Black, Head of Technical Secretariat Services, manages. This group provides a place for information and guidance on RAAC, and is open to any member to join.

It was created following a 2019 Safety Alert from CROSS (at that time known as SCOSS) about failures of RAAC planks/panels (www.cross-safety.org/sites/



[default/files/2019-05/failure-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-planks.pdf](http://www.istructe.org/resources/news/istructe-statement-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-c/)). CROSS is the independent, confidential reporting system supported by IStructE and the Institution of Civil Engineers. Since 2007, it has published numerous Safety Reports on RAAC (www.cross-safety.org/uk/safety-information/cross-theme-page/structural-safety-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-raac-planks).

During the height of the questions from the media and others about RAAC, we were able to point them to the group's 2022 and 2023 guidance (**Box 1**). Indeed, policy-makers in Scotland, England and Wales have used these as a basis for their decisions about RAAC in schools.

The 2022 guidance was published to improve awareness of RAAC among the wider structural engineering community, and to share findings to help those who are asked by clients to advise on the management and mitigation of RAAC panels.

This was followed in April 2023 with further guidance about the

risk factors associated with RAAC panel construction, with a proposed classification approach to these risks and how they may impact on the proposed remediation and management of RAAC.

We have been clear with government and other stakeholders that professionally qualified structural engineers – Chartered and Incorporated members of the Institution – should be appointed to undertake the comprehensive investigations to assess the condition of RAAC.

Since the DfE's announcement, we are aware of an increasing number of members being contacted to undertake surveys, and so we strongly advise members to read the RAAC Study Group's two online guides. The Institution has also been contacted by members outside the UK who are aware that RAAC has been used in their country, seeking advice about how they should manage buildings where RAAC is found to be present.

The Institution's RAAC guidance is applicable to buildings outside the UK and will be useful to support members in assessing the condition of RAAC and understanding risk factors that may impact on proposed remediation and management.

Looking ahead, further guidance and training materials will be issued as and when more evidence comes to light and training needs are identified.

Box 1. Guidance from IStructE RAAC Study Group

- | *Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) panels: Investigation and assessment*, March 2022
- | *Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) Investigation and Assessment – Further Guidance*, April 2023

Both publications are available at www.istructe.org/get-involved/study-groups/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-planks/.