Litmus

AI in surveying.

Faster than we can explain

What surveying is actually doing with AI

Litmus Report

1st Edition September 2026

Independent intelligence on AI for the UK surveying profession.

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WHAT WE FOUND

Five key areas we discussed

01 The standard produced a scramble, then a lull.

Firms completed the visible compliance work in the weeks after March, then stopped. Few have a view of what a second stage involves.

02 Adoption does not track firm size.

Contributors described firms avoiding AI entirely, experimenting without direction, and moving with real intent, at every scale from sole practitioner to international consultancy.

03 Exposure accumulates whether or not a firm has decided anything.

Staff, subcontractors and clients are already using these tools. A firm that has taken no position has still taken on the risk.

04 AI is being used against surveyors as well as by them.

Complaints have changed in character, and fabricated evidence is now credible enough to force re-inspection.

05 The scarce resource is judgement.

The instinct that catches an error before it becomes a claim is built by doing the work. It is being spent faster than it is being built.

The noise arrived before the evidence.

Litmus exists because of what I kept hearing, and what I kept failing to find.

Across surveying, construction and the wider built environment, artificial intelligence arrived accompanied by a great deal of noise. Vendors with something to sell. Confident opinions that travelled further than the evidence behind them. Misinformation that took hold because there was nothing independent to check it against. Some of it well meant. Very little of it tested.

Then the RICS Professional Standard on the responsible use of AI took effect on 9 March 2026, and firms across the profession began working out what it meant for them.

What was missing was anywhere that looked across the whole profession at once. There is excellent work happening in individual disciplines. There is nothing that applies a litmus test across all of them, from residential valuation to quantity surveying to geospatial, and reports back without an agenda. That is what this group is for.

This is the first Litmus report. It is a reading of a conversation, not a dataset. It captures what senior practitioners are seeing from very different positions in the profession. It carries no survey figures, because the survey has not yet run. That work comes next, and it is described at the end of this report.

I convene and chair Litmus. The findings in this report belong to the group.

Nina Young FCA
Chair, Litmus

WHAT LITMUS IS

Independent. Not led by a vendor, does not speak for a professional body. Contributors give their time voluntarily.

Sessions run under the Chatham House rule. Nothing is published until every contributor has agreed to it.

Not a think tank. An independent group of senior practitioners who meet quarterly, talk honestly, and publish what they find.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

