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NEC Annual Conference & Martin Barnes Awards Official Programme

Thursday 18th June 2026

Updated with post-conference
insights and analysis



Welcome to the NEC 2026 Annual Conference

Collaborating to shape the future of global infrastructure: celebrating NEC-led excellence worldwide

The infrastructure and built environment sectors have never had a greater opportunity to demonstrate what excellence in delivery really looks like. Across the globe, major programmes are proving what is possible when the right frameworks, behaviours and relationships are in place - and the appetite for a better way of working has never been stronger.

At the same time, the demands on our industry are evolving fast. Rising expectations, tighter timelines, climate pressure and digital transformation are reshaping what it means to deliver successfully. Completing a project is no longer the measure of success. Excellence is defined by creating systems that perform over time, withstand pressure and earn public trust.

NEC Contracts exists to support exactly that. Through clarity, collaboration, fair risk allocation and robust governance, the NEC suite gives organisations the contractual foundation they need to deliver outcomes that last.

Early warning, transparent dispute-avoidance mechanisms and aligned behaviours across the supply chain are not optional extras in this environment. They are what separates projects that endure from those that do not.

This year's conference explores how organisations can scale that excellence across the full project lifecycle - harnessing digital intelligence, embedding climate resilience, and building the leadership and delivery models that strengthen supply chains at every tier. Our theme, *collaborating to shape the future of global infrastructure and the built environment*, reflects both the scale of that ambition and the community best placed to realise it.

Whether you have joined us from across the UK or travelled internationally, welcome. The Martin Barnes Awards will also be presented today - celebrating the very best of NEC practice in the real world. Make sure you are in the room.



Conference Plenary Speakers

Bringing together senior leaders and practitioners from across the global infrastructure and built environment community.



Alison Nicholl
Head of Constructing
Excellence, BRE



Dawn Mathias
Commercial Deputy Director
Construction, Government
Commercial Agency (GCA)



Jamie Hillier
Partner, Akerlof



Professor David Hancock
Construction Director &
Infrastructure Practice Lead,
National Infrastructure and
Service Transformation
Authority (NISTA), HM Treasury



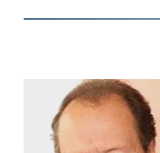
Amanda Meeder
Manager NEC4 Knowledge
Center Oosterweel
Antwerp, Lantis



Gustavo Martinez
President of the European
International Contractors (EIC)



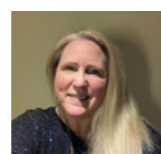
John Welch
Commercial Director,
United Utilities



Professor David Mosey
Emeritus Professor, Centre
of Construction Law, King's
College London and Member
of NEC Contract Board



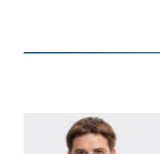
Ambrose McGuire
Senior Programme Director,
Global Programme
Management, AECOM



Helen Sturdy
Deputy Director of
Pre-Construction New Hospital
Programme, NHSE and Member
of NEC Contract Board



Jyoti Sehdev
Senior Sustainability
Engineer, Costain



Sam Costello
Head of Delivery, Infrastructure
UK, Turner & Townsend



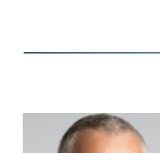
Andrea Naylor
Managing Director,
Thomas Telford



Ir Ricky Lau Chun-Kit
Permanent Secretary for
Development (Works),
Development Bureau, The
Government of the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region
of the People's Republic of
China and Chair of NEC Users'
Group APAC of NEC Contracts



Matthew Garratt
Commercial Director, Dalkia,
EDF Group and Member
of NEC Contract Board



Stuart Grant
Director of Asset Management
and Operations, Tideway



Clare Chamberlain
Head of Construction Works
Category, Government
Commercial Agency (GCA)



Isabelle Adams
Enterprise Director, Great
Grid Partnership, Strategic
Infrastructure, National Grid



Oliver Conde
Global Work Winning
Director, Mace Consult



Peter Higgins
Chairman, NEC Contract Board
and Director of pdConsult



Ngw Wang Chung
Acting Director, New
Estates Division, JTC

Overview of talks and panel discussions

Through global insight and practical case studies, our talks and panel discussions will explore today's most pressing delivery challenges and showcase how progressive commercial and contractual models can unlock better, more resilient outcomes.

Delivery Excellence in Today's Environment for Growth

Explore how organisations are strengthening delivery excellence through capability building, clearer pipelines, and modernised approaches set out in the Construction Playbook. This session highlights NISTA's role, industry upskilling, innovation and industrialisation, and the value of collaborative contracting.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Professor David Hancock

Collaboration as a Key Driver of Industry Innovation

Hong Kong has embarked on a challenging yet rewarding journey of NEC collaboration. We gained far more than initially set out for, proving collaboration to be the vital bridge to successful projects, innovation, and reciprocal industry-wide impact.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Ir Ricky Lau Chun-Kit

From Projects to Outcomes: Rethinking Long-Term Value

This session explores how decisions, governance and behaviours must evolve to demonstrate value beyond cost, strengthen public trust and ensure outcomes that endure. It highlights how NEC enabled programmes reinforce

outcome based delivery and align behaviours that sustain confidence over time.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Oliver Conde
Stuart Grant
Sam Costello
Helen Sturdy

Reshaping Construction Procurement: CWAS3 and The Procurement Act

Get a clear, practical view of how CWAS3 and the Procurement Act are reshaping procurement rules, flexibility and transparency. Learn what these changes mean for NEC based strategies, how to prepare clients and suppliers for new expectations, and how reform supports capability, consistency and long term value.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Clare Chamberlain
Dawn Mathias

Revealing the Next Generation of NEC Alliancing

Discover how next generation alliancing is redefining how teams collaborate, govern and deliver major programmes. This plenary session introduces the vision, principles and performance drivers behind the new model and how it can unlock stronger outcomes across complex delivery environments.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Peter Higgins
Professor David Mosey

NEC Contract Suite: What's New & What it Means in Practice

Hear directly from the NEC Contract Board on the latest updates across the suite, including the new ECSC for NGOs and enhancements to Option X29. This session explains the rationale behind recent changes and their implications for users.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Peter Higgins

Delivering Mega and Multi Programme Systems

This session examines how NEC mechanisms, supported by digital ecosystems, AI enabled decision infrastructure and integrated data environments, enable shared outcomes, coordinated decisions and supplier resilience across complex, system wide environments.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Amanda Meeder

Collaboration at Scale

Collaboration is becoming essential as programmes grow in scale and interdependence. Hear how organisations are applying collaborative delivery models in practice, what drives successful behaviours, and how NEC mechanisms support trust, transparency

and shared outcomes across diverse and increasingly complex delivery ecosystems.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Isabelle Adams
Gustavo Martinez

Collaborative Contracting in Practice: JTC's NEC Journey

Discover why JTC adopted NEC. Reflect on lessons from two years of target cost delivery, exploring how pain/gain mechanisms shape fair outcomes to strengthen collaboration, transparency and capability across major developments.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
Ngu Wang Chung

Delivery Leadership: Skills, Capacity and Leading Under Pressure

This session explores how leaders maintain trust, balance technical authority with ethical, people centred decision making, embed meaningful social value, and use NEC governance to build resilient, high performing teams with psychological safety.

Matthew Garratt (Moderator)
John Welch
Jamie Hillier
Ambrose McGuire
Jyoti Sehdev
Alison Nicholl



Workshop overview

Discover established strategies in digitalisation, risk management, governance, and collaborative delivery with our choice of break-out sessions.

