JUSTENG RECRUITMENT

SPECIALIST RECRUITMENT

Forensic Engineering, Expert Witness & Construction Disputes

A guide to the most rewarding niche in engineering — written for the professionals who move into it, and the practices that hire them.

Forensic Engineering | Expert Witness | Delay & Programme | Quantum & Commercial | Dispute Resolution

INTRODUCTION

A sector most engineers discover far too late

Almost nobody sets out to become a forensic engineer, a delay analyst or a quantum expert. Most people arrive after ten or fifteen years of design, delivery or commercial work — and then wonder why nobody told them sooner.

Construction and engineering disputes are a permanent feature of the built environment. Buildings fail, programmes slip, costs escalate, and somebody has to establish — rigorously, impartially and to a standard that will survive cross-examination — what actually happened and who carries the consequence. That work is done by a small population of highly qualified specialists, and demand for them consistently outstrips supply.

JustEng runs a dedicated desk for that population. We place forensic engineers, expert witnesses, delay analysts, quantum specialists and disputes-focused consultants with the practices that lead the market, and we help experienced engineers, surveyors and planners make the move across.

Part one — for professionals

What the sector is, who succeeds in it, what it pays, and how the transition actually works in practice.

Part two — for practices

How we search a market this small, why generalist recruitment struggles here, and how we work with you.

Inside this brochure

04 · The four disciplines
05 · The backgrounds this sector recruits from
06 · Who this sector actually hires
07 · Why people move — and why they stay
08 · How the move actually works
10 · Specialist search, and how we work

> *"The work sits at the intersection of engineering, investigation and law."*

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PART ONE

For engineers, surveyors and planners

If you can look at a failure, a delayed programme or a blown-out final account and work out why it happened — this sector will pay you properly for it.

THE WORK

Four disciplines, one common skill

Disputes work divides into four broad specialisms. They draw on different technical backgrounds, but they reward exactly the same instinct: the ability to take a messy, incomplete, contested set of facts and reason your way to a defensible conclusion.

Forensic Engineering

Investigating why something failed — fires, explosions, structural collapse, water ingress, façade and cladding defects, plant and equipment failure, materials and product defects. Site investigation, laboratory examination, root cause analysis, and a report that decides a claim.

Expert Witness

Providing independent technical opinion to courts, arbitrations and adjudications. Writing CPR Part 35-compliant reports, meeting opposing experts, producing joint statements and giving evidence. Your duty is to the tribunal, not to the party paying you.

Delay & Programme

Establishing why a project ran late and who owns the delay. Forensic programme analysis, as-planned versus as-built, time impact analysis, windows analysis, concurrency, extension of time claims and prolongation. Planners and project managers transition into this most naturally.

Quantum & Commercial

Establishing what the delay, defect or variation is actually worth. Valuation of claims, loss and expense, disruption, final account disputes, damages and cost overrun analysis. The natural home for experienced quantity surveyors and commercial managers.

Around these four sit the supporting roles the sector also hires into — technical assistants, claims consultants, contract and commercial specialists, and dispute resolution support — which are frequently the practical entry route for those earlier in their careers.

COVERAGE

The backgrounds this sector recruits from

Very few people enter disputes work directly. Almost everyone arrives from a mainstream technical or commercial career — and the discipline you came from becomes the specialism you are known for.

Structural

Collapse, movement, cracking, temporary works and design defect investigation.

Fire

Origin and cause, compartmentation, fire protection performance, external wall systems.

Electrical

Switchgear and distribution failures, batteries and energy storage, installation defects.

Mechanical & MEP

Plant and equipment failure, escape of water, HVAC and services performance.

Façades

Cladding, curtain walling, water ingress, remediation scope and building safety.

Civil & Geotechnical

Ground movement, drainage and flooding, infrastructure and highways defects.

Materials

Concrete, steel, polymers, corrosion, product liability and manufacturing defects.

Architecture & Building

Design liability, workmanship, building pathology and professional negligence.

Quantity Surveying

Quantum, loss and expense, final account and valuation disputes.

Planning & Programme

Forensic delay analysis, extension of time and prolongation.

Marine & Energy

Cargo, vessel and offshore incidents, power generation and renewables losses.

Digital & Data

Digital forensics, data analysis and evidence handling across all of the above.

If your discipline is not listed, it is very likely still relevant — disputes arise wherever something was designed, built, valued or programmed. Ask us.

THE PROFILE

Who this sector actually hires

This is a selective market, and it is honest about being one. The bar is high in three specific places — and it is worth knowing where before you apply.

A strong academic record

Leading practices filter hard on academics, and they do not apologise for it. A first or upper second at Master's level from a well-regarded university is the standard expectation; a PhD or EngD is a genuine advantage. The reason is simple: your conclusions will be challenged by an equally qualified expert on the other side, and analytical rigour is the only defence. This is the single most common reason a strong industry CV is turned down.

Chartership and real project experience

Chartered status matters, because a tribunal will ask about it. But so does time actually spent on projects. You cannot credibly explain why a detail failed if you have never seen one built. The people who do best have enough delivery experience to know how things go wrong in practice, not only in theory — and enough professional standing to be believed when they say so.

The root cause instinct

The defining trait is not knowledge, it is temperament. Can you resist the obvious answer long enough to test it? Can you follow evidence to a conclusion you did not expect, and then report that conclusion even when it is unwelcome? Investigation rewards people who are genuinely curious, methodical and comfortable saying "the evidence does not support that".

Also essential

- Excellent written English — the report *is* the product
- Composure under challenge, in writing and in person
- Independence and integrity, without exception

Not required

- Prior forensic or expert witness experience — this is trained
- A legal background
- Any particular age or grade

THE CASE

Why people move — and why they stay

Disputes work has an unusual reputation among the people doing it: they almost never leave. Here is what they say when asked why.