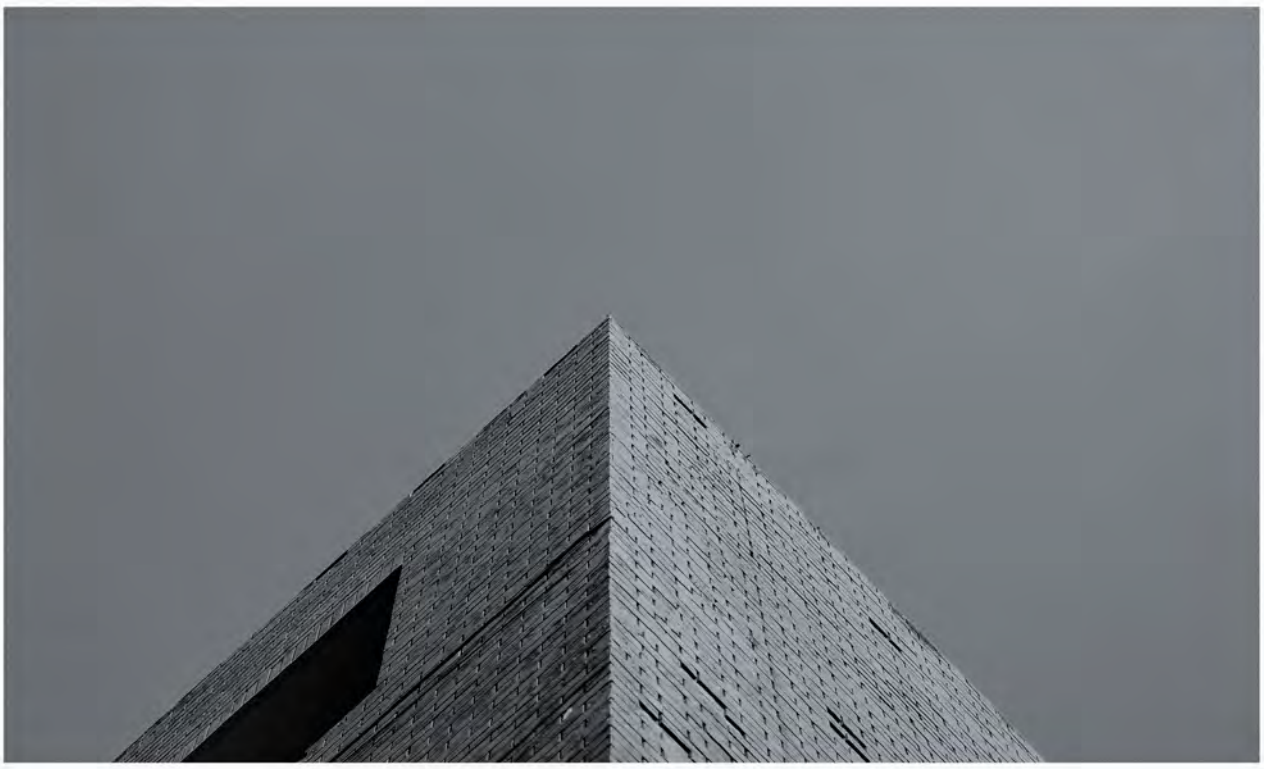
How this report was made

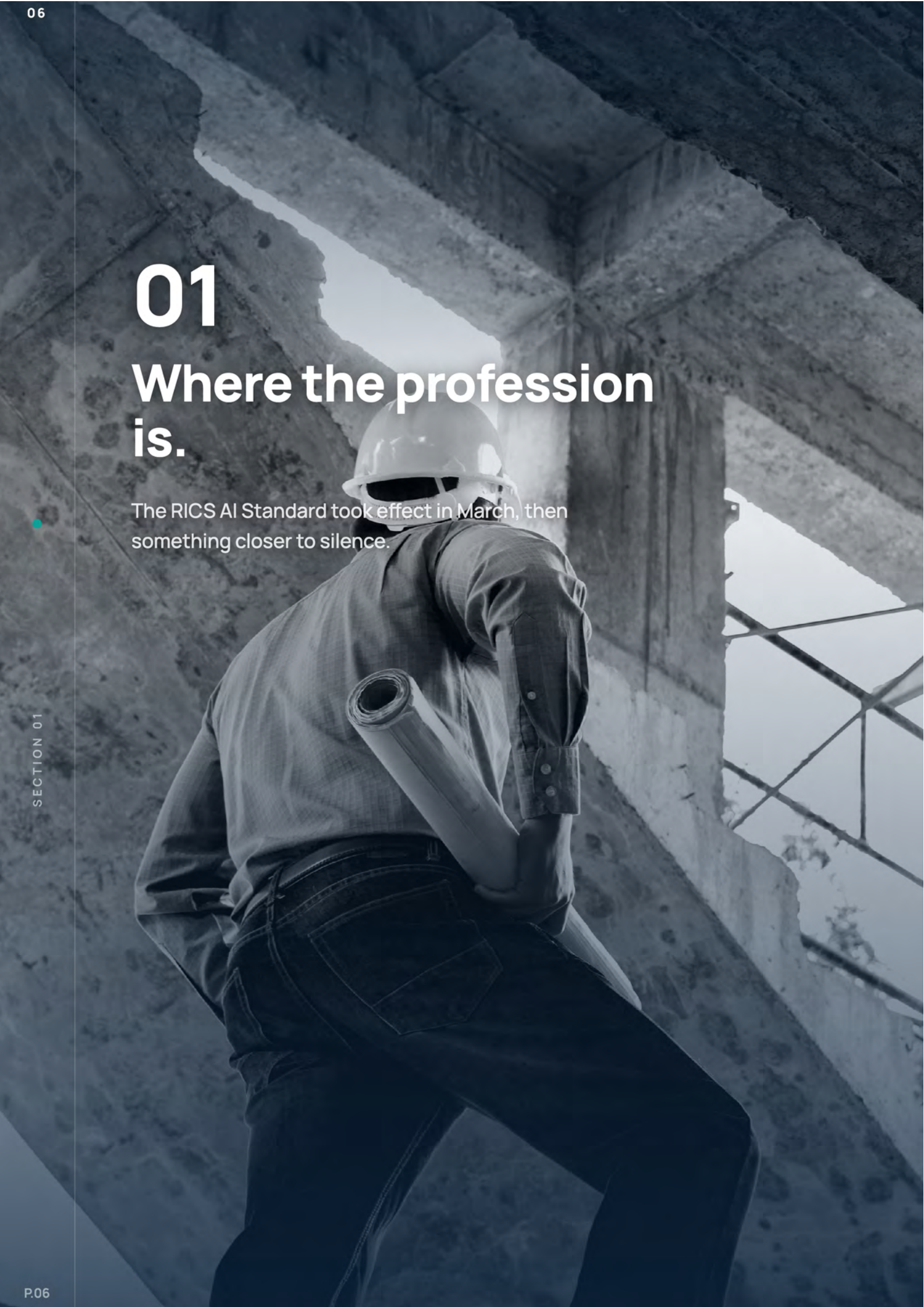
This report draws on the first Litmus session, held on 21 July 2026, attended by five contributors and the chair.

The session ran under the Chatham House rule. The recording is not shared outside the group.

Contributors speak in a personal capacity. Where a contributor is quoted by name, the quotation reflects their professional view. Observations concerning specific firms, clients or institutions are reported without attribution, in the group's own voice, in keeping with the Chatham House rule. Every named quotation was approved by the contributor before publication.

This is qualitative work. No claim is made that any of it is representative of the profession as a whole. Establishing that is the purpose of the research described in section six.





01

Where the profession is.

The RICS AI Standard took effect in March, then something closer to silence.

Jony Milner, Technical Manager at Legal & General Surveying Services, described the shape of the reaction to the new RICS AI Standard.

"Everybody in the sector had a bit of a rude awakening. If you had said it was going to come out this time next year, they would probably have said exactly the same thing, because people are reactive rather than proactive."

JONY MILNER

Contributors described a common first difficulty. Firms could not establish where AI was already in use. Staff who reported no AI use were, on questioning, using assistants embedded in office software, or writing tools, without recognising either as AI. The initial structural response in several firms was to appoint internal champions or departmental leads, largely in order to find out what was already happening.

One contributor described the argument that shifted their organisation from discussion to action. Rather than presenting the standard as an obligation to be met in due course, it was presented as a failure already under way. If a firm cannot evidence a mandatory requirement, it is already non-compliant. Framed that way, the matter moved.

FIELD NOTE 01

Firms could not establish where AI was already in use.

The pattern reported after that initial burst was consistent across several firms. Visible compliance work was completed. Momentum then slowed, with limited direction on what a next stage would involve.

