



The panel will see you now

The APC interviews start today – so here's a quick guide to preparing for that final stage from APC coach Alpesh Patel (below)



Right now, APC candidates are in full swing preparing for their final assessment. The culmination of years of study together with practical experience will now be tested. The trail of documents for the final submission will have already been submitted to the RICS.

Preparing for this rigorous interview requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge across the scope of quantity surveying. They will have to show they understand the base skills, methods and techniques, and how to apply them to meet client's requirements. If you can relate to the advice and deliver the breadth and depth of QSing, the options, and professionalism then you will almost certainly be one of the 60% of candidates who pass the APC each year.

Visualise the full picture

Understand the full spectrum of quantity surveying chores that would normally be undertaken by QSs. Remember, you have already been signed off by your supervisor/counsellor as having undertaken them. Be conscious that the definition of the actual competencies aren't particularly prescriptive, so expect to answer questions on areas that are expressed in the competencies, but also areas where aspects are implied from the competencies. For example, although the competency definition does not expressly state that one needs to know about the full process of valuing materials on and off site, or for that matter the pedantic nature of the adjustment of attendances on prime cost sums, there is an implied requirement for candidates to know the full details. Candidates, who have undertaken interim valuations, can sometimes during the interview admit they have undertaken the chore without reference to the terms of contract.

Realise that there are various stages, such as feasibility, cost planning, procurement, contract, tender documentation, analysis of received tenders, appointment of contractor, interim valuations, final accounts, cost reports and so on. In reality you might have skipped certain chores, but as a potential chartered QS you ought to know them, whether through on the job experience or off the job learning.

Realise the details

Understand the details of each of the chores – the micro level. Know about cost planning and the different methods available – unit method, gfa, historical elemental analysis, approximate quants and so on. Then funnel the knowledge

even deeper. What are the sources of information for preparing a cost plan? Use in-house cost information, BCIS, journal profiles and price books. Then go deeper again and ask what adjustments should be made. Make sure you know about inflation, location, qualitative factors, how to adjust, how to set out and what to exclude.

Weigh-up all options

As you would expect from other professionals, you must first provide all conceivable options at various stages and then analyse them against the client's requirements. Demonstrate you have the necessary knowledge to recommend the appropriate solution based on the client's restraints in terms of time, cost, quality and risk.

As far as contracts are concerned, understand the various types available, such as JCT 98 family, JCT 05 Family, ECC, GC Works or ICE. Work out the different ways of valuing variations under your contract – contract rates, pro-rata, fair and reasonable, prior quote, dayworks and so on. What are the options for pricing documents? There is full BQ, based on a standard method, (builders quants), approximate BQ, schedule of works, schedule of rates, spec and drawing, activity schedule. Which is best for the client and why? Analyse each one against time, cost, quality and risk.

Be a pro

While you are providing the advice to the assessors, bear in mind you must also demonstrate that you are a professional adhering to the RICS code of conduct.

You will have been expected to have already advised the client on the services you can provide and those you cannot, had a condition of engagement in place, agreed the appropriate fees, complaints procedures, PII cover and so on, before actually giving the cost plan advice.

Also, you will have already made a commitment to provide timely advice in respect of the cost plan. If not, you might well have a breach of contract. If the client was not happy with the resolution, then as well as taking dispute action he may report you to the RICS.

If you decided to tender on the basis of drawing and spec as opposed to a full BQ, then this will be construed as a change to the services under your engagement and you will have to inform the client that he is due a saving. This is how the professional aspects fit into the technical aspects.