The earnings ceiling is in a different league

Established experts in this sector earn multiples of what equivalent design, delivery and commercial roles pay — a ceiling comfortably more than double mainstream practice. Reputation, not headcount, drives the number, and reputation compounds year after year.

Demand does not switch off

Disputes are counter-cyclical. When construction slows, claims rise. This is one of the few engineering specialisms that becomes busier in a downturn, which makes it one of the most recession-resistant careers in the built environment.

It travels anywhere

Forensic method and expert credibility are globally portable. The Gulf, Asia-Pacific, North America, Europe — the same skills are in demand everywhere, and international instructions are routine rather than exceptional.

Genuine work-life balance

Workloads are more predictable than project delivery. No bid deadlines, no perpetual programme pressure. Hybrid and remote working is standard across the sector, and the peaks are visible well in advance.

A career, not a rotation

People join this sector and stay for the rest of their working lives. Expertise deepens rather than dating, and there is no shelf-life on judgement — many of the most sought-after experts are also the most senior.

Your name on the work

You build a personal professional reputation, not a project list. Your reports carry your name, your opinion is your own, and that reputation follows you rather than belonging to an employer.

Intellectually, it is also simply harder — and most people who move across say that is the part they did not expect to enjoy so much.

THE TRANSITION

How the move actually works

The most common objection we hear is "but I have never done forensic work". Neither had anyone else. The sector recruits on underlying capability and trains the method — that is how it has always staffed itself.

What is trained

- Forensic investigation method and evidence handling
- Report writing to evidential standard
- CPR Part 35 duties and expert witness procedure
- Giving evidence, and being cross-examined
- Instruction handling, scope and fee management

What you bring

- Deep technical knowledge of how things are designed and built
- Judgement earned on real projects
- Professional standing and chartership
- The academic rigour to withstand challenge

A realistic first two years

You will start on smaller instructions under a senior expert, doing the investigation and drafting while they carry the opinion. Site attendance comes early. Your first sole-authored report typically follows within the first year, and your first appearance as a testifying expert two to four years in, depending on the practice and the flow of casework. Progression is genuinely merit-based: the market values people who are right, and it notices quickly.

How we help

Honest screening. We tell you before you apply whether your academic record and experience will clear a given practice's bar, rather than letting you find out through a rejection.

Translation. Design and delivery CVs do not read well to disputes practices. We help you reframe what you have done in the language this market recognises.

Complete confidence. Nothing is ever sent anywhere without your explicit approval, on a role-by-role basis.

Long-horizon advice. If the right move is eighteen months away, we will say so. We would rather place you once, well.

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PART TWO

For the practices that hire them

The candidate pool in this sector is small, largely passive and unusually well informed. Reaching it is a different job from filling a design vacancy.

OUR OFFER

Specialist search for a specialist market

Alongside our wider engineering recruitment, we run a dedicated desk for forensic engineering, expert witness, delay, quantum and construction disputes practices.

Why generalist recruitment struggles here

The market is small enough that the good candidates are known, and passive enough that they are not on job boards. They are also discerning: an approach that misreads the difference between a delay analyst and a planner, or that cannot explain why a practice is worth leaving a partnership track for, gets ignored. Volume-based recruitment does not work on a population this size — it simply burns it.

What we do differently

- **We screen on your actual bar** — including the academic filter most practices apply but rarely publish
- **We map, we do not advertise** — the shortlist comes from knowing the market, not from waiting for applications
- **We run anonymised campaigns** where you need discretion, without ever labelling the role "confidential client"
- **We sell the sector, not just the seat** — most of our placements are people moving across from mainstream practice
- **We brief properly** — candidates arrive understanding expert duties, the training path and the realistic timeline to testifying
- **We tell you when we cannot help** — a brief we cannot fill well is better declined than half-served

The transition candidate

A large share of the people we place have never done forensic work before. Practices that are open to training the method — rather than competing for the same forty experienced names — consistently hire faster, hire better and retain longer. We will help you build and run that pipeline.

PROCESS

How we work

01 · Brief

A proper conversation about the seat, the casework, the team and the bar — including where you will and will not flex.

02 · Map

We build the market map for the discipline and geography, then approach individually. No mailshots.

03 · Screen

Technical fit, academic record, chartership, motivation and the awkward questions asked early rather than late.

04 · Shortlist

A short list that is genuinely short, each with a written rationale for why they clear your bar.

05 · Process

Interview coordination, feedback both ways, and honest read-outs on where a candidate actually is.

06 · Offer

Offer management, resignation support and counter-offer handling — the stage most placements are lost at.

Confidentiality

Client identity is withheld from public advertising as standard. Candidate details are never circulated without explicit, role-specific consent. Our campaign copy names no client unless you ask us to.

Geography

UK and Ireland as our core market, with international search across the Gulf, Europe and Asia-Pacific where practices operate globally. Hybrid and remote briefs are the norm rather than the exception in this sector.

Working with us as a candidate

If you are reading this on the other side of the table: everything above applies to you too. We will tell you honestly whether a move is right, what a practice is really like, and where your CV falls short — before you spend three months finding out the hard way.

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START A CONVERSATION

Whichever side of the table you are on

Thinking about a move

Send us your CV and we will tell you, candidly, whether this sector is a realistic move for you and what it would take. No obligation, and nothing goes anywhere without your say-so.

justeng.co.uk/submit-your-cv

Hiring into your practice

Tell us what the seat needs to do and where your bar sits. We will tell you what the market looks like for it, honestly, before you commit to anything.

justeng.co.uk/contact-us

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