James Garner, member of the RICS construction professional group panel, Head of AI and Data at Gleeds and founder of Project Flux, and a contributor to the standard itself, has observed the same trajectory more widely, and takes a positive view of what the standard achieved.

"Even though there are gaps, and there will have to be updates, it has been really useful to bring it to the top table and get people taking this seriously. It has probably brought forward conversations that would have taken months, maybe years."

JAMES GARNER

Contributors raised the question of enforcement independently of one another. The broadly shared expectation was that a publicly visible case, in which a firm is found not to have complied, will do more to concentrate attention than the standard itself has done. Nobody welcomed that prospect. Several regarded it as likely.

The standard is also being read beyond the body that wrote it. Contributors reported that other professional bodies are adapting it for their own members, and that it is being referenced outside the UK.

"The RTPI is working on one, and I am discussing with them how to help them adapt the RICS standards into their own. Dubai Expo is also adapting it."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

A UK professional standard becoming a reference point elsewhere is worth noting. It raises the stakes for how well it is implemented here.

A pattern that emerged repeatedly is that adoption does not track firm size. Contributors described firms avoiding AI entirely, firms experimenting without direction, and firms moving with real intent, at every scale from sole practitioner to international consultancy.

The spread is visible from outside a firm as well as within it.

> **On one side I am talking to a vendor. On the other, a small firm that does not know where to start. Many will not admit it publicly, but one to one, they will.**

NINA YOUNG

> **Technology is this plaster people are putting on everything, without any defined process.**

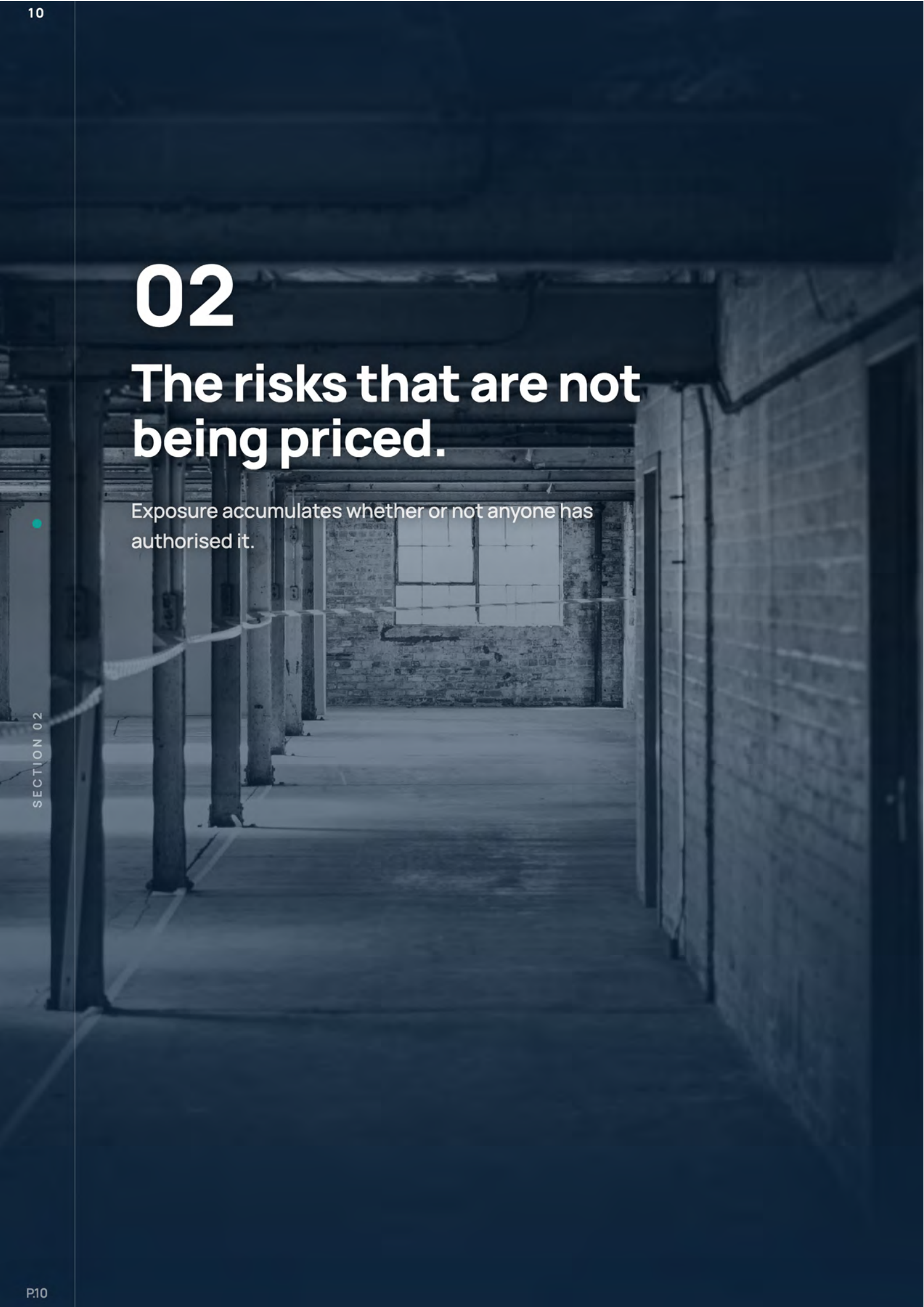
JONY MILNER

SECTION 01. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FIRMS

– Establish where AI is already being used before deciding anything. Most firms find more than they expected.

