MC MS Blog

A road less travelled: my journey to becoming an adjudicator



NOVEMBER 24, 2026

As you may have seen on LinkedIn recently, I had the pleasure of speaking at the TECSA Annual Dinner, having been kindly invited by Zoe de Courcy to share my journey to becoming an adjudicator. My route into adjudication hasn't been particularly conventional, and preparing for the evening gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I got here and, perhaps more importantly, the people who encouraged me along the way. I thought it worth sharing some of those reflections more widely, particularly for anyone whose own career has taken a less conventional route.

A different starting point

My route to adjudication began some distance from where I ultimately ended up. I had always been interested in law and, from an early age, wanted to become a barrister. However, personal circumstances meant that, by 17, continuing my studies in law was not a realistic option. I left college with few formal qualifications and, at that stage, no idea that my career would eventually bring me back to law through construction and adjudication.

Without a clear alternative career path, and with the need to support myself financially, I began working for an electrical subcontractor as an office assistant. At that stage, I had no experience of the construction industry and little understanding of the role of a quantity surveyor. Adjudication was even further removed from my experience and would not enter my career until many years later.

The first nudge

It was during this time that I received the first of several important pieces of encouragement that would shape my career, when my employer encouraged me to consider what I wanted to do next.

I had worked alongside the quantity surveyor there and became reasonably proficient in the specialist skill of deciphering his handwriting before typing up his letters and emails to send out. That exposure gave me an insight into the role of a QS and, importantly, made me realise that it was something I could see myself doing.

I still needed to support myself financially, so I decided on the not entirely sensible combination of working full time and studying full time. Fortunately, because of my industry experience, Reading University allowed me to enter directly onto the second year of the BSc. I then spent the next two years frantically running between work and university. Needless to say, my university experience was, I suspect, rather different from that of the average student. I graduated and eventually moved into a construction consultancy company. Here my experience significantly broadened, working on all types of projects and values up to £180m. I also experienced adjudication for the first time.

Bringing construction and law together

And then came another nudge. My manager encouraged me to consider how I might combine my longstanding interest in law with my experience in construction. This led me to undertake the Robert Gordon Postgraduate Diploma in Construction Law, following which I moved into full-time contentious work as a quantum expert witness.

It was during this period that becoming an adjudicator was first suggested to me, again by a member of the senior leadership team who was himself a well-respected adjudicator. The idea immediately appealed to me, bringing together my interests in construction, law and dispute resolution. What I needed was some encouragement to recognise that it was a step I was ready to take. That encouragement proved important and ultimately led me to undertake the RICS Diploma in Adjudication, marking the beginning of my journey towards practising as an adjudicator.

Taking the next step

The final nudge in this story, came from a friend and former colleague who suggested that I undertake a pupillage with Matt Molloy and kindly made the introduction. I subsequently completed the pupillage, enabling me to apply for admission to the CIArb, UK Adjudicators and CIC panels.

I was subsequently fortunate enough to be offered a role with MCMS which became a turning point for me, both professionally and personally. Unlike some of the earlier opportunities in my career, this was one I needed little encouragement to take. I recognised immediately that it was an opportunity I wanted to pursue. Through panel appointments, I was able to gain considerable experience sitting as an adjudicator. More recently, I was accepted onto the RICS President's Panel and then the application process for the TECSA Adjudicator Panel, the latter ultimately leading to the invitation to speak at the Annual Dinner and to reflect on the journey that had brought me there.

Looking back, my route was neither straightforward or planned. Two themes, however, stand out to me.

(i) The value of encouragement

At almost every significant turning point in my career, somebody encouraged me to take a step that I hadn't necessarily considered taking myself. My first employer encouraged me to pursue quantity surveying; a later manager encouraged me to combine my experience in construction with my longstanding interest in law; and eventually another suggested that I might be capable of sitting on the other side of the table as an adjudicator.

Without those interventions at the right time, my career might have taken a different course. They have taught me the value of encouragement, particularly when it comes from someone whose judgement you respect.

(ii) Taking opportunities, even when you do not feel entirely ready

There was no grand career plan that took me from leaving college at 17 to becoming an adjudicator. Each stage created opportunities that I could not necessarily have anticipated from the one before it. I began with an ambition to become a barrister and, when I left college, believed that a route into law had closed. In reality, I found a different route back to it, through construction, dispute resolution and ultimately adjudication.

Perhaps the two lessons are therefore closely connected. If you see potential in somebody, tell them. That encouragement may have considerably more influence than you realise. Equally, when someone whose judgment you value encourages you to take the next step, it may be worth being open to the possibility that they can see potential that you have not yet fully recognised yourself.

I am grateful to TECSA for inviting me to share my story and for giving me the opportunity to reflect on those who have influenced it along the way. For anyone whose career has not followed a conventional route, or who is considering an opportunity they had not originally envisaged, I hope there is something useful in that experience. A different path is not necessarily the wrong one.



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