Addressing Climate and Nature Risk: Resilience, Adaptation & Regenerative Solutions

Understand how climate uncertainty is reshaping design and delivery, and how NEC climate clauses and Option X29 embed resilience and accountability. We explore how to balance cost and long-term performance, apply climate clauses effectively, and use regenerative solutions to reduce risk and strengthen whole-life resilience.

Professor Lewis Barlow (Moderator)
Decarbonisation Head of Profession, WSP UK and ICE Trustee for Carbon and Climate

Katherine Drayson (Speaker)
Senior Environment Manager, TfL

Claire Kirk (Speaker)
Carbon Performance Lead, Environment Agency

Professor Anusha Shah (Speaker)
CEO & Founder, Plan for Earth

Deep Dive into the Next Generation of NEC Alliancing

This session explores the behaviours, governance structures and delivery mechanisms that enable integrated teams to operate as one, strengthen decision making and drive high value performance across programmes and portfolios.

Professor David Mosey (Speaker)
Emeritus Professor, Centre of Construction Law, King's College London and Member of NEC Contract Board

Peter Higgins (Speaker)
Chairman, NEC Contract Board and Director, pdConsult

Conflict Avoidance in Practice: NEC's Approach and Cross Industry Perspectives

Explore how NEC's dispute avoidance route, real case experience and cross industry initiatives support early resolution and healthier project relationships. Hear how different approaches align with Project 13 principles and how proactive behaviours can strengthen delivery confidence.

Shy Jackson (Moderator)
Partner, BCLP and Member of NEC Contract Board

Jim McCluskey (Speaker)
Senior Commercial Manager, Kier Infrastructure

Sue Barrett (Speaker)
Contracts & Commercial Director, Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority

Will Rule (Speaker)
Partner, Allora Infrastructure

Helpdesk Heroes: Ask the NEC Experts

Bring your NEC contract questions to this interactive session with two of our most experienced Helpdesk advisors. Drawing on real FAQs, common misconceptions and live delegate questions, this session offers clear, practical guidance for users.

MiMi Aye (Moderator)
Head of Content, NEC Contracts, Thomas Telford

Ian Heaphy (Speaker)
Director, IN Construction Consulting and Member of NEC Contract Board

Robert Gerrard (Speaker)
Senior NEC Consultant and Secretary of NEC Users' Group APAC, NEC Contracts

INTRODUCING NEC RECRUIT

Find the NEC professionals other job boards miss

NEC Recruit is the only specialist job board dedicated to NEC Contract professionals, connecting employers with highly targeted NEC-accredited and NEC-experienced talent across the UK and internationally.

Backed by Thomas Telford Limited (TTL), the commercial division of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) and publisher of NEC Contracts, NEC Recruit is uniquely positioned to support recruitment across the NEC and infrastructure community. **Reach NEC talent faster**

Our audience of over 50,000 NEC professionals includes experienced: Commercial Managers | Quantity Surveyors | Project Managers | Contract Managers | Procurement Specialists | Planners | NEC Specialists | Estimators

With NEC Recruit, you can:

- Access a unique pool of over 50,000 NEC professionals
- Reach active and passive NEC talent
- Promote vacancies directly to NEC specialists
- Advertise opportunities across the UK and internationally
- Target professionals working across NEC4 and earlier NEC frameworks

Dual visibility. Maximum impact.

Every vacancy advertised on NEC Recruit also appears on ICE Recruit — the official job board of the Institution of Civil Engineers — extending your reach across the civil engineering and infrastructure sectors.

Unlike generalist job boards, NEC Recruit connects employers with a trusted and highly engaged NEC professional network.



Advertise your NEC vacancies with confidence

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NEC Annual Conference 2026: Scaling excellence in a new age of delivery

The NEC community gathered at One Great George Street in Westminster on 18 June for the NEC Annual Conference 2026, themed “Scaling Excellence in a New Age of Delivery.” Opening on behalf of NEC Contracts and Thomas Telford Limited, Managing Director Andrea Naylor set the tone, and moderator Matthew Garratt, a member of the NEC Contract Board, guided a programme that kept returning to one idea: success is measured less by delivering a project on time and budget than by the long-term value it creates, and by how well parties collaborate to get there.

The Morning

Professor David Hancock of the new National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) argued that the UK Government’s 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy is about more than a pipeline of projects; it is a mechanism for creating confidence, giving clients, contractors and the supply chain the certainty to invest in skills and capacity ahead of a major rise in spending. From Hong Kong, Ir Ricky Lau of the Development Bureau (DEVB), Chair of the NEC Users’ Group APAC, showed where that confidence can lead, describing a cultural shift towards trust and shared ownership and a next chapter of localised contract editions, Chinese translations, AI across the project lifecycle, and expansion into the Greater Bay Area and mainland China.

Two further plenaries turned principle into practice. “From Projects to Outcomes”, featuring Turner & Townsend, Mace, Tideway and NHS England, argued that every decision across the asset lifecycle shapes long-term value, and that metrics should capture wellbeing, resilience and social value, not just cost and time. The Government Commercial Agency then set out

how the Procurement Act and the CWAS3 framework are reshaping public procurement, from the shift to the Most Advantageous Tender to new KPI reporting requirements, all of which can be carried into nec contracts through options such as X20 and X12.

The biggest news came from the NEC Contract Board. Peter Higgins and Professor David Mosey unveiled the developing NEC4 Project Alliance Contract, the next generation of NEC alliancing, built on shared purpose, aligned incentives, transparent governance and early supply chain involvement. The Board also confirmed a new Engineering and Construction Short Contract for the humanitarian sector, developed with IHIP; the updated X29 placing nature on an equal footing with carbon; new X and Y clauses; and the forthcoming ICE Dispute Register for NEC Contracts.

The Afternoon

Amanda Meeder of Lantis described how NEC4 underpins the vast Oosterweel programme in Antwerp, building trust and shared accountability, though she was candid that using NEC outside the UK demands a real mindset shift. In “Collaboration at Scale”, National Grid’s Isabelle Adams set out the Great Grid Upgrade, 17 onshore and offshore projects intended to transform the transmission network by 2035 through an enterprise model that aligns the supply chain around shared incentives, while Gustavo Martinez of the European International Contractors presented a new position paper, drawn from 17 international case studies, arguing that complex, high-risk projects need collaborative delivery models where traditional approaches too often run late and over budget.

Singapore’s JTC offered the client’s view. As the first public sector body there to adopt NEC4, Helen Ngu Wang Chung explained that JTC treats the contract as a platform for collaboration rather than simply a means of allocating risk, using its target cost mechanism to drive innovation. Her closing lesson echoed across the day: collaboration cannot be achieved through contracts and processes alone, because “it’s fundamentally about the people”. That thread ran into the final leadership panel, where United Utilities, Akerlof, AECOM, Costain and BRE described an industry facing rising complexity and shrinking capacity, and called for a move away from “heroic” leadership towards something more authentic, built on trust and psychological safety.

The breakout streams grounded the themes in everyday practice. In “Helpdesk Heroes”, Ian Heaphy and Robert Gerrard drew on the questions NEC users ask most to show that the contract is rarely the problem; poor communication, unrecorded instructions and over-engineered Z Clauses usually are. “Conflict Avoidance in Practice” made a stark financial case, contrasting a dispute that cost almost £1 million and 18

months through traditional routes with a comparable issue resolved by a Conflict Avoidance Panel in three months for around £40,000, and concluded that the real barriers to prevention are cultural, not contractual. A third session examined climate and nature risk, exploring how the updated X29 can turn environmental ambition into genuine contractual accountability.

