

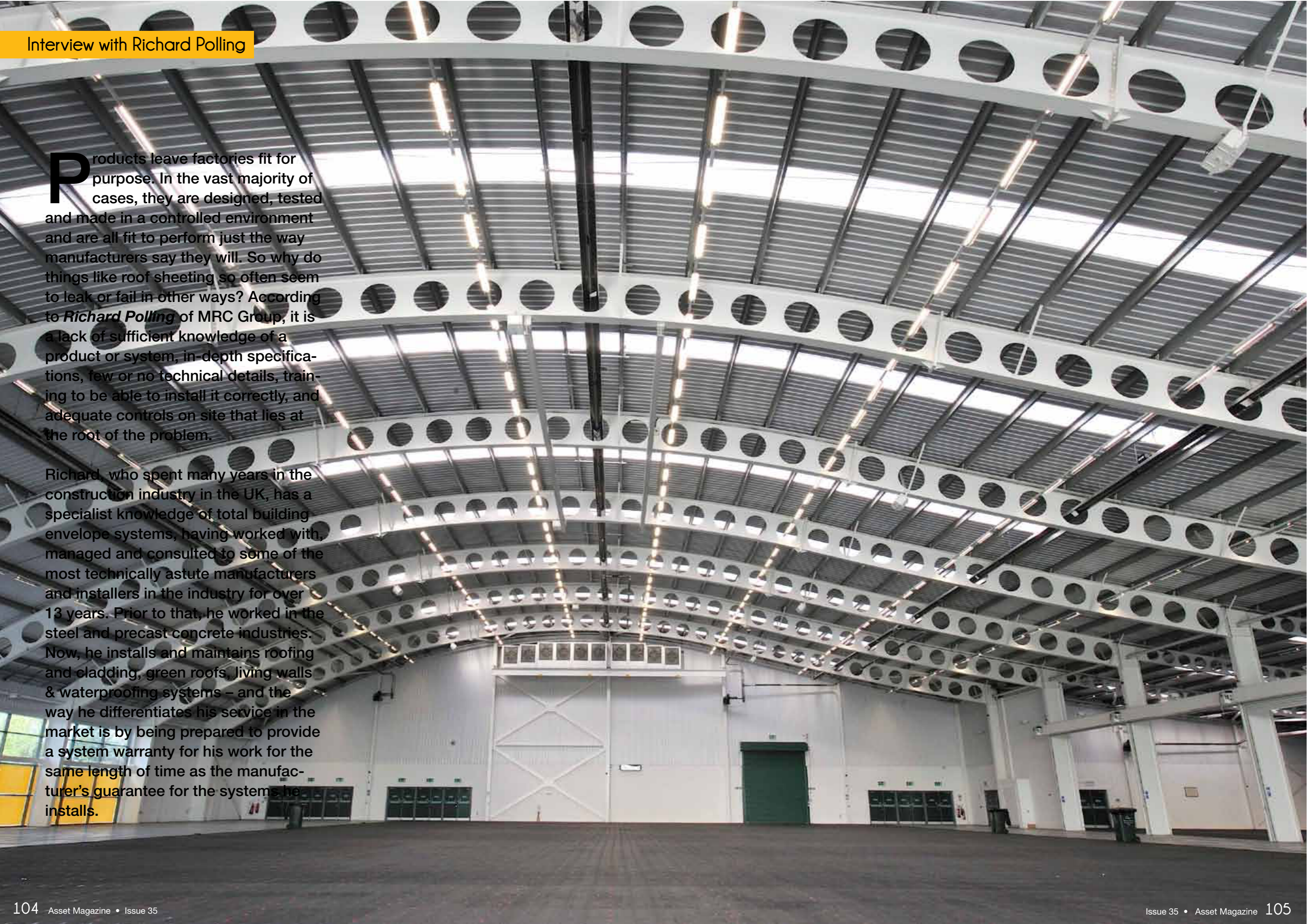
# A dire need for higher standards in roofing and cladding installations

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**P**roducts leave factories fit for purpose. In the vast majority of cases, they are designed, tested and made in a controlled environment and are all fit to perform just the way manufacturers say they will. So why do things like roof sheeting so often seem to leak or fail in other ways? According to *Richard Polling* of MRC Group, it is a lack of sufficient knowledge of a product or system, in-depth specifications, few or no technical details, training to be able to install it correctly, and adequate controls on site that lies at the root of the problem.

Richard, who spent many years in the construction industry in the UK, has a specialist knowledge of total building envelope systems, having worked with, managed and consulted to some of the most technically astute manufacturers and installers in the industry for over 13 years. Prior to that, he worked in the steel and precast concrete industries. Now, he installs and maintains roofing and cladding, green roofs, living walls & waterproofing systems – and the way he differentiates his service in the market is by being prepared to provide a system warranty for his work for the same length of time as the manufacturer's guarantee for the systems he installs.





At first glance, that may seem fairly reasonable. But, as he tells *Asset*, one will find almost no contractors in South Africa who are prepared to provide a warranty for their work for longer than a year or two. When compared with a product guarantee of 15 or 20 years, that's not much of a guarantee at all. "What it really means is that most of the roofing and cladding contractors out there don't have sufficient confidence in their design of the details, or their installation work," he says, adding that much of the problem lies in the fact that the skill sets and industry knowledge in our country is comparatively low in real terms.

