Home Improvements: Housing Research in Practice

Methodology and Data

Contents

Introduction

This document provides supporting information for *Home Improvements: Housing Research in Practice*. The report was compiled as part of an AHRC funded knowledge exchange project, Home Improvements, coordinated by Prof. Flora Samuel at the University of Sheffield School of Architecture.

In this supporting document we present the research methods and data which underpin the report findings and recommendations.

1.0 Research Methods

Home Improvements: Housing Research in Practice draws on data from three interconnected sources:

- The RIBA Research Practice Survey;
- A limited sample of targeted interviews;
- Three research projects led by architectural practices in collaboration with architectural academia as part of the Home Improvements project.

Between February and May 2013, an online survey was issued to chartered architectural practices. The survey was distributed via the RIBA bulletin on three occasions. The survey was distributed to the RIBA's network of 24,000 individual members. The RIBA's typical response rate for similar studies is 50-100 responses. The Home Improvements survey sits at the upper end of this rate, accumulating 83 responses.

The survey comprised two sections. In the first section we asked practitioners their views on research, concentrating on how they valued research and what opportunities they thought it had for developing their business. One of the fundamental questions asked practitioners to describe their own understanding of what research is. In particular, we were also interested in gauging whether practices needed assistance in conducting research, and if so, what should this consist of? The second part of the survey was specifically aimed at practices working in the housing sector. With this our aim was to establish how, why and when practitioners were conducting research, thereby exposing which areas of housing they considered needed more attention. We were also interested in evaluating where practitioners looked for cutting edge knowledge in housing, and why these places were considered important.

Secondly, a sample of semi-structured interviews was conducted. In addition to following up the responses of survey participants, these interviews specifically targeted key housing design practices. Consequently, this included a range of practice sizes from solo practitioners to large practices, and from emerging practices to well established ones. In these interviews practitioners were invited to uncover research conventions in practice, and to identify innovative approaches and cutting edge knowledge. Because practices were selected for one or more of these factors the semi-structured approach allowed a flexible thematic framework for all interviews.

1.0 Research Methods

The report also draws on knowledge developed in the course of the AHRC based Home Improvements project. Within the project, funding for three embedded research projects led by architectural practitioners in conjunction with architectural academia, with input from our industry partners, was provided. Following a call for expressions of interest in the professional press, nine practices were invited to Sheffield to participate in an Ideas Lab. This was a sandpit event for the incubation of a series of research projects with all the members of the team. Three practices were successful in securing funding. The knowledge exchange partnerships and research projects are as follows:

Ash Sakula, working with the **University of Sheffield** and **Design for Homes** examined the context of self-build. Their project, titled Collective Custom Build, resulted in an information rich advocacy website, which locates the opportunities inherent in future occupiers having more say in how housing is conceived and built in the UK.

Satellite Architects, working with **Kingston University** and **Taylor Wimpey**, explored the public realm in housing and produced a design handbook to assist industry in delivering detailed places.

Urbed, working with the **University of Edinburgh** and **Design for Homes** investigated issues of parking and housing. Titled Parking Space, the research set out to interrogate the prevailing assumption that less parking will discourage car ownership, make new neighbourhoods safer and allow better quality urban design.

In setting up, delivering and reflecting on the process of this project we learnt a great deal about how to facilitate practitioner research, which is reflected in the *RIBA Research Practice Guide*.
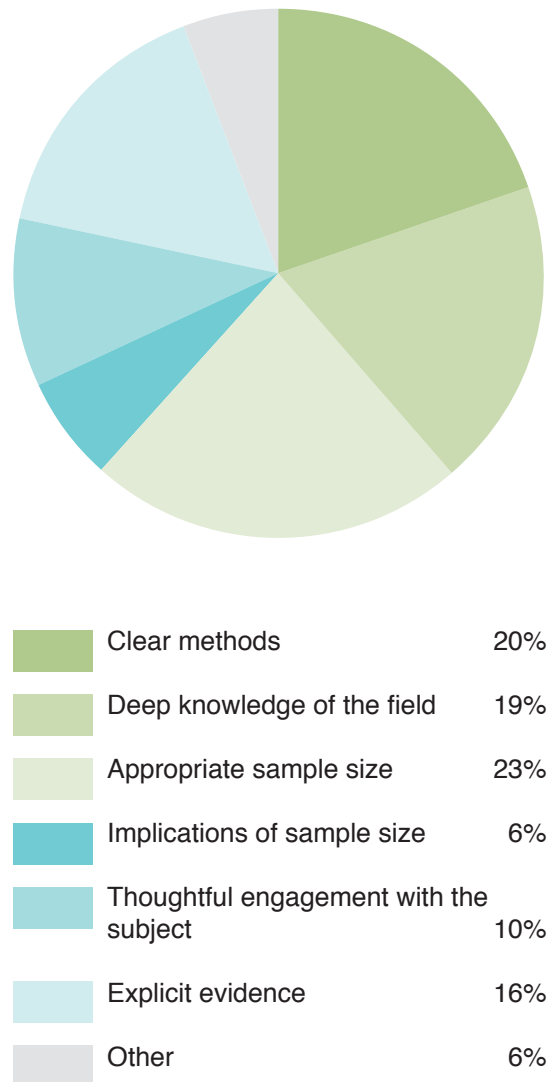
2.1 What is Research?