The Awards

The day also paused to celebrate, with the Martin Barnes Awards recognising the pioneers using collaboration and sustainability to advance global engineering and project management. This year’s winners spanned continents, from major UK infrastructure and justice schemes to projects in Hong Kong, Scotland and Peru, a reminder of how far NEC’s collaborative approach now reaches. The full roll of honour is featured elsewhere in this issue.

The through-line was consistent. The tools already exist, and increasingly powerful ones at that. The challenge, and the opportunity, is to use them well, and at scale.



Sponsored Content

The Case for Alliancing

Alliancing is gaining popularity as clients look for different ways to deliver complex projects. In a market shaped by building safety reform, net zero obligations, inflationary pressure and constrained public funding, it is being viewed more favourably than traditional contracting models. The Construction Playbook's emphasis on outcome-based specifications and "sustainable, effective, win-win contracting arrangements" reflects a wider shift in how projects are expected to be delivered.

A different delivery model

Alliancing challenges the long-standing assumption that value is best protected by allocating risk downwards through the supply chain. The Construction Playbook emphasises that risk should sit with those best able to manage it - achieved through earlier engagement, clearer outcomes and more integrated decision-making. Alliancing translates those principles into practice by bringing together the client, contractor, consultants and key suppliers around shared objectives and a genuine 'best for project' culture. For NEC users, this should feel less like a departure from the norm, where the procurement philosophy is already built on early warnings, active management and collaboration.

What makes an alliance effective?

The difficulty lies in turning high-level concepts into successful implementation. Successful alliances require disciplined front-end planning, mature governance and a commercial model that supports openness rather than defensiveness. This means a clear shared vision, aligned decision-making structures, transparent cost and

performance mechanisms, and a realistic approach to behavioural expectations. Alliancing works best where parties are prepared not simply to cooperate, but to learn, adapt and solve problems collectively over the life of a programme.

Where it works best

Alliancing demands time, commitment and organisational maturity, and will not suit every project. It lends itself to complex, high-value or long-term programmes where repeat learning and innovation can be optimised - and where traditional procurement can struggle. For the right projects, the real question is no longer whether alliancing is acceptable in principle, but whether traditional procurement is still good enough in practice.

Rachel Murray Smith, Partner and construction and procurement law expert, said: "Adopting an alliancing form is not an automatic salve. Alliancing must be underpinned by behaviours that fully align and support the collective objectives rather than individual positions; in many instances this requires maturity, openness and trust."

Authors: Rachel Murray-Smith (Partner), Allan Owen (Partner) and Laura Campbell (Senior Associate)

Construction and Infrastructure Focussed

Sharpe Pritchard advises clients across the full lifecycle of infrastructure and construction projects. From early strategy and procurement through to delivery, completion and dispute resolution.

Our team supports public sector bodies, developers and contractors to navigate complex legal challenges, manage risk and keep projects moving.

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Martin Barnes Awards 2026 Winners

Celebrating global visionaries that are shaping the future of NEC

The Martin Barnes Awards celebrates pioneers and visionaries shaping the future of global engineering and project management through collaboration and sustainability.

Named in honour of Dr Martin Barnes, whose ground-breaking contributions to the NEC Contracts revolutionised project delivery, these awards recognise exceptional achievements that inspire progress and transform the industry.

From innovative project solutions and climate change initiatives to leadership and collaboration, the awards showcase the creativity, resilience and ingenuity driving success. Being recognised as a winner, runner-up or highly commended demonstrates a commitment to excellence and a meaningful contribution to the NEC community and beyond.

The 2026 winners were announced and celebrated during the NEC Annual Conference and Martin Barnes Awards ceremony at One Great George Street, bringing together industry leaders from around the world to recognise outstanding achievements and share in the successes of the NEC community.

[Explore this year's winners, runners-up and highly commended entries below.](#)

Project Excellence and Innovation

This award recognises ground-breaking innovation, inventive solutions and best practice.

Winner: M5 Junction 26 & A38 Chelston Link Road (Somerset Council)

Runner Up: HMP Millsike (Kier)

Highly Commended: Trunk Road T4 in Sha Tin (CRBC - Build King Joint Venture)

Future-focused Collaboration

This award recognises outstanding collaborative efforts to develop new solutions to real-world technical challenges while addressing social and environmental issues.

Winner: HMP Millsike (Government Commercial Agency (GCA))

Runner up: Yuen Long South First Phase Development Contract 2 (China Railway Group Limited)

Highly Commended: Bristol Airport Public Transport Interchange (Griffiths Farrans JV)

Climate Change Initiatives

This award recognises projects and initiatives that demonstrate sustainable practices and positive societal impact, while taking responsibility for minimising harm and maximising benefits in helping to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Winner: Newton Tree Nursery (Forestry and Land Scotland)

Runners-up: Tung Chung Eco-shoreline – Nature-based Solutions (AECOM)

Link Coast and Hills by Piers Sustainably (Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD))

Client of the Year

This category recognises both public and private asset owners that commission projects and can prove their excellence as an exemplary client.

Winner: Autoridad Nacional De Infraestructura (ANIN)

Runner Up: Forestry and Land Scotland

Highly Commended: Environment Agency

Professional Services of the Year

This award honours consultancies, advisory firms, law firms, building and quality surveyors and solution providers delivering transformative impact through innovation, client and end-user satisfaction, and leadership in sustainability.

Winner: West Sussex CC & Atkins Realis Partnership (PDP)

Runner Up: Mace Consult

Contractor of the Year

This award recognises contractors and subcontractors who set new benchmarks in project delivery by embracing sustainability, innovation, and exceptional efficiency.

Winner: Build King Civil Engineering Ltd

Runner Up: Haigh Rail Ltd

Individual Excellence Award

This award celebrates individuals who have demonstrated exceptional creativity, leadership and innovation in implementing NEC principles.

Winner: Craig Jones (Head of Commercial (Capital Programmes), United Utilities)

Runner Up: Mahomed Sabeer Ibrahim (Director, ECS Associates (Pty) Ltd.)

Highly Commended: Phil Crampton (Head of Commercial Delivery - Small Secure Houseblock Programme, Ministry of Justice)

Dr Martin Barnes Distinguished Contribution Award

This award honours members who have significantly advanced the adoption and best practices of NEC principles.

Winner: Tom Carey (Partner, Infrastructure & Capital Projects, EY)

Runner Up: Leung Cheuk Lun (NEC Executive, Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD), Hong Kong)

Highly Commended: Chris Jones (Director, Oraculum Consulting Limited)



Scaling excellence: what it actually takes

The construction and infrastructure industries have always had to adapt. But the pressures bearing down on them right now feel different in character, not just in scale. Volatile markets, a generational shift in procurement legislation, a decarbonisation agenda that cannot be deferred, and increasingly complex programmes spanning multiple organisations and jurisdictions - these are not problems that yield to harder work within existing frameworks. They require a fundamental rethink of how the industry organises itself to deliver.

That is what this year's NEC Annual Conference is about. Not the theory of better delivery, but the practical question of how you scale it.

The legislation moment

The Procurement Act is the most significant shift in public sector contracting in a generation, and the temptation will be to treat it as a compliance exercise. That would be a missed opportunity. Its emphasis on transparency, supplier relationships and long-term value reflects a growing recognition that adversarial supply chain behaviours are a structural problem, not just a cultural one. The parties with the least commercial leverage have consistently borne a disproportionate share of the risk. The Act creates a legislative framework that supports fair, collaborative supply chain management. The question is whether organisations use it as a foundation or a ceiling.

