

# QUANTITY SURVEYING

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Building  
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**BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT  
CAREER  
STREAMS**

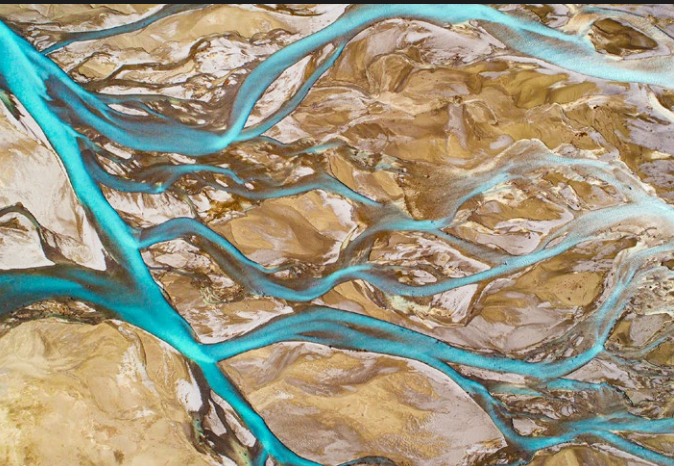
Ngā ara rerekē o te ao  
hanga taiao

He ara whiria  
A braided river



## CHOOSING THE RIGHT CAREER STREAM FOR YOU

Inspired by Aotearoa New Zealand's many braided rivers, this helpful guide has been created for anyone entering or changing careers in the construction industry. Like a river, your chosen career stream may twist and turn throughout your career, but all streams can lead to rewarding and impactful roles – enabling you to make a tangible impact on New Zealand's built environments.



# QUANTITY SURVEYING

This guide gives you an overview of the opportunities and expectations within Quantity Surveying – including typical career pathways, key skills required, what the role looks like day-to-day, and how to get started.

**Quantity Surveyors are the financial guardians of construction projects, working across both consultant and contractor environments. They represent financial interests throughout a construction project lifecycle, including:**

- Initial cost planning and budget setting during design development
- Tender evaluation and procurement support during project initiation
- Cost monitoring and commercial management during construction
- Variation assessment and claims administration throughout delivery
- Final account settlement and commercial close-out at project completion

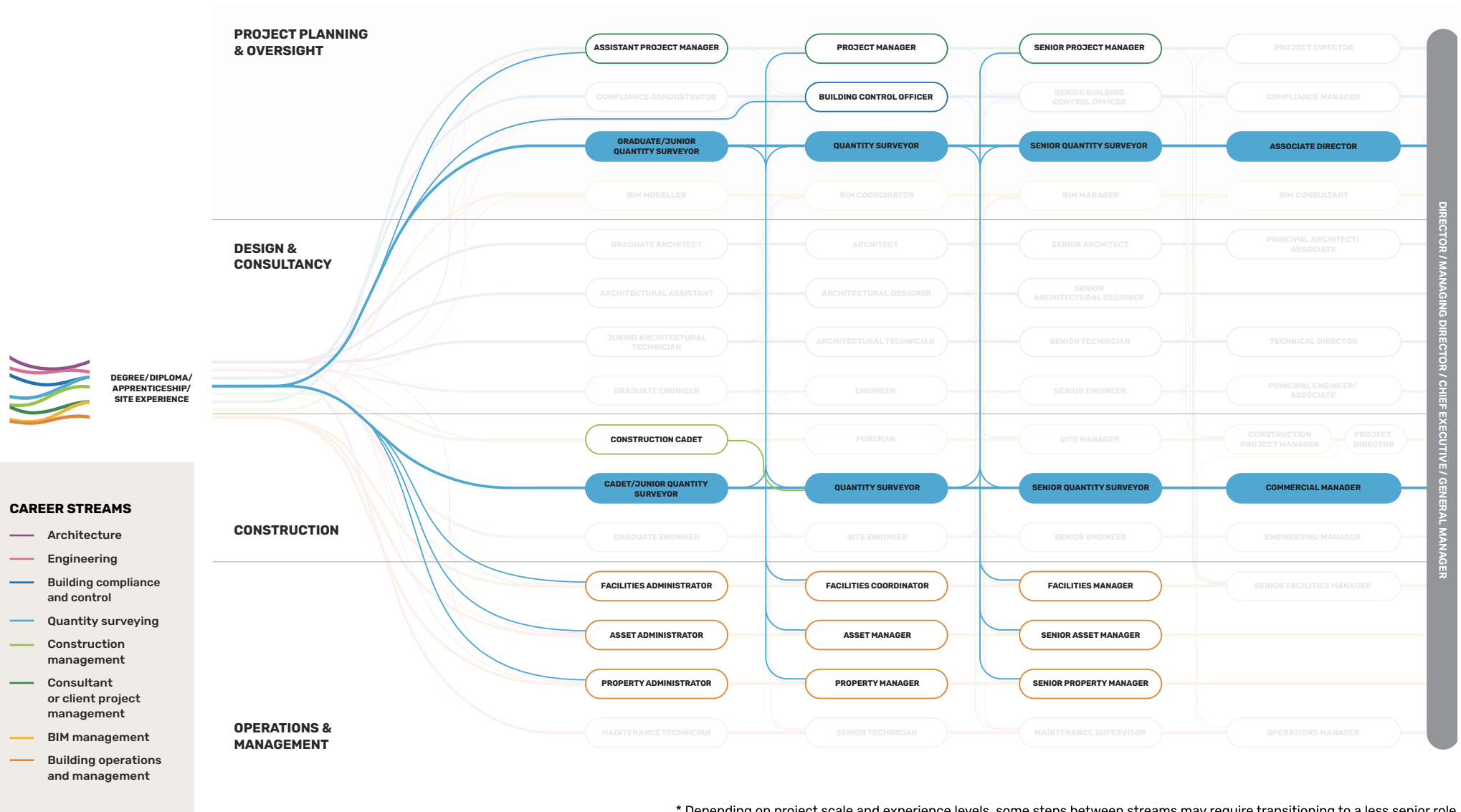
**Consultant or Professional Quantity Surveyors (PQS)** represent the asset owner's financial interests throughout a construction project, focusing on cost optimisation and value delivery. They provide independent cost advice and commercial guidance to protect the client's investment and support informed decision-making. They may work as a consultant or be directly employed by the client organisation.

