



Alexandra

How to Choose a Fencing Contractor



How to choose a fencing contractor

One of the first steps in ensuring that you get the right fence for your project is to choose the best fencing contractor for the job. Get this element right and you will prevent complications from developing at any point during, or following, the installation. Our guide will help you get the best person for your project, ensuring you maximise security, health & safety and value for money.

Know what you need to know

You should get a list of questions ready to help you decide on your contractor. You need to be sure about your chosen contractor's competence and problem solving skills and their ability to spot things you may have missed. Any technical queries should be addressed before the project starts to ensure it runs as smoothly as possible.

It's always best to know what you want from the start. What sort of fence do you want, where will it run from and to, how much of your land will it enclose? Find examples of local projects similar to yours that you can show your proposed contractors.

Things to ask

- Which material do they recommend you use and why?
- How do they intend to carry out the job?
- Do they offer a warranty on their work?
- How long do they estimate the job will take and what will happen if they run over this time?
- Ask for references from previous customers
- Have they had experience in installing the type of fencing you are looking for?
- Have they had experience in installing your type of project? Many fencing types are regulated and specific; you need to be sure your contractor understands all the legislation.



On the last point, a good contractor will spot any pitfalls or problems that you might have missed and be able to suggest solutions or alternatives.

Things to think about

Would you prefer to work with a local contractor who knows your area, or a larger UK-based operation that might have more resources? A local established company may have a good reputation for decent, reliable work, but a bigger concern may be able to offer a lower price for installation.

Finding a contractor

You could try looking up “fencing contractor” on the internet; you will get a list of contractors but don’t be tempted to just take the first one on the list. Do your research – do they look professional? Are there photographs of their work? Are there references from previous customers? Can you find someone who has recently had a similar job done? It would be useful to find out who they employed and what their experience was. Is there a recognisable address and a phone number? A mobile number to reach someone who is on site all day is fine, but a reputable company will also have a landline, and their advertising should include both next to their postal address.

Check online for references and feedback, especially if the contractor is listed in an online directory. Don’t be fooled into thinking that the company at the top of the list is automatically the best.

Meet face-to-face

You should pick three or four contractors to meet for estimates and further discussion. You need to be able to communicate well with your potential contractor because they will be your main point of contact for the duration of the project. Check to make sure contractors don't have a history of disputes with clients or subcontractors.



Things to keep in mind

Be wary of a contractor who requires you to make a decision straight away, or who wants you to pay in cash. A cash discount can be legitimate, but it isn't the same as being required to pay cash only. Make sure you get written estimates for the services you are requesting, and if they will not give you one, you do not want to do business with them.

Make sure you check your short list out. Call up former clients to find how their project went and ask to see the finished product. Ask if they would use that particular contractor again. What issues did they face? Were any problems ironed out quickly and to their satisfaction?

