

Client & Architect



What Clients think of Architects

Feedback from the 'Working with Architects'
Client Survey 2016

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Data analysis and reporting undertaken by
Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd



Research undertaken for the
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RIBA 
Architecture.com

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FRONT COVER:
Photographer: Bircan Tulga
Architects: Hoos

Foreword

by RIBA President,
Jane Duncan

We are at a landmark moment in the evolution of professional practice. New disruptive trends are throwing clients' long-held opinions about architects into sharp relief. There is a glittering opportunity for architects to thrive in this new context, but to do it we must adapt; and to adapt, we need clarity about what our clients think of us and where they see room for improvement.

That is why this report is so welcome. It sets out the results of the RIBA's inaugural 'Working with Architects' survey. For the first time, it quantifies how satisfied clients are with architects.

It is part of an ongoing research initiative led by the RIBA's Client Liaison Group, and builds on the evidence summarised in their much applauded 'Client & Architect: developing the essential relationship' report published in 2015.

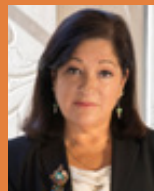
The survey asked real clients about their experiences of working with architects on their projects. Their everyday experiences define our reputation, and this matters. Reputation colours attitudes even before an architect walks into a room and sets the tone for working relationships. If it is poor, it could stand in the way of the kind of collaboration required in today's highly complex, fragmented, and increasingly sophisticated project environments.

That is why this survey is so important. We of course want our clients to have satisfying and fruitful experiences of working with us. Ultimately, the design quality of our built environment is at stake, and our clients deserve the best.

I am cheered to see many good ratings in the results, but it is the anomalies and poorer ratings that provide the clues we need to adapt to develop our future relationships. Contractors are a distinct market segment, but their satisfaction ratings for our process management skills fell below our self-imposed baseline. The next step is to respond positively with training and support. We also need to establish best methods for the RIBA to monitor how effectively we are improving over time.

For individual practices, the survey results provide very powerful evidence to underpin strategic marketing and training plans. Knowing the lie of the land helps you prepare the best management techniques to avoid difficulties with client relationships.

The implications of this report are brave and far-reaching. It is the start, I hope, of a new era in the relationship between clients and architects. As Paul Nash, CIOB President, intimates on page 17, it may even spur other professions to examine how they are perceived. Most importantly, it presents unprecedented opportunities to continue to improve. Let's seize them.



Jane Duncan
RIBA President
Jane Duncan Architects Ltd

About the survey

Conducted from May to July 2016, the survey received responses from 958 clients. Roughly a third were private domestic clients; a third were contractors; and a third were commercial clients.

It asked clients how satisfied they were with various aspects of the service they received from designers on an actual project. The vast majority used Registered Architects, most of whom were also RIBA members.

The satisfaction measures were rated on a five-point scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. Questions sought ratings about both the completed building and the designers' process management. Overall scores measured general level of satisfaction, value for money, and asked whether the clients were likely to use architects again given their experience.

Interpretation

We use the term 'architects' throughout this report to refer to non-architect designers as well as Registered Architects. We feel that the term is unlikely to mislead since the vast majority - nine out of ten - respondents answered questions about Registered Architects. Where we distinguish between the performance of architects and non-architects, we make the distinction clear.

In any sample of responses there will always be outlier results, and this survey is no different. There were extremes of satisfaction, some good, some bad. Using mean averages throughout this analysis effectively irons out their potential to skew the conclusions we draw. Where the assumption does not apply, we say so. The most prominent example of this is the ratings from contractor clients, whose answers were so different that they have been treated as a separate market segment.

Just because two things correlate does not mean that one causes the other. But it might do, and that is powerful. The most interesting correlations uncovered in this research are explored in this report.

In the absence of previous data, we established a baseline average threshold above which satisfaction ratings can be considered 'good'. This is defined as 50% of clients being 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their architect. Thus, any satisfaction scores over that threshold can be considered good. The more percentage points over the threshold, the better the score, and vice versa.

By definition, these results are biased because the answers relied on for analysis reflect client opinion, not fact.

The survey questions were deliberately phrased to encourage clients to give honest feedback and to focus on where there is room for improvement. The purpose of the survey was not to seek praise but to learn how architects can continuously improve their services to clients.

“Requiring a person to complete an attitude questionnaire often causes the person to construct an attitude where none existed prior to attitude measurement”

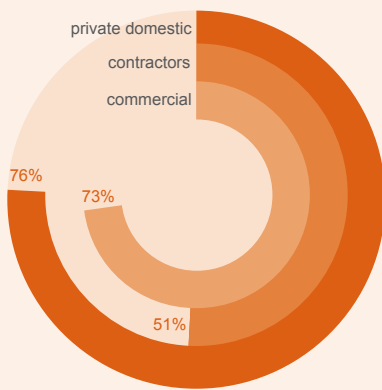
BUDD, RICHARD J. (1987) RESPONSE BIAS AND THE THEORY OF REASONED ACTION IN SOCIAL COGNITION

Executive summary



Key findings

The survey results are from 958 client participants. A third private domestic clients, a third contractors, and a third commercial clients. The expectations of private domestic clients who use an architect for one-off projects will be very different compared to commercial clients and contractors who work regularly with architects.



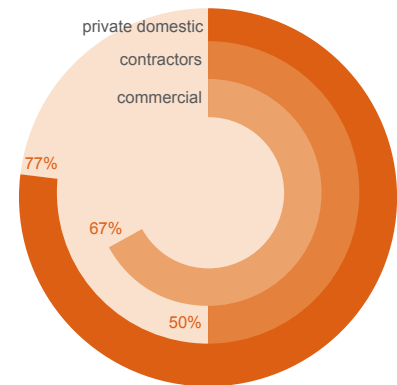
Clients are pleased with their project, overall

Most clients are satisfied with their buildings. Highest scores come from private domestic clients, 76 per cent of whom are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the project, overall. Contractors give the lowest satisfaction scores.

◀ Per cent of clients who are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the project, overall

Architects' design skills are highly rated ...

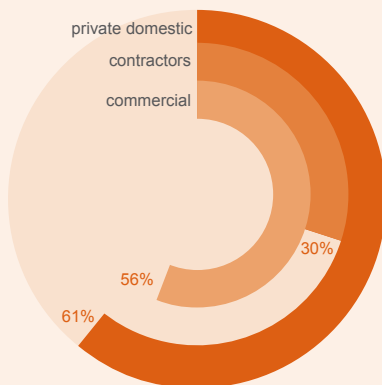
Clients appreciate their projects' aesthetic and other design qualities (such as levels of daylight, room dimensions, ease of circulation, and so on) and their architects' ability to meet the brief. Private domestic clients are more satisfied with architects on all counts than contractor or commercial clients.