Alliancing is not a new idea. Doing it at scale is.

Long-term collaborative alliancing has been part of the industry's vocabulary for decades. What is genuinely new is the complexity and ambition of programmes now being delivered through alliance models. Projects like Tideway and Oosterweel in Antwerp have demonstrated that NEC contract frameworks can support truly integrated delivery across large, multi-party programmes - proof points for an approach the broader industry can adapt and apply.

What they also demonstrate is that alliancing at scale requires more than good intentions and well-drafted contracts. Managing compensation events, early warnings and payment notices across programmes spanning multiple organisations and jurisdictions is operationally demanding. Digital contract management is what makes those obligations practically achievable, consistently, across every tier of the supply chain - reducing friction, reducing errors, and keeping the collaborative intent of the contract intact in practice as well as on paper.

The decarbonisation connection

The industry's carbon challenge and its commercial challenge are not separate problems. They are the same problem. You cannot ask a supply chain partner to invest in sustainability innovation, share carbon data openly, or absorb the cost of early design changes if the contract treats them as an adversary. Collaboration is the commercial foundation that makes genuine sustainability progress possible.

Scaling what works

Our research this year found that 83% of industry professionals globally agree that trust between parties is critical to project success - yet 70% still operate within traditional contract frameworks. The industry does not have a belief problem. It has a practice problem. The benefits of collaborative contracting are experienced by those working within it and widely recognised by those who are not. What holds progress back is that traditional approaches remain the default, and changing a default requires deliberate effort from those with the power to do it.

**Excellence in delivery is not a secret.
The industry knows what it looks like.
The work now is to scale it.**

SAVE THE DATE



NEC Annual Conference and Martin Barnes Awards 2027

17th June 2027

One Great George Street, London

(Keep an eye out on the NEC website for updates)

From intent to practice: how NEC Digital makes collaborative contracting work



Collaborative contracting works. The evidence is clear and consistent - from major infrastructure programmes in the UK to complex multi-party projects across Australia, Singapore and beyond. Fewer disputes, better cost outcomes, more resilient supply chain relationships. These are not theoretical benefits. They are what organisations working within NEC contract frameworks report experiencing on the ground.

The harder question is how to make collaboration the norm rather than the exception, and how to sustain it across programmes of increasing scale and complexity. That is the problem NEC Digital was built to solve.

The gap between intent and practice

NEC contracts create the contractual conditions for collaboration from day one. Clause 10.2 places a mutual obligation on both parties to act in a spirit of mutual trust and co-operation. The early warning mechanism requires parties to notify each other as soon as anything arises that could affect cost, time or quality. Compensation event processes ensure that risk is allocated fairly and transparently when circumstances change.

These mechanisms work when used correctly and consistently. The challenge is that traditional contract management creates friction at every stage. Manual drafting introduces errors. Sequential review processes slow everything down. Version control issues mean different parties work from different documents. For organisations operating across multiple jurisdictions, managing contract administration across languages, time zones and regulatory environments through disconnected systems and email chains makes the collaborative intent of the contract harder to sustain in practice.

A platform built on NEC principles

Launched in November 2025, NEC Digital redesigns contract creation around the collaborative principles that NEC contracts are built on. Guided workflows lead users through the drafting process intelligently, with built-in clause compatibility checking that prevents conflicting selections before they happen. The platform understands how different contract components interact, ensuring internal consistency that would otherwise require significant expert knowledge to achieve manually.

The Z clause library allows organisations to build and store their own clause sets, with each Z clause directly linked to the core clauses it impacts - making it immediately clear how any addition affects the rest of the contract. Dispute options are selected automatically. Secure tender management allows Contract Data Part One to be shared with bidders via a simple link, streamlining the process without compromising control.

Growing with the industry

Since launch, NEC Digital has continued to develop in direct response to how organisations are using it. PDF reference materials - contracts, guidance notes and flowcharts - are now built into the platform with watermarked downloads, so users



can access everything they need without leaving the drafting environment. Contract versioning allows teams to track changes and restore previous versions, with a full audit trail maintained throughout. Contracts can be cloned - replicating clause selections and Contract Data Part One across projects - bringing consistency and speed to organisations managing multiple programmes.

For international programmes, the rollout of country-specific Y clauses is significant. Australia was the first market to go live, with further jurisdictions to follow. Y clauses handle cross-border complexity within the platform itself, making it practical to apply consistent collaborative frameworks across global supply chains.

Accessible to everyone in the supply chain

Smaller contractors, subcontractors and supply chain partners have historically been at a disadvantage in contract management - lacking the dedicated legal and commercial resource

to navigate complex documentation with confidence. NEC Digital's plain-language, guided approach changes that. The platform is accessible to businesses at any stage of their digitalisation journey, with no specialist infrastructure required.

When everyone in the supply chain can engage with the contract confidently - issuing early warnings on time, managing compensation events properly, understanding their rights and obligations - the collaborative behaviours the contract is designed to encourage can actually function as intended. Contract literacy across the full supply chain is one of the most direct levers available for improving project outcomes.

The best collaborative projects are built on trust, transparency and early communication. NEC Digital makes those things easier to achieve, more consistently, for more organisations. That is how good practice becomes standard practice.

NEC Trainer Opportunity – Apply Now



Are you an experienced NEC practitioner passionate about developing others? We're expanding our trainer panel for NEC ECC Project Manager Accreditation and want to hear from NEC professionals who can make learning engaging, inspiring and meaningful.

Why work with us?

- Deliver high-quality training using your real-world NEC project management experience
- Work flexibly with assignments that fit your schedule
- Make a lasting impact by building capability across the construction industry
- Represent Thomas Telford Ltd - a trusted leader in collaborative contracting

Who we're looking for

- NEC4 ECC Project Manager Accreditation
- 5+ years' experience using NEC4 ECC as a Project Manager
- A score of at least 75% in your latest accreditation assessment
- Experience delivering engaging training, workshops, or presentations

Interested? Apply now.

Send a copy of your CV to nectrainerapplications@neccontract.com

NEC Digital: collaborative contracting for the digital age

NEC contracts have long set the standard for collaborative contracting worldwide. NEC Digital takes everything that makes them exceptional and transforms it for the digital age - not by digitising the old process, but by fundamentally redesigning how contracts are created, managed and shared.

What is NEC Digital?

Launched in November 2025, NEC Digital is a subscription-based online drafting platform that brings the internationally recognised NEC contract suite into the digital age. Built on the same principles of clarity, simplicity and collaboration that define NEC itself, it gives clients, contractors, consultants and project teams a single, intuitive environment in which to create and manage NEC contracts.

This is not a PDF version of a paper contract. It is a purpose-built platform designed around the real-world challenges of modern construction and infrastructure delivery - reducing errors, removing friction, and making collaborative contracting accessible to every organisation in the supply chain, regardless of size or resource.

82% of industry professionals feel positive about wider adoption of collaborative contracts.

YET 43% cite training as the biggest barrier to using them. NEC Digital addresses both.

How it works

At the heart of NEC Digital is a guided drafting process that replaces manual document editing with intelligent, step-by-step contract setup. Built-in logic prevents incompatible clause selections before they happen, and contextual guidance is available throughout - so users always have the information they need to make informed decisions without leaving the platform.