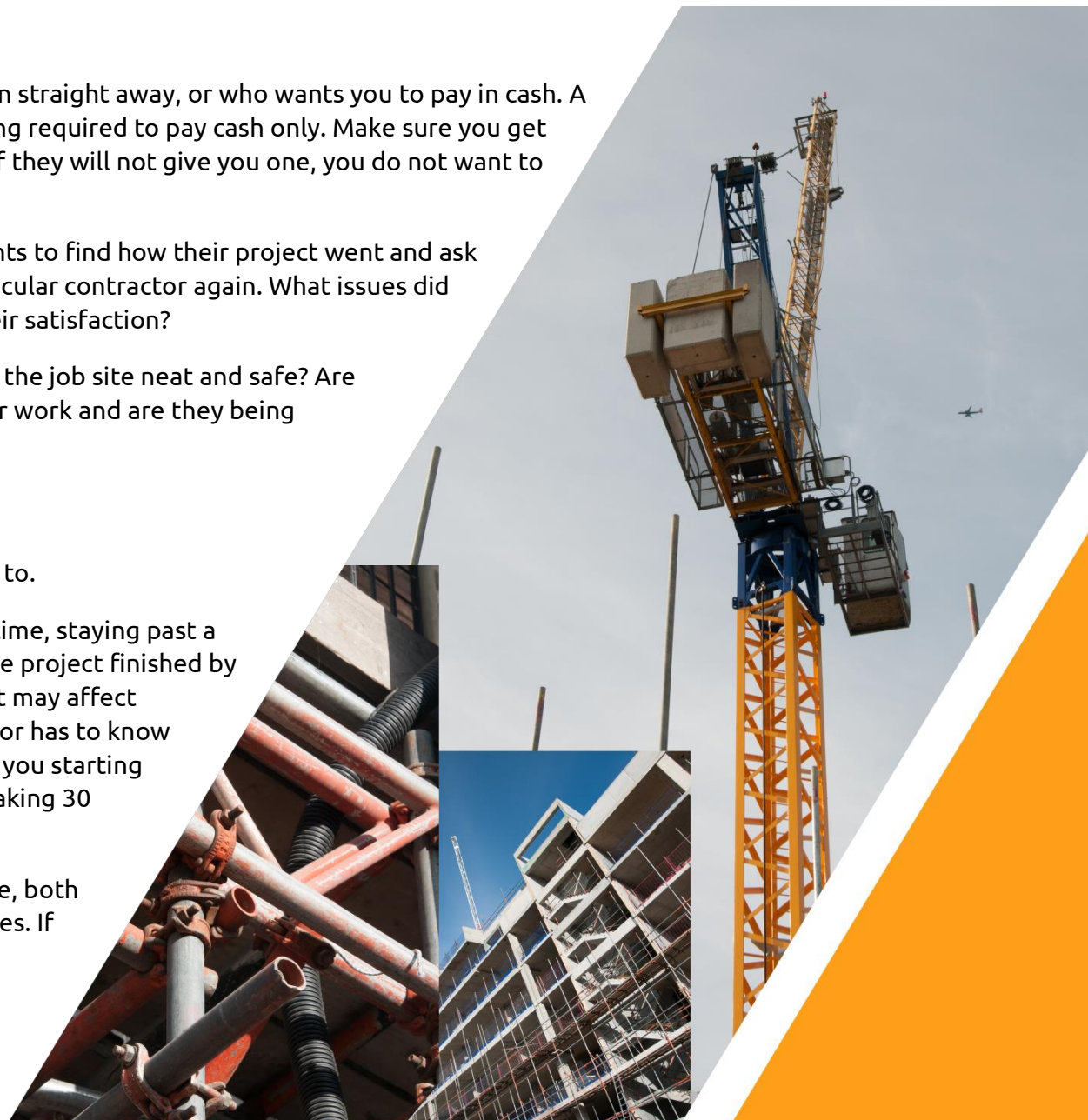
Visit a current job site and see how the contractor works. Is the job site neat and safe? Are workers courteous and careful in the way they carry out their work and are they being respectful to the customer's premises?

Set parameters

Decide on your budget and the timescale you want to work to.

If you don't want the workers showing up before a certain time, staying past a certain hour, using the site facilities, or you need to have the project finished by a specific date, tell the potential contractors at this stage. It may affect whether or not they wish to quote for the job. The contractor has to know what your limits and expectations are. If people don't want you starting until 9:30 and want you out by 4, that project—instead of taking 30 days—might take 45.

The contractor will need clear access to their part of the site, both to complete the work required and to allow for any deliveries. If special arrangements are required then these need to be discussed with the contractor prior to appointment as they could also affect timescales and costs.



Getting a quote

It's a good idea to get at least three quotes, so that you can get an idea of reasonable rates for the type of job - and like all labour costs, these can vary from area to area.

Check their professional qualifications listed on their website or online profiles and their insurance documentation. This includes their public liability insurance. If they've got these, they'll be only too happy to put your mind at rest.

Relevant qualifications can vary. The Fencing Industry Skills Scheme/Construction Skills Certification Scheme (FISS/CSCS) ensures that contractors have the right training and knowledge for their areas of expertise. There are also NVQ or apprenticeships that they may have taken.

When deciding which quote to go with, think about your experience in talking to the contractor so far. Did they provide a quote within a reasonable timescale? Is it easy to establish a rapport with them? The right fencing contractors for the job will be reliable and open to communication - they want the project to go smoothly as much as you do.

It's not always about price

Don't simply go for the lowest price quote. Too cheap a quote and the contractor could simply be cutting corners or could be desperate for work. It's handy if you can get all your potential contractors to present tier quotes in a similar fashion, it will make it easier to compare like-with-like. It's often better to spend more and get someone you're comfortable with and will deliver on all the project objectives.