The data presented within this section is derived solely from the survey responses.

Definitions of research

As an open and qualitative question, there was a number of ways in which research was defined. It is noteworthy that not all descriptions were definitions of research per se; rather some are descriptions of different approaches to undertaking research through and for design. We identified five main responses to this question which suggested that research comprised the following characteristics:

- The activity of keeping up to date with current materials, approaches and legislation.
- Developing ideas through design
- A form of funded work which investigated a particular subject
- Engaging with academics in order to take part in research project
- Teaching within schools of architecture
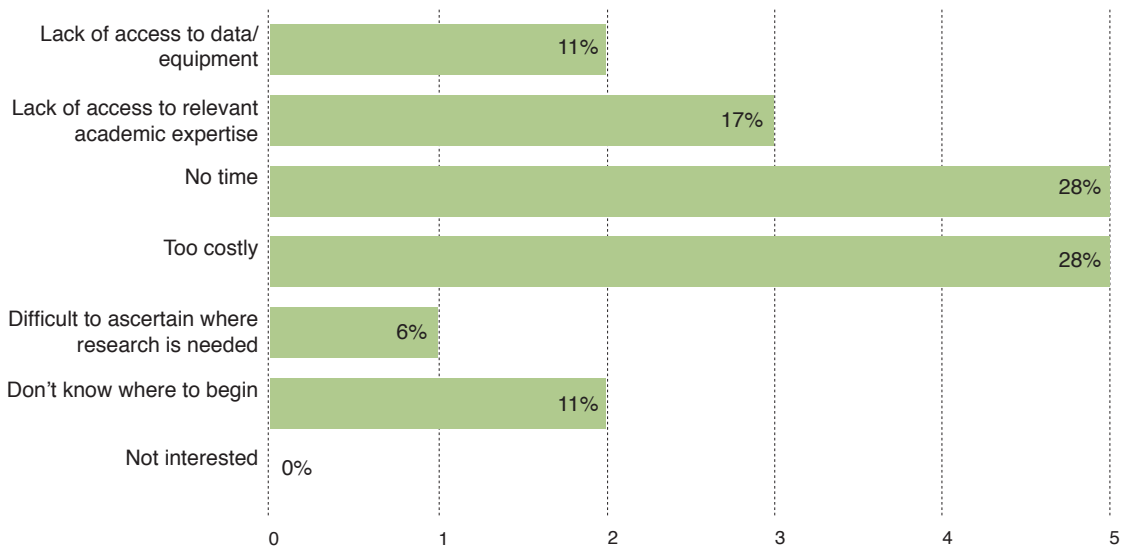
The major characteristics of research

Clear methods		20%
Deep knowledge of the field		19%
Appropriate sample size		23%
Implications of sample size		6%
Thoughtful engagement with the subject		10%
Explicit evidence		16%
Other		6%

2.2 Research Activity

Practices involved with research

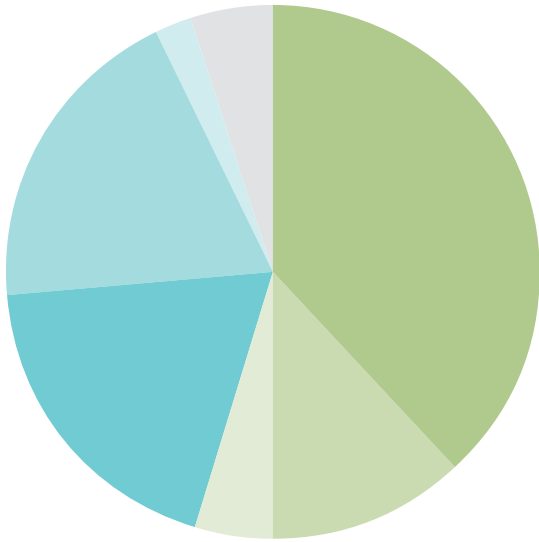|	
Sole	20% 3% 8%
Small	21% 4% 20%
Medium	5% 1% 10%
Large	4% 5%

