Dean O'Leary



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Construction and engineering

Dean O'Leary has been handling construction disputes for over 30 years and is regularly ranked in Chambers & Partners, Legal 500, Who's Who Legal and Lexology as a leading global construction barrister.

Prior to practising law in Dubai, Dean practised as a barrister in Liverpool, and prior to that he worked as a quantity surveyor, after a period of service in the Royal Marines Commandos. Dean moved to Dubai in 2006 and since then he has been involved in some of the largest construction and engineering arbitrations in the region.

Whilst his primary area of practice is handling construction and engineering disputes, Dean also deals with disputes relating to upstream and midstream Oil & Gas and other Energy matters. His instructions regularly call on him to represent employers, contractors, subcontractors, consultants and suppliers in mediations, adjudications, expert determinations, arbitrations and the DIFC Courts (the latter of which are modelled on the English Commercial Court). He also advises and manages local litigation matters in the UAE.

He has experience of working with the FIDIC, ICC, NEC and JCT forms of contract along with many bespoke forms too. His day-to-day practice sees him working with the FIDIC suite of contracts (main contracts, subcontracts and consultancy forms) and he has conducted arbitrations under the auspices of the UNCITRAL, DIAC, ADCCAC, DIFC-LCIA, QICCA, BCDR- AAA and ICC Arbitration Rules as well as numerous ad hoc arbitrations under various lex arbitri. He is conversant with the substantive and procedural laws of England, the DIFC and several civil law jurisdictions in the Middle East.

As well as acting as counsel, Dean also accepts appointments as an arbitrator, adjudicator or mediator.

Representative Matters (selected examples only):

- Representing an MEP contractor against an international JV in relation to MEP works carried out at a new build hospital in the UAE. ICC arbitration.
- Representing a fit-out contractor against an international contractor in relation to interior fit-out works carried out at a new-build airport in the UAE. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a healthcare authority against an international contractor in relation to the construction of a hospital in the UAE.
- Representing a landscape contractor against private developers in relation to a high-end villa project. Ad hoc arbitration under the auspices of the UNCITRAL Rules.
- Representing an international designer in a dispute relating to the construction of two iconic towers in the UAE.
- Representing an international consortium against the employer for the construction of a solar power plant in the UAE.
- Representing a civil engineering contractor against a developer in relation to a piling contract for the installation of thousands of piles on a large commercial development in Dubai. ICC arbitration.

