



Many claims could be avoided by selecting clients more carefully. The client who does not like your advice, constantly revises instructions or challenges every bill is not only difficult to deal with, but is more likely to be the source of a complaint or a claim.

Can the firm act?

Before accepting instructions – and, ideally, before meeting a new client – try to establish whether there may be a conflict of interest. Has your firm acted for this client or a competitor before, and were those instructions given jointly with another (partner, family member, business associate)? If so, consider whether there is a conflict now or potential for one in the future. Have you or someone else in the firm acted for another party in this matter? Whilst potential conflicts of interest are a perennial problem for valuers, all surveyors should remember their professional obligations.

Can I act for this client?

Beware of accepting work, no matter how attractive, if it is outside your locality or outside your usual field of practice. Do you have the skills to deal with it? If it requires additional work because you are unfamiliar with it, will you have time to deal with it? Can anyone else in the firm help you?

Even if you are very familiar with a type of work, you will not be able to help the new client effectively if:

- you are already too busy to take on another client
- the matter is very urgent or complex and you have a full workload
- you are about to go on holiday or you will be away from the office for some time

Should we act?

Has the client already sought advice from another surveyor? Be very careful about giving advice based on the client's version of events without seeing supporting reports or correspondence. Try to find out why they want to change surveyors.

Do we want to act?

Is this a client who fits the firm's profile, and is it work that you want to do? What sort of client will they be? Will their reputation reflect badly on you? Are they likely to challenge bills, to be slow in paying or in giving instructions? If they have used another surveyor before, try to find out their reasons for changing. They may have previously received good advice which they found unpalatable – if you give them the same advice, will they be any more likely to accept it?

If you have any misgivings, stop and think carefully – you do not have to take on this new client. If you have underlying concerns about the client's truthfulness, bona fides or business practices, do you really want them as a client?

Existing clients

Don't assume that, because the firm has acted for same client before, there is no need to apply any selection criteria. The work may be different to that which was done before or the client's circumstances may have changed.

Money laundering regulations must always be applied, even if the client is someone well known to the practice. If you consider that there is no need to obtain formal identification because you have known the client personally for some years, make a note on the file to that effect.