▶ Per cent of clients who are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with architects' technical design performance (mean average of all scores)

... but managing the process is less well rated

Although clients give architects good ratings for some aspects of the process - interpreting client needs, explaining and communicating - clients are less satisfied with other aspects of architects' process management - architects' commercial understanding, adding value, adhering to the programme and managing work. Contractors give substantially lower satisfaction scores than other clients.

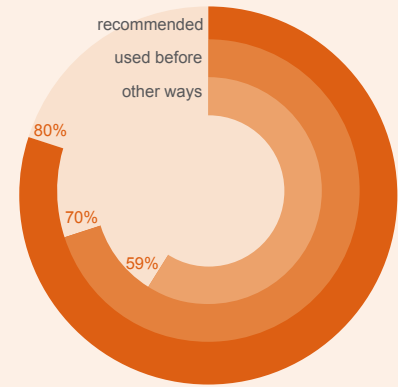


▶ Per cent of clients who are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with architects' process management performance (mean average of all scores)

Architects selected personally are more highly rated

It seems that clients are more satisfied when there is a personal element in the way they selected their architect. In other words, architects selected through personal recommendation or because the client had used them before were rated significantly higher than architects selected in other ways, such as advertisement, framework or via novation on a design & build project.

Per cent of clients who are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with architects' design performance (mean average of all scores)



Confirmed correlations

Examining the survey data reveals some expected, and unexpected, correlations:

- ▶ **Architects are more highly rated than non-architects**
The proportion of clients who are 'very' satisfied with the job is higher amongst those who used an architect than a non-architect. Architects achieve higher client satisfaction ratings in all performance measures, and satisfaction is particularly higher for developing and interpreting the brief.
[see page 18](#)
- ▶ **Follow-up rated highly**
Architects who followed up after the end of the project when not contracted to do so were even more highly rated than architects who were. Both were rated significantly higher than architects who did not follow up.
[see *How was it for you?* on page 24](#)
- ▶ **Contractors less satisfied**
The survey includes responses from all types of clients. Ultimately, the largest difference in client perception is not between private domestic and commercial clients as you might expect, but between contractor clients and everyone else.
[see *Dance in step with contractors* and *Close the expectation gap* on pages 16 and 17](#)

You have to break eggs to make an omelette

Architects need to listen and respond to client feedback to seize future opportunities, says Nigel Ostime

The best architecture generally derives from the best client–architect relationships, and these relationships come out of trust generated through openness and integrity, as well as shared values and goals.

We established the RIBA Client Liaison Group in 2013 with the aim of making the Institute more outward-facing. We wanted to provide a forum to hear views directly from clients and, critically, a vehicle to feed ideas and initiatives from the Institute back to them. We didn't want to be just a talking shop. We wanted to provide architects with the means to improve their offer and to help pick up more work. And to improve, you have to measure.

This survey follows on from the roundtables we held in 2014–16 and the findings summarised in the 2015 'Client & Architect' report. It is the most significant exercise we have undertaken to date but our work is aimed at continuous improvement, so there is always more to do.

Architects are by and large attracted to the profession by the hope of producing good work and making a contribution to the built environment rather than with a view to running a business. This means that many are better equipped to perform the creative, problem-solving aspects of the work than the commercial and process-related ones.

In 'Client & Architect' we identified five factors that clients want us to focus on:

- Championing the vision
- Listening and understanding
- Engaging with people
- Delivering technical talent
- Learning and improving

The survey results broadly validate these points but in particular are telling the profession that it needs to improve its commercial understanding and implement more consistent project processes – the 'services that wrap around the design process'.

We now need to follow through and demonstrate that we can implement the changes clients are calling for. The RIBA has a range of initiatives designed to help do this and they are set out on page 25. Please make use of them.

But we must also celebrate the good outcomes from the survey. Architects are rightly credited with unique skills in creativity and in developing great design solutions. The product is good but the way we get there needs some attention.

So have we done the right thing in asking these searching questions? We have previously said that the RIBA must 'radiate trust, knowledge, advice and understanding' and we think the profession is robust enough to take the more challenging responses the survey has thrown up. Indeed there would be little point in just asking what we do well. This survey confirms our strengths as well as demonstrating a maturity and willingness to accept that there is room for improvement. As the old adage goes, the only thing we can be certain of in the future is change. By testing the water every couple of years this survey will help to keep the profession in touch with developing trends and stay ahead of the curve. We hope you agree.



Nigel Ostime

Chair, RIBA Client Liaison Group
Hawkins\Brown

What clients think architects do well



The survey measured clients' opinions about 18 different criteria, as well as how clients rate the outcome of the project overall. We have split clients into three groups - private domestic clients, contractors, and all other commercial clients.

Ratings are shown in Table 2-1; we have highlighted (in orange) the highest levels of 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied clients for each of the satisfaction criteria. Contractors are consistently less satisfied than private domestic or commercial clients. Chart 2-1 on the following page shows the balance between satisfied and dissatisfied clients for the eight top-rated criteria. This chart excludes clients who gave a 'neutral' rating.

Satisfaction with the finished project is high

Clients are highly satisfied with the end product. Two thirds of clients are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the project, overall. They recognise that architects contribute strongly to making good end product that meets their needs and requirements. Satisfaction is particularly high among private domestic clients, 76 per cent of whom are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied.

For private domestic clients, satisfaction actually increases in line with the size of job; 48 per cent of private domestic clients whose job cost less than £100,000 are 'very' satisfied, rising to 75 per cent of those with jobs costing more than £500,000. Satisfaction is also very high among commercial clients with office, residential and heritage/cultural projects.

Table 2-1

Client satisfaction ratings, per cent 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied

per cent 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied	type of client			ALL
	private domestic	contractors	commercial	
OVERALL	76	51	73	66
TECHNICAL DESIGN PERFORMANCE				
aesthetic qualities of project	78	64	78	73
project meets brief	78	52	54	67
effect project has on function of building	79	49	72	66
other design qualities of project	75	56	68	66
effect project has on maintenance of building	73	29	62	54
PROCESS MANAGEMENT				
developing / interpreting the brief	69	46	68	61
explaining design proposals	66	36	66	56
communicating with client	59	43	65	55
understanding client needs	68	36	60	54
collaborating with the project team	61	36	56	50
managing their work	63	27	60	49
technical design spec	n/a	30	60	45
managing the handover process	55	30	51	44
efficiency of admin	51	26	54	43
adhering to programme	55	18	50	40
data management approach	n/a	31	42	36
commercial understanding	n/a	16	49	32
value adding activities	n/a	17	49	32

“The excellent layout and design has significantly helped to attract more customers to purchase goods from our museum shop”

PUBLIC SECTOR, HERITAGE

Clients are pleased with aesthetics

The projects' aesthetic qualities are the top-rated attribute. 73 per cent of all client respondents and 78 per cent of private domestic clients are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with architects' performance in this respect. Very few are dissatisfied. It seems clients recognise that architects excel at delivering their core service: design quality.

