



The role of Clerk of Works / Site Inspector

Clerks of works, also known as Site Inspectors, Site Supervisors or Building Quality Officers, monitor the work of companies that carry out contracts for their employer or client. Examples of such contracts include erecting buildings, constructing roads, installing pipelines and maintaining estates.

Their main responsibility is to make sure that work is carried out to the client's standards, specification and schedule. In most cases, the specifications are prepared by architects or engineers employed by the client. Clerks of Works make sure that the correct materials and workmanship are used and that the client is given quality work and value for money.

Clerks of Works are either on site all the time or make regular visits. They need to be vigilant in their inspections of a large range of technical aspects of the work. This involves:

- becoming familiar with all the relevant drawings and written instructions, checking them, and using them as a reference when inspecting the work
- making visual inspections
- taking measurements and samples on site to make sure that the work and the materials meet the specifications and quality standards
- being familiar with legal requirements and checking that the work complies with them.
- having a working knowledge of health and safety legislation and bring any shortfalls observed to the attention of the person(s) concerned.

Clerks of Works are not only inspectors but also superintendents. This means that they can advise the contractor about certain aspects of the work, particularly if something has gone wrong. They can also agree to minor changes. They cannot, though, give advice that could be interpreted as an instruction, particularly if this would lead to additional expense.

They keep detailed records of various aspects of the work, which they put together in regular reports for the architect or planner and the client. Records include details of:

- progress and any delays
- the number and type of workers employed
- weather conditions
- visitors to the site
- drawings received
- deliveries
- instructions
- details of any significant events including any serious deficiencies in health or safety performance observed while on site.

Clerks of Works liaise closely with the contractor's staff. They must, however, maintain their independence, as they are responsible for working in the best interests of their employer or client.

If the work involves maintenance, alterations or additions to buildings by directly employed workers, Clerks of Works may be responsible for supervising them.

Some Clerks of Works specialise in particular areas such as building, civil engineering or mechanical and electrical installations.

Hours and environment

Clerks of Works normally work 35 to 40 hours a week, Monday to Friday. Weekend and evening work is common, particularly when deadlines for completion of construction are imminent. Part-time work and flexible hours are possible.

They are based in site offices, normally in temporary structures, but spend most of their time outdoors in all weather conditions.

Inspection work usually involves climbing ladders and scaffolding and therefore a Clerk of Works should also have a good working knowledge of good health and safety safe working practices.

For certain projects, such as tunnel construction, it can involve going underground.

Clerks of Works often have to spend considerable time travelling to building sites and may be away from home for short periods of time.

Salary and other benefits

These figures are only a guide, actual rates of pay will vary, depending on experience, the employer, where the individual lives and the location of the job etc.

- New entrants may earn around £20,000 a year
- Experienced Clerks of Works/Site Inspectors may earn over £25,000 a year
- Senior Clerks of Works/Site Inspectors may earn in excess of £35,000 a year.

Skills and personal qualities

A Clerk of Works should:

- have a wide understanding of the building industry, including knowledge of materials, trades, methods and legal requirements
- be physically fit
- have a good head for heights
- be attentive to detail when checking work and materials
- be technically competent
- have good spoken and written communication skills
- be honest and vigilant to make sure that the work and materials meet the required standard
- be able to establish an appropriate working relationship with the contractor's staff
- be persuasive and diplomatic while remaining independent
- have good judgement, because they have to decide when to insist on corrections, when to persuade or negotiate, and when to compromise.
- set an example by acting in a professional manner at all times including wearing personal protective equipment when on a construction site.
- keep up to date with changes in construction methods, statutory legislation and carry out continued professional development (CPD).

Interests

It is important to:

- enjoy working outdoors
- be keenly interested in the construction industry.

Getting into the profession

There are several thousand Clerks of Works throughout the UK. Employers include:

- local authorities
- health authorities
- government departments
- large industrial and retail companies
- architectural practices
- consultancy firms.

Self-employment is common.

The number of Clerks of Works is growing and there is currently a shortage. Vacancies are advertised in The Institute of Clerks of Works' *Site Recorder*, local and national newspapers, Jobcentre Plus offices and increasingly on the internet

Entry for young people

There are no set qualifications needed for entry to this work but it is essential to have relevant experience. Clerks of Works usually enter the profession after some years' experience at craft or technician level in construction or civil engineering. For this reason, it is not a profession that is open to school leavers.

Entry for adults

Adult entry to the profession is normal because of the need for experience. Entry is possible with a wide range of construction and civil engineering qualifications, including:

- a craft or technician qualification, such as City & Guilds, NVQ/SVQ Level 2 or 3 or BTEC/SQA national award
- a BTEC/SQA higher national award
- a foundation or honours degree.

Some employers require applicants to be members of The Institute of Clerks of Works.

Training

Entrants may work towards NVQs/SVQs in Site Inspection at Levels 3 and 4. They may also work towards different levels of membership of The Institute of Clerks of Works – Student, Licentiate and Member. This is not essential but is increasingly required by employers.

Student membership is open to those studying one of the following:

- NVQ/SVQ Site Inspection Level 3 or similar
- a relevant BTEC national award or Scottish Group Award (SGA)
- a relevant Advanced or further City and Guilds Certificate
- a qualification at this level with an associated professional institute recognised for exempting qualifications.

Licentiate membership is open to those who have successfully completed one of the above.

Member status is open to those who have achieved one of the following:

- NVQ/SVQ Site Inspection Level 4 or similar
- a relevant BTEC/SQA higher national award

- a relevant first or higher degree
- corporate membership by examination of one of the associated professional institutes recognised for exempting qualifications.

Entry to each level requires not only a relevant qualification but also a detailed report of the candidate's professional history, a professional practice interview and a materials identification test.

All Clerks of Works are expected to engage in continuous professional development. This is to make sure that they keep abreast of developments in areas such as new materials, practices, law and regulations, and health and safety legislation.

Getting on

Experienced Clerks of Works may progress to site management or other management roles in the construction industry. They may become self-employed. It can be possible to work abroad, particularly in Europe and developing countries.

Related jobs

Building Control Surveyor/Inspector
 Building Technician
 Chartered Surveyor
 Civil Engineering Technician
 Construction Supervisor/Manager
 Insurance Surveyor
 Quality Control Inspector

There are many variations in the job title:

Site Inspector
 Site Supervisor
 Warranty Manager
 Customer Care Manager
 Building Quality Officer
 Estates Manager
 Construction compliance Manager
 Contracts Monitoring Officer
 Quality Control Inspector
Plus many more...

Magazines/journals: Site Recorder