– Treat the standard as a live obligation rather than a project completed in March.

– Compliance work that stopped after the first burst remains unfinished.



02

The risks that are not being priced.

Exposure accumulates whether or not anyone has authorised it.

Suzanne Hill is a business strategist, founder of Constructive Intelligence, and an AI consultant working with construction firms. Her framing removes the question of whether to adopt.

"Whether or not you are on board with AI, everybody in your company is using it. Your information is leaking through your employees. It is leaking through your subcontractors. It is leaking through your clients."

SUZANNE HILL

She calls the underlying condition organisational drift. Firms defer the decision. Exposure accumulates in the meantime, and it accumulates whether or not anyone has authorised it.

Her two working principles are worth reproducing as she states them. Context before capability. Rules before tools.

"They are being expected to make decisions about something when they have no context. That is where a lot of the confusion comes from."

SUZANNE HILL

Treat your data like the contents of your bank account. Know exactly what happens to it when you put it into an AI tool.

SUZANNE HILL

Chris de Gruben is senior director of AI strategy and governance at Artefact, where he works with property firms on deploying AI. He set out the economics that sit behind that.

"Your subscription probably costs about two thousand pounds a month to run. They are willing to subsidise it because they want your data. It can be your prompts, the documents you input, what you do with the outputs."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

The point extends beyond the model developers. Contributors distinguished between three commercial incentives now shaping the market. The frontier developers, who need training data. The platform providers, who do not own the models and instead seek to own the environment the models are used in. The hardware manufacturers, competing for the consumer layer. The incentives differ. None of them are aligned with a firm retaining full control of its data.

A specific and under-examined exposure emerged around existing software. Vendors are adding AI functionality to products firms already use, waved through under processes designed for something else entirely.

FIELD NOTE 02

The vendor says we have an AI bolt-on, but they have not gone through vendor vetting. Then the penny drops.

SUZANNE HILL

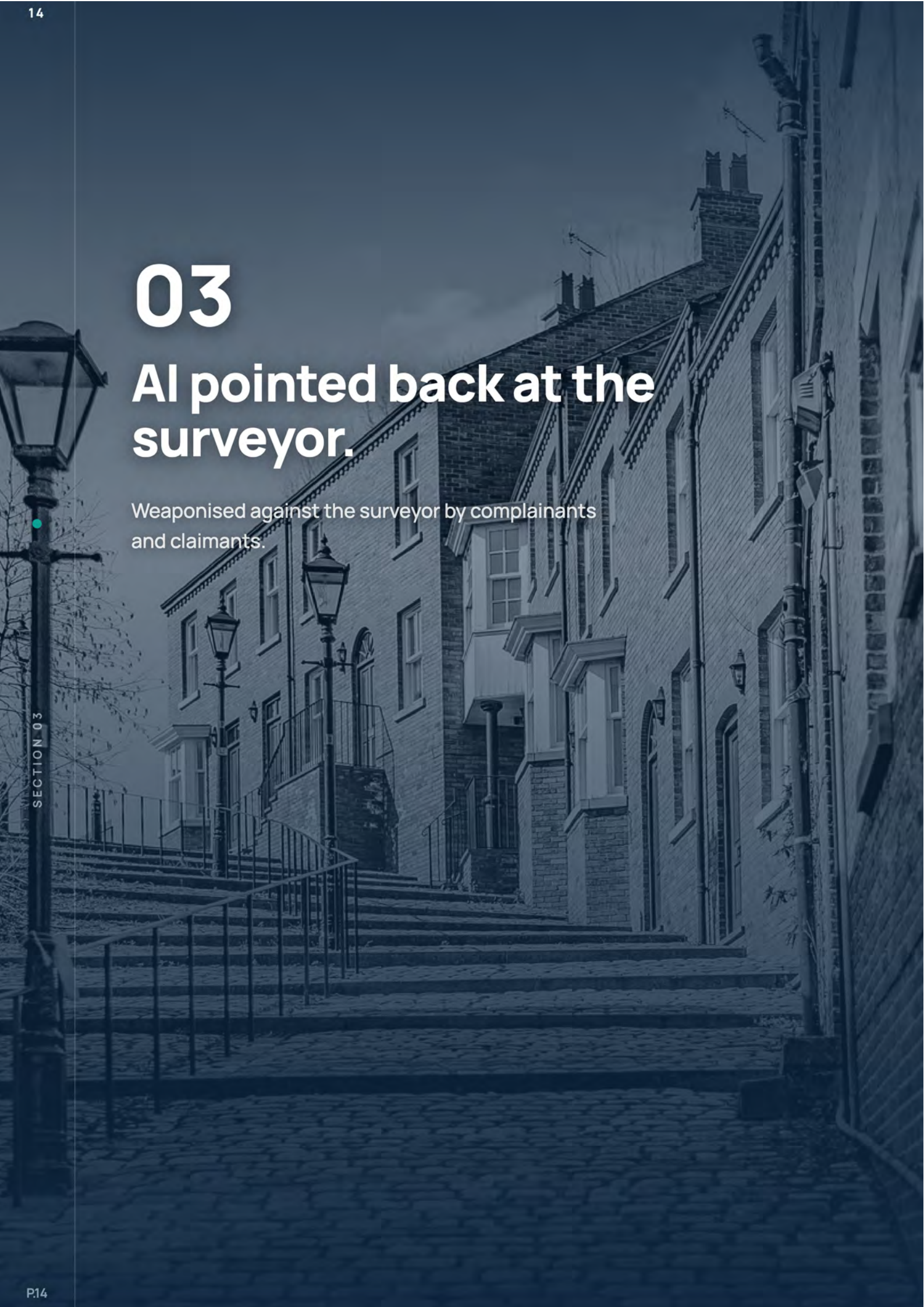
Hill was clear that size offers no protection. Contributors described firms with turnover in the hundreds of millions instructing individual departments to trial AI tools independently, with no central governance, no register, and no vendor assessment. Contributors also raised concentration and lock-in risk, and contractual exposure — confidentiality obligations, non-disclosure agreements and client data restrictions being breached by ordinary use of ordinary tools.

