

# The 2026 QS forecast

**What the smart Quantity Surveyors see  
before everyone else**



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# Introduction

The UK construction market is changing fast.

Inflation, new frameworks, and the drive toward net zero are reshaping what it means to be a Quantity Surveyor. The best opportunities are no longer public, they're private, passive, and reserved for QS's who know where to look.

This guide is built for them.

Inside, you'll find a clear picture of the commercial landscape; what's driving demand, where investment is flowing, and how the role of the QS is evolving across sectors.

It covers:

- How the UK market is shifting across infrastructure, build, and consultancy.
- What skills and tools are defining high-performing QS's today.
- Which opportunities sit beneath the surface, and how to position yourself to access them.

Whether you're freelance, permanent, or just planning your next step, this guide will help you think strategically, move early, and stay visible in a market where timing and trust matter most.





# 1. Why this guide matters

The UK construction market is in flux. Budgets are tightening, demand is steady, and the pressure on commercial control has never been higher.

For Quantity Surveyors, that means one thing; opportunity for those who know how to read the market. This guide isn't about job hunting. It's about staying ahead of it.

Whether you're freelance or permanent, early-career or senior, the most valuable QS's right now are those who combine commercial clarity with strategic awareness.

Too many QS's wait until something breaks; a project, a manager, a salary freeze - before thinking about their next move. By then, the best opportunities have already been taken by people who were quietly prepared.

The UK QS market has moved on from "reactive hiring." Companies now plan a year ahead, and most of the best roles are filled long before they're advertised.

This guide will show you:

- Where the market is moving
- What's changing beneath the surface
- How to position yourself for the next wave of demand

Because when the sector shifts, the smart ones don't chase. They're already there.



## 2. The commercial picture

The last few years have redrawn the commercial map.

Inflation, interest rates, and public spending cycles have forced contractors and consultancies to rebuild their delivery models.

QS's now sit closer to the boardroom than ever.

**Public sector:** major frameworks in infrastructure, education, and healthcare remain the safest ground. Procurement is tightening, but the pipeline is strong, especially across renewables, transport, and social housing.

**Private sector:** build-to-rent, logistics, and data centres are driving steady cost consultancy demand, while commercial and retail lag behind. Developers want cost certainty in a volatile supply chain, and that's where QS's who can forecast and advise early are thriving.

**Freelance market:** day rates are resilient, especially for specialist knowledge such as M&E, however NEC experience, cost control, and pre-construction skills are always in demand. Clients will still pay a premium for those who can stabilise programmes and protect margin.

**Permanent market:** movement has slowed at the junior end, but mid to senior QS's with framework or client-side experience remain in short supply. Companies are protecting talent, not replacing it.

Money is still moving. But it's moving differently. The QS's who understand where capital's flowing - and why - are the ones with control over their future.





# 3. What's changing on the ground...

The QS role has evolved. The days of just measuring and reporting are over. Today's market rewards those who can interpret data, influence decisions, and protect value.

Technology is reshaping the job fast:

- Digital cost control tools and 5D BIM are now standard on large frameworks.
- AI-driven forecasting is becoming part of tender strategy.
- Carbon accounting and ESG reporting are moving from side tasks to core deliverables.

You no longer win credibility by knowing the rates; you win it by explaining what the data means.

Clients want QS's who can hold commercial, contractual, and sustainability conversations in the same breath. Those who can navigate NEC, CEMAR, and Power BI without flinching are becoming indispensable.

It's also a cultural shift. Remote delivery and hybrid project teams mean visibility comes from results, not presence.

Your reputation now lives in how you communicate, not how often you're seen on site.

The next generation of high-performing QS's aren't "numbers people."

They're translators; turning data, contract, and commercial risk into decisions leadership can trust.





# 4. Where is the work?

## Infrastructure:

Still the backbone of UK demand. Rail, highways, energy, and utilities dominate the pipeline, with huge investment tied to long-term frameworks. Think AMP8, RIS3, and HS2 legacy projects. These aren't one-year contracts, they're decade-long delivery programmes that need QS's who understand governance, change control, and risk.

## Private build:

Commercial build is steady, but selective. Developers are favouring design-and-build contractors who can manage cost and carbon simultaneously. Expect steady demand in logistics, industrial parks, and retrofit.

## Consultancy:

The fastest-growing part of the market. Private consultancies are expanding into sustainability and digital advisory; they're no longer just cost managers. Firms are hungry for QS's who can bridge commercial insight and client-facing credibility.

## Housing & regeneration:

Government-backed frameworks, retrofit funding, and net-zero targets are fuelling a quiet boom. Employers want QS's who understand social value, funding compliance, and lifecycle costing.

**There's work everywhere , but the advantage sits with those who know which sectors are accelerating, and which are plateauing.**





# 5. How to get in (or stay ahead)

## Routes in

If you're early in your career, focus on visibility and credibility. If you're established, focus on leverage.

- **Rotate across sectors early:** civils, build, consultancy; each gives a different commercial lens.
- **Learn the contract:** NEC4 is the current currency of confidence.
- **Get hands-on with systems:** CEMAR, Power BI, or cost-to-carbon tools. They'll future-proof your skillset.

## Staying sharp

For those already in:

Your edge comes from staying current. Every framework is now data-driven; learn how information moves through your project. If you can spot where money leaks before it's reported, you're already ahead.

## Mistakes to avoid

- Waiting until you're unhappy to update your network.
- Thinking your current employer is your long-term plan.
- Assuming visibility online equals opportunity offline.

The QS's who move fastest aren't chasing job boards; they're already in quiet conversation about what's next.