Yes

No

Unanswered
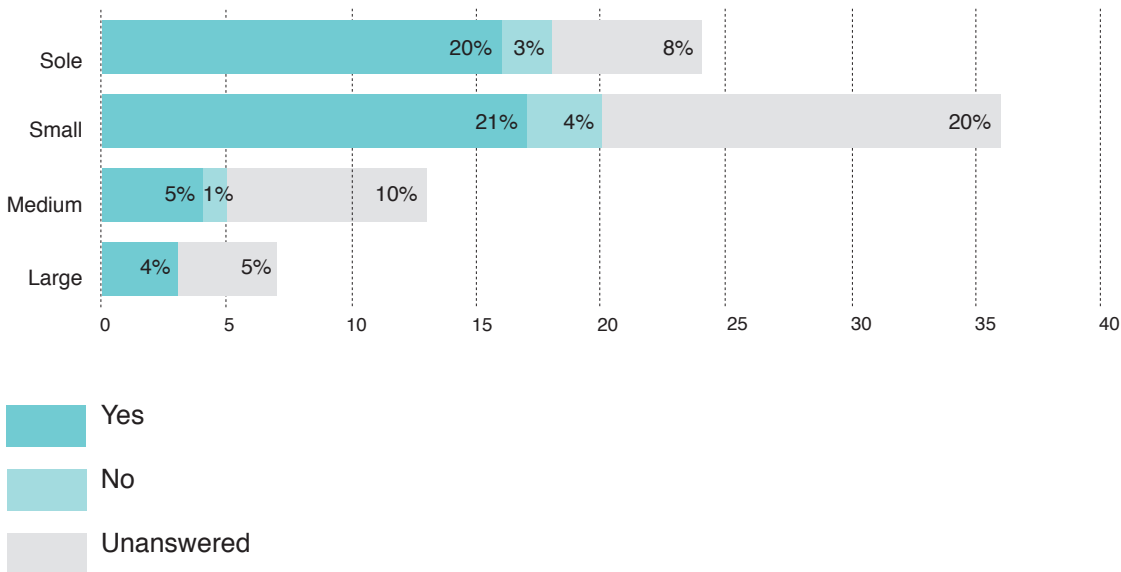
Reasons for not doing research in practice

Lack of access to data/equipment	11%
Lack of access to relevant academic expertise	17%
No time	28%
Too costly	28%
Difficult to ascertain where research is needed	6%
Don't know where to begin	11%
Not interested	0%

2.2 Research Activity

Types of research in practice

Research topics in practice

	Research through and tor design, and research into ways of working	38%
	Research through and for design	12%
	Research through design and research into ways of working	5%
	Research for design and research into ways of working	19%
	Research for design	19%
	Research through design	2%
	Research into ways of working	5%

	Environmental performance	14%
	User behaviour	12%
	Digital technology and process	6%
	Management and procurement process	8%
	History and theory	11%
	Performance and practice	5%
	Construction (including process and detail)	18%
	Participation and consultation	10%
	Urban planning and landscape	12%
	Other	6%

2.3 Grants for Research

Practices who had previously received grants for research

Yes	26%
No	74%
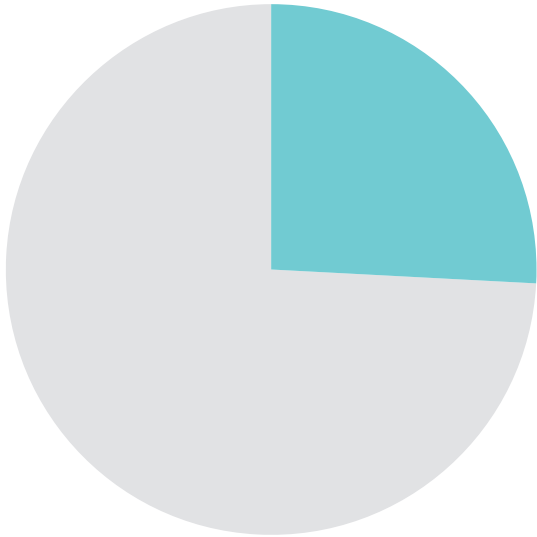
Awareness of how to obtain grants for research

Yes	15%
No	26%
Not sure	59%
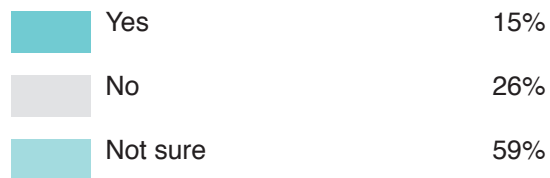
Practices interested in pursing research