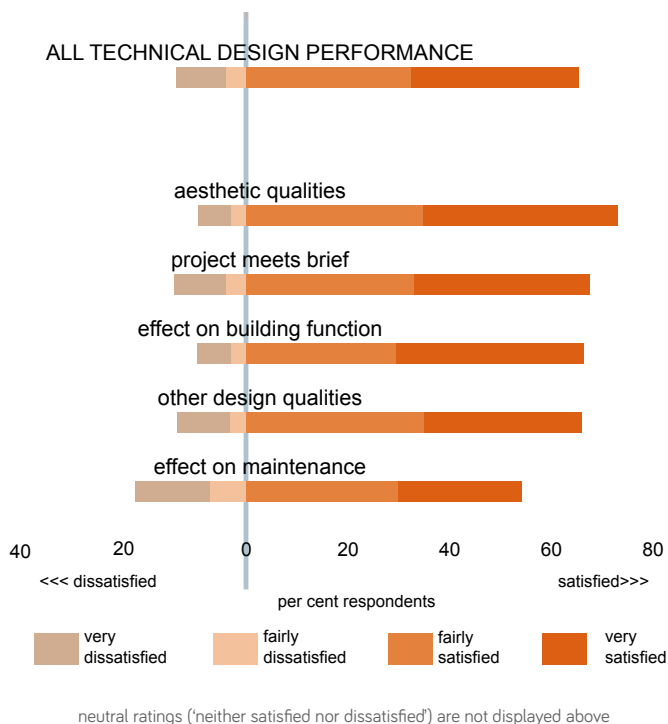
The most satisfied clients are those with private sector projects: commercial, residential and office projects. In fact, clients with office projects gave a 95 per cent satisfaction rating ('very' or 'fairly' satisfied) for their aesthetic qualities.

“We were so pleased with the great experience and vision of [our] architects – we would do it again”

PRIVATE DOMESTIC, HOMEOWNER

Chart 2-1

Client satisfaction ratings, ranked in descending order of 'very'/'fairly' satisfied: technical design performance attributes



Architects are good at meeting the brief

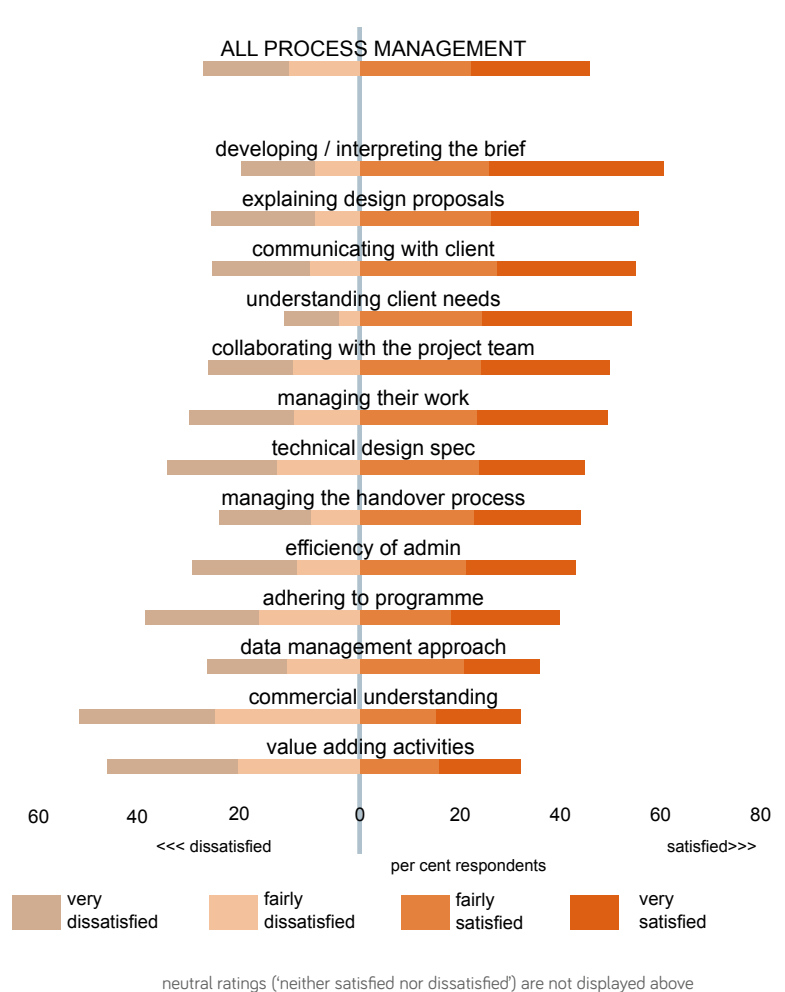
Clients are very pleased with how architects develop the brief; how well the project meets the brief; its other design qualities; and the effect the project has on the function of the building. About two thirds of clients are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with these aspects, including at least three quarters of private domestic clients.

“The architect [was able to] creatively transform [our] aspirations ... into a realisable and deliverable project”

PUBLIC SECTOR, EDUCATION

Chart 2-2

Client satisfaction ratings, ranked in descending order of 'very'/'fairly' satisfied: process management attributes



“[The architects] communicated my vision and expectations in a very clear manner”

DEVELOPER, INDUSTRIAL

Key skills of interpreting needs, explaining and communicating are rated highly

Clients are also satisfied that architects understand their needs, explain their design proposals well, communicate well and collaborate well with the rest of the design team. At least 50 per cent of clients are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied here. Private domestic and commercial clients other than contractors give architects the highest scores. Clients with health, heritage and office projects are the most impressed.

Benefits of using an architect

Several respondents highlight what they see as the benefits of using an architect, and in particular, how using an architect has benefited their business.

The ability to turn an idea into a reality is admired, with one client commenting that their architect "communicated my vision and expectations in a very clear manner". Clients recognise that architects' designs affect user behaviour. One said that their architect's design improved their workspace and "increased employee engagement", while another noted their architect's designs "raised staff awareness of areas such as circulation, DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliance, health and safety, etc."

Clients say architects help them develop new ways of looking at a building. One commented that they now have "more appreciation of [the] value of good quality materials, attention to detail, raised standards generally of care of building". Another said, "It has given us a focus on place-making and the importance of good, functional and pleasing design".

Some clients feel that a well-designed building can enhance the image of a company. One reports that the "overall image/quality of facilities [is] attractive for income generation". Another says the building has benefited the company's "brand awareness and marketing".

Some clients express a concern that the high standards of quality of service at the early stages of design are not followed through to the same standard at later stages during the construction stage.

"Using an architect increased the regard for our business's approach to design quality"

DEVELOPER, RESIDENTIAL

Photographer: Bircan Tulga



Good briefing in, good building out

Learn the language, consider the users, and demand an engaged client. Most of all, pinpoint the value, says Stephen Hodder

Good news: architects are pretty good at briefing. Here are the headlines: a healthy two thirds of private domestic and commercial clients are satisfied by how their architects developed the brief. Even more – three quarters – are satisfied that the finished building met the brief.

