Design quality and performance

Call for evidence

Buildings and places that meet the needs of their owners, users and of wider society – buildings that perform as predicted and create value, whether in terms of environmental performance value or social and cultural value – are something the industry strives for. The RIBA seeks to celebrate the work of those who lead the field – by publicising their buildings, the research related to them, and broader research on design quality and performance.

The information that researchers, architects, engineers, surveyors, and other built environment professionals in practice and academia hold is vitally important to the profession and industry. The RIBA is putting out a call to submit evidence on the issues related to design quality and performance to help us to map the knowledge landscape, and to provide built environment professionals with easy access to the current research. The evidence collected will help us to steer our work over the course of 2015 supporting the profession, developing guidance, identifying research gaps and working with funding partners.

The evidence we are interested in falls into the five broad categories below – measuring quality, creating value, avoiding pitfalls, whole-life and end of life, and case studies – but we will still welcome and accept evidence that doesn’t comfortably sit within them. Details about how to get in touch are at the end of this document.

To talk about design quality and performance we first need to understand what constitutes quality and value, and how performance might be measured.

We are interested in research, evidence and schemes that develop and use quality, value and performance indicators, including social and cultural value [1]. These might be measurable, objective or subjective; they may build on frameworks like the CABE ‘types of value’ [2]. They might be broad or extremely specific: we are interested in them all.

Predicting performance is important, but so is measuring it: we’d like to hear about methods of Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) and Building Performance Evaluation (BPE) and about schemes that have undertaken them.

We know that there are many barriers to widespread POE and BPE. Some are relatively well understood, others less so – and we would like to hear about them all, so we can work to overcome them.
Architects work with their clients to create architecture that delivers economic, social, cultural and environmental value, but our knowledge about how the skills of the profession contribute is incomplete.

We are interested in skills, strategies and processes that support the creation of good design and excellent performance. These might focus on a particular part of a project – briefing (based on a business case which may not lead to a new building, but a more beneficial use of an old one), design, procurement, construction, or the use of a building or place. It might encompass all the stages, as in Soft Landings [3] or might be related to other types of activities that architects undertake.

There will be many ways of working that support the creation of value, but a key one is client engagement, and we are keen to hear about projects where strategies such as working with an RIBA Client Advisor [4], early engagement of the full project team, ongoing client relationships and new business models, such as joint ventures have improved project outcomes.

In a complex industry it’s not surprising that there are pitfalls that can lead to poor design. But understanding them can help to reduce risk.

Poor performance can result from over-specification, complex integration, poorly coordinated installation, unreliable commissioning or difficult to maintain operation.

We are interested in all projects where something has stood in the way of design quality, and also when designs and processes have been developed to mitigate these problems (such as the creation and use of a retrofit coordinator role). We recognise that this type of information can be difficult to obtain for legal and reputational reasons. Because of this we will accept confidential submissions, or submissions where details such as building name and design team details are anonymised.
Whether long- or short-lived, excellent architecture should perform well throughout its life.

We are interested in whole-life performance, data from Life Cycle Analysis – and the insights they bring – maintenance, adaptability, product upgrades, waste management and design for reuse. We are keen to investigate the economic and business rationales that help close the loop (such as learning from or planning for Stage 7: In Use of the RIBA Plan of Work 2013 and then using this in Stage 0: Strategic Definition). Examples where BIM has been important in delivering value across the project lifecycle are also of interest.

Case studies are a rich source of information and insight for practitioners.

By collating and disseminating case studies about excellent buildings and places the RIBA will create an important resource for architects and other built environment professionals, as well as for clients.

We are keen to hear about projects with proven design quality and performance, especially, but not limited to, offices, schools and housing. The public database of case studies will be hosted on www.architecture.com, but we are also happy to receive confidential case studies.
How to respond

Responses should be emailed as word documents, and include links to online research if available. Emails should be sent to research@riba.org with the subject “Design quality and performance – call for evidence”. Please do not send images or documents, such as research papers, unless you are the copyright holder.

Sources

When submitting evidence it would be helpful if respondees could note the source of the information. A full academic reference is not necessary (though welcome) but signposting along the lines of “Usable Buildings Trust research into post occupancy evaluation concluded…”, or hyperlinks would be appreciated.

About this call for evidence

We will be collating evidence throughout 2015, but this call for evidence closes on 31 January 2015. Further calls for evidence on more focussed topics within the broader theme may go out throughout 2015 as our work develops.

The RIBA works in partnership with the RIBA Research and Innovation Group and, in particular, with Prof Flora Samuel, Chair of the working group on design quality and performance.

If you have any questions about this call for evidence, or the RIBA’s programme of work on design quality and performance, please contact:

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Partners

In early 2015 Innovate UK will launch a £4m competition for the development of innovative products, processes and services for improving the Whole-Life Performance of Buildings. Innovate UK expect to fund ~12 projects of £150k-800k to commence in late 2015.

The findings from the RIBA call for evidence will be made available to applicants as they write their funding proposals – all applicants will benefit from the call for evidence, but those who have contributed will have a head start.

For more information about the Innovate UK call please see [https://connect.innovateuk.org/web/bwlp].

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