Key features include:

- Guided contract setup across all main options (A-F), with automatic dispute option selection (W1-W3)
- Side-by-side Clause Navigator for intuitive, efficient contract navigation
- Intelligent clause compatibility checking that prevents errors before they occur
- Comprehensive Z clause library personalised to your organisation - with each Z clause directly linked to the core clauses it affects
- Secure tender management - Contract Data Part One shared with bidders via a simple link, with client confirmation when bidders engage with the digital tools
- Robust permission controls and Cyber Essentials certification for enterprise-grade security

“ NEC Digital is far more than a digital version of a paper contract. It's a fundamental transformation in how collaborative contracting works. ”

New since launch

- PDF reference materials - contracts, guidance notes and flowcharts built directly into the platform, with watermarked downloads available
- Contract versioning - track every change, restore previous versions, and maintain a full audit trail of amendments throughout
- Contract cloning - replicate clause selections and Contract Data Part One across projects for greater consistency and speed

Download the report at necontract.com/insights-supply-chain

- User management dashboard - full organisational control of team access, roles and permissions
- International Y clauses - country-specific clauses now live for Australia, with further jurisdictions to follow, making it practical to apply consistent NEC frameworks across global supply chains

“ For organisations managing multiple programmes, contract cloning and versioning bring a level of consistency and control that manual processes simply cannot match. ”

Who benefits

NEC Digital delivers value across every role in the contracting process.

Clients - draft contracts with confidence using guided setup, ensure high-quality tender submissions, and maintain complete visibility throughout.

Consultants and law firms - streamline contract review and advisory services, deliver faster and more accurate advice, and build reusable Z clause libraries across client contracts.

Contractors - access secure tender environments with clear guidance, submit bids with full clause visibility, and significantly reduce bid preparation time.

78% of industry professionals report improved costs when using collaborative contracts.

80% see better environmental outcomes.

81% experience higher efficiency.



The same NEC you trust, transformed

Everything that makes NEC contracts trusted globally remains unchanged. All NEC4 clauses, options and legal structures are identical. The plain-language drafting that makes NEC accessible across the supply chain is preserved. The collaborative ethos - built on trust, mutual obligation and partnership - is the foundation on which NEC Digital is built.

What has changed is everything around it: the speed, the accuracy, the accessibility, and the ability to apply NEC's collaborative framework consistently, at scale, across programmes of any complexity.

“ NEC Digital - where clarity meets collaboration in the digital age ”



Find out more and book a demo at: necontract.com/digital

What does the global construction industry really think about trust?

Earlier this year, NEC Contracts commissioned the most extensive study of construction supply chain relationships we have ever undertaken. 'Trust, Contracts and Outcomes' surveyed more than 1,000 professionals across the UK, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Peru - contractors, consultants, subcontractors, civil engineers, architects, surveyors, and public and private sector clients. What emerged is both encouraging and, in places, uncomfortable reading.

The industry knows what good looks like

The research found overwhelming consensus on the value of collaborative working. 83% of respondents agreed that trust between parties is critical to successful project outcomes. 81% agreed that collaboration helps issues to be resolved more quickly. 78% agreed that the most effective supply chain relationships are built on trust and co-operation.

These findings are consistent across all five markets and all roles - and they point to an uncomfortable conclusion: that how construction projects are typically procured and managed is at odds with what the people doing that work believe would make them better.

83% agree trust is critical to project success.

YET 70% still operate within traditional contract frameworks.

The gap between belief and practice

Despite near-universal belief in collaboration, 70% of respondents said their organisations operate within traditional contract frameworks. Fewer than one in eight actively drive for collaborative contracts. Only 58% of projects, on average, are delivered on time and to budget.

The research is clear on why. In every market, the client was identified as the primary driver of contracting framework choice. Where traditional frameworks dominate, clients have specified them - defaulting to what is familiar rather than what the evidence suggests works better. The parties with the least commercial leverage are consistently the most enthusiastic about collaborative approaches. Those with the most power to drive change are the slowest to move.

A global challenge, a consistent answer

The findings are strikingly consistent across five very different markets. Effective communication is the top factor in minimising disputes everywhere. Support for collaborative contracts is strong among those who have used them. And the barriers to wider adoption are structural and addressable - not cultural and fixed.

Where major clients have committed to collaborative contracting at scale, the evidence is visible: better delivery rates, fewer disputes, more resilient supply chains. The direction of travel is clear.

The challenge now is giving more organisations the confidence and the mechanisms to act on it. That conversation starts here.

“Where clients have committed to collaborative contracting at scale, the effects cascade through the entire supply chain.”



Download the full report at:
neccontract.com/insights-supply-chain

Build the expertise that wins work and delivers it



NEC Training | The official NEC training and accreditation programme

Knowing NEC contracts is one thing. Having the knowledge, confidence and credentials to apply them effectively on live projects is another. NEC Training exists to close that gap - and as NEC adoption continues to grow across both public and private sectors globally, investing in your team's capability has never been more important.

As the only official provider of NEC training and accreditation in the UK, every course is delivered by recognised NEC specialists with extensive practical experience.

Training that covers every role, every level

Whether your team is new to NEC or building on existing experience, there is a programme for them:

- Introduction courses - the fastest route to NEC confidence for anyone who will touch an NEC contract
- Specialist workshops - deep dives into selected topics, built around real commercial scenarios
- Bespoke project launch workshops - aligning your entire project team before work begins
- Accreditation programmes - the NEC Gold Standard, delivering ICE-awarded qualifications, valid for five years

All programmes are available as public courses, virtual delivery or in-house.



Visit:
neccontract.com/products/training

Why in-house delivers the greatest return

In-house delivery means everything is built around your organisation in a far more cost-effective way. Teams leave with shared understanding and the ability to apply their learning to live projects the next day.

The accreditation that makes a difference

Accreditation is increasingly a tender requirement, with many public sector frameworks requiring it. NEC accredited professionals are listed on the NEC Accreditation Register and entitled to use the new NEC post-nominals:

- NEC4 ECC Project Manager Accreditation - NEC AccPM
- NEC4 ECC Supervisor Accreditation - NEC AccS
- NEC4 TSC Service Manager Accreditation - NEC AccSM
- NEC4 FMC Service Manager Accreditation - NEC AccSM

95% of public sector organisations report improved cost efficiency following NEC training

85% benefit from minimised disputes

Transforming Construction - NEC Contracts, 2025

A year in review: NEC news and updates

The past 12 months have been among the most active in NEC Contracts' history with new product launches, international milestones, and a growing body of guidance and training solutions. Here is a look at the key developments.

Global research report

Earlier this year, NEC Contracts published 'Trust, Contracts and Outcomes: A Global Study of Construction Supply Chain Relationships'. Drawing on responses from more than 1,000 professionals across five markets, the report made the case for client leadership as the primary lever for closing the gap between belief in collaborative contracting and actual adoption. The full report is available at neccontract.com.

NEC Digital launches

November 2025 saw the launch of NEC Digital, a purpose-built online drafting platform bringing the NEC contract suite into the digital age. Since launch the platform has developed rapidly, adding contract versioning, a full audit trail of amendments, contract cloning, and PDF reference materials built directly into the drafting environment. Australia's country-specific Y clauses were the first to go live, with further jurisdictions to follow.

Singapore: a landmark year

Singapore has taken significant strides in embedding collaborative contracting within its built environment sector. New Y clauses for facilities management projects were published in August 2025, alongside a formal training partnership with BCA Academy. Public sector agencies including JTC Corporation, the Housing and Development Board and the Land Transport Authority have all committed to piloting NEC4 on upcoming projects.