- Representing a VIP client in Abu Dhabi against a contractor in relation to the development of a housing project in Abu Dhabi. Litigation in the Abu Dhabi courts.
- Representing an offshore pipelaying contractor against a subcontractor in relation to the trenching and backfilling operations for the installation of subsea pipelines. DIFC-LCIA arbitration.
- Representing a hospitality company against a contractor in relation to the construction of a hotel in Abu Dhabi. Issues relate to defective construction, late completion, prolongations costs. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing an employer (offshore pipelaying contractor) against a contractor in relation to new build project in Abu Dhabi. Issues related to defective construction of quay wall, late completion, termination, costs to completion, eviction from site. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a Korean contractor in a dispute with a subcontractor in relation to an earthworks contract in Qatar. Issues related to the entitlement and valuation of disposing of excavated material. ICC arbitration.
- Representing a Korean contractor against a Korean subcontractor in relation to MEP works carried out at a GGC airport. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a Dubai contractor in a dispute regarding the design, manufacture, supply and installation of housing units to a project in Mozambique. Issues related to late delivery, design changes, outstanding payments. CACM Mozambique.
- Representing a Singaporean contractor in respect of an Oil and Gas dispute. Issues related to the supply and installation of equipment in Iraq and related EPC services. Claim value approximately AED 20 million. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a large local contractor against large international construction company acting as construction manager in relation to a tower project in Saudi Arabia. Issues related to poor performance by construction manager. Claim value approximately AED 35 million. DIFC Courts.
- Representing a large UAE developer against a contractor relating to extension and refurbishment works carried out on a 5-star hotel in Dubai. Issues related to poor performance, late completion, loss of profits. Claim value approximately AED 10 million. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a Spanish contractor for a claim in Oman relating to the construction of an airport runway.
- Representing an international JV for a claim relating to works carried out on a large project in Qatar.
- Representing a developer regarding a claim against its designer on a large commercial project in Bahrain. Issues related to poor design, poor supervision, delay to completion, loss of profit. Claim value approximately BHD 10 million. BCDR arbitration.
- Representing a developer regarding a claim against an enabling works contractor on a commercial project in Dubai. Issues related to poor workmanship, early termination, loss of profit. Claim value unspecified. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a developer regarding a claim against contractor on a large commercial project in Qatar. Issues related to poor design and poor workmanship.
- Representing a subcontractor regarding the installation of MEP works on a project in Dubai. Issues related to call of performance bond, variations, delayed completion, prolongation costs, delay damages from employer and other subcontractors. Claim value approximately AED 5 million. ICC arbitration.
- Representing a contractor regarding the installation of pipes/drains covering the whole Dubai region. Issues related to suspension, late completion, variations, prolongation costs. Claim value approximately AED 300 million. Dubai Municipality Rules arbitration.
- Representing a contractor regarding the construction of three multi-storey towers in Dubai. Issues related to the sale of individual building plots, transfer of ownership, deed of assignment/novation, liabilities to Dubai Municipality, performance bond, handover to new contractor, termination of consultancy and subcontract agreements. ICC arbitration.
- Representing architectural consultants regarding numerous contracts for the design of a mega project in Dubai. Issues related to copyright infringement, scope of services, time for completion, late payment, suspension and termination.
- Representing an employer regarding the construction of two connected 40+ storey towers in the UAE. Issues related to late completion, prolongation costs, defective works, loss of revenue. Claim value approximately AED 700 million. Ad hoc arbitration.

- Representing an employer regarding construction of a 4-storey hotel. Issues related to defective works, late completion, loss of revenue, replacement of engineer. Ad hoc arbitration.
- Representing an EPC contractor for the design and construction of a sugar plant in Africa. Issues related to progress, standard of design and early termination. Claim value approximately AED 120 million. UNCITRAL arbitration.
- Representing a client regarding the construction of a tyre recycling plant and a construction demolition waste plant. Issues relate to delayed completion, liquidated damages, loss of profits, etc. DIAC arbitration and separate legal proceedings. Ongoing.
- Representing a main contractor in a dispute with a subcontractor on a project at a large airport in the UAE. Issues related to delayed completion, valuation of variations, prolongation costs, liquidated damages. Claim value approximately AED 75 million. ICC arbitration. Provided an advice on UAE law which was used in the Korean courts.
- Representing a subcontractor in arbitration proceedings on a large reservoir project. Issues related to delay and disruption, wrongful termination, non-payment of certified sums, loss of profit, liquidated damages. Claim value approximately AED 33 million. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a subcontractor for a claim against a JV main contractor on a large multi-use tower project. Issues related to delayed completion, prolongation costs, defective works, third party claims. Claim Value approximately AED 110 million. ICC arbitration.
- Representing a main contractor in arbitration proceedings. Issues related to subcontractor's failure to erect pre - cast units on time, time for completion, prolongation costs, liquidated damages. Claim value approximately AED 35 million. ICC arbitration.
- Representing a developer against a contractor for a claim arising out of a contract for the design, build and operation of an automated car parking system. Issues related to defective works, corporate identities, software licences, early termination of maintenance agreement.
- Representing a developer in a claim made by an engineer in DIFC Court proceedings. Issues related to suspension, termination, loss of profits, prolongation costs, prospective/contingent losses, effect of exclusion/limitation clause. Claim value approximately AED 25 million.
- Representing a developer in a claim worth approximately AED 3.5 billion made by a contractor on a large sports development project. Issues related to early termination, call on bond, slow progress, entitlements to extension of time claims, prolongation costs, defective works, vesting and ownership of plant and materials. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a developer in arbitration with a claim valued in excess of AED 100 million relating to the construction of a diaphragm wall for a canal spanning several kilometres. Issues related to wrongful termination, unpaid certified monies, fitness for purpose obligations, loss of profits. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a developer in an arbitration with a claim worth in excess of AED 120 million in relation to a to a groundworks contract for a large residential development in Dubai. Issues related to early termination, loss of profits, prolongations costs. DIAC arbitration.
- Representing a Scottish contractor in respect of claims arising from two contracts in Abu Dhabi relating to the supply of plant at oil refineries for sand and water treatment processing.
- Representing a developer against a contractor’s claim related to the construction of a breakwater serving a large offshore development in Dubai.