**Contractor Quantity Surveyors** work within construction companies to manage project costs and commercial risks. They work closely with site teams to capture cost implications of construction issues and opportunities, requiring strong understanding of construction methods and materials. They may work for main contractors or specialist sub-contractors.

Both of these roles combine technical measurement skills, commercial expertise, and financial decision-making, offering a rewarding path for those who value precision, analytical thinking, and real-world impact. Work in quantity surveying suits people who are detail-oriented and methodical, with strong numerical skills, excellent communication abilities, and the capability to solve complex commercial problems under pressure.



## QUANTITY SURVEYING CAREER STREAM



## KEY PARTS OF THE ROLE

- **Core measurement and quantification capabilities** – You'll need strong ability to read and interpret construction drawings, specifications and technical documentation, understanding building construction methods, materials and trade terminology
- **Financial management and commercial awareness** – You'll also need be to competent with cost planning software, measurement tools and digital technologies, and to understand construction contracts, procurement processes, and financial management systems
- **Complex stakeholder management** – You'll work across diverse stakeholder groups including architects, engineers, contractors, and clients. Excellent communication skills are required, as well as the ability to diplomatically manage competing commercial interests
- **High professional responsibility** – Your decisions will have significant financial consequences for projects and organisations. Commercial situations often involve substantial sums and legal implications requiring confident professional judgement
- **Continuous professional development** – Construction methods, industry practices and contract forms evolve regularly. It's important to stay current with procurement methods, regulatory changes, and technological advances while maintaining professional registration requirements
- **Detailed documentation and reporting** – You'll need to balance efficiency with comprehensive record-keeping for legal and professional accountability. All commercial decisions require thorough documentation and clear reporting to stakeholders. For contractor QS roles, documentation becomes critical for managing

progress claims, variations, and potential disputes, as these records often form the basis for commercial negotiations and legal proceedings

## ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS

After gaining experience in quantity surveying, other roles that become possible include:

- **Client or consultant project management** – Representing owners in construction projects using commercial knowledge and contractor relationships
- **Construction management** – Applying commercial awareness and established relationships in site-based management roles

- **Property development and investment** – Applying cost management expertise to development feasibility and investment analysis
- **Asset management** – Lifecycle cost analysis, maintenance planning, and portfolio optimisation services for property and infrastructure organisations
- **Building compliance and control** – Applying construction and contract knowledge to manage regulatory processes
- **Adjudication and mediation** – Construction dispute resolution through authorised processes under the Construction Contracts Act
- **Education and training** – Tertiary education, corporate training, or professional development roles

