

Quantity Surveyor interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Quantity Surveyor roles usually test whether you can produce accurate figures under real project constraints, not just whether you know the theory. Expect a mix of technical measurement questions, behavioural questions about handling disputes or pressure, and scenario questions that put you in the middle of a live cost problem.

- **Technical:** Questions on measurement methods, bills of quantities, cost planning and use of software such as AutoCAD, BIM or CoST.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about negotiating variations, managing disagreements with contractors, or working to tight deadlines.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd handle a cost blowout, a disputed claim or conflicting stakeholder demands.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about explaining cost reports or budget variances to non-technical stakeholders.

Most interviews open with a short walk-through of your CV and current experience, move into technical questions about your estimating and contract administration process, then shift to behavioural and scenario questions before finishing with your questions about the firm's project pipeline and software environment.

1. Walk me through how you'd prepare a bill of quantities from a set of architectural drawings.

Why they ask

Tests whether you understand the core estimating process end to end, not just the final output.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: describe your steps in order, from reviewing drawings and specifications through to measurement, pricing and quality-checking the final document.

Example answer

"I start by reviewing the architectural and engineering drawings alongside the specifications to understand scope, then break the works into measurable elements following standard measurement rules. I measure each element, whether that's concrete volumes, formwork areas or finishes, and record it against a consistent coding structure. Once quantities are set, I apply current rates, cross-check against similar past projects for sense, and review the whole document against the drawings again before it goes out, since a measurement error at this stage flows straight through to the budget."

2. Tell me about a time you had to negotiate a contract variation that the contractor and client disagreed on.

Why they ask

Variation negotiation is one of the most frequent friction points in this role, and interviewers want evidence of judgement and communication under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result): set the scene, explain your role, describe the specific actions you took, then the outcome.

Example answer

"On a project I worked on, the contractor claimed a variation for extra excavation costs after hitting unexpected rock, while the client disputed the volume claimed. My task was to verify the actual quantity and reach a figure both sides would accept. I went back to the site records and survey data, remeasured the excavation independently, and set up a joint site meeting where I walked both parties through my calculation methodology. We agreed on a revised quantity that was lower than the contractor's original claim but higher than the client wanted to pay, and both sides signed off without it going to formal dispute."

3. A contractor submits a progress claim that's significantly higher than your own assessment of work completed on site. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a common real-world scenario that tests judgement, process knowledge and how you handle confrontation professionally.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure: state your immediate priority, the steps you'd take to verify facts, and how you'd communicate the outcome.

Example answer

"My first priority is to base the certification on what I can verify, not on pressure to approve a figure. I'd revisit the site to remeasure the disputed items, checking against the program and any photographic records, and compare that against the claim line by line. If there's a genuine gap, I'd document my measurement and reasoning clearly and raise it directly with the contractor before the certificate is due, giving them a chance to provide supporting evidence I might have missed. I'd rather have that conversation early than certify a figure I can't stand behind later."

4. How do you approach cost forecasting on a project where early estimates are proving unreliable?

Why they ask

Tests technical understanding of forecasting methodology and how you adapt when initial assumptions don't hold.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through with a focus on adjustment: explain your baseline method, then how you identify and respond to drift.

Example answer

"I'd start by comparing actual costs to date against the original cost plan to identify where the variance is concentrated, whether that's a specific trade, a rate assumption or scope creep. From there I'd rebuild the forecast for the remaining works using current market rates and actual productivity data rather than the original assumptions, and flag the revised numbers to stakeholders with a clear explanation of what changed and why, so the budget report stays credible rather than just optimistic."

5. How comfortable are you working across BIM platforms and contract management systems day to day?

Why they ask

With BIM and digital contract tools now standard on many projects, employers want to know your practical software fluency, not just familiarity.

How to structure your answer

Direct skills statement: name the specific tools you've used, how you used them, and where your experience has gaps.

Example answer

"I've used BIM models to extract quantities directly rather than relying solely on 2D drawings, which speeds up measurement and reduces transcription errors, and I've managed variations and payment certifications through contract management systems rather than spreadsheets alone. I'm still building deeper experience with some of the newer estimating software on the market, but I pick up new platforms quickly given my Excel and CoST background."

6. How do you explain a significant budget variance to a client who isn't across construction terminology?

Why they ask

Client-facing communication is a core part of the role, and interviewers want to see you can translate technical detail into plain language.

How to structure your answer

Communication example: describe the situation briefly, then focus on how you adapted your language and approach for the audience.

Example answer

"I avoid leading with technical jargon and instead frame the variance in terms the client cares about: what changed, what it costs, and what their options are. For a recent budget report showing a variance from additional site works, I used a simple one-page summary with the key numbers highlighted, then talked through the causes and the choices available, whether that's absorbing the cost, reducing scope elsewhere, or seeking additional funding. That approach kept the conversation focused on decisions rather than getting lost in the detail."