

The variety of roles within quantity surveying. Podcast with Priti Lodhia

Andrew Belt: What is a quantity surveyor and what roles are there in the profession? I'm UCEM PR and Social Media Manager, Andrew Belt, and joining me to answer these questions, among others, is UCEM BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying Programme Leader, Priti Lodhia. Hi, Priti.

Priti Lodhia: Hi, Andrew.

AB: How are you?

PL: I'm good, thank you. Thank you for inviting me to do this podcast.

AB: You're very welcome. As I mentioned at the top, could you first talk me through what is a quantity surveyor?

PL: Yeah, sure. So a quantity surveyor is a professional that provides expert advice on the financial aspects of a construction project. They're also sometimes known as a cost consultant or a commercial manager.

AB: Okay. And what different roles are there in the profession?

PL: So there's mainly two types of quantity surveyors. First, there is a professional quantity surveyor – or PQS – and they work for the client, and then you get the contractor's quantity surveyor who works for the contractor.

AB: And what do each of these roles do?

PL: Okay. So my background is as a PQS so I'll talk you through that first. I basically worked on the client side of building projects.

PQSs generally tend to work for consultancy firms and manage the construction cost. Just for the client. So we're involved early on in the building project and we help clients set budgets for the project.

Then on traditionally procured projects, we work very closely with the design team, during the development of the design to ensure that the costs stay within the budget. PQSs tend to create estimates and cost plans as well help manage the costs on the project. Once the design's complete, they would then be involved with the tendering process and helping to choose the contractor.

Once the project actually goes on-site, then we'd be involved with doing valuations of the work and also managing any variations that might arise. We will also then be reporting to the client, providing cost reports to give them advice about how the costs on the project are going, but some PQSs during that post-contract period tend to take on the role of a contract administrator so they'd be helping to manage the contract.

AB: Okay. So that that's the PQS side...

PL: Yes. So that's the PQS side. Then you've got the contractor's quantity surveyors. They also work with the PQS, but they work on the opposite side, so they work for the contractor. They do both tend to work closely together but the contractor's PQS is employed on the contractor's side.

So they're also managing the costs on the project and they are trying to make sure that the project remains profitable for the contractor. One of my colleagues, actually, Amanda

Milambo, who is a Programme Leader for the MSc Quantity Surveying, used to work as a contractor's quantity surveyor.

So they get involved on a traditional project, usually in the tendering period, so they can be involved with evaluating tender documents and advising on risk.

They also might be involved with pricing the tender documents and advising on the completion of contract documents. And then, post-contract, they will be carrying out all the financial administration of the contract.

Again, they might be involved with submitting valuations for the work and doing any variations as well and they work closely with any subcontractors and suppliers and manage the contracts and payments with them as well.

They also carry out cost value reconciliations and prepare and agree final accounts with the client.

AB: And keeping costs down, of course, is very important for any company. What would you say is the best thing about quantity surveying?

PL: What I really love about quantity surveying is the variety and the different sectors and roles that you can be involved with. It's so diverse and multifaceted. There's just so many different areas that you can work in and also, day-to-day, you're going to be doing lots of different things.

It's not like you're doing the same thing every day. There's so much variety. I remember when I was doing my degree, I actually really loved the variety of subjects that the degree covered, because we'd be studying law, construction technology, marketing, economics, so I just felt that the degree gave me knowledge in lots of different areas.

AB: And a general understanding of quantity surveying, you would think maths is a very important facet [of quantity surveying].

PL: So maths is quite important, but I wouldn't let that put you off. As long as you can do basic maths and trigonometry, sort of like GCSE maths, that's all you really need and then you can pick up the rest while you're going along, but, yeah, there is obviously an element of maths in there.

AB: So you don't have to be a math whizz like Rachel Riley. That's good to know. And why should people consider studying on your programme?

PL: I think that the UCEM degree is really fantastic due to the flexibility that it offers. You can continue to work while you study so you're gaining that valuable experience as well as studying alongside [your work] and you can speed up or slow down your programme depending on your current situation.

It's fantastic that it gives people that flexibility and they can help it fit into their life and study around their commitments.

The other great thing I find about the programme as well is that you're going to be studying with students from all over the world so it has a really international feel [to the programme].

You can learn about the experiences of others in different countries and see what quantity surveying is like in other countries from your interactions with the other students.

AB: Most students, of course, will be working full-time and then studying with us part-time so that goes back to your flexibility point. What, typically, do graduates of the programme go on to do in the sector?

PL: So, graduates go on to either obviously doing a quantity surveying job; so again, they can become a professional quantity surveyor working on the client side or they may become a contractor's quantity surveyor working for the contractor.

Some also go into some areas that they can specialise in. So, they might specialise in mechanical and electrical quantity surveying or civil engineering quantity surveying. Other things that they might go on to do is become project managers because, working as a QS, you get lots of experience of managing projects and risks as a key advisor to the client.

Some people tend to move into project management as an outcome of this. There's a lot of variety in the QS roles that you might be doing. You can work in lots of different sectors. You can be working on railway projects or commercial developments, such as offices and business parks so it is really quite diverse what you can go into after doing the [BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying programme].

AB: Thanks, Priti. So, if you would like to learn more about Priti's programme, head to ucem.ac.uk and navigate to the right page by choosing 'Programmes' from the menu. Thanks for listening.