Briefing is demanding. It requires compromise and expectation management. Balancing client ambition against stakeholder needs, user requirements, budget, programme, planning and design is no easy feat.

The theory goes that if a brief delivers a building, then a great brief delivers a great building. This is how architects add value for clients. We turn briefs into great briefs. It sets the pattern for how projects unfold, and is the reason why the RIBA is currently piloting a Briefing Toolkit.

Think about how architects coordinate lots of conflicting pressures for optimum benefit. Was it possible to design a building? Yes. Was it possible to design a cheaper building and secure planning permission for homes on that site to open in two years' time? No. That's added value.

What lessons should we draw from the survey? It's easy to leap to simplistic conclusions and rest on our briefing laurels. But of course it's far more complicated than that.

First, contractor clients are significantly less satisfied than others. As a major source of work for architects, this is disappointing. We should ask why.

Novation might be skewing results. The briefing process is often largely concluded by the time architects are novated to the contractor. Another issue is to do with clashing motivations. While architects are minded to consider a wide spectrum of concerns, contractors' contractual focus is narrower. Perhaps it's a matter of speaking your client's language. After all, their objectives ought to entirely overlap.

There are other wrinkles in the data. Despite being generally happy with architects' brief development, fewer than half were 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied that they added value. This is unexpected, and highlights the obstinate need not just to define value, but to pinpoint how it is created. There's a big role for the RIBA here.

Elsewhere, clients in certain sectors – education, for example – were distinctly less happy with the overall briefing than others. Health sector clients bucked the trend by being very satisfied with how their architect developed the brief but much less satisfied that the building met their brief.

There are probably a number of forces at work here. Perhaps the relative complexity and specific language of certain kinds of buildings makes the briefing process or meeting the brief that much tougher. The same is true for health buildings, with the added nuance that the user profile is so varied that their needs can never be fully anticipated. Aware of these issues, we insist on having a named individual to work hand-in-glove with us on our projects. It's not just the architect: successful briefing also needs an engaged client.

These results are gold dust. What better evidence is there than direct feedback from the people who commission buildings, use them, and pay our fees? Architects should turn it to their advantage. Just as important, the RIBA's member support should take account of it.



Stephen R Hodder MBE

Client Ambassador, Past President RIBA
Hodder + Partners

What clients think architects could do better

3

Clients see room for improvement in architects' commercial understanding

A majority of clients think architects need to improve their understanding of commercial drivers. The score is made higher by contractor clients, but even without their influence about one third of commercial clients are not satisfied with architects' commercial understanding.

Commercial understanding and adding value are the only areas rated for satisfaction where more clients are dissatisfied than satisfied. The larger the project contract value, the more dissatisfied clients are.

Adhering to the programme

Clients readily acknowledge that programme delays can be caused by a variety of external factors beyond the control of the architect. Over half of clients are satisfied with architects' ability to adhere to the programme. This figure is reduced by contractors' negative scores, two thirds of whom are dissatisfied.

“Despite good conceptual understanding and genuine insights into the way that we might arrange the spaces, the architect concerned was completely incapable of managing their workload or their client's expectations”

PRIVATE DOMESTIC, HOMEOWNER

Table 3-1

Client satisfaction ratings, per cent 'very' or 'fairly' dissatisfied

per cent 'very' or 'fairly' dissatisfied	type of client			ALL
	private domestic	contractors	commercial	
OVERALL	13	31	12	19
PROCESS MANAGEMENT				
commercial understanding	n/a	75	35	56
value adding activities	n/a	66	33	50
adhering to programme	30	66	30	43
technical design spec	n/a	56	20	38
managing their work	25	51	25	34
efficiency of admin	28	47	25	34
data management approach	n/a	37	22	30
collaborating with the project team	23	42	24	30
communicating with client	28	38	22	30
understanding client needs	19	42	26	30
managing the handover process	22	40	20	28
explaining design proposals	17	36	17	24
developing / interpreting the brief	18	27	20	22
TECHNICAL DESIGN PERFORMANCE				
effect project has on maintenance of building	11	22	12	15
project meets brief	14	19	10	14
other design qualities of project	14	14	13	14
effect project has on function of building	13	10	7	10
aesthetic qualities of project	11	9	8	10

“Too complex design and detailing, despite trying to get [the architects] to understand our commercial drivers, they were not able to temper the design”

CONTRACTOR

Managing work, administration, collaboration

The way architects manage their work, the efficiency of their administration, and the way they collaborated with other members of the project team emerge as areas where architects could improve, being negatives for about a quarter of commercial clients.

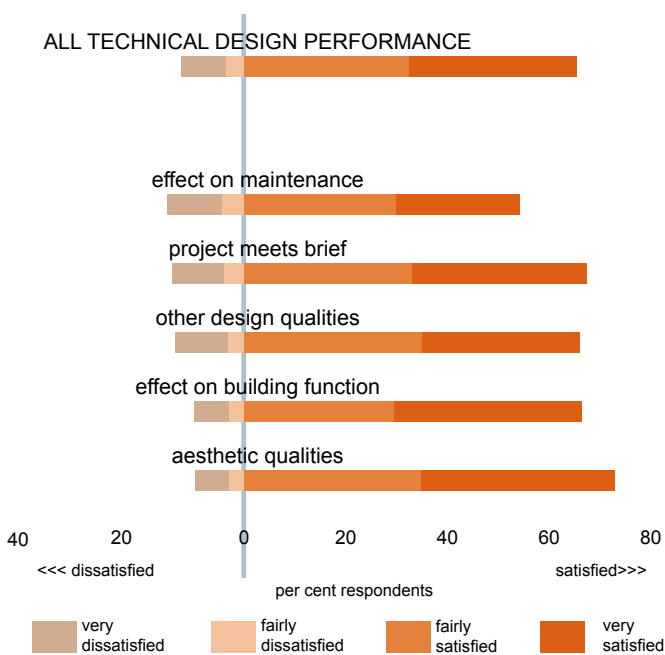
About half of contractors are dissatisfied with architects' ability to manage their work and the efficiency of their administration. Fewer clients – 30 per cent – are dissatisfied with architects' collaboration with the rest of the project team, but again for contractors this is a significant area of concern.

“Late information, lack of coordination, poor understanding of original brief, attempts to place all construction phase design in the CDP [Contractors' Design Portion]”

CONTRACTOR

Chart 3-1

Client satisfaction ratings, ranked in descending order of 'very'/'fairly' dissatisfied; technical design performance attributes



neutral ratings ('neither satisfied nor dissatisfied') are not displayed above

The technical design specification and BIM

A majority of clients are satisfied with these two criteria. Contractors make up a significant proportion of clients who are 'fairly' or 'very dissatisfied' with technical design compared to commercial clients.

Value for money

The majority of clients are satisfied with the value for money offered by architects, although half of contractors less so, with 47 per cent dissatisfied.