SECTION 02. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FIRMS

– Ask existing software suppliers what their AI functionality does with firm and client data.

– Check whether confidentiality obligations and client data restrictions are already being breached by ordinary use of ordinary tools.

– A firm that has taken no position has still taken on the exposure.



03

AI pointed back at the surveyor.

Weaponised against the surveyor by complainants and claimants.

SECTION 03

The most original material in the session concerned exposure running in the opposite direction.

Nik Carle is a litigation partner at Browne Jacobson LLP, specialising in professional liability for property professionals and acting on both defence and claimant sides. He set out two distinct tracks.

"The first is surveyors who are users of AI. The second is where AI is being weaponised against the surveyor by complainants and claimants."

NIK CARLE

The second track is already visible. Contributors reported a marked change in the character of complaints from the start of the year. Submissions that would previously have been informal and loosely argued are now well structured and articulate. They cite specific RICS standards. They set defined response deadlines. The change was sufficiently abrupt to be noticed as a step rather than a trend.

> **In terms of available support, the balance of power is shifting. Complainants are better resourced than ever before.**
>
> NIK CARLE

Contributors also described a more serious development, tested internally. A photograph of an ordinary domestic interior was altered to introduce a structural defect. Those reviewing it could not reliably determine whether the defect was genuine.

The consequences are operational and commercial at once. If a photographed defect cannot be trusted, re-inspection becomes the default position, at a cost measured in a surveyor's day plus travel for every contested case. Where re-inspection does not happen, the alternative is settling claims for defects that were never there. For firms handling volume work, neither outcome is sustainable at scale.

Carle noted an asymmetry that follows. A regulated professional is constrained in how they may respond, by conduct rules that do not constrain the person making the complaint. The obligations that define professional standing also limit the ability to meet an AI-assisted complaint on its own terms.

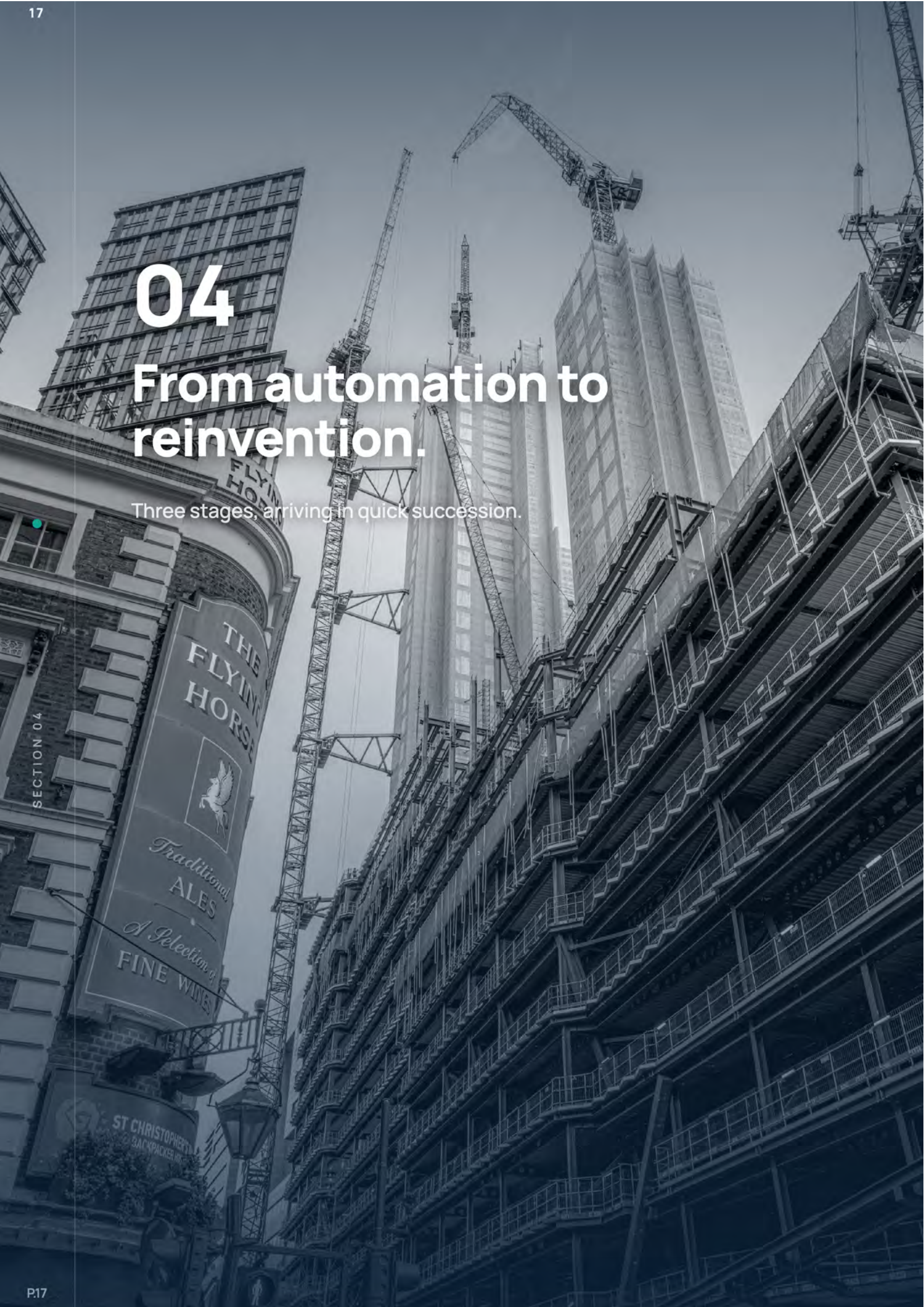
> **“These are the same old legal principles in a new and shiny wrapper.**
>
> NIK CARLE