In November, JTC Corporation awarded Singapore's first public sector NEC4 collaborative contract, for infrastructure works at Jurong Innovation District. More than 15 pilot projects across the public and private sectors are now in development, making Singapore one of the most exciting growth markets for NEC globally.

Chinese translations and mainland China expansion

January 2026 brought a landmark announcement: the launch of the first official Chinese language translation of the NEC ECC Hong Kong Edition, as part of a tri-party partnership between NEC Contracts, the Hong Kong Development Bureau and the Qianhai Authority. For the first time, NEC contracts will be piloted in mainland China. Both Traditional and Simplified Chinese versions have been developed to support adoption across Hong Kong and mainland China, and the partnership was included in the Hong Kong Government's 2025 Interim Policy Address.

APAC Conference and Hong Kong developments

The NEC Asia Pacific Conference in Hong Kong in November 2025 drew over 250 delegates from across the region, highlighting the momentum building across APAC markets.

Latin America: translations and training

NEC's commitment to Latin America continued with the official Spanish translation of the NEC4 Professional Service Contract in August 2025, followed by the NEC4 Facilities Management Contract in November, helping to promote best practice in FM procurement.

A new three-level learning pathway for NEC users in Peru was also launched, developed with local trainers and industry professionals to support the growing community of practitioners working with NEC contracts across the country.

New appointments in Singapore and Peru

NEC Contracts strengthened its international operations with dedicated country managers in two key markets: Himashi Soriano in Singapore, and Julio Cabrera in Peru - where NEC contracts have been implemented on close to \$9 billion worth of public infrastructure projects since 2019.

New guidance, practice notes and clauses published

NEC4 Guidance Notes covering the Building Safety Act 2022, the Construction Playbook, NEC4 ECC for underground works, and Programme Management Offices have been released over the past year. NEC4 Practice Notes on choosing between the FMC, FMS and TSC, and on how NEC contracts work alongside FAC-1 - following NEC's acquisition in May 2025 - have also been published, along with the NEC4 ECC conflict avoidance clauses, released to coincide with Conflict Avoidance Week 2025.

New Training Advisory Panel

In May 2026, NEC established a Training Advisory Panel bringing together consultancy firms, client organisations and subject matter experts to guide training course development and strategic direction, with its first session held this month.

The year ahead:

Introducing the next generation of NEC alliancing contracts

The NEC4 Project Alliance Contract (PAC) has been developed by the NEC Contract Board in partnership with the Alliance Steering Group, combining features from the PPC2000, NEC4 ALC and FAC-1. It will integrate clients, consultants, contractors and suppliers under a single contract, promoting early supply chain involvement, risk management and shared objectives.

An NEC4 ECSC to support the humanitarian work of NGOs

The new NEC4 Engineering and Construction Short Contract for the Humanitarian Sector has been developed with the International Humanitarian Infrastructure Platform (IHIP) to help agencies, contractors and donors deliver infrastructure projects with greater clarity, accountability and impact.

NEC expands Option X29 to put nature alongside climate in major industry milestone

NEC has updated Option X29 and expanded the supporting guidance to formally recognise nature alongside climate change in infrastructure delivery - a significant milestone in the evolution of environmental considerations within NEC contracts.



Advance your career. Strengthen your team. Deliver better infrastructure.



Training

ICE Training | The professional development programme of the Institution of Civil Engineers

Great infrastructure starts with great people. ICE Training is the training arm of the Institution of Civil Engineers - the globally respected professional body with more than 200 years of history and a 97,000-strong membership - providing expert-led learning for engineers, project managers and construction professionals.

Whether you are building foundational knowledge or advancing towards technical authority, ICE Training provides a clear, progressive pathway for every stage of a career.

A structured learning architecture

Technical discipline pathways cover structures and buildings, ground engineering, transport and rail, and energy - each structured across three levels:

- Foundation - essential knowledge and core principles
- Intermediate - applied capability and practical delivery skills
- Advanced - strategic leadership and technical authority

Embedded across every discipline are five cross-sector professional capabilities: sustainability, health and safety, digital transformation, infrastructure delivery, and leadership and ethics - ensuring every programme delivers both deep technical expertise and the wider professional behaviours modern infrastructure demands.

Flexible delivery for every team

ICE Training programmes are available in multiple formats:

- Public courses - virtual or classroom, on scheduled dates
- In-house delivery - tailored to your organisation, projects and challenges, on a date and location of your choosing
- eLearning - flexible, self-paced online modules available at any time

In-house delivery offers the most impactful and cost-effective route for teams - contextualised to your projects and standards, consistent across your organisation, and flexible around operational priorities. Training can be delivered worldwide, with content adapted to local regulations and industry needs.

Supporting your professional journey

ICE Training programmes support CPD, Initial Professional Development and Professional Review preparation, as well as UK-SPEC competence development. ICE Training also delivers APM-recognised PFQ and PMQ qualifications in partnership with 20/20 Project Management Training. All programmes are delivered by experienced engineers, project managers and industry specialists - ICE approved and recognised for their professionalism, expertise and real-world insight.



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or Email: info@icetraining.org.uk

NEC learning, reimagined



NEC contracts are only as effective as the people using them.

Training has always been central to what NEC Contracts offers. This year, the way that training is delivered has taken a significant step forward with the launch of a new Learning Management System, designed to support professionals throughout their NEC journey.

More than just a platform change, this represents a rethink of how NEC learning feels, how it connects, and how it develops professionals over the course of their careers. The new environment brings a refreshed digital identity that aligns more closely with the wider NEC brand, creating a clearer, more intuitive space to access NEC training and accreditation programmes.

Key features include:

- **A personalised learning experience** - choose appropriate NEC courses that meet your specific development needs
- **Structured learning pathways** - clear and logical routes to skill development

- **Flexible learning** - blended courses available to access anytime, anywhere
- **Expert tuition** - learn from accredited specialists in their respective fields
- **Multi-lingual UI capabilities** - addressing the need for inclusive learning experiences for NEC's growing international community
- **Improved data and insights** - greater visibility of progress and results to track performance
- **Social and collaborative learning** - engage with and receive support from tutors and peers through forums and live video sessions
- **Cost-effective learning** - an affordable alternative to traditional classroom training

Looking ahead, the platform opens up new possibilities for how learning connects with wider digital tools, including more flexible and integrated ways for individuals and organisations to engage with NEC content.

Learning made simple.



Delivering on the public sector's biggest promises

The gap between what the public sector is being asked to deliver and what it is currently delivering is significant. Mandatory housing targets require 370,000 new homes a year across England. Regeneration programmes are growing in ambition and complexity. And local government reorganisation is adding pressure to procurement at precisely the moment when speed and clarity matter most.

The organisations closing that gap share a common characteristic. They have stopped treating procurement as an administrative function and started treating it as a delivery tool. And the contract model they are reaching for is collaborative.

The legislative moment for public sector clients

Two developments are reshaping how public sector construction is procured, and both point in the same direction.

CWAS3 - Construction Works and Associated Services 3 (RM6320) - is the UK Government's £80bn mega-framework for public sector construction, managed by the Government Commercial Agency. Spanning general construction, civil engineering, offsite solutions and NHS healthcare through ProCure24, and going live in January 2027, it is the procurement vehicle through which a significant proportion of publicly funded construction will flow for the next eight years. Across Lots 1, 2 and 3, NEC4 is a required form of contract - meaning that for a large part of the public sector, collaborative contracting is no longer a choice but a specification requirement.

The Procurement Act reinforces the same principles at a legislative level - transparency, fair supplier treatment and long-term value. These are not new ideas. They are what NEC contracts have been built on for thirty years. What the Act does is make them a statutory obligation rather than a matter of organisational choice.