Chart 3-2

Client satisfaction ratings, ranked in descending order of 'very'/'fairly' dissatisfied; process management attributes



neutral ratings ('neither satisfied nor dissatisfied') are not displayed above

Budgets

Just under half (43 per cent) of projects in the survey exceeded their budgets, although this is not usually due to the architect. In only a fifth of cases where respondents explained why the budget had been exceeded did they say that this was due to the design or an architect's error.

Common reasons were unforeseen works, changes made by the client, or changes by someone else such as a builder. Unexpected complications when opening up historic buildings, the removal of asbestos and the discovery of archaeological remains were also reported as sources of budget overspend.

The most common reason given for budget overspend by commercial clients was 'briefing issues' - suggesting architects need to be clearer up-front if the client's expectations and brief do not match the budget. The process of the brief gradually exceeding the budget was often referred to by clients as 'design creep', and as much a client's responsibility as the architect's.

“The architect [was] very focused on visualisations and not build-able details as that is what they thought the client required as this was the service they had provided previously. This architect didn't have the required technical detailing that suited the fast-paced programme”

CONTRACTOR

TOP TIP:

Many projects go over budget, with architects sometimes perceived to be responsible. Avoid 'design creep' - by keeping the budget on the agenda when developing the brief and design proposals.

In some instances, however, it seems that the architect bears at least some responsibility. One client explained, “[The architect] ignored [the] budget to produce a publishable design, specifying expensive materials, [and the] inclusion of expensive elements that were not required”.

In commenting on the budget overspend, other criticisms emerged: “The project was over budget because we were given a design which was above budget even though they were aware of the constraints of the budget from the start of the process”.

TOP TIP:

Clients across the board are less satisfied with architects' process management than they are with their design expertise. Fix their perception by complementing your design workflow with best-practice process management techniques and attitudes to collaboration. Adopting the discipline of BIM Level 2 conventions is likely to help.

“[Architects] must understand the commerciality of what they are being asked to do. If I have a project budget of £10m, I do not expect a building designed to a construction cost of £10m”

DEVELOPER, EDUCATION

Dance in step with contractors

Identifying the crunch points in architects' relationship with contractors is the key to better project choreography, says Dale Sinclair

The satisfaction ratings from contractors are disappointing but no surprise. They were foreshadowed during the very first RIBA for Clients roundtable meeting with contractors in 2014, findings that were subsequently written up in our 2015 'Client & Architect' report.

Contractors agreed that architects were great at design but not so good at providing the wrapper around the design process, such as good design management. Contractors concluded that the design manager role would not have been created if issues around risk, information delivery and accuracy were properly considered by the design team. There was the sense that this had been a necessary evolution, but that the door was open for architects to reprise the role.

Architects need to consider a number of issues in response to contractors' comparatively low satisfaction ratings.

First, we need to address the crucial relationship between architects and specialist subcontractors at Stage 4, i.e. where the latter runs with the architect's design intent information (known as the Contractor's Design Portion on a traditional contract). In design and build procurement, the contractor takes responsibility for all aspects of the design. It is easy, therefore, to fall prey to the assumption that this alters the relationship between the design team and the specialist subcontractor, especially since it is not typically framed in appointment documents. In practice, of course, there is no difference. We urgently need to bring clarity to this topic to ensure our Stage 4 information is prepared appropriately.

The second issue is the lack of quality assurance processes, a portmanteau term for a number of pressing topics. They range from adequately checking detailing to the late issue of information or poor coordination of the design team's work.

A better understanding of the gremlins here, backed up with robust data on the specific issues involved, would allow improvement.

The third point is that as lead designer, architects need to produce better design programmes based on our detailed understanding of the iterative nature of design and knowledge of design dependencies. We need to learn how to communicate the status of our designs against the design programme more effectively. We should also improve our project management skills as lead designers in charge of the design team.

Architects frequently work for contractors after they have been novated to the role on design and build projects. As part of better conveying design status, novated architects need to disclose more detail on design risks with the contractor's perspective in mind. What aspects of the design are robust? Where is further design development required? What aspects of the design have still to be drawn? Explaining the rules-of-thumb underpinning our work would communicate our designs better and allow the project team to make more considered decisions about cost and risk.

BIM-driven industry-wide design responsibility matrixes would clarify many of these issues. We need to engage with contractors as valued clients to understand their concerns in greater detail. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is essential if we are to recalibrate our understanding of good Stage 4 deliverables and to learn how to better coordinate, record design status and lead our designs to a satisfactory conclusion.



Dale Sinclair

RIBA Ambassador for
Collaboration and Technical Advancement
CIC BIM Champion
Director, AECOM

Close the expectation gap

Contractors want architects to acknowledge risk as the key to better working relationships, says Paul Nash

With a background in both the contracting and consultancy sides of the industry, Paul Nash has worked closely with architects at all stages of the project lifecycle, from inception to completion. In this interview he lends his insights into why contractors are so different from other kinds of client. And as the current President of the CIOB, his views carry extra weight.

Since it seems to go to the heart of the issue, where and how do you think that architects add value?

The dynamic between the architect's ability to get under the skin of the client, develop the brief, unlock the potential of a site and work the planning system is exceptional. It requires real skill and creates value.

In my view their role becomes more problematic later on when the design has to turn into a set of information that can be procured and delivered by contractors.

Contractors' satisfaction ratings in this survey are consistently much lower than other kinds of clients'. Why?

There's an expectation gap between what architects do best and what contractors want them to do. The contracting side is all about risk management. Contractors give their clients a guarantee and sign a contract based on a fixed date of completion and a fixed price. Where it is reasonable to do so, they want to reduce, remove or transfer that risk. It's a huge generalisation, but I'm not convinced that architects understand this. But it is key to explaining some of the behaviours we see in project teams.

Theodore Levitt famously said that clients buy quarter-inch holes, not quarter-inch drill bits. It captures an important concept. Buildings are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Too often I think we lose sight of that when designing buildings.



Paul Nash
CIOB President
Turner & Townsend

Do you implicate contracts?

Contracts bear closer scrutiny. They demand a robust set of information that defines the product. But by its nature, design development is an iterative process. Maybe the architect is trying to achieve the best outcome for the client, but the contractor just wants drawings and specifications that they can price up. We have to draw a line somewhere or we'll never build anything.

It's not just contracts, though. Our industry is still too siloed. Collaboration is the key to breaking down these silos but in practice we still have a long way to go. BIM is a step in the right direction but does not necessarily promote collaboration. What is needed is education, particularly in the softer skills that underpin collaborative behaviours.

The CIOB has supported the RIBA's past and current client engagement initiative. What do you think of its approach?

The RIBA has turned a mirror on the architectural profession and that is to be applauded. It is important always to ask whether you could improve. But the research cannot stop here. The CIOB is keen to keep collaborating with the RIBA, perhaps even asking architects what they think of contractors. It could only improve mutual understanding.

How do you think architects would respond?

I suspect some architects would say that all that contractors are interested in is driving down the cost at the expense of quality.