Recommendations

"I have known and worked with Dean for a number of years. His knowledge of construction matters, and UAE law is, in my opinion, second to none. As a former QS, Dean is extremely well qualified in this field and his practical, hands-on experience elevates his status. Dean is also straight talking, transparent and a pleasure to deal with. Having spent so many years in the Middle East, Dean fully understands the culture and the practicalities of doing business in the Region. Highly recommended!" **Instructing Solicitor, 2026**

"Having worked with Dean since 2018, I have seen first hand why he is so highly regarded by his clients. He is an exceptionally

knowledgeable international construction lawyer who combines technical excellence with commercial awareness and sound judgement. Dean is very personable and always builds a strong rapport with clients and instructing solicitors." **Gilbert Hakim, Fenwick Elliott□□□□, 2026**

"We had the pleasure of instructing Mr Dean O'Leary as Counsel in connection with a significant arbitration conducted under the DIAC Rules. Throughout the proceedings, Dean demonstrated exceptional professionalism, strong technical expertise and an excellent understanding of both the legal and commercial complexities of the case. Dean provided clear, pragmatic and well-considered advice throughout, representing our interests with confidence, diligence and a highly strategic approach. We greatly valued his contribution to the case and would have no hesitation in recommending him as Counsel for complex arbitration and dispute matters." **Calogero Guglielmo, Commercial & Contracts Manager, Contractor, 2026**

"Dean has vast experience in handling high-value and complex construction disputes. What particularly sets him apart, and in my view places him at the top of his game, is his ability to combine that depth of experience with excellent tactical judgment. He has a real ability to identify the issues that matter, navigate the difficult points that inevitably arise in these types of complex disputes, and approach them in a strategically astute and commercially focused way." **Faisal Attia, Partner, Pinsent Masons, 2026**

"I have worked with Dean on several complex arbitrations over the years. His background in construction gives him a firm grasp on the construction process and the issues it throws up. Coupled with his intimate knowledge of substantive and procedural laws and the forms of contract make him a formidable counsel." **Paul Craig, Director, Quantum Dispute and Resolution Consultancy, 2026**

Academic qualifications

- LLM Construction Law, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
- MBEng (Distinction) International Construction Law, University of Stuttgart
- MSc Construction Management, South Bank University, London
- MA Employment Law, University of Leicester
- Diploma Law, BPP Law School, London
- Diploma Arbitration, College of Estate Management, Reading
- Diploma International Commercial Arbitration, Keble College, Oxford University
- Diploma International Construction Law, University of South West England
- Diploma Oil and Gas Law, London Metropolitan University
- Diploma International Dispute Resolution, QMUL, London
- Certificate in Adjudication, Chartered Institute of Arbitrators
- Bar Vocational Course, BPP Law School, London
- BSc (Hons) Building, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool

Professional qualifications & appointments

- Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (FCIArb)
- Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Building (FCIOB)
- Fellow of the Architects and Surveyors Institute (FASI)
- Member of the Association International Energy Negotiators (AIEN)
- Registered Adjudicator

- Registered Arbitrator
- Accredited Mediator

Professional bodies

- Member of the Technology and Construction Bar Association (TECBAR)
- Member of the Commercial Bar Association (Combar)
- Member of the Professional Negligence Bar Association (PNBA)
- Member of the International Bar Association (IBA)
- Member of the Honourable Society of Lincoln’s Inn