

## Engineering contracting in the UK

Expatriates (expats) who are citizens from outside the UK and EU and have engineering qualifications and experience, alongside the [right to live and work in the UK](#), can take advantage of the [great opportunities](#) offered by a career as an expat engineering contractor.

Because contractors usually [earn much more than employees](#), it is possible for expat engineering contractors to take home significantly higher net pay than a regular employee, as well as enjoy the lifestyle and tax advantages of 'being their own boss'.

Engineering contractors are always in demand in the UK because:

There is a major shortage of qualified and experienced engineers in the UK

Fewer young British people are choosing careers in engineering

The UK has a long and strong engineering tradition, with many of the top global engineering firms having headquarters here

Engineering skills are required to build and maintain basic infrastructure, such as transport, public health and the built environment.

Engineering contractors are also in demand during economic downturns, partly because contractors are lower risk to hire and then terminate during periods of uncertainty, and also because major infrastructure construction and maintenance projects still proceed during tough times.

### What is an engineering contractor?

Engineering contractors typically work independently through their own limited companies or umbrella companies and are knowledge-based workers. They should not be confused with an engineering contractor firm that is commissioned to complete a major project, employs a staff, often of thousands, and subcontracts specialist areas to subcontractors. Confusingly, some of these subcontractors are likely to be the engineering contractors that are the subject of this article.

Engineering contractors (the individuals, not the firms) in the UK have been around for centuries and were one of the first professional groups to develop and perfect the contracting model, mainly because:

Most engineering projects are just that – projects, with a start, middle and end that do not suit the model of permanent employment

Engineers have easily transferable and transportable skills, because they are very highly regulated by professional bodies. For example, most UK engineers are chartered, and have been, in the case of some disciplines, since the early 19th century.

Engineering contractors can fulfil a wide number of roles, as many as there are sub-disciplines of engineering, and there are several levels of qualification within the engineering profession. These may be:

At a more junior or lower-skilled level, completing a relatively minor element of a much larger project

In a mid-range position as a chartered engineer responsible for a larger, discrete part of a project, or

A project engineer and manager ultimately responsible for the entire project, through to completion.

The common theme of all engineering contractors is that they are highly proficient at their chosen engineering specialism. They mostly have a professional qualification, such as chartered or incorporated status, they are passionate about what they can do, they hit the ground running and can work unsupervised as part of a team because they know how to do the job that they've been contracted by the client to do.

### Where do engineering contractors work?

In the UK engineering can be found in almost every element of society. Clean water and power have to be delivered to homes and businesses, transport links are required, meaning roads, bridges and railways being built and maintained, buildings need heating and ventilation, plus most products and services have some engineering component, as do the vehicles we drive.

This means engineering contractors can find work in the:

Private sector for medium and large companies and corporations

Public sector for national and local government, government departments, in education and in healthcare

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Third sector, as the not-for-profit sector is known in the UK, for organisations such as charities and other social enterprises.

Within these broad sectors, engineering contractors can find themselves working in defence, aerospace, construction and engineering, business services, manufacturing, automotive, for central government departments, regional government, in schools and universities – in fact almost every part of the private and public sector uses engineering contractors.

The UK is a leading centre of excellence for many of the engineering disciplines, both in private sector commerce and in universities and research institutes. These include:

Automotive and mechanical,

Aeronautical and aerospace

Energy and nuclear engineering

Chemical and plant engineering

Civil, public health, structural, marine, offshore, oil and gas and geotechnical engineering

Building services (HVAC)engineering

Electrical and electronic engineering.

Typically, a significant number of engineering disciplines are permanently on the current [Migration Advisory Committee](#) shortlist of skills shortages that require inward migration of non-EU citizens to fill. These present ideal opportunities for suitably qualified expat contractors who can secure a client to sponsor them for a [Tier 2 \(General\)](#) skilled worker visa.

### **What can engineering contractors earn?**

Engineering contractors' earnings depend very much on the kind of contracts they work on. Typically, an expat engineering contractor will take home significantly more of their earnings as net pay than an employee in a parallel permanent role with similar skills and experience. ContractorCalculator has an online calculator that can work out how much better off a contractor will be compared to an employee.

Contractors' pay is usually calculated on an hourly or daily basis and engineering contractors submit timesheets that provide their client with the amount of hours they have worked in a set period, usually a week or month.

Hourly and daily rates hugely across disciplines and according to qualifications, skills and experience and start at £10 hour/£100 per day at the bottom end, to £1,000+ per day at the top end.

With the right skills, expat engineering contractors from outside the UK and EU have the potential to earn significantly more than employees can, and to enjoy a great lifestyle.

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