Genuinely, I think contractors do understand this point. However, they operate in a boom-bust industry, and are keenly interested in profit and loss.

In my experience architects don't sit comfortably in this hard-edged commercial world. Part of me is thankful for that. We need people willing to champion the built environment legacy for future generations.

What affects clients' opinions

4

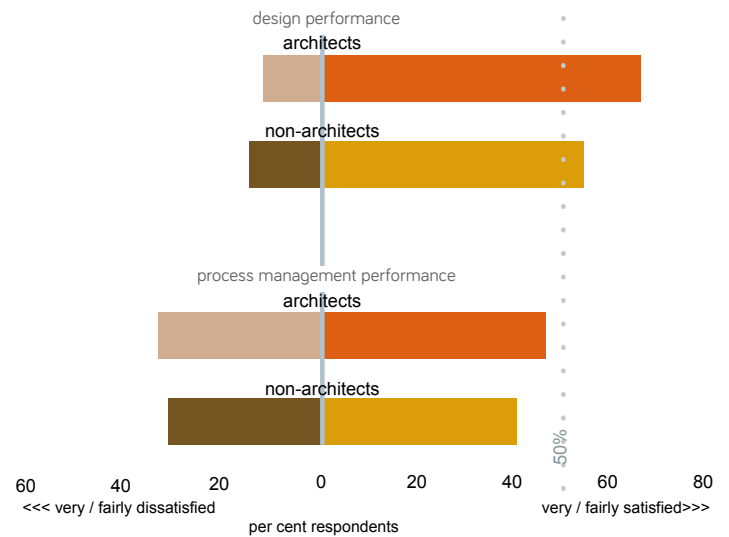
Architects are rated higher than non-architects

About nine out of ten clients used a Registered Architect. This proportion is slightly higher among private domestic clients than commercial clients. Significantly more clients are 'very' satisfied with their project when using an architect than when using a non-architect. Satisfaction is higher for all performance measures, including a particularly large difference between architects and non-architects for developing and interpreting the brief (62 per cent of architect clients are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied compared with 45 per cent for non-architects).

The charts in this section show the balance between positive and negative satisfaction scores for design performance and process management performance.

Chart 4-1

Client satisfaction ratings, by whether an architect or a non-architect was used



neutral ratings ('neither satisfied nor dissatisfied') are not displayed above

Photographer: Alice Masters



Contractors are the most critical clients, by far

There is consistently a significant gap between the average satisfaction ratings by contractors compared to all other types of client. For the overall design and aesthetic ratings, the proportion of contractors rating 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied is about 10 percentage points less than other clients. The divergence grows to between 15 and 20 percentage points for ratings of architects' process management.

Clearly, there is critical difficulty in the relationship between architects and contractors.

“It’s very difficult to work with an architecture company who has been novated to us. Even though we’re their client and paying for them, their allegiance lies with our client”

CONTRACTOR, OFFICES

TOP TIP:

Contractor clients are a great source of repeat work but are much less satisfied with architects than are other kinds of client. Recognise that contractors value different aspects of an architect's skills and put the budget, efficiency, accuracy, buildability and timeliness centre-stage.

Selecting an architect personally delivers higher satisfaction

Architects who were personally recommended to clients received higher satisfaction ratings compared to other selection methods. Projects where an architect was recommended to a client score highest for satisfaction, with 80 per cent 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the design, and 57 per cent satisfied with the architects' process management. Although satisfaction is slightly lower among those who had used the architect before, it is significantly so for clients who selected their architect in a different, potentially less personal, way.

Chart 4-2

Client satisfaction ratings, by main type of client

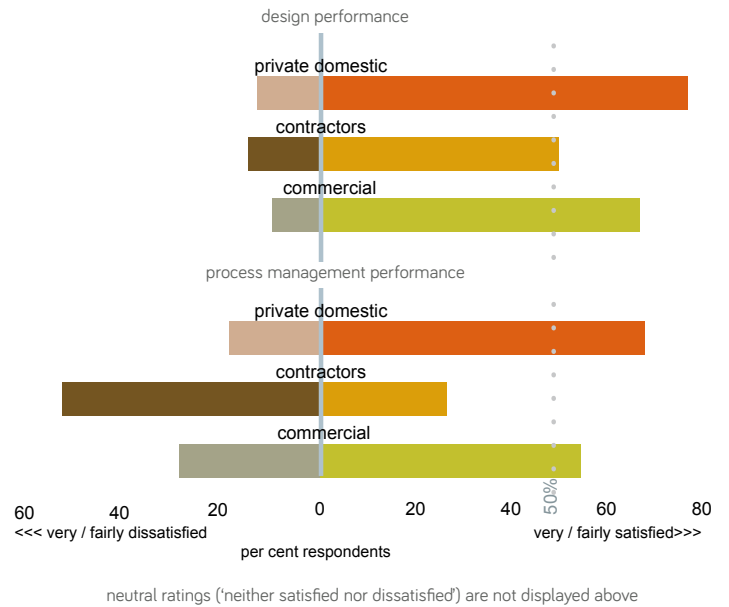
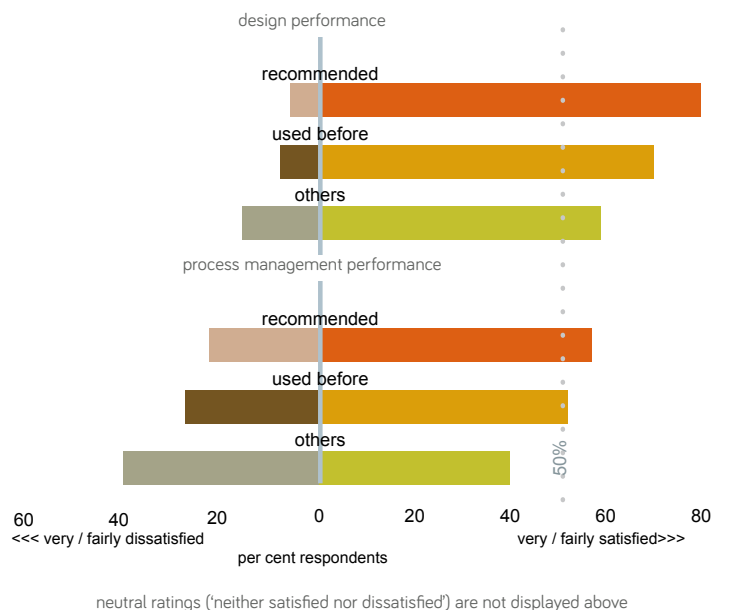


