

## A day in the life of an NEC accredited Project Manager

**Lorna Dixon**  
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*Please introduce yourself including your background, role and company.*

My name is Lorna Dixon and I am a Senior Project Manager at Mott MacDonald in the Advisory and Programme Delivery unit. I am a chartered civil engineer, and have experience working for both client and consultant organisations. Although I now primarily work on buildings projects, I've experienced NEC in highways, rail, flood defence and infrastructure projects.

*What does your role involve?*

My role involves the project and contract management of a range of different buildings projects at all stages. At the moment my projects include the construction of a new special educational needs school, and the design for the refurbishment of a derelict Victorian building into a state-of-the-art medical centre. I both manage contracts on behalf of clients, and look after and administer Mott MacDonald's own NEC contracts, so I get to use the NEC from "both sides of the fence"!

*What does a typical day look like to you?*

There's no such thing as a typical day in my job! I love the variety and it keeps me on my toes. You may well find me chairing and running risk reduction/early warning meetings, reviewing

Contractor's programmes, or developing our own programmes, advising clients, writing all sorts of contractual communications, visiting sites, coordinating Mott MacDonald's engineering resources and mentoring junior members of staff.

**“ There is no such thing as a  
typical day in my job! ”**

*What do you enjoy the most about your job?*

What I enjoy most about my job is that it requires me to use very different skill sets. I get to be technical and “black and white” when it comes to aspects such as NEC contract administration. Then I also get to meet and build really good working relationships with people, and those soft skills are just as important. A contract is never going to go well if you don't get on with people!

*How many NEC procured projects have you worked on?*

It must be around 15. The majority of all the projects I have worked on have been NEC; some spanning years and some just a couple of months. They have primarily been NEC3 PSC or ECCs, or their shorter forms. I am currently enjoying getting to grips with NEC4 on my newer projects!

**“** Always refer back to the contract, there is always an answer in there even if it is not immediately apparent. **”**

*At what point in your career did you (or your organisation) decide to take the NEC accreditation course?*

I decided in 2015, having worked on NEC projects for about six years. Most of my learning came from a great colleague of mine who had been using NEC since it began. I was keen to formalise what I was learning so the accreditation seemed an obvious route and I was lucky that my employer supported it. My clients are now requesting NEC4 contracts to be used, so I converted my NEC3 Accreditation to NEC4 earlier this year.

*What was the one takeaway from the course that you are using every day?*

It would be difficult to pinpoint just one aspect as you're learning constantly during the four-day course – and during the assessment afterwards! I would say that it is to always refer back to the contract, there is always an answer in there even if it is not immediately apparent.

*What was the first NEC procured project that you worked on?*

One of my first roles was a secondment into a highways contractor for the construction of a bridge strengthening in Hertfordshire. During some demolition works we found asbestos and had to temporarily stop works. My manager gave me a form to fill in to describe what had happened. I didn't really understand the context at the time, but that was my first experience of writing an early warning!

*What was the most memorable NEC procured project that you worked on and why?*

The project that is the most memorable and where I really cut my teeth on NEC was when I was working on the client/employer side for a rail project at the design and preliminary works stages. The contract had been severely amended and the Works Information was so vague that it didn't really work. This exposed the client to a lot of risk. I learned a great deal on how not to do things during that project, especially, to not amend the contract unless absolutely necessary.

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*What advice would you give somebody pursuing engineering as a career?*

Engineering is such a broad and interesting industry and provides so many great career opportunities. Pursuing qualification in commercial and project management, such as the NEC Project Manager Accreditation, will only enrich an engineering career further, as it has done for mine. I was recruited into my current job because of my NEC Project Manager Accreditation, and I've never looked back!

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