# 6. The toolkit

The best QS's aren't the busiest. They're the most prepared.

Here's what that looks like:

- **Market insight:** understand regional demand, not just salary bands. If you know where the next framework is going, you can move before everyone else.
- **Commercial confidence:** be fluent in NEC, JCT, and risk allocation. The more you de-risk a client's spend, the more they'll invest in you.
- **Data skills:** learn enough digital to stay relevant; Power BI, cost benchmarking tools, and CEMAR workflows are now standard.
- **Career storytelling:** keep your portfolio up to date. Focus on outcomes: how you saved money, mitigated risk, or improved process, not just where you worked.

A great QS toolkit isn't about tools. It's about trust. Clients and employers hire those who can explain complexity clearly, both in numbers and language.







## 7. What's next?

The next 12 to 18 months will separate those who perform from those who simply participate. Construction output will level off in parts of the private sector but continue to climb in infrastructure, energy, and consultancy. The challenge for most QS's won't be finding work; it'll be finding the right work.

### **Infrastructure and utilities**

The major frameworks are entering mobilisation under AMP8 and RIS3. That means more long-term commercial roles, and fewer short-term contracts. Employers are shifting from reactive project support to strategic cost leadership. So any QS's who can link cost forecasting to asset strategy will become indispensable.

### **Energy & renewables**

Investment in decarbonisation, EV infrastructure, and energy storage will spike. These projects demand QS's who can quantify carbon as confidently as cost; expect new roles blending sustainability with commercial control.

### **Consultancy**

Private cost consultancies are expanding advisory arms. They're not just measuring — they're guiding clients through inflation, risk, and value engineering. That shift is pulling in QS's with client-side gravitas and digital fluency.

### **Contracting & civils**

Margins will stay tight. Employers will lean on QS's who can manage change events and protect programmes. Those with deep NEC4 knowledge and real-world delivery experience will remain in constant demand.

The next year won't be about volume, it'll be about positioning. The QS's who prepare now, sharpen their technical edge, and keep one eye on renewables and infrastructure will be the ones commanding the best work, best rates, and best options when the market swings again.



# 8. Salary & role forecast

The QS market remains commercially strong, but stability looks different depending on where you sit. After two years of sharp wage inflation, pay has steadied. Employers are no longer competing on salary alone. They're competing on project quality, flexibility, and long-term security. In other words, career value now outweighs cash value.

Across both permanent and freelance markets, we're seeing three clear shifts:

## 1. Value over volume

Companies are hiring fewer QS's, but better ones. Teams are smaller, expectations are higher, and commercial decisions carry more weight. Employers are investing in people who can protect programmes and forecast risk, not just report costs.

## 2. Skills defining the premium

The pay gap is no longer based on geography. It's based on capability. QS's who combine contract fluency, digital literacy, and client confidence are setting the pace across every region. Those who can interpret data, influence stakeholders, and quantify value are now commanding the top offers, even in cautious markets.

## 3. Strategic roles rising

The traditional project QS is evolving into something more advisory. Employers want commercial partners who can manage frameworks, lead cost strategy, and shape delivery. It's not about seniority, it's about scope.

Overall, salaries are stable, but expectations have risen. The true premium now lies in visibility, not volume, being known for impact, not just available for hire.

## Want updated salary data?

**Contact us and we'd be happy to give you our latest data and projections. Details are at the end of this guide.**



# 9. Hidden opportunities

The QS roles you see online are only half the story.

The real movement happens quietly, between clients, frameworks, and specialist partners.

Where to look:

- **Carbon & ESG delivery:** clients need commercial leadership to cost compliance.
- **Digital transformation:** cost consultancies embedding tech into cost control.
- **Private infrastructure:** data centres, EV charging, energy storage.
- **Framework leadership:** pre-construction roles shaping delivery strategy.

Most of these aren't advertised. They're sourced through trust, timing, and proximity to the right conversations.

That's why being "passive" doesn't mean standing still; it means being positioned.

When the right opportunity arises, you're already in view.







# Final word

A successful QS career isn't built on luck. It's built on timing, relationships, and preparation.

The market will keep changing; that's a certainty. Costs will rise and fall. Programmes will tighten and expand. Employers will overhire, then freeze. But through it all, one truth stays the same: the most valuable QS's are those who make calm, commercially sound decisions when everyone else is panicking.

Your role is to be the person who brings order to chaos ; who understands not just what a project costs, but why it matters. The more you think like a business owner, the more control you'll have over your own career.

Think about it this way: every tender, every framework, every client relationship is a reflection of your own brand. Protect it. Invest in it. Keep it sharp.

Don't just measure projects, measure progress.

Keep your network alive even when you're not looking.

Stay close to market data, not rumours.

And work with partners who see your potential before you're ready to move.

That's what the most successful QS's have in common. They don't wait to be found; they're already known.

The future of the profession belongs to the commercially aware, the strategically minded, and the quietly confident. Stay that way, and you'll never need to chase another job again.



# See your career the way the market does

We've been around long enough to know each Quantity Surveyor's story looks different. Different priorities. Different pressures. Different ambitions.

You'll hear plenty of people shouting about the next big move, the next pay rise, the next jump. That's not strategy. That's noise. The best QS's don't play that game, they set the rules.

At clearnorth, we run Career Discovery Meetings; private, one-to-one sessions designed to cut through the noise and focus on you. Where you are now. What matters most. And how to build a career that actually fits your goals, not someone else's checklist.

We don't sell roles. We build relationships and we only work with people who take their career as seriously as we take our craft.

If this guide has inspired you and you want a clear view of your market, and a strategy that makes sense for you, not the crowd - get in touch.



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