Chart 4-3

Client satisfaction ratings, by how client selected their architect



Following up after completion leads to higher client satisfaction

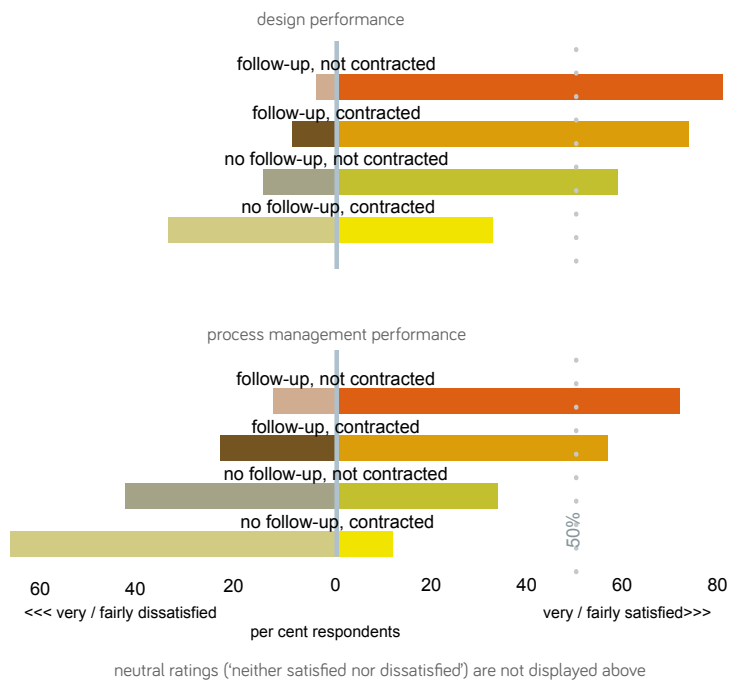
There is a direct positive relationship between client satisfaction and whether an architect followed up after completion. Both design satisfaction scores and process management scores are improved when a follow-up visit has occurred. The improvement for process management scores is particularly marked after a follow-up. The most favourable satisfaction ratings were achieved on projects where the architect was not contracted to follow-up but did so anyway. Satisfaction ratings here cover an unusually wide range – from over 60 per cent dissatisfied to over 80 per cent satisfied.

TOP TIP:

Following up on the project – particularly when not contracted to – provides clients with a consistent level of service and demonstrates that the architect recognises a successful project is one that works for the client in-use. When half of all architects' work comes from personal recommendations or previous experience, it pays to follow up on projects as a matter of good strategic commercial sense.

Chart 4-4

Client satisfaction ratings, by whether the architect followed up after completion and whether the architect was contracted to follow up



Photographer: Alice Masters



Implications and opportunities

5

The main findings of the survey more or less meet expectations. Broadly speaking, they confirm the perceptions revealed in the 2015 'Client & Architect' report. Clients like the effect of architects' work on the end product but see room for improvement in the way they do it.

However, hidden in the detail are important correlations that are genuinely eye-catching.

Contractors are the most critical group but potentially offer good prospects for repeat business

Contractors appear to have distinctly different priorities compared to other clients. Not unreasonably given that they often join the procurement stream late, driving down costs and getting the job done may be the most important factors for them.

There is a central paradox, though. While contractors rate architects less highly, they are one of the most likely client groups to use architects again. 52 per cent are 'very likely' to use architects again; just 3 per cent are 'very unlikely' to.

In fact, with architects so frequently novated, contractors often do not have any choice in the matter. Indeed, this is borne out in the findings. Some contractors complained that architects appear more loyal to their pre-novation client.

This is less a question of professional integrity but highlights the challenge of adapting to different client priorities after novation. As repeat customers, contractors are an important source of work. Their concerns are critically important. Tackling their misgivings head on could make you stand out in the market, potentially a sound investment for future business success.

Following up is good for business

In the context of a profession which very largely depends on repeat custom and word-of-mouth recommendations for its commissions, it should come as no surprise that following up with clients is important. Until now, though, there was little evidence to demonstrate how dramatic an effect it has.

It seems that the customer service mantra applies to architectural practice. Following up on a project, especially when architects are not contracted to do so, correlates to significantly higher client satisfaction ratings. The converse is true, too. Not following-up, especially if having previously agreed or promised to do so, correlates to negative lasting impressions in clients.

The implications for practice are immediate and urgent. Even where there is no Stage 7 or other after-service work commissioned, it almost certainly pays to follow up anyway.

"He said he would like to call from time to time as he lives around the corner to see how things were progressing but he never did"

PRIVATE HOMEOWNER

Keep budgets under control

43 per cent of projects went over budget. Despite the unavoidable risks inherent in construction, this figure is still high. There is a tendency among some clients to blame architects. While some survey comments exonerated architects when budgets were exceeded, others were not so forgiving.

Architects who put the budget centre-stage will potentially have a significant positive impact on how they perform, differentiating themselves in the market. The 2015 'Client & Architect' report described this as treating cost as "the grit in the oyster".

Possible strategies are varied. Use the briefing process – something clients think architects do well – to manage clients' budget expectations. Avoid what clients describe as "design creep", i.e. increasing the scope of the design beyond the brief and budget. And demonstrate a firm control of budgets throughout the delivery phase by doing what you promised when you promised it.

Realise that the clients' priorities may be different - commercial understanding is more important to clients

As much as design quality, completing on time, within budget and with the fewest possible issues are extremely important value-preserving benefits for clients, particularly commercial clients. Clients gave many examples of how their architects added value: opening up unused space; attracting new occupiers into premises; enhancing the client's branding; improving staff or visitor engagement. Despite this, only a minority of clients acknowledge that architects add value.

Adding value is the flip-side of sticking to the budget, but should not be at the expense of the budget – unless evidenced, encouraged by the client and affordable. Demonstrating an empathy and understanding of these factors throughout the project has the potential to help increase client satisfaction.

Following up on the project of course allows you to gauge the extent to which intended value-adds actually bear fruit.

"Our signature building has won awards and indirectly advertises our business"

PRIVATE SECTOR, HEALTH

"The success of the project and the impression it has created has raised our service profile with a range of stake holders"

PUBLIC SECTOR, HERITAGE

Demonstrate that architects offer value for money

About one third of clients are dissatisfied with the extent to which architects offer value for money. Aspects of architects' service that clients are very satisfied with appear not to feature in their value for money calculation.

This is possibly because the work happens early on and clients forget. It is also possible that the fact that architects' process management skills are weaker overshadows their design skills.

Either way, there is work to be done to make the case for architects' value for money. A good way to do so is to reinforce the message during follow-up meetings, and, eventually, to cite robust evidence from previous projects.

TOP TIP:

The work of architects is often not thought to add much value by commercial clients. Agree to demonstrate the values of your service up front, address them throughout the project, and appraise your success afterwards. Build up a convincing body of evidence.

Photographer: Alice Masters



How was it for you?

Post-completion follow-up creates value that pays for itself, argues Ben Derbyshire

Why follow up? According to the survey results, because clients like it. Unsurprisingly, clients like it when their architect checks how the building is performing after completion. They like it even more when there is no contractual obligation to do so.

What clients expect from their architect's follow-up varies. It can be a simple chat over a cup of tea about the new house extension or a more sophisticated post-occupancy evaluation (POE) with a significant cost attached.

