

## **Inclusive Design: creating a user's world**

### **Tutors' Notes**

This teaching package, produced by RIBA in 2009, consists of a DVD and accompanying notes for tutors. The DVD contains three case studies of development projects which all explore the nature of inclusive design processes by using live examples of architectural projects as a basis for discussion. The role and relationship of the architects, the client, the user advisors, access consultants, and other members of the design team are all examined in the film.

Activities 1 to 5 below outline learning sessions that can be delivered by Tutors.

### **The teaching package aims:**

- to promote the principles of inclusive design by encouraging tutors in schools of architecture to teach students about the importance of this design approach;
- to assist tutors to develop in their students, the values, knowledge and skills necessary to design inclusively;
- to provide material that will help tutors to explain how the principles of inclusive design can be embedded into the design process by using case studies as examples;
- to provide ideas and references for further study on the topic of inclusive design.

### **Why is it important to teach inclusive design?**

There are strong moral, legal, social, economic, sustainable and environmental reasons why inclusive design is important and it is evident that the expectation that architects will design inclusively is now high on the agenda. For a fuller discussion see CEBE Building and Sustaining a Learning Environment for Inclusive Design. Report of Special Interest Group in Inclusive Design available from the Centre for

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Education in the Built Environment (CEBE) website at

<http://cebe.heacademy.ac.uk>

Architects and others whose work impacts on the design and quality of the built environment are expected to ensure that any design intervention is designed inclusively to meet the needs of the diverse population. The expectation that proposals for development will be subject to rigorous public participation is also significant.

See, for example,

- Planning Policy Statement 1 (2007) Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development, which states that “Planning policies should promote high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term, but over the lifetime of the development.”
- Architects submitting applications for planning permission will be expected to demonstrate exactly how the design proposed meets the need to design inclusively. The Design and Access Statement that must accompany most planning applications must explain how this has been achieved by the designer. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment CABI, 2006 explain this requirement in Design and Access Statements, How to write, read and use them;
- The RIBA curriculum for students indicates that inclusion is an important topic that must be taught in schools of architecture;
- CABI has stated (2006) that the quality of design should be judged by “whether or not it achieves an inclusive environment.”

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### **How can the film be used?**

The film is divided into three parts to enable tutors to select appropriate case study material at the right stage of the student's experience. Each part represents a self contained case study of a well known building. All the case studies explore the role and relationship of the architects, the client, the user advisors, access consultants, and other members of the design team, but the emphasis of each case is slightly different.

- The Roundhouse in London;

The challenges associated with altering a unique listed building to sensitively incorporate access and inclusion is the main theme of this case study. The challenge for the architects was to ensure that the building had an open, welcoming feel and that it could be used by everyone. In achieving this it was important to retain the sense that the venue was an exciting place to be and that everyone was welcome.

- The Eden Project in Cornwall;

The big challenge explored in the Eden project video is how to make a visually attractive venue become an enjoyable place for visually impaired people as well as welcoming everyone to enjoy its ambience.

- The Willows School in Wolverhampton.

The Willows School is a rather different challenge in that a special school and a primary school were being brought together on a single campus to create an inspiring educational environment for both groups of children. The challenge was to cater for children with different needs in different, but equal ways. Jonathan Hines from Architype stresses in the film the importance of the inclusive process which he believes makes a better building.

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### **What is inclusive design?**

Imrie and Hall (2000) quote a respondent to a survey as stating “*schools of architecture pay only lip service to building standards and access for disabled people is generally thought of as providing ramps.*” This is rather a harsh criticism, but if there is any truth in this statement, it may be because of the association of inclusive design with accessibility standards and poor quality design outcomes that is often the outcome of a design response driven by regulatory codes.

In reality, inclusive design is much more than regulations and codes. It is about responding to the different needs of the diverse population. Meeting the needs of elderly people and disabled people to enable people to enter and use buildings is a significant aspect of what an inclusive design process attempts to achieve.

However, the accepted definition of inclusive design has evolved to embrace the idea that the designer needs to consider the diversity of the human population. This includes consideration of difference associated with gender, race, religious belief and sexual orientation as well as age and ability. For example, at the Willows School in Wolverhampton consideration needed to be given to the prayer needs of Moslem students and staff as well as dealing with the specific needs of disabled children and the educational and social needs of all the children. Of course, in the end the building must be more than just a place that everyone can access and use; it must be an inspirational environment for the whole community.

### **Definitions of inclusive design**

There are many different definitions of inclusive design, some of which are given below.

