

Book review

Understanding JCT standard building contracts, 8th edn

David Chappell, Taylor and Francis, London, 2007,
ISBN 978-0-415-41385-5, **£20-99, 144 pp.**

The structure of this book, arranged by topics, is refreshingly straightforward and is not overcomplicated, as some other contractual books are prone to be. It is primarily concerned with explaining the 2005 suite of JCT Standard Building Contracts, and does not attempt any detailed comparison of the terms and conditions of those contracts with previous versions of the JCT standard forms. Although this approach may not appeal to everyone, it seems entirely appropriate as an introductory text aimed at newly qualified architects and other construction professionals. The topics, each given a separate chapter, are: (1) Contractor's obligations; (2) Insurance; (3) Third parties; (4) Work in progress; (5) Money; (6) Claims; (7) The end; and (8) Dispute resolution. These are followed by a five page Table of Cases, a Clause Index and a Subject Index. Most of these headings are self-explanatory. The exception is perhaps 'The end', which is not necessarily the end, if dispute resolution becomes necessary, but rather deals with the end of the construction phase on site – practical completion and defects liability, suspension and termination.

The style of writing is concise but readable, and the book is packed with plenty of useful information and guidance. The book does not include the actual text of the contract clauses and the reader will need to obtain a copy of the JCT forms in order to review the precise

wording, but that is not essential for a general introduction to the forms. The text gives no detail of the legal arguments, but makes passing reference to many basic legal principles, which are applicable to construction contracts generally, and not just in relation to the JCT 2005 forms. Despite the lack of detailed discussion, there are many references throughout the book to cases relevant to the topics discussed and the Table of Cases, which lists all of the cases mentioned with the appropriate citation, is particularly useful to anyone wishing to read more about the legal background. The Introduction makes clear that the book applies to contracts in England and Wales, and 'substantially' in Northern Ireland, but not to Scotland, which are governed by a different legal system.

This concise publication appears to deliver exactly what was promised on the back cover: 'David Chappell avoids legal jargon but writes with authority and precision. Architects, quantity surveyors, contractors and students of these professions should find this a straightforward and practical reference tool arranged by topic'. The omission of any reference to engineers in this statement is perhaps due to the author or publisher taking the view that engineers are more likely to be involved in projects in which the ICE Conditions of Contract or NEC are used, but civil, structural and building services engineers are of course likely to be involved in all but the smallest building projects and they too could find this little book extremely informative and helpful: particularly so if they are indeed less familiar with the JCT suite of contracts.

Barry Manie