SECTION 03. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FIRMS

– Expect complaints to be better argued and better referenced than they were.

– Decide in advance how photographic evidence submitted by a complainant will be verified.

– Record the basis of an inspection finding at the time, not retrospectively.



04

From automation to reinvention.

Three stages, arriving in quick succession.

SECTION 04

De Gruben's account is the clearest description in the session of where the technology is heading, because it is drawn from deploying it. He described three stages, arriving in quick succession.

"Twelve months ago we were deploying task agents. Teaching people to create a presentation, to do a simple task through prompting. That saves ten to twenty per cent of someone's time. Six months ago it was workflow automation. That takes fifty to seventy per cent, particularly for back office functions."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

The third stage is different in kind.

"In the last two to three months, autonomous agents. You point it at a data lake and describe the output you want. It goes through all of your data and generates its own outputs, without following a process."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

STAGE 03

The silos disappear. The processes as they exist today will no longer exist.

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

He was equally clear about what has not been solved.

"We explain what the output should look like. But we have no idea how it does it."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

Hill pressed the practical objection. The capability is impressive in principle. A highly regulated industry has different conditions.

"Unless you can provide a robust audit trail and obtain appropriate professional insurance, widespread adoption will remain challenging."

SUZANNE HILL

De Gruben accepted that neither is resolved. An important distinction emerged here: compliance with written rules is the tractable part.

"Following the regulation is the easy bit. Understanding why it makes certain decisions is the complicated bit. Why do you put a staircase here and not there. That is why valuation is so automatable."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

He put a figure on that, about his own discipline: "I can automate eighty per cent of the valuation process with the tools available to me today."

Contributors also raised the prospect of a discipline being absorbed rather than automated.

"There's a real chance quantity surveying and project management converge into a single function."

JAMES GARNER

That view was shared by more than one contributor. It is contested elsewhere in the profession. It is recorded here because two contributors reached it independently.

Project management is very human centric. Those are the skills that will take longest to automate.

JAMES GARNER

Two problems arrive with scale. The first is cost. Contributors described firms encountering unbudgeted five and six figure monthly charges once staff began building agents freely. The second is sprawl.

"Firms wake up one day and have thousands of agents running on their systems with relatively little control over them."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

The response now emerging is consolidation. Templated agents, restricted deployment, and an orchestration layer to manage what has already been built.

"Firms are going to be pushed into spending big money fixing the tech stack, the data platforms, the shape of that data, the governance of that data. All that technical debt that has been accumulated is going to come calling."

CHRIS DE GRUBEN

> **If companies have not gone down the digital transformation route, forget it. The gap is now too big.**
>
> SUZANNE HILL

Garner offered the counter-argument, and it deserves equal weight.

"I would not say all is lost. You could get up to speed pretty quickly by drawing a line. Forget about your legacy data and start now. Nobody has perfect data."

JAMES GARNER

Hill's warning about the wrong kind of progress is the one to hold on to: "The danger is that people rush to build a faster horse. They optimise their legacy process rather than building the company they need to become in five years."

Milner raised a question that follows from the same logic, applied to residential work. The underlying observation is that the profession is largely engaged in performing existing tasks faster, while the question of which tasks survive goes unasked.

> **Everybody has a ring doorbell now that is pinging data consistently. Could a house survey itself in that way?**
>
> JONY MILNER

The clearest example raised in the session concerned procurement rather than productivity. A large consultancy acquired an AI platform business, and is embedding it across its own systems.

Contributors described the acquisition as defensive. The platform was regarded inside the business as a threat to it, and the response was to buy it. The consequence runs into procurement.

The mechanism is sequencing. If design optimisation and performance guarantees move upstream to the design stage, the order in which work is procured changes, and firms competing against that are competing on a different basis.