Yes	48%
No	15%
Not sure	37%
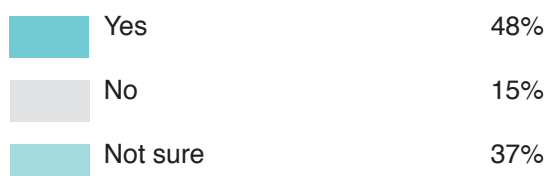
2.3 Grants for Research

Sources that practitioners would turn to in order to find research funding opportunities

Source	Percentage
Architectural press	11%
Academic partners	27%
Industry partners	8%
Social media	3%
CPD	4%
RIBA	24%
Not sure	23%
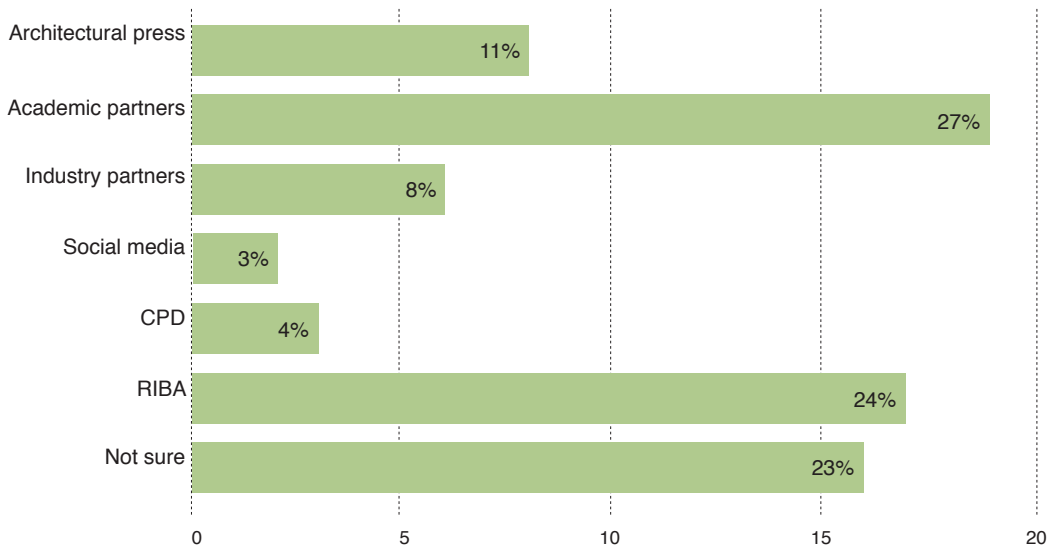
Actions that could help practices pursue research grants

Action	Percentage
Partnering with other industry professionals/organisations	17%
Academic partnering	22%
RIBA support	23%
Publicity for research grant opportunities and success in professional journals	25%
Training	13%
Not sure	3%
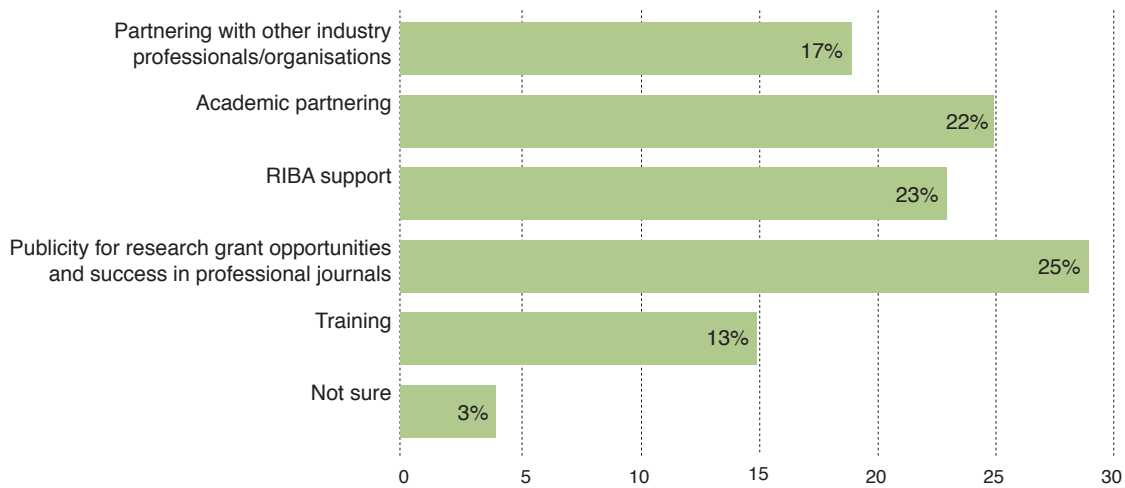
2.4 The Benefits of Research

The importance of research for developing a healthy business

Very important: 43% / 2%
Quite important: 15% / 4%
Important: 32% / 4%
Not at all important:
Unanswered: 2%