You ultimately get what you pay for so choose carefully, because once you have the finished product you are stuck with it, and it can cost you much more to have it changed or repaired in the future, than if you had it done right the first time.



Check materials

If you want specific materials to be used on the job, now's the time to specify them to ensure the quotations all reflect this. Also get the contractor to provide samples of the fencing to be installed.

Who's performing the work?

Will the person you're hiring do the work himself, or will it be subcontracted to someone else? It's nice to know who will be showing up when the project starts, and large jobs could involve multiple subcontractors. Having subcontractors isn't a bad thing. They often have a more thorough knowledge of their part of the job. Who will be managing the day to day job onsite is another question to think about.

Do your homework

Now is the time to look into testimonials, references and sites of products and installation. Invest the time now, so it doesn't cost you both time and money later.

What's their training?

A contractor which actively supports training will be keen to encourage employees to enhance their skills which can result in a better standard of job. Have their employees completed the CITB Site Management Safety Training Scheme which ensures the employees' health and safety skills are up to date? Another training scheme to look out for is CSCS card training; a fully carded workforce means that anyone working on your site has the correct H & S knowledge. Ask to see their CSCS Platinum Certificate of Commitment.



Health and safety

The Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme set the standard for which to measure health and safety proficiency. Contractors which are CHAS accredited show they are compliant with health and safety legislation.

Agree what is to be paid when

Payment schedules can also tell you something about a contractor's financial status and work ethic. Asking for half the payment up front may mean they have previous jobs costs to pay off, indicate financial problems or that they are worried that you won't pay the rest after you've seen the work. Large projects often start with 10 percent at contract signing, three payments of 25 percent evenly spaced over the duration of the project and the final 15 percent when every item on the snagging list has been completed.

Agree payment terms before the work commences –ensure you know what you are getting for any upfront payment. It may be difficult to get money back. Be clear from the outset exactly what you want the contractor to do and then stick to it - changing your mind too often in the middle of a project can be costly.

Get it in writing

Once you agree a price and start date, get a written contract and make sure both sides understand it and agree to all of it. You both need to be clear about:

- Exactly what is included in the estimate (or preferably quotation)
- When work will start and how long it will take
- What payments will be expected from you before the works are finished
- What basis you will want to agree any increase in cost



CONTRACTORS HEALTH & SAFETY ASSESSMENT SCHEME

Accredited Contractor

www.chas.gov.uk

Remember that as soon as a change is made or a problem is uncovered the price goes up and the length of the project increases; there are good contract examples available online if your contractor won't supply a contract.

Make sure you know what kind of warranties and guarantees are available and what they really mean. These should be backed by, not only the manufacturer, but the company installing it. Decide what will happen if things don't go to plan or if you aren't happy with the work. If a company does quality work and installs quality products, it should be willing to give you a money back guarantee if they don't deliver.

Check what might happen to your property and those of your neighbours or local utility lines. What provision will be made if there is any damage?

What if things go wrong?

- Complain, but give your contractor a chance to put things right. If you are still unhappy, put it in writing with a deadline.
- Consider withholding payments – but check what you have written in the contract on this point.
- Keep a note of phone calls, conversations and events. Take photos of any work you are unhappy with recording the time and date taken. It's a good idea to send confirmation emails after phone calls to clarify that you have both understood the issue.
- Get advice – speak to the Trading Standards Department, Citizens Advice Bureau, consult a solicitor, engage a Chartered Building Surveyor or other suitably qualified professional person.
- If the contractor is a member of a trade association - speak to them, as they may offer an arbitration scheme.
- Speak to your Building Control Surveyor, who may be able to assist on health and safety issues.



Spread the word

Finally, if your fencing contractor did a great job, pass it on. Tell others, consider leaving online feedback, or write them a quick letter of recommendation. Customer testimonials have never been more important, and they'll appreciate it.

Find an installer

Alexandra offers a 'Find an Installer' feature on our website allowing specifiers and end users to find companies experienced with perimeter and security fencing in their area. In addition, the Alexandra website can be used to request literature, download specification sheets on our full range of products, and order samples.

Visit: www.alexandrasecurity.com/find-an-installer

If you have a project or technical query that you need help with, just contact our Sales team:

eMail: sales@alexandrasecurity.com

Telephone: **01892 833001**