"It was the same in the UK ten or 15 years ago," he comments. "Contractors weren't installing systems correctly, and were not controlling the work done on site. What changed there is that they were brought to account for it, and it has changed the standards in the industry." He points out that every serious manufacturer of roofing products is able to supply installers with an internally produced, tried and tested, set of drawings which could then be updated for the project they were using them on, to ensure the correct details for all the roof components.

In essence, if the product is installed according to those details, there should be little chance of it failing. All the large competing manufacturers now do this as a standard – because if one company offers it, the competitors have to follow suit. This has resulted in a more tightly controlled installation process where installers know clearly what they are supposed to do in order to ensure that a roof or a cladding doesn't fail. This in turn means that most installers offer at least a 12 year guarantee on their workmanship.

“I always tell people that roof sheets don’t leak. If your roof is going to leak or fail, it will be around the perimeter, or around any penetrations,” Richard explains. Getting details such as roof ridges, eaves, and flashings correctly designed and constructed is therefore critical to the performance of the installation.

So is installing anything on top of a roof – such as solar panels, which are becoming more affordable and popular. The problem with these, he says (although he is in favour of them in principle), is that they are seldom installed by people who know how it will affect the performance of a roof, or who know whether the underlying structure is adequate. The angle at which a solar panel is installed on a roof and the gap between it and the roof sheeting combine to create undesirable uplift, which can have disastrous consequences. Assuming that one avoids this, even letting someone other than the roof installer onto the roof may invalidate its warranty – something that most property owners are unaware of.

Richard believes that one of the key problems is that at present in South Africa is the lack of education and skills across the industry, as well as a lack of expected standards from the installers. They addressed the problem in the UK, and it must be possible to do so here too – so what needs to happen?



“The first thing is that manufacturers should issue a full set of drawings – standard details of the way in which the various products should be installed. The education process starts with them. It’s their system, and if you are going to use it, then you need to do so in the way they specify,” he maintains. “The second thing is that contractors need to be trained on how to install products according to those details. Without those details, you can’t really expect the roofing or cladding contractor to install a product correctly because he’s probably just going to do what he knows based on his previous experience – and they are there to make money, so often they will cut corners,” he adds.

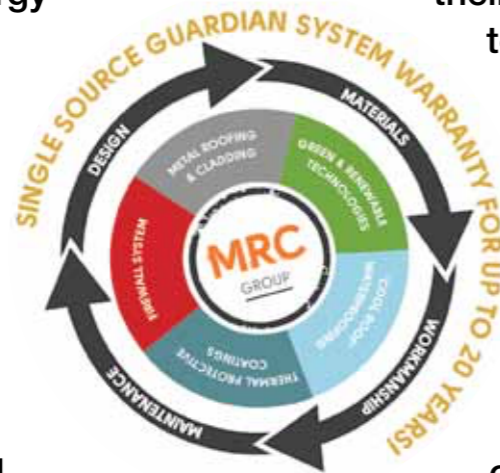
“So, you need to issue drawings, train the installers to use them, and then get the roofing and cladding contractor to issue a warranty. And for as long as the average warranty is a year or two, people will cut corners because they don’t really care,” he continues. This is why he so strongly believes in giving the client a warranty on his company’s workmanship that is equal to the length of the manufacturer’s warranty. “And that’s not just on the roof sheeting or the waterproofing product – I will warrant the perimeter details and the junction points between differing systems as well, because those are the things that are never covered in any guarantee.” As part of the service to MRC Group’s

clients, they will continue to maintain a roof or other installation for the duration of that warranty, because – as Richard points out – one cannot offer a warranty unless the roof is maintained correctly.

When a roof does fail, there are various solutions that can be applied, but one thing is for sure – it is always more expensive to fix a problem after the fact than to prevent it in the first instance. It may be a little more expensive for the client, or less profitable for the contractor, to do the job correctly in the first place – but then most of us know that we ultimately get what we pay for, and this is no exception. If getting the cheapest price or doing the work as

fast a possible are going to be priorities, then quality will be a casualty.

MRC Group undertakes new build installations, refurbishments, repairs and maintenance for a vast range of building envelope systems including over-roofing, the most energy efficient built up roofing systems, 'cool roof' waterproofing and green roofs. "I don't want to work for a massive number of clients – I'd rather work for a few high quality developers who have extensive industrial, commercial and retail property portfolios who understand the merits of a warranted building envelope system that covers design through to maintenance and who expect high quality systems installed correctly and on time, and I'll take responsibility for the maintenance on those installations," says Richard. That includes installing additional items like solar panels, without compromising the design and integrity of the roof system. The benefit to the client is that in addition to making sure that the product warranty remains valid, they also have a professional trained and experienced building envelope installer traversing the roof safely.



Education from the manufacturer's side and improved training for the installers on site are just a start. What will ultimately make the biggest difference to moving the market forward is an insistence on higher standards – which must ultimately come from clients and their agents on the professional teams. Once companies are brought to book for shoddy workmanship, or lose out to others who are doing a better job, competition will force the standards to improve. MRC Group is leading the charge on this one from the contractors' side, setting an example of design, in-depth specifications (all available on their website for specifiers to download) good workmanship, training workers to international standards, and being prepared to issue a warranty that few in the industry are currently likely to compete with. "A good installer should be able to warrant his workmanship to match the product guarantee including perimeter details – that's my challenge to the marketplace," he concludes. A+

*For more information visit [www.mrc-group.co.za](http://www.mrc-group.co.za)*

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