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)
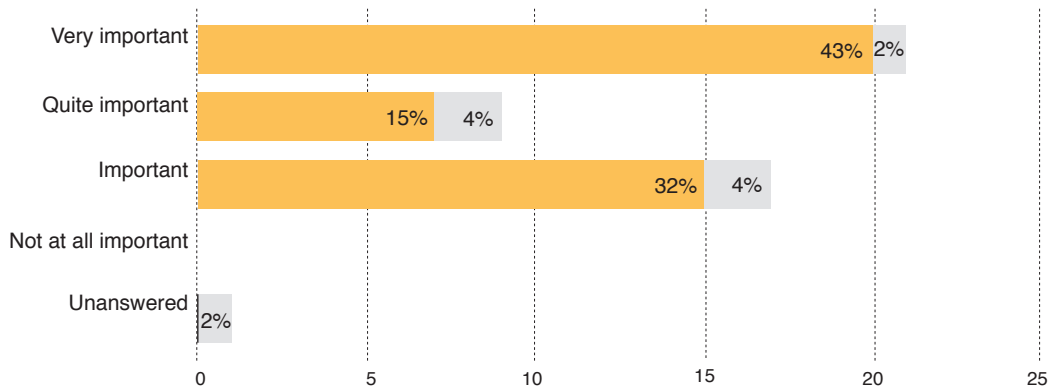
Asked to provide five main benefits of research, practitioners suggested the following:

Improve the built environment: 18% / 2%
Improved brand: 3%
Generates further work: 12% / 1.5%
Access to alternative funding streams: 4% / 1%
Job satisfaction: 10%
Demonstrate the value of architecture: 13% / 1.5%
Publicity: 2%
Demonstrate specific expertise: 8% / 1.5%
Innovation: 15% / 1%
Advancing sustainability: 9%

(x-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50)

■ Researchers
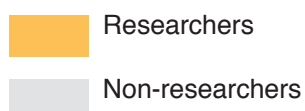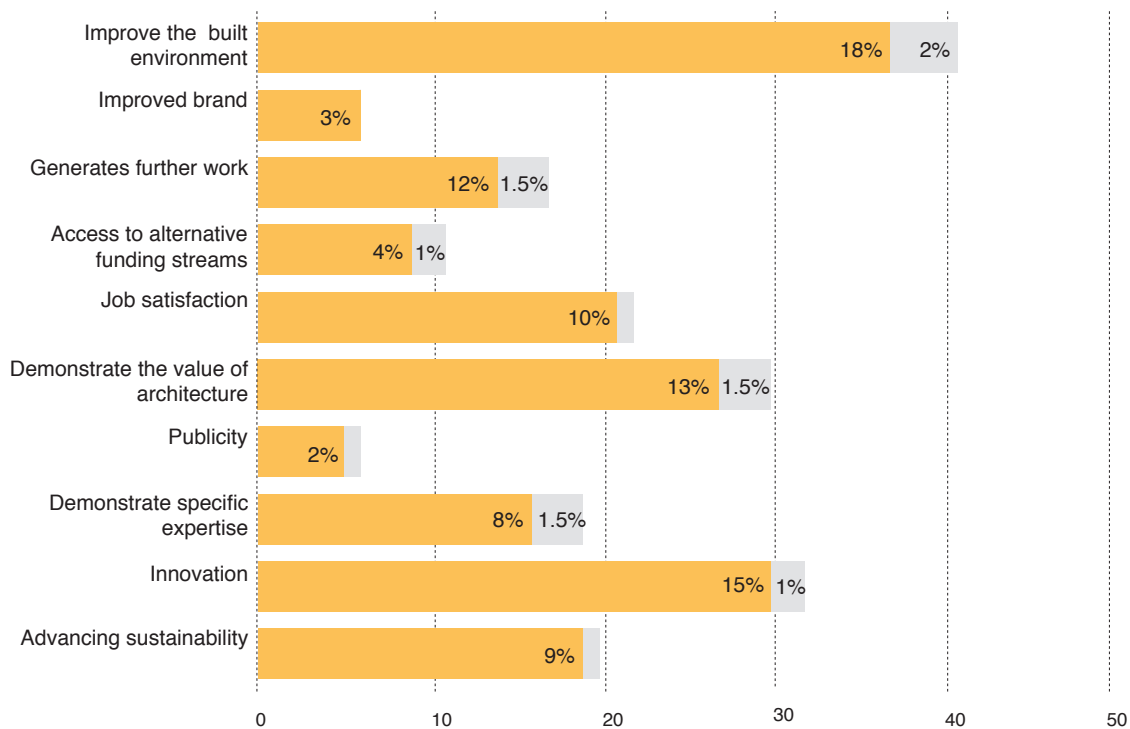
▨ Non-researchers

In this section 'non-researchers' refers to practices who stated in the survey that they did not
do research. 'Researchers' refers to practices who said their practice did do research.