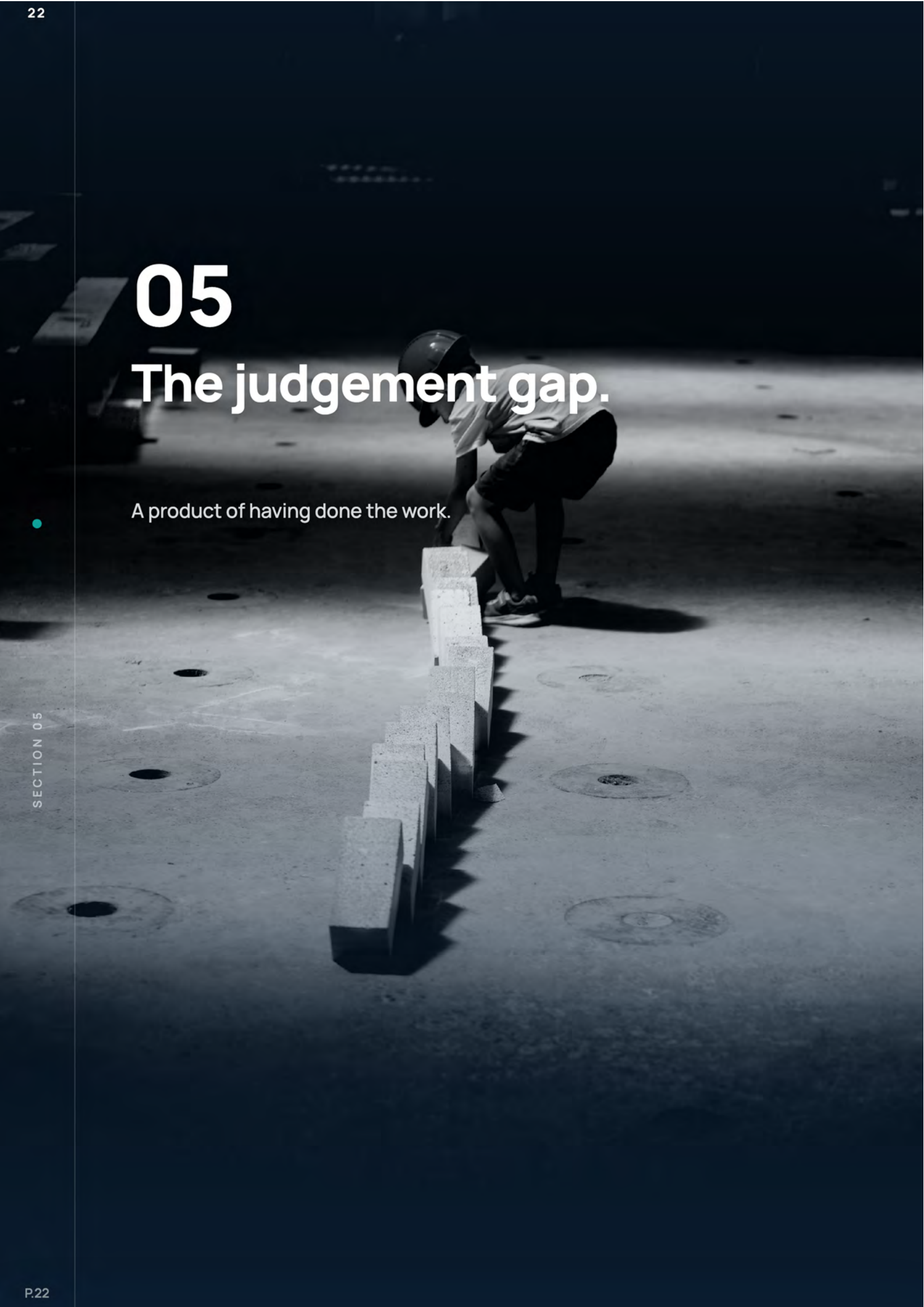
SECTION 04. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FIRMS

- Automating an existing process locks that process in. Ask first whether it should exist.
- Data quality and governance is the constraint most firms meet next.
- Agent sprawl and unbudgeted cost arrive quickly once staff can build freely.

Contributors noted that acquisitions running the other way may matter more.

"A technology company buying a consultancy is coming at it from a different lens. What they want is your client book."

JAMES GARNER



05
The judgement gap.

A product of having done the work.

The most consistent concern across the session had nothing to do with technology.

Contributors described an experience paradox. Surveyors with long practical experience carry an instinct for when something does not look right, and that instinct is what catches an error before it becomes a claim. Newer entrants, contributors reported, are markedly less likely to challenge a plausible but incorrect statement. The capacity to be sceptical about an output is itself a product of having done the work.

Contributors also described a pattern of departure rather than resistance.

"Every time we have any significant change in practice, we see resistance to that change, like with the adoption of pad technology, and given the demographic some consider I've paid the mortgage off, why be an old dog learning new tricks when they can retire, leading to a brain drain. This will affect the skills shortage we already have, and a rush to fill that gap will lead to a standards issue which we already have."

JONY MILNER

Contributors were less troubled by refusal to adapt than by quiet departure. Some experienced surveyors will simply go, and the judgement goes with them.

Hill argued that the profession has the value equation backwards.

"There is this impression that we will bring in a graduate and they can look after AI. Graduates might understand the technology, but they have no context. They do not know what good looks like. The people who will get the most out of AI are the ones with the most expertise and the most work experience."

SUZANNE HILL

The core failure was a complete trust in what the AI was saying to her.

NIK CARLE

Carle brought evidence from the legal sector, where this has already been tested in a decided case involving a junior lawyer, a senior colleague and a supervising partner. All three were found wanting. The junior lawyer's conduct was the most striking element.

"Even when the AI was alerting her, recommending strongly that she should cross-check and verify, she brushed these warnings aside."

NIK CARLE

Garner was sharply critical of the response from higher education.

"Anyone would think AI is a dirty word. There are randomised checks, and people are being told they will be thrown off their course when they have not even used AI. It has created a culture of absolute fear."

JAMES GARNER

Contributors described a technology firm that renamed its software engineers as AI engineers and instructed them to stop writing code, recruiting instead for creativity, judgement and communication. The same shift is beginning to appear in surveying job specifications.

Professional qualification is starting to respond. A new RICS pathway in data analytics and intelligence is in pilot, developed with input from contributors to this group.

"With most pathways it's clear what you're trying to do. This one is harder, because it's trying to put a pin in something that's constantly moving. That's not a criticism, it's the nature of the subject."

JAMES GARNER

Garner closed with a longer view, pointing out that Plato had the same worry about writing eroding memory. "We will adapt, because we will have to."