## SALARY BANDS\*

| Consultant QS               | Graduate QS         | QS                   | Senior QS                    | Commercial manager            | Director               |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Minimum time in role</b> | 2-3 years           | 2-4 years            | 3-6 years (destination role) | 4-8 years (destination role)  | (destination role)     |
| <b>Salary range</b>         | \$50,000 - \$65,000 | \$60,000 - \$80,000  | \$80,000 - \$120,000         | \$120,000 - \$160,000         | \$155,000 - \$200,000+ |
| Construction QS             | Cadet/Junior QS     | QS                   | Senior QS                    | Commercial manager            | Commercial director    |
| <b>Minimum time in role</b> | 2-3 years           | 3-4 years            | 5-7 years (destination role) | 6-10 years (destination role) | (destination role)     |
| <b>Salary range</b>         | \$65,000 - \$95,000 | \$70,000 - \$120,000 | \$110,000 - \$140,000        | \$130,000 - \$180,000         | \$160,000 - \$270,000+ |

\*Salaries and time in roles is indicative only and can vary significantly based on experience, performance, firm size and structure, regional location, specialisation, and market conditions.



## ROLE OVERVIEW

### KEY DAILY ACTIVITIES

#### Consultant/PQS

- Cost planning and budget development for design teams
- Tender evaluation and contractor assessment
- Monthly cost reporting and budget monitoring
- Variation assessment and commercial advice
- Contract administration and payment certification

#### Contractor or sub-contractor QS

- Preparing and submitting client progress claims
- Assessing subcontractor progress claims and variations
- Monthly financial reporting and cost forecasting
- Managing relationships with subcontractors and suppliers
- Measuring and valuing costs associated with delays and scope changes

### WHERE YOU COULD WORK

**Quantity surveying consultancies** – Specialist cost management firms providing independent advice to clients

**Multi-disciplinary consultancies** – Working within teams including architects, engineers, and project managers

**Construction companies** – Main contractors or specialist subcontractors managing commercial risks

**Client organisations** – Large organisations with ongoing construction programmes such as healthcare, education, retail or government agencies

**Financial institutions** – Banks and lenders requiring cost expertise for due diligence assessments and lending decisions

**Property development companies** – Developers requiring cost management throughout project life cycles

### WHO YOU'LL WORK WITH

Architects, engineers, design consultants, contractors, subcontractors, project managers, clients, developers, legal advisors, procurement specialists, and financial institutions

### TYPICAL WORK ARRANGEMENTS

#### Consultant/PQS

- Standard business hours with occasional extended hours during tender periods or project milestones
- Primarily office-based work with regular site visits for progress assessments and inspections
- Flexible working arrangements increasingly available
- Predictable schedule with meeting-intensive periods during key project phases

#### Contractor QS

- Variable hours including early starts, late finishes, and weekend work during critical project phases
- Significant site presence required for progress monitoring and commercial management
- Project-driven schedule with less predictable hours due to construction demands and deadlines
- Limited remote working opportunities due to site-based requirements

#### Both pathways

- Professional client-facing role requiring clear communication and commercial presentation skills
- Project-based work requiring adaptability to changing project requirements and deadlines

### REWARDS AND SATISFACTION

- Influence over project financial outcomes and commercial success
- Variety in project types and sectors providing diverse technical challenges
- Clear professional development pathways through NZIQS membership and professional registration
- International career opportunities with transferable skills and recognised qualifications

### WORK-LIFE BALANCE

#### Consultant/PQS

- Generally predictable hours with structured working arrangements
- Project deadline pressures can create concentrated periods requiring longer hours during tender submissions
- Meeting-intensive schedule requiring good time management and stakeholder coordination
- Increasing flexibility with hybrid working arrangements for office-based activities

#### Contractor QS

- Variable schedule with long and irregular hours during critical project phases, including weekends and early starts
- Site-based demands can impact personal and family life due to project requirements
- Physical demands including site safety considerations and outdoor conditions
- Limited work-from-home opportunities due to site inspection and progress monitoring requirements

## GETTING STARTED

The qualifications needed for a technical role in quantity surveying provide clear pathways into the profession. You'll also need practical knowledge of the construction industry and current building practices, construction methods and materials.

### IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- **Gain relevant qualifications** – Bachelor of Construction with Construction Economics/ Quantity Surveying major, or New Zealand Diploma in Construction (Quantity Surveying). Cross-crediting is possible from related degrees (engineering, architecture, accounting) with additional QS-specific papers
- **Seek practical experience** – Gain experience in related construction roles (such as site administration, project coordination, building surveying) to develop knowledge of construction processes and industry practices
- **Connect with industry professionals** – Talk to people working as quantity surveyors to understand daily realities and career progression opportunities
- **Develop core skills** – Focus on numerical accuracy, analytical thinking, communication skills, and attention to detail essential for commercial management

### HOW TO GET INTO A QUANTITY SURVEYING ROLE

- Apply for cadetship programmes offering structured development pathways with QS consultancies or construction companies
- Consider scholarship opportunities with major firms providing education support and guaranteed employment
- Start in administrative roles within construction companies and progress towards technical positions, alongside additional study
- Progress from trade or technical roles by completing formal QS qualifications while maintaining construction credibility
- Move from related construction disciplines such as project management, building surveying, or estimating with additional QS-specific training

### ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- Construction methodology and building systems
- Cost planning software and digital measurement tools
- Construction contracts and commercial management
- Financial management and budgeting
- Legal frameworks and statutory requirements
- Communication and stakeholder management
- Quality assurance and inspection techniques
- Report writing and professional documentation



## CAREER STORY



**Emmolina May**, Construction law specialist and adjudicator, Lecturer

**“My first job actually was working as a QS but in an architectural company, and at the same time I did project management and procurement and then implementation. So that was quite a weird mix, but was a very good, weird mix.”**

**When Emmolina May arrived in New Zealand after completing her schooling in China, she initially worked as a graphic designer after completing a Level 5 diploma. She was driven by the practical need to “find the most economical way to support myself” and gain residency through working in New Zealand. After several years as a graphic designer, Emmolina started seeking a new, more challenging career path.**

After considering career change options, she chose construction as “the only logical option” given her desire to do practical work and her constraints in terms of tuition cost. Within construction, she selected Quantity Surveying because, “I had never heard of that title before, I had no idea what a QS does,” viewing this unfamiliarity as an opportunity for growth. This seemingly random decision was followed by methodical research of the options and opportunities available in the role, before she decided on a Diploma of Quantity Surveying, and later pursued a Bachelor of Construction. Emmolina’s graphic design background proved invaluable in her studies, as her tutors recognised her software skills and adaptability. “They saw this as providing very good transitional skills for me because I was already familiar with using software regularly,” she recalls. This led to her gaining insights and skills in both Quantity Surveying and Architectural Technology, that later became very beneficial for her career.

Her career trajectory demonstrates the diverse paths available in Quantity Surveying. Starting in a small architectural company with project management and procurement responsibilities alongside traditional QS tasks, she then moved to a larger home builder doing take-offs, variations, and payment claims. She subsequently progressed to an even larger company, where she broadened her skills into commercial construction and civil infrastructure. Her focus then shifted to infrastructure projects, working more strategically in stakeholder engagement, contract management and change management. Eventually, she identified an important industry gap. “There was a fundamental gap in the current industry about dispute resolution and contract awareness,” she says.

This realisation shaped her current role, where she divides her time between her own consultancy firm and her role as a lecturer with Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology. Throughout her journey, she has often found herself outside her comfort zone. “Every project has learning and the harder the project, the more I grow,” she says. Her advice to others looking to follow a similar path is to take opportunities as they arise. “Don’t worry too much about having a plan... every experience is a good experience, and you will learn along the way. As long as you keep moving roughly in the right direction, you will get there, and it’s not a competition of who gets there first.”

## CAREER STORY



**Alysha Tolich**, Estimator/Senior Quantity Surveyor,  
B3 Buildings

**"I've been knee deep in mud. I've been tying steel at 8pm at night. I think because I've been able to get my hands dirty, so to speak, and actually get in there and learn it, rather than just read it in a textbook ... that helps a lot because it's a lived experience I can actually offer."**

**Alysha Tolich's journey from receptionist to commercial manager began at age 19, when she took an administrative role simply because she needed a job. Moving to a construction company as a receptionist and administrator, she found herself unexpectedly drawn to the industry despite having no qualifications.**

Alysha's attention to detail helped her identify issues that were damaging the company financially, but put her in conflict with others in the company. When she decided to leave, her employer recognised her potential and instead offered support to move her into a QS role. This transformed a negative situation into a career-defining opportunity.

While completing her Diploma of Quantity Surveying through Open Polytech, Alysha worked full-time on-site, absorbing everything she could. Over 11 years with the company, she often handled complete projects from estimating and quantity surveying through to site and project management. This hands-on approach, including being "knee deep in mud" gave her an understanding of how buildings are actually constructed.