For public sector procurement teams navigating both developments simultaneously, NEC provides something genuinely valuable: a contract framework that does not just comply with the direction of travel but embeds it at every stage of the project. And for organisations managing multiple programmes across complex supply chains, NEC Digital adds the operational infrastructure to make those principles work in practice - reducing administrative friction, maintaining a full audit trail of contract changes, and ensuring consistency across every tier.

What the research tells us

Our global research this year found that public sector respondents were notably less likely to see supply chain relationships as inherently adversarial than their private sector counterparts. Those who have worked directly with collaborative contracts on major programmes are more optimistic still. The data suggests that direct experience of collaborative contracting shifts attitudes significantly - and that where public sector clients have mandated collaborative approaches consistently, the effects cascade through the supply chain.

That is an important finding for those responsible for procurement strategy. The single most powerful lever for improving supply chain outcomes is client specification. When a public sector organisation specifies NEC and genuinely commits to its principles, contractors adapt, supply chain members build their knowledge, and collaborative behaviours become the norm.

Built for public sector delivery

NEC contracts were designed with public sector delivery in mind. The suite is endorsed by the Crown Commercial Service, recommended by the UK Government, and adopted across major programmes. For housing and regeneration programmes in particular, the flexibility of the NEC suite is a significant practical advantage.

Option X22 supports early contractor involvement, bringing supply chain knowledge into the design phase before commitments are made and NEC's early warning mechanism - requiring parties to flag risks as soon as they become aware of them - is precisely the tool that keeps complex, long-running programmes on track.

The next step

The public sector understands the value of collaboration better than almost any other part of the industry. What the research shows is that

understanding and consistent practice are still not the same thing. Closing that gap - through procurement mandates, client leadership and investment in contract knowledge across delivery teams - is where the real gains lie.

The conditions for change are in place. The legislative framework supports it. The evidence base is compelling. For public sector organisations committed to delivering on their most ambitious programmes, collaborative contracting is not a nice-to-have. It is how the work gets done.

Join the NEC Users' Group today



The NEC Users' Group is a global community connecting organisations and professionals across the entire supply chain, providing opportunities to share knowledge, best practice and experience with fellow NEC users.

Why join the NEC Users' Group?

Members benefit from exclusive access to expert support, industry insight and valuable networking opportunities through events, training and digital engagement.

Membership benefits

- Exclusive technical support from NEC experts via the help desk
- Tailored consultancy support
- Free or discounted access to a range of NEC products

- Free or discounted access to the NEC Annual Conference
- Opportunities to connect and collaborate with NEC users worldwide

Membership options to suit your organisation

Flexible membership tiers are available to meet different needs, including:

- Individual
- Corporate
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Join the NEC community today:
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NEC Contracts launches the NEC4 Project Alliance Contract (PAC)

NEC Contracts is set to publish the NEC4 Project Alliance Contract (PAC) in the final quarter of 2026, marking the next generation of NEC alliancing contracts. Developed by the NEC Contract Board with the Alliance Steering Group, the PAC draws together the strongest features of three established collaborative contracts: the Project Partnering Contract (PPC2000), the NEC4 Alliance Contract (ALC) and the NEC Framework Alliance Contract (FAC-1).

The PAC is a multi-party contract that appoints several suppliers to form an alliance with the client, working together to design and build an asset in a collaborative, two-stage environment. It keeps the familiar NEC structure of core clauses, optional clauses and Contract Data, alongside the NEC principles of clarity, simplicity and a stimulus to good contract management.

Day-to-day delivery is led by an Alliance Manager, while key decisions are taken by unanimous agreement of the Core Group, on which every Alliance Member is represented. Standard NEC mechanisms such as early warnings, the programme, compensation events and performance incentives all feature.

The PAC also introduces pre-construction phase alliance activities as a fundamental requirement rather than an option, with a pre-construction timetable, early supply chain engagement and a structured process for driving improved value. A combined duty of care sits alongside individual member responsibilities, with the option of a 'no blame, no claim' approach.

Designed for construction projects of any type, anywhere in the world, from buildings and infrastructure to power, renewables and oil and gas, the PAC suits programmes that need multiple parties to work together under sophisticated management processes. As with all NEC4 contracts, it is built for international use through Y clauses that address different legal jurisdictions.

The PAC is the successor to the ALC and is intended to replace PPC2000 over time, with existing users of both fully supported during the transition. FAC-1 remains the go-to contract for framework alliances, and the PAC can sit beneath it as a works contract. On publication, the PAC will be supported by dedicated User Guides and flowcharts.



Upcoming Training Courses



20 July
NEC3 to NEC4 ECC Project Manager Accreditation extension

17 August & 10 September
NEC4 ECC Project Manager Accreditation (Blended)

4 September
Introduction to the NEC4 Facilities Management Contract (FMC)



Training

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Digital Twins Foundation

7 September
ICE BIM for Infrastructure Foundation

17th September
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See every UK date for July to October



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Addressing Climate and Nature Risk: Resilience, Adaptation and Regenerative Solutions

How should infrastructure contracts respond to climate and nature risk? That question framed a forward-looking conference session moderated by Professor Lewis Barlow, Decarbonisation Head of Profession at WSP UK and ICE Trustee for Carbon and Climate, joined by Claire Kirk of the Environment Agency, Professor Anusha Shah of Plan for Earth, and Katherine Drayson of TfL.

A central thread was the launch this week of the updated X29, which puts nature on an equal footing with carbon. Until now there has been little real guidance on how to write nature into a contract. The panel argued that nature should be treated as a core infrastructure component rather

than an add-on, and that the industry should move from sustainability towards genuinely regenerative outcomes, working with nature-based solutions rather than engineering around them.

The speakers were candid that climate risk is consistently underestimated. From a TfL perspective, flood risk remains highly visible yet under-addressed, rising temperatures are not reflected in current building design, and drought is placing growing pressure on water supply resilience. The message was that infrastructure can fail if nature impacts are not properly factored in. The Environment Agency's work in the Thames Valley, with an aspiration to deliver half of its water management through nature-based solutions, was cited as a sign of the ambition required.

Asked how to integrate nature without ostracising other disciplines, Anusha Shah described the goal as "having nature as an ally, as another team member in your team." Katherine Drayson reinforced that "nature is a crucial part of our infrastructure," adding that climate change also affects the green infrastructure the sector depends on.

A live poll identified the main barriers as funding, lack of knowledge, ageing infrastructure, short-term thinking and political constraints. Discussion also turned to the practical challenge of evaluating tenders using X29.

Looking ahead, the panel called for stronger cross-discipline collaboration, connecting carbon specialists with commercial teams, letting ecologists and multidisciplinary teams lead early decisions, and building a community of practice and mentoring across the industry.



Conflict Avoidance in Practice: NEC's Approach and Cross-Industry Perspectives

Conflict avoidance was the focus of a lively conference session moderated by Shy Jackson, member of the NEC4 Contract Board, with contributions from Jim McCluskey of Kier Infrastructure, Sue Barrett of the Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority, and Will Rule of Allora Infrastructure.

The panel's central message was that dispute avoidance does not begin once a project is underway, it begins during procurement and contract formation. As Jim McCluskey observed, "It has to start before you sign the contract." Poor risk allocation, the speakers argued, is often the root cause of later disputes, while Early Contractor Involvement and collaborative procurement help establish alignment from the outset.