Who decides what competent looks like

Where a claim turns on the use of AI, or on the failure to use it, someone has to say whether the surveyor fell short. Courts rely on expert evidence to answer it.

The test is whether the work sat inside the broad band of what a reasonably competent practitioner would have done in the same circumstances, or fell so far outside it that no competent practitioner would have made the same error. Perfection is not the standard.

Establishing where that band sits requires independent expert evidence. And the expert has to hold two things at once.

In negligence cases, we are going to need a new breed of expert witness. Deep knowledge of surveying practice was always essential. Now, experts must come forward with genuine credentials and expertise in AI use by surveyors as a professional sector.

NIK CARLE

There is a sequencing problem beneath this. The band cannot be established until there is a body of real cases to establish it from, and there is no such body yet. The first claims will be argued in the absence of a settled view of what competent AI use looks like.

There is a second problem, and it is circular.

Expert witness work is a sideline for many surveyors. On this evidence it becomes a considerably more significant one, and the people who can do it credibly do not yet exist in numbers.

> **Any expert in that position is going to be using AI themselves to produce their reports and to arrive at their opinions. They will be subject to all the same risks they are opining on.**
>
> NIK CARLE

SECTION 05. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FIRMS

- Verification is a skill that has to be taught. It cannot be assumed.
- Experienced staff are a firm's most valuable AI asset, not its obstacle.
- Recruitment and training are where AI capability becomes visible to clients and candidates.

06

What Litmus will test next.

Ask how far AI has moved into UK surveying and you will get a different answer depending on who you speak to. That was true in this session, among people who spend their working lives close to the question.

No independent, full scale survey of AI adoption across UK surveying exists. Individual disciplines hold partial views. Vendors hold commercial ones. Nobody holds a picture of the profession as a whole.

Litmus is building it. The State of AI in Surveying survey will run across every surveying discipline, at every level of seniority, from those still qualifying through to firm owners.

THE SURVEY WILL BE

Independent, with no funder influence over questions or findings

Anonymous by default

Open across every surveying discipline

Open to everyone, at every level

Designed by Litmus contributors

Responses will distinguish between those answering for themselves and those answering on behalf of a firm. Both matter, and they are different pictures. A firm's stated position and the daily experience of the people inside it are frequently not the same thing.

We need to hear from you. Whether your firm has a full governance framework in place or has never discussed AI at all, the picture is incomplete without you. Particularly if you think you have nothing useful to contribute, because that view is itself part of what needs measuring.

SECTION 06. HOW TO TAKE PART

- The survey opens in Autumn 2026. Details to follow.
- You can respond for yourself or on behalf of your firm.
- No firm or individual is identified in the findings.

Contributors

Nik Carle FCIArb	Solicitor and litigation partner at Browne Jacobson LLP, has specialised for 30+ years in defending negligence claims against surveyors and other property professionals. Occasionally acts for claimants too. Brings the legal exposure perspective.
Chris de Gruben FRICS, AssocRTPI	Senior Director, Head of Property for the UK & EU at Artefact. Chartered valuation surveyor, formerly ten years as a World Bank urban specialist consultant. Co-Chair to the RICS AI standards working group. Brings the deployment perspective.
James Garner FRICS	Member of the RICS construction professional group panel and a contributor to the RICS AI standard. Head of AI and Data at Gleeds, and founder of Project Flux. Chartered quantity surveyor, twenty years in practice. Brings the standards and profession-wide perspective. Contributing in a personal capacity; views are his own.
Suzanne Hill	Business Strategist, Founder of Constructive Intelligence, and AI consultant with almost 30 years' experience working with the construction industry across more than 60 countries. With postgraduate qualifications in AI for Business, she brings an organisational transformation perspective.
Jony Milner MRICS, MCABE, C.Build E	Technical Manager at Legal & General Surveying Services. Chartered surveyor, residential survey and valuation. Brings the volume residential and secured lending perspective.
Nina Young FCA	Founder of Surveyors UK. Chair and convener of Litmus. Independent voice on AI in Surveying. Over a decade in Audit, Risk and Governance in regulated professions.

ABOUT LITMUS

Litmus is an independent intelligence group on AI for the UK surveying profession.

HOW IT WORKS

Litmus brings together senior practitioners from across surveying, construction and the professions that sit alongside them. The group meets quarterly for two hours, under the Chatham House rule.

Contributors take part in a personal capacity and give their time voluntarily. They are not paid, and their firms have no standing in the group.

Litmus is convened and chaired by Nina Young, founder of Surveyors UK.

WHAT IT PUBLISHES

– A report after each quarterly session

– Occasional briefings where something warrants it

Everything Litmus publishes is free.

Nothing is published until every contributor has approved it.

INDEPENDENCE

– No funder, vendor, professional body or institution has any influence over what Litmus discusses, what it finds, or what it publishes

– Litmus does not endorse products, recommend suppliers, or rank tools

– Where a Litmus output is supported by funding, the funder is named in that publication. Funders see no findings before publication and have no right of review

– Contributors approve their own quotations and the report as a whole before publication

– Contributors are unpaid and take part in a personal capacity

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Litmus is convened by Surveyors UK, an independent media and community business which sells products and services to the surveying profession.

Litmus is editorially independent of that business. No Litmus publication recommends, endorses or promotes any product or service, including those of Surveyors UK or any business connected to it.

We publish this so readers can weigh it for themselves.

CITE AS

Litmus (2026), Faster than we can explain: what surveying is actually doing with AI, 1st Edition September 2026.

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