

CONSTRUCTION RISK CHECKLIST > Pre-construction > Validate Construction Programme

A Construction Programme Is Only Useful If It's Realistic

Every residential construction project starts with a programme.

The problem is that many programmes are based on optimism rather than reality.

Materials arrive later than expected. Subcontractors become unavailable. The weather doesn't cooperate. Client selections are delayed. Before long, a project that was supposed to take six months is running weeks or even months behind schedule.

While some delays are unavoidable, many can be reduced by properly validating the programme before work begins.

A construction programme should not simply be a timeline. It should be a risk management tool that identifies potential bottlenecks, critical activities and dependencies before they affect the project.

The objective is not to predict the future perfectly. The objective is to ensure the programme is realistic and achievable based on the information available at the time.

Construction Programme Validation Checklist

Before construction starts, make sure you can answer "Yes" to the following:

- 1. Have key subcontractors reviewed and committed to the proposed programme?**
- 2. Have long lead-time materials and products been identified?**
- 3. Have procurement dates been included in the programme?**
- 4. Have council inspections and approval timeframes been allowed for?**
- 5. Have client selections and decision-making deadlines been included?**
- 6. Have weather and seasonal conditions been considered?**
- 7. Have realistic labour productivity assumptions been used?**
- 8. Have holidays, public holidays and planned shutdown periods been considered?**

9. Have critical path activities been identified?

10. Has contingency been included for foreseeable delays?

11. Have site-specific risks been considered?

12. Has someone independently reviewed the programme for realism?

One of the most common causes of delay is failing to identify long lead-time items early enough. Joinery, trusses, structural steel, kitchens, specialist cladding products and imported fixtures can all significantly affect project completion dates. If procurement is not aligned with the programme, delays can occur even when construction work is progressing well.

Subcontractor availability is another critical consideration. A programme may look excellent on paper, but if the electrician, plumber, roofer or plasterer is unavailable when needed, the entire sequence can be disrupted. Obtaining commitments from key trades before finalising the programme can significantly improve accuracy.

Client decisions should also be treated as programme activities. Kitchen selections, tiles, fixtures, colours and finishes are often overlooked during planning. Delayed decisions frequently become delayed construction activities.

Builders should also challenge their own assumptions. How long did similar projects actually take to complete? Are labour allowances based on real-world experience or best-case scenarios? Historical project data is often one of the most valuable tools for validating future programmes.

It is also important to recognise that not all activities carry the same level of risk. Critical path activities deserve particular attention because delays to these tasks will directly affect the completion date. Understanding where the programme is most vulnerable allows resources to be focused where they matter most.

Perhaps the most effective validation step is obtaining an independent review. A project manager, experienced colleague, key subcontractor or even an AI review of the programme can often identify assumptions, omissions and sequencing issues that may otherwise be missed.

The most successful builders don't simply create a programme and hope it works. They challenge it, test it and validate it before construction begins. Because the cheapest delay to fix is the one you identify before the project starts.