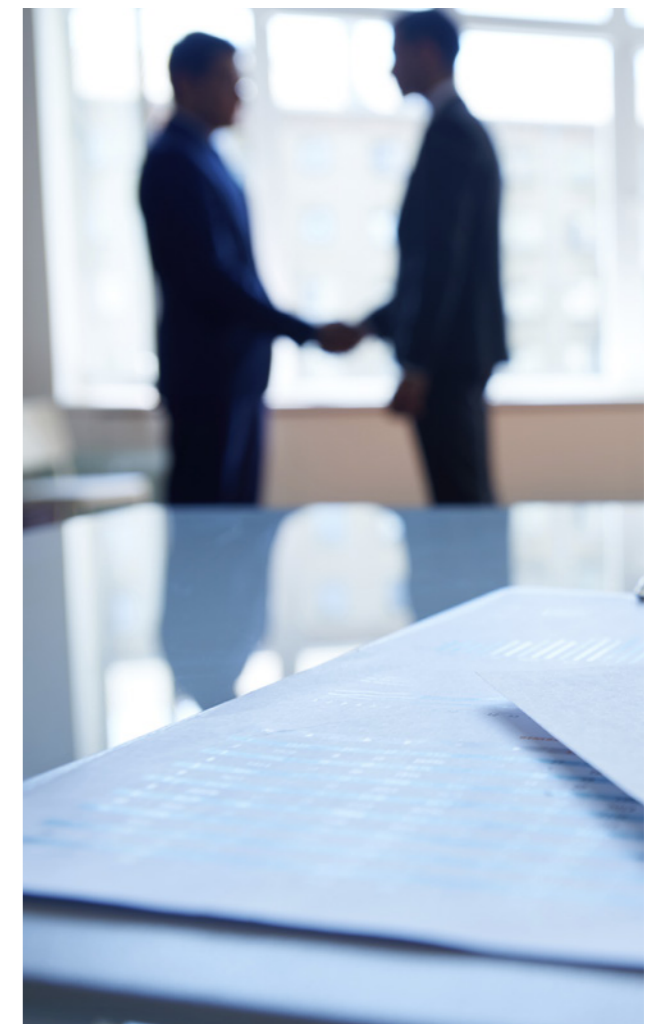
Once delivery begins, the advice was to deal with issues immediately rather than stacking them up until the end. NEC's mechanisms, including early warnings, compensation events and senior representative meetings, are designed to address issues as they arise. Unresolved compensation events and growing issue logs were identified as early warning signs of trouble ahead.

The financial case for prevention was striking. Sue Barrett described one dispute that took 18 months and almost £1 million to resolve through traditional routes, while a similar issue referred to a Conflict Avoidance Panel cost around £40,000 and concluded in roughly three months. The lesson was clear: the cost of avoiding conflict is almost always lower than the cost of resolving it later.

Will Rule highlighted that many contractors operate on margins of 2.5% or less, leaving little capacity to absorb risk. This, he argued, is why excessive risk transfer fails, summing it up as, "It's not about risk transfer. It's about genuine risk sharing."

A live audience poll found that the biggest barriers to dispute avoidance are cultural rather than contractual, pointing to organisational processes, reluctance to change and behaviours. One delegate captured the paradox neatly: "Everyone will pay £100,000 to fight a claim. No one pays £20,000 to avoid it."

Looking ahead, speakers called for stronger governance, earlier intervention and better use of the tools NEC already provides, suggesting success may increasingly be measured by disputes prevented rather than claims won.



Helpdesk Heroes: Ask the NEC Expert

The NEC Helpdesk handles a steady stream of enquiries from users across the world, and at the NEC Annual Conference a panel session lifted the lid on the questions asked most often. Moderated by MiMi Aye, Head of Content at NEC Contracts, the discussion brought together Ian Heaphy, Director at IN Construction Consulting and member of the NEC Contract Board, and Robert Gerrard, Senior NEC Consultant and Secretary of the NEC Users' Group APAC.

A clear theme emerged: many disputes begin with poor communication. Instructions given verbally, left unrecorded or later interpreted differently are a recurring source of conflict. NEC's notification and instruction procedures exist precisely to create clarity and an auditable record, and the panel urged users to follow contractual processes before work proceeds, rather than carrying out the work and seeking a compensation event afterwards.

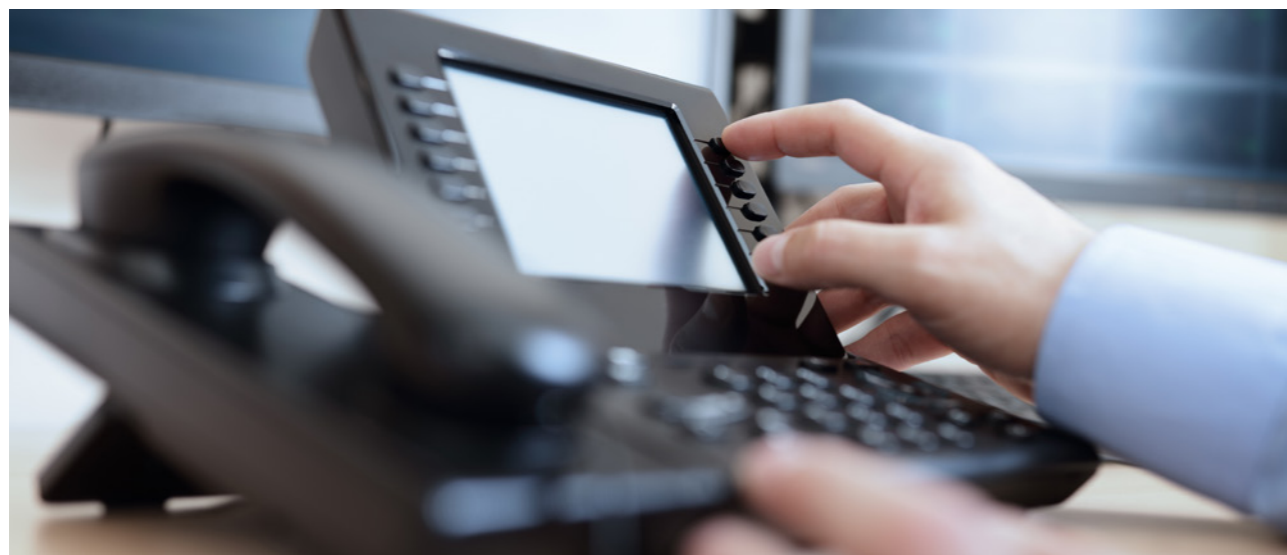
The session also clarified what the Helpdesk can and cannot do. It is a confidential service that explains how nec contracts operate, but it cannot resolve specific project disputes. Common misunderstandings were addressed too. As Ian Heaphy put it, "A programme is a

statement of intent. It's an estimate of what we think we're going to do," cautioning that programmes should never be contractualised.

Z Clauses drew particular attention. Both speakers agreed they should remain, since no standard form can anticipate every project, but warned that amendments to NEC's core operational clauses often alter risk allocation, break contractual processes and create administrative dead ends. Robert Gerrard noted, "When people amend the standard clauses, that's where the bigger problems occur." Many requirements added through Z Clauses, the panel suggested, could instead be handled through the Scope.

On compensation events, the panel reinforced NEC's prospective assessment principle, using forecasts from the dividing date rather than substituting actual costs after the event. Heaphy illustrated the cost of getting this wrong with a project that took two years to build but four years to settle.

Looking ahead, the panel anticipated greater use of real-time project management and AI tools to support forecasting, faster commercial decisions and more disciplined drafting of Z Clauses.



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