

The USABLE BUILDINGS TRUST

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES 2014

Charitable objectives

The Usable Buildings Trust (UBT) was established in 2000 and obtained charitable status in 2002. Its charitable objectives are to maintain its independence and to:

- promote studies of building performance in use;
- put the results in the public domain; and
- disseminate and interpret the findings in the wider public interest.

A new professionalism

UBT has been encouraging design and building teams to get much more involved in understanding how the buildings they design and adapt actually work, so they can carry forward their insights, work with occupiers, improve building performance, and learn from the feedback.

We were guest editors of the Special issue of *Building Research & Information* on the subject, Volume 41, No 1, Jan-Feb 2013. This has led amongst other things to a Commission of Inquiry convened by The Edge www.edgedebate.com, chaired by Paul Morrell, the government's former Chief Construction Adviser. From February to May 2014, the Commission is undertaking a series of open hearings with Institutional Presidents, CEOs and others, and will report in late summer 2014. UBT will give evidence to the final session.

Soft Landings

Soft Landings provides practical support to the *new professionalism* with an approach that any project team can use to organise itself and its work to help improve engagement with users and outcomes, and make follow-through and feedback routine. In 2008-10, UBT led the production of three major publications: the *Soft Landings Framework*, case studies on schools, and an awareness-raising document. The schools work involved a number of design practices and was funded by the Technology Strategy Board. Since 2008 BSRIA, the Building Services Research & Information Association, has been taking Soft Landings forward, hosting a user group including clients, designers, contractors and facilities managers which meets regularly to compare experience and produce practical guidance. The Cabinet Office is also developing a version for use in government projects.

Communicating energy and carbon performance

Following its advocacy of using Display Energy Certificates (DECs) to make the in-use performance of public and commercial buildings visible and actionable, UBT developed the Landlord's Energy Statement and the accompanying Tenant's Energy Review for rented buildings in association with the British Property Federation, with financial support from the Carbon Trust. This would have allowed DECs to be used in multi-tenanted buildings, if the government had seen fit to require them.

UBT continues its work on energy reporting and benchmarking, which needs firmer technical underpinnings. In 2011, we joined a UK Green Building Council task group on making better use of DECs and the CRC energy efficiency scheme. At the end of the year, our representative Bill Bordass received an award from UKGBC for the best technical contribution to its work that year. Unfortunately, government did not take up its recommendation of mandatory DECs in the private sector, even though this had considerable support from industry.

In 2011-12, with support from UCL, CIBSE the Better Buildings Partnership, the Carbon Trust and N G Bailey UBT led a scoping study into another UKGBC recommendation, a Technical Platform. This would be an independent, authoritative and properly funded body that could review data and benchmarks, develop and maintain a sound basis for communicating building energy and carbon performance, and provide advice to government and industry. Unfortunately government was not interested in an institution of this kind, preferring entirely market-based measures, but UBT thinks that the case will be made eventually.

Housing performance

We were guest editors of the September 2010 special issue of *Building Research and Information (BR&I)* on the evaluation of housing performance. Our introductory Editorial and our paper *Building Evaluation: Practice and Principles* were amongst the ten most downloaded papers from BR&I in 2011. Fionn Stevenson, who leads UBT's work on housing, is now Professor of Sustainable Architecture at the University of Sheffield.

In 2012-14, Adrian Leaman and Isabel Carmona worked with the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance to help develop a "guidance wheel" to assist identification of responsible energy-efficient refurbishment measures for traditional dwellings, as with the government's Green Deal. The work was supported by the Department of Energy and Climate Change and built upon an earlier "triage" prototype that Bill Bordass and Isabel Carmona had developed with English Heritage. For a range of different contexts, it draws attention to possible risks of individual measures in three areas: energy performance, technical performance and heritage; and the interactions between measures that need taking into account.

www.usablebuildings.co.uk

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Practice and research

We have been working with the Edge group in pursuit of UBT's objective to foster closer links between research and practice. This has included a series of meetings with the Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board. Topics emerging include:

- The inappropriateness for many building performance-related issues of the deeply-embedded model of innovation, which leads from scientific research through technological development and into practice.
- A widespread misconception that innovation means novelty, whilst in buildings for the most part it is purposeful improvement, grounded in a considered understanding of what works and what needs attention, e.g. buildings that prove to be too complicated for their users.

In buildings, improvement often comes from bringing people, processes and products together in slightly different ways to achieve radically better results. This requires an interdisciplinary approach and close connection between research, practice and policy.

Institute of Building Performance

The public and policymakers think that the construction industry understands building performance in use. In fact, the industry is not well informed, as it does not follow through after building work is completed; and the amount of feedback and use-related research is limited. UBT is therefore advocating and seeking funding for the establishment of a well-resourced and completely independent interdisciplinary Institute of Building Performance, that can develop the knowledge domain, and support and challenge industry and government.

Conferences and courses

Each year we make typically twenty-five presentations on subjects including building performance in use, professionalism, Soft Landings, communicating energy performance, usability of controls, user needs, and unmanageable complication. This has included lectures and contributions to postgraduate courses at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), the University of Cambridge, University College Dublin, University of Dundee, London Metropolitan University, University College London, the University of Newcastle, Oxford Brookes University, the University of Reading and the University of Sheffield.

In 2014, for the Royal Institute of British Architects, we are also providing fourteen half-day CPD courses on *Design Intent to Reality: Closing the Performance Gap*, which also advocate new professionalism.

Website and student support

Much of the information on our website www.usablebuildings.co.uk is freely available, including papers, the results of building performance surveys, and a portfolio of building evaluation techniques. Some requires a password, for copyright reasons. We also provide more substantial support to student dissertations, especially free access to occupant survey techniques and guidance on analysis. This work is led by Adrian Leaman. Every year, UBT supports typically fifty building studies by postgraduate students.

Donations

By being a virtual organisation, UBT keeps its overheads to a minimum. It nevertheless depends on donations from organisations and individuals to meet core funding requirements. We are also seeking more substantial contributions for founders of the Institute of Building Performance.

Personal contributions from UK taxpayers are eligible for Gift Aid, raising the nett amount donated by 25%.

A donation form can be downloaded from www.usablebuildings.co.uk.

For further information, please contact adrianleaman@usablebuildings.co.uk

People

Trustees: Denise Bennetts, Joanna Eley, James Meikle.

Company secretary: Adrian Leaman.

Support: Bill Bordass, Michael Buckley, Isabel Carmona, Kate Fewson, Adrian Leaman, Richard Lorch, Fionn Stevenson.

Accountants: Henry Jarvis Fleming, 74 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1AD

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