After maternity leave, Alysha established her own company and returned as a contractor. This period boosted her confidence and demonstrated her capabilities, but the work environment eventually prompted her move to her current company. Now two years on, she has progressed to a senior Quantity Surveyor role supervising three quantity surveyors and handling commercial responsibilities. The company's supportive culture and upcoming buy-in opportunity represent the culmination of her efforts.

Alysha's advice to newcomers emphasises the importance of on-site experience and persistent hard work. She believes that five to ten years of "getting your boots dirty" provides invaluable knowledge. Her journey demonstrates how non-traditional pathways, combined with practical experience and formal qualifications, can lead to significant career advancement in construction. Most importantly, she shows that understanding how things are actually built – not just how they appear on plans – creates more competent professionals.

## EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

### TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

#### Quantity surveying consultancies

- An emphasis on independent client advice and professional service delivery
- Diverse project portfolio experience across multiple clients and sectors
- Structured professional development support and clear progression pathways
- Client relationship management and business development opportunities

#### Construction companies or specialist subcontractors

- Commercial risk management focus with direct financial accountability
- Deep understanding of construction methods and contractor operations
- Site-based experience and practical construction knowledge development

#### Multi-disciplinary consultancies

- Integrated project delivery within collaborative design and delivery teams
- Cross-disciplinary knowledge development and broader skill sets
- Complex project coordination and stakeholder management experience
- Career mobility across different technical disciplines

### PROJECT SCALE

#### Large projects

- Higher complexity with multiple experts involved and standardised approaches
- Specialist role definition with focused technical responsibilities
- Formal processes and extensive documentation requirements
- Structured team environments with clear hierarchies and procedures

#### Smaller projects

- More individual responsibility with direct client contact and broader skill requirements
- Generalist approach handling multiple project aspects and stakeholder relationships
- Greater variety in daily activities and technical challenges
- Closer client relationships and immediate project impact visibility

### REGIONAL VARIATIONS

#### Main centres

- Specialist roles with focused responsibilities and clear career progression
- Better professional development opportunities and peer support networks
- Higher volumes with more structured processes and increased role specialisation
- Greater competition but more opportunities for advancement

#### Regional areas

- Broader role scope combining multiple disciplines and responsibilities
- More varied work but potentially less specialist support and mentoring
- Stronger community connections with long-term client relationships
- Lower living costs but potentially limited career advancement opportunities

## NEXT STEPS AND RESOURCES

### BUILDING YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

#### Industry connections

- Join construction industry associations for sector-specific conferences, training and best practice sharing, site visits and technical workshops
- Participate in NZIQS events and professional development sessions
- Build relationships with contractors, consultants, and clients in your region
- Engage with mentoring programmes and emerging professional networks

#### Upskilling and continuing education

- Construction contract updates and commercial management training
- Cost planning software and digital measurement technology courses
- Communication and negotiation skills development for stakeholder management
- Risk management and commercial strategy training for senior roles

#### Industry resources

- New Zealand Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NZIQS)  
[nziqs.co.nz](http://nziqs.co.nz)
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)  
[www.rics.org](http://www.rics.org)
- Building Institute Aotearoa  
[buildinginstitute.nz](http://buildinginstitute.nz)

### MAKING YOUR DECISION

Quantity Surveying offers professional recognition, financial responsibility, and the satisfaction of managing construction project costs effectively. When making career decisions, consider your aptitude for numerical analysis, interest in commercial management, and tolerance for financial responsibility. The field rewards analytical thinking, attention to detail, strong communication skills, and continuous learning about construction technology and commercial practices.

Careers in QS offers clear progression pathways, international transferability, and the opportunity to influence major construction projects, from initial concept through to completion. Whether pursuing consultant or contractor pathways, Quantity Surveying provides engaging technical challenges and significant professional responsibility in New Zealand's construction industry.

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*This guide draws from research including in-depth interviews with construction professionals across New Zealand, industry surveys, and analysis of career progression patterns. For the complete research report and additional career pathway information, visit [buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27](http://buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27)*



### IS THIS THE RIGHT CAREER STREAM FOR YOU?

A career in **quantity surveying** is more than just a job. It's a pathway to professional growth, community contribution, and long-term job satisfaction. Whichever career stream you choose, you'll be playing an important role in protecting communities, contributing to high-quality construction, and making a tangible and lasting difference to New Zealand's built environment.



### GET THE GUIDE

**Use the QR code to download the full Built Environment Career Streams guide and explore the many rewarding pathways in the construction sector.**

Or head to the website using this link:  
**[buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27](http://buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27)**