*“An inclusive environment is one that can be used by everyone regardless of age, gender or disability. It recognises and accommodates differences in the way people use the built environment and provides solutions that enable all of us to participate in mainstream activity equally,*

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*independently, with choice and dignity*" Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide (ODPM, March 2003).

*"Inclusive design is about making places that everyone can use."* Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE, 2006).

*"Inclusive design is not a new genre of design, nor a separate specialism, but an approach to design in general and an element of business strategy that seeks to ensure that mainstream products, services and environments are accessible to the largest number of people"* Roger Coleman, Helen Hamlyn Research Institute at the Royal College of Art.

*"Contrary to the negative assumption that attention to the needs of users limits good design, the experience of imaginative designers around the world reveals the range of applications that delight the senses and lift the human spirit when universal design is integral to the overall concept"* Ostroff and Preiser, (2001).

Note: In a number of countries including USA and Japan the ideas of inclusive design are referred to as *universal design*. The preferred term in the UK is inclusive design, but the general principles are the same.

### **Activity 1 – Exploring the Definition of Inclusive Design**

A useful discussion topic with students, which would help to bring out misconceptions and misunderstandings about inclusive design would be an exercise designed to examine their perceptions of inclusive design. How would your students define inclusive design? It might be interesting to ask the students to give their own definition and then show the film to see if perceptions change.

In all three case studies used in this film the common ground is that inclusive design solutions emerge from inclusive processes. In other words, inclusive buildings where everyone feels welcome are likely to emerge from a design process that engages both client and prospective users.

### **Activity 2 – Exploring the Process of Engagement**

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After seeing the films, students could be asked to design a process diagram demonstrating when and where engagement with users should be carried out for a particular project. The idea is to address the fact that some individuals approach consultation with resistance and so participation processes, could be introduced. Where possible, this activity might be used in conjunction with a current studio project. Ideas in the film for engagement with users could be the starting point for the discussion. Students could be encouraged to think of a range of innovative ways of engaging with different people, particularly with hard to reach groups who are unlikely to put themselves forward to discuss design schemes.

### **Activity 3 – Community Participation Debate**

Arrange for the film to be shown to a community group with students present. Engage the community members in debate about their own needs and expectations in the design of buildings and environments and their preferred methods of consultation and participation.

### **Activity 4 – Identifying and Reviewing Design Principles**

Ask the students to agree a set of design principles to act as guidance for inclusive design practice. The students could be asked to compare and critically review their ideas and those set out by CABE's set of principles that call for places to be:

**Inclusive** so that everyone can use them safely, easily and with dignity

**Responsive** taking account what people say they need and want

**Flexible** so different people can use them in different ways

**Convenient** so everyone can use them without much effort or separation

**Accommodating** for all people, regardless of their age, gender, mobility, ethnicity or circumstances

**Welcoming** with no disabling barriers that might exclude some people

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**Realistic** offering more than one solution to help balance everyone's needs and recognising that one solution may not work for all

**Understandable** everyone knows where they are and can locate their destination.

A further comparison might be made with the Principles of Universal Design put forward by Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, USA.

<http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/>

### **Additional information**

Center for Universal Design <http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/>

Centre for Accessible Environments [www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk)

Design Council; [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)

Helen Hamlyn Research Centre: Centre for Inclusive Design [www.hhc.rca.ac.uk](http://www.hhc.rca.ac.uk)

Institute for Human Centred Design [www.adaptenv.org](http://www.adaptenv.org)

TCPA 'Applying Inclusive Design principles to eco-town development'

<http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/ecotwsinclusion.pdf>

### **Comments on the film content**

RIBA President Sunand Prasad (2007-2009)said:

"The RIBA is here to make the best architecture flourish, because great architecture improves our lives for everyone, irrespective of who they are. Accessibility and the creation of accessible environments is absolutely central to good design and architecture; it is not something that is separate or added on. For too long, accessibility was all about ramps and handrails, but it is much more than that. It is actually about providing environments that are fit for people with a range of abilities, and it is vital that we listen to the needs of different people."

The film is available to view online at: [www.youtube.com/user/ribavideo](http://www.youtube.com/user/ribavideo)

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To request a copy of the film, contact [inclusivedesign@inst.riba.org](mailto:inclusivedesign@inst.riba.org)

### References

CABE (2006) *The principles of inclusive design; they include you.*

Imrie, R and Hall, P (2001) *Inclusive Design: Designing and Developing Accessible Environment*, London and New York, Spon Press.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide.*

Ostroff, E and Preiser, W (2001) *The Universal Design Handbook*, New York, McGraw Hill.



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