

What is UBT?

The Usable Buildings Trust

The Usable Buildings Trust (UBT) is a charity dedicated to achieving buildings with better all-round performance through the effective routine use of feedback at all stages in the life cycle.

What do we do?

We consider the technical, economic and environmental performance of new and existing buildings and how well they meet the needs of their owners, occupiers, users, managers and other stakeholders. We get hold of the information and make techniques and results available to everybody. Our current focus is on public, commercial and educational buildings. Although based in the UK, we have an international perspective.

Why do we need to do it?

Not enough feedback currently happens, so we do not learn fast enough from how buildings actually perform in use. The situation is now beginning to improve, e.g. with more emphasis on integrated teams and better outcomes. However, there is a lot of ground to make up: new processes and teams can only be as good as the experience and information available.

Our main activities

The three main areas are outlined briefly in this introductory leaflet:

1. Our website. This is the main gateway to all our material and contacts.
2. Education and dissemination, using the website and face-to-face activities.
3. Research and technical, filling in gaps where techniques and data are not available.

These are supported by administration and fundraising, with minimum overheads.

Trustees and Faculty are listed overleaf.

Our website

www.usablebuildings.co.uk is the main gateway into UBT, its data, its contacts, and its programme. The site was set up over five years ago by members of our Faculty and has an established international reputation, with some 100,000 “hits” per month and over 1,000 registered subscribers who are able to download additional information. In 2003, the website was donated to UBT, which is now broadening its content, as outlined below.

The Techniques Portfolio

The portfolio of feedback techniques is a product of a Partners in Innovation (PII) research project completed in 2004. The PII was sponsored by the UK’s Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and undertaken with the support of a User Group, clients, and industry bodies including CCC, CIBSE, CIC and RIBA. A simple but powerful user interface provides access to the ten general-purpose UK techniques tested in the project, plus supporting information and contacts. More techniques will be added as appropriate to widen the scope of the portfolio to more issues, more sectors and more countries.

The Results Portfolio

www.usablebuildings.co.uk already contains the results of post-occupancy evaluations (POEs) of buildings from around the world; and in particular the 20 studies from the Probe series published in the UK’s Building Services Journal from 1995 to 2002. We intend to add many more, to develop a new user interface, and to include results from all forms of feedback in the Techniques Portfolio.

Education and CPD

The website already contains a range of papers, conference announcements, links and other materials. More targeted educational modules will be added for advanced courses and continual professional development (CPD).

See our education and dissemination programme overleaf.

Making feedback routine

Leading organisations of all sizes are coming to realise how important feedback is to getting better value from their buildings: for people, for themselves, for the economy, for the environment. However, the feedback loop has been difficult to close: although everybody benefits nobody wants to pay. This is where the UBT Charity comes in: promoting feedback techniques and results for the general good.

Financial and in-kind support

UBT is looking for three types of financial support:

1. One-off donations, to assist UBT’s work.
2. Core supporters. Donors will provide us with regular support to ensure continuity for UBT’s work and influence what we do.
3. Project sponsors. Specific activities may attract dedicated full or partial sponsorship, for example running the website, managing a user group, undertaking or supporting a specific research or educational activity ... or giving us some of your time.

See overleaf for more details.

Technical support

Have you got feedback results?

You may be able to put them on our website.

Are you developing or operating feedback techniques? **If the technique is well-established and you want to put results in the public domain, please let us know.**

Are you using or keen to learn about or to discuss feedback techniques?

You may wish to join or even set-up a user group.

Do you have any comments or suggestions?

Please email us or write in above.

Sponsorship

Donations and Gift Aid

As a registered charity, UBT can reclaim tax on donations made, provided that the UK income and capital gains tax you have paid is at least equal to the tax reclaimed. This increases the value of your donation to us by 28 per cent. If applicable, please tick the following confirmation:

I want the Usable Buildings Trust to treat the enclosed donation as a Gift Aid donation:

A sponsor has generously offered to match the first £ 50,000 we raise in 2004, so for each £100 you give we will receive a total of £256.

Single donations

I attach £_____ (cheque or CAF voucher) payable to the Usable Buildings Trust.

Core supporters

An annual donation will provide core funding for UBT's work. Donation levels are:

Silver £ 1000 or more p.a.
Gold £ 2500 or more p.a.
Platinum £ 5000 or more p.a.

Please tick the level(s) of sponsorship in which you are interested and we will send you full details of supporter benefits and a subscription form.

Project sponsors

To support specific UBT activities, to suggest new ones you may be interested in sponsoring, or to offer us other services (e.g. your time) please write in the topic below.

Topic:

Your details

Name:

Organisation:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone:

Email:

Please send to: The Usable Buildings Trust,
4 Ingram House, 90 Bootham, York, YO30 7DG.

Education and dissemination

Contact: Adrian Leaman

Strategy

A new generation of clients, designers, builders and managers need to understand how buildings actually work and incorporate feedback routinely in all their activities.

Doesn't the industry already do this?

Not routinely. By and large, it designs, builds and alters buildings. Once a project is physically complete, team members (and often the client representative too) move on to the next one: they do not stay around to see how what they have created actually works. Hence they only become aware of problems when they are asked to investigate a failure. Meanwhile, minor problems persist, and new problems emerge undetected. Even successes can be overlooked where there is no feedback.

What about research data?

Research is a vital form of feedback upon which most development depends. However, it can take a long time for emerging issues to be identified as research topics and much longer still to obtain definitive results. Today, when things are changing so fast, professionals need to learn on the job too.

How can UBT help?

- We can provide materials. Our website includes resources which are already widely used in education and CPD, e.g. the Probe series of published post-occupancy studies.
- We can act as a clearinghouse for feedback material developed by anybody, provided its quality is to the satisfaction of our members.
- We can give talks and seminars on feedback and usability in your offices, to clients, to design teams, at CPD events, at conferences, and in university courses, particularly MScs.
- We are developing a series of modules suitable for briefing called "What the users think ...". These will cover a wide range of topics and be produced jointly with experts in the area concerned.
- You may be able to help us in jointly developing material of common interest.

Research and technical

Contact: Bill Bordass

Approach

UBT largely acts as a source of information. Where suitable information seems to be missing, UBT will stimulate technical and research activities, for example by:

- getting people together;
- liaising with developers of techniques;
- undertaking or advocating scoping studies in areas where work seems to be required;
- sometimes undertaking, commissioning or collaborating in research.

User Groups

UBT will host a Feedback User Group. This will follow on from the group which in 2003-04 successfully tested and commented on the general-purpose techniques now in the Portfolio. We are also considering sector-specific user groups, in collaboration with leading organisations in the sectors.

Annual Event

We will hold an annual conference to review progress in making feedback routine and learning from the results. This will also help to set the agenda for the future activities of the Trust. Gold and platinum supporters will have free places at this and other events.

People and Contacts

Trustees: Joanna Eley, Denise Bennetts,
Jim Meikle, Sir Andrew Derbyshire
Faculty: Bill Bordass, Adrian Leaman

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