Either way, these are processes that it pays to build into your business development budget. It will encourage your clients to recommend you to others or to use your services again, both also correlated with high satisfaction ratings. What's more, the knowledge gained ought to improve the quality of advice and outcomes of successive projects, setting up a virtuous feedback loop to help the profession to thrive.

The survey comments were telling. One client said their architect promised to pop round to see how they were getting on. He never did, no doubt destroying his chances of a personal recommendation. Another said their architect abandoned them as soon as they had photos for their website, suggesting more interest in promotion and peer approval than the thing that matters to clients: performance in use.

Architects say they would do more POE if clients were willing to pay. But we must move to a model of practice where the costs are built in to the fee. Since this report tells us that after-service care adds to clients' satisfaction ratings, surely it can be translated into value that deserves commensurate remuneration? We should discuss POE early, include a minimal service as part of the basic offer, and present the potential advantages of more thoroughgoing POE as bolt-on options. Done comprehensively and in collaboration with other professionals, word-of-mouth endorsement is sure to follow.

By following up we can learn how to improve technical design. Just as important is to discuss - with the contractor as well as the client - what went well or badly during the management of the project. It shows professional integrity and a commitment to continuous improvement.

It is tempting to think that improvements will come by working with a different team: a better engineer, a more knowledgeable cost consultant, a more understanding client, or a more organised contractor. But this is to misunderstand the nature of the industry. Procurement behaviour is aimed at low cost more than best value, and the next time will be no different unless the designer takes on the responsibility of leading the design team.

So let's build on the sensible provisions of Stage 7 of the RIBA Plan of Work:

- Undertake in-use services in accordance with schedule of services.
- Conclude activities listed in handover strategy, including POE, review of project performance, project outcomes and R&D aspects.
- Update project information as required in response to ongoing client feedback until the end of the building's life.
- Update 'as-constructed' information in response to ongoing client feedback and maintenance or operational developments.

Doing so can only boost already high levels of client satisfaction. It will also trigger the feedback loop of experience that we need as professionals to build a body of knowledge that our clients value, and which they will therefore pay for. This, surely, is the bedrock of ethical practice and, indeed, our professional future.



Ben Derbyshire
RIBA President Elect
Chair, HTA Design LLP

Additional guidance and support

RIBA for Clients Phase One Client Feedback

Summary articles and filmed interviews by client sector
Download the report for free *Client & Architect – developing the essential relationship*
www.architecture.com

Recommended Reading

Being an Effective Construction Client, Peter Ullathorne
BIM for Construction Clients, Richard Saxon
BIM in Small Practices: Illustrated case studies, Robert Klaschka
BIM Demystified 2nd edition, Steve Race
www.ribabookshops.com

RIBA Plan of Work Guides

- Contract Administration, Ian Davies
- Design Management, Dale Sinclair
- Health and Safety, Peter Caplehorn
- Information Exchanges, Richard Fairhead
- Project Leadership, Nick Willars
- Sustainability, Sandy Halliday and Richard Atkins
- Town Planning, Ruth Reed

RIBA Plan of Work Stage Guides

- Briefing – Stages 7, 0 and 1, Paul Fletcher and Hilary Satchwell
 - Design – Stages 2 and 3, Tim Bailey
 - Construction – Stages 4, 5 and 6, Phil Holden
- www.ribabookshops.com

RIBA Contracts

RIBA Domestic Building Contract (suitable for work being carried out on the customer's home including renovations, extensions, maintenance and new buildings)
RIBA Concise Building Contract (suitable for all types of simple commercial building work)
www.ribacontracts.com

RIBA Agreements

Create your Agreements online
www.ribabookshops.com

RIBA CPD Programme

Core curriculum (external management)
www.architecture.com

On Briefing

Briefing & Evaluation Toolkit (currently being piloted)*

On POE

(POE) Achieving the right outcomes
Download the RIBA POE/BPE Primer
www.architecture.com

CIC Design Quality Indicator
www.cic.org.uk

BCO Guide to POE
www.bco.org.uk

Benchmark workplace effectiveness
www.leesmanindex.com

Useful Links

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/homes-and-communities-agency
www.hbf.co.uk
www.housingforum.org.uk
www.building-knowledge.info
www.bre.co.uk

What the RIBA is doing to help

The first phase of the RIBA for Clients initiative has helped to inform the CPD core curriculum and to initiate new guidance, toolkits and other initiatives to support members, including:

- a 10 point guide to POE: Achieving the right outcomes;
- the Briefing & Evaluation Toolkit*;
- an update to A Client's Guide to Engaging an Architect (two versions are planned, one for domestic and one for commercial projects).

We are currently piloting the RIBA Clients into Schools initiative, where we introduce clients to work with students of architecture, delivering feedback through lectures, seminars and design workshops.

Find an Architect, the RIBA's online directory helps clients search for a Chartered Practice that is right for their project. The RIBA provides a client referrals service and a competition service – both tailored to meet clients' needs.

www.architecture.com

Many people have been involved in this project.

Thank you to the clients who have given us their feedback and to the CIOB, the RICS, Constructing Excellence, Home Owners Alliance, and Media 10, organisers of Grand Designs Live and UK Construction Week, for promoting the 2016 'Working with Architects' survey.

Thank you to the RIBA President Jane Duncan; and RIBA President Elect Ben Derbyshire for their contributions to the project.

Special thanks to the RIBA Client Liaison Group:

Nigel Ostime (chair), Hawkins\Brown;
Stephen Hodder MBE, Hodder + Partners;
Caspar Rodgers, Alma-nac;
Dale Sinclair, Aecom;
Ayo Allu, Berkeley Group;
Matt Thompson, communications consultant;
and the RIBA team, Linda Stevens, Madison Taylor, Christopher Thorp and Kat Martindale.

“Here it is: our end-of-term report card. Design: tick. Budget: okay with room for improvement. Delivery: could do better. So back in practice let’s examine our management techniques, work with clients to improve processes that reflect their needs not ours, and then let’s check again to measure how we’ve improved. That’s got to be good for client businesses and, as a consequence, ours.”

TIM BAILEY,
PARTNER, XSITE ARCHITECTURE LLP

“Our clients, and society at large, need to know that we architects are prepared to take a long hard look at what we offer, and how it is perceived by them. We need to do this at the level of each individual project and in this report the profession is opening itself to feedback at an Institutional level. No one and nobody should be above continuous improvement. The issue now is how we respond in practice and at the Institute. I look forward to playing my part in both as a practitioner and in due course, as President.”

BEN DERBYSHIRE, RIBA PRESIDENT ELECT,
CHAIR, HTA DESIGN LLP

“The report throws up some trends which on the face of it, look like cause for concern. After closer review the results reveal a potential area for improvement for both architects and their clients, which can only be achieved by closer collaboration.”

AYO ALLU,
HEAD OF TECHNICAL, BERKELEY HOMES

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