2.5 Publication

Practices with published research

Reasons for not publishing research

	Published	33%
	Unpublished	67%

	No time	32%
	Publishing costs	14%
	Accessing research grant funding for publication	8%
	Didn't know how to	14%
	Not sure	16%
	Other	16%

2.5 Publication

Is publication beneficial for practice?
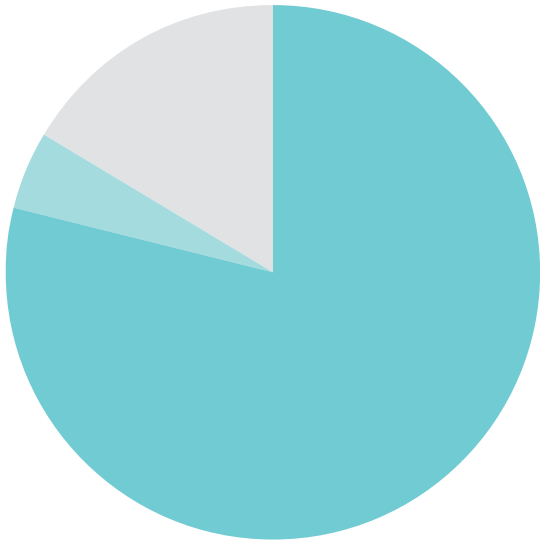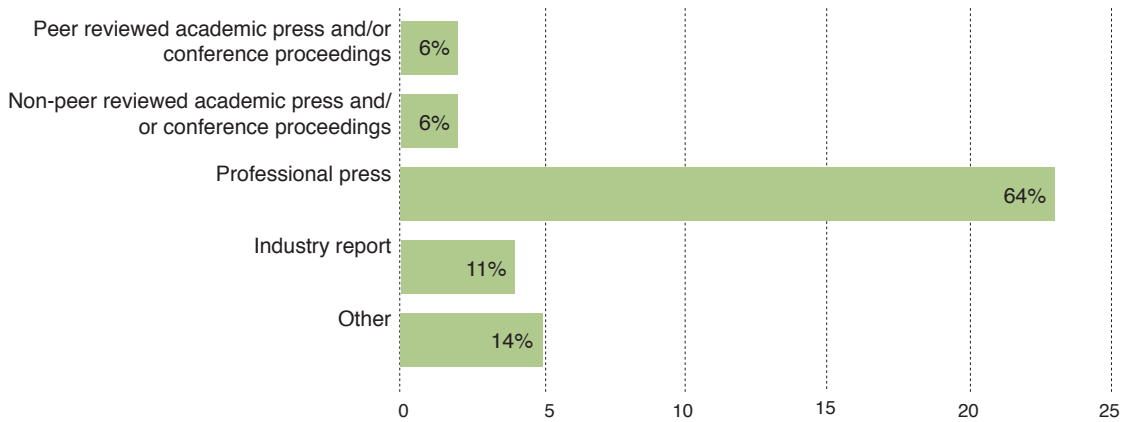
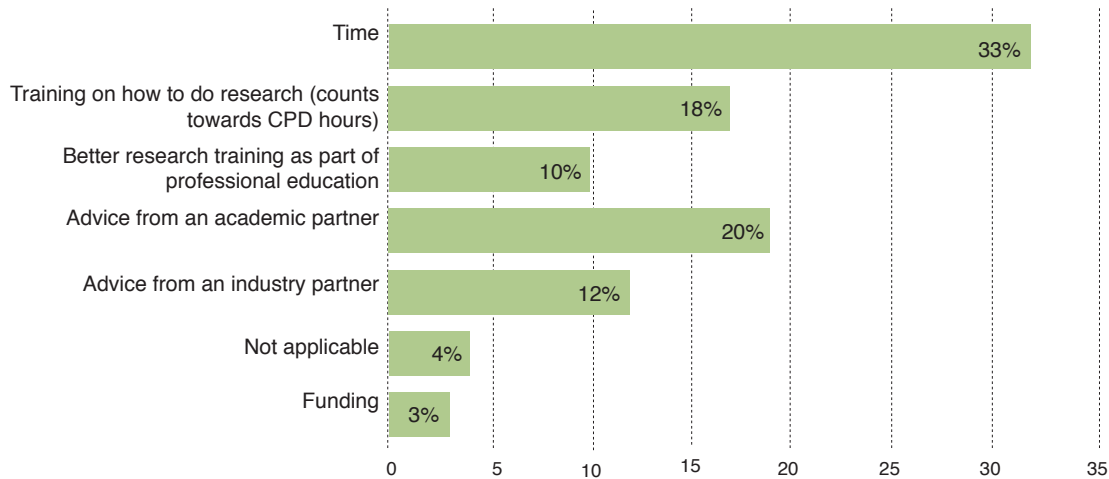|		
■	Yes	79%
■	No	5%
■	Not sure	16%

Overall, Practices suggested that Clients were often interested in research and that it identified the practice as experts in a certain area. It was also suggested that clients were more convinced about design outcomes that were supported by a body of research.

2.5 Publication

**Places that practices have had their
research published**

Category	Percentage
Peer reviewed academic press and/or conference proceedings	6%
Non-peer reviewed academic press and/or conference proceedings	6%
Professional press	64%
Industry report	11%
Other	14%

Asked what would help practitioners publish, the following suggestions were made:

Category	Percentage
Time	33%
Training on how to do research (counts towards CPD hours)	18%
Better research training as part of professional education	10%
Advice from an academic partner	20%
Advice from an industry partner	12%
Not applicable	4%
Funding	3%

# 2.6 Assistance with Research

Types of assistance required

Responses can be summarised in the following categories:
- Demonstrating the relevance and value of practice based research
- Disseminating research more effectively
- Better guidance re current research opportunities
- Better guidance re current topic areas
- Guidance regarding how to apply for funding

**Organisations Practitioners would seek assistance from:**

- Universities
- Schools of Architecture
- Funding Bodies
- Government & NGO's
- RIBA
- Other Professional Bodies
- British Library
- Industry Organisations
- Suppliers and Manufacturers
- Charities
- Network organisations such as HUB and the Edge

Type of assistance required from Universities and the RIBA

Universities

RIBA
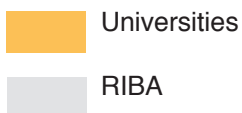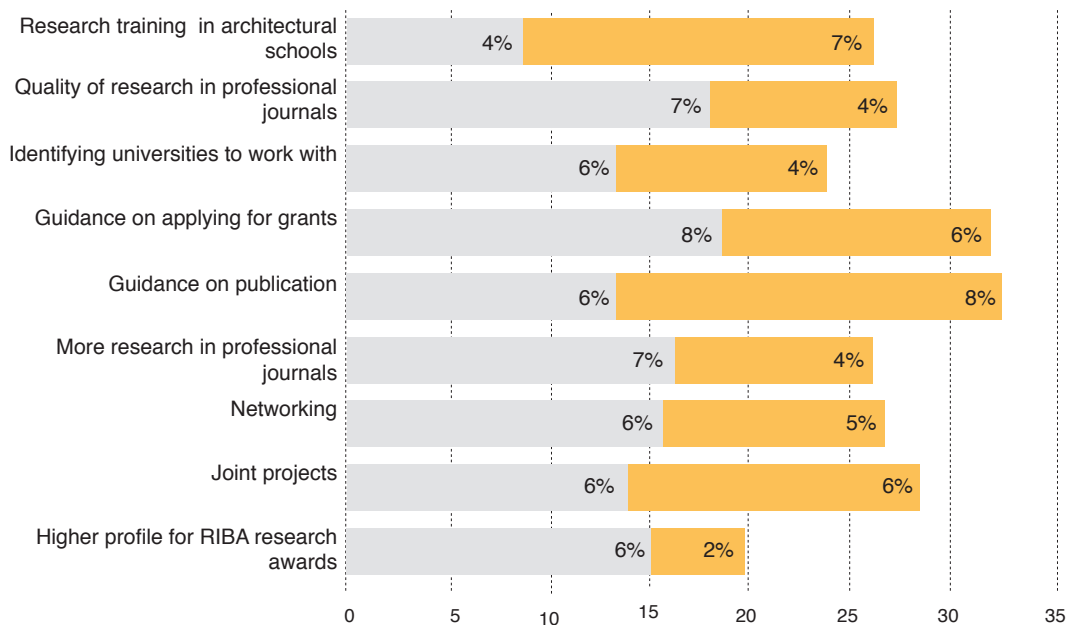
2.7 Housing Research

Practices undertaking research in housing


Yes	38%
No	63%
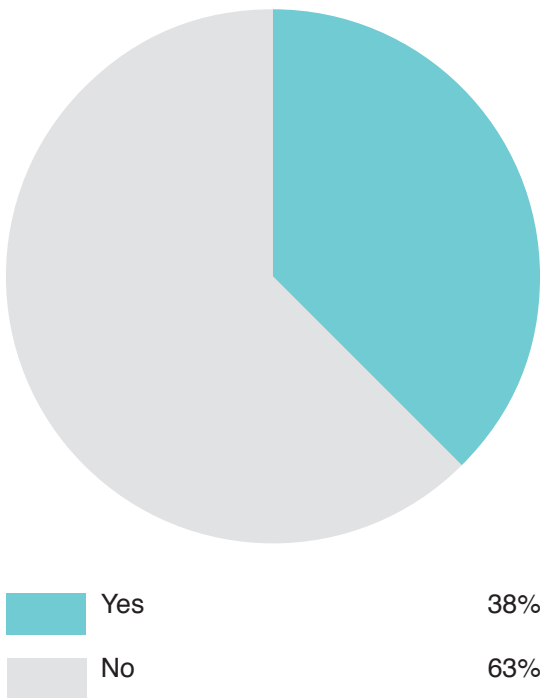
Research needed in housing

Responses ranged from very specific research areas such as "the passage of moisture in highly insulated buildings", to design and well being. Responses were grouped into the following overarching categories:

- Implications of low energy and environmental approaches for occupants
- Impact of space & size on occupants
- Models of procurement
- Multiple occupancy housing
- Housing for specific needs
- Land ownership and availability of land
- Retrofit for sustainability
- Low cost housing
- Prefabrication techniques
- The value of quality and design in housing
- User aspirations and contemporary requirements
- Technologies for improving environmental performance

Where is the most important housing research taking place?
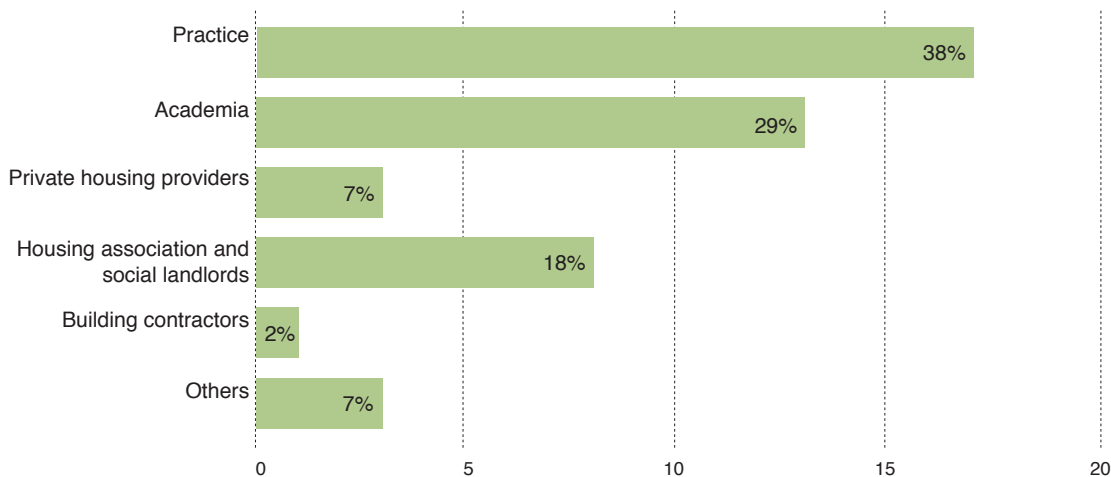
Acknowledgements

Interview Practices
We are grateful to the following practitioners and their practices for their time and interest in our research, and providing a wealth of knowledge through interview.

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PRP

Cany Ash

Ash Sakula

David Rudlin

Urbed

Fran Bradshaw

Anne Thorne Architects

Hendrik Heyns

Allies and Morrison

James Soane

Project Orange

Jon Ackroyd

Architype

Julia Park

Levitt Bernstein

Kevin Davis

DJD Architects

Luke Tozer

Pitman Tozer

Mike Keys

Feilden Clegg Bradley

Paul Monaghan

AHMM

Phil O'Dwyer

OMI

Sabine Storp

StorpWeber Architecture

Sarah Wigglesworth

Sarah Wigglesworth
Architects

Sean Griffiths

FAT

Simon Humphries

Urban Splash

Stephen Smith

Wright & Wright Architects

Named Survey Practices
We would also like to thank the following practices, who chose to be named, for taking the time to complete our online survey. Their input has been a great benefit to the research.

AREA Landscape Architects

AshSakula

Bill Morris Architect

DJD Architects

Eric Parry Architects Ltd

Forero Senior Architects Ltd

Green Planning Solutions LLP

Hodgson Gabb Studio

Hugo Hardy Architect

Jonathan Braddick Chartered
Architects

Judge Architects Ltd

Love Architecture Ltd

McCaren Architecture

Peter Oborn Architect

Pollard Thomas Edwards
Architects

Prue Chiles Architects

Simon Mundy Projects

StorpWeber Architecture

The Morrison Partnership

RIBA