

The USABLE BUILDINGS TRUST

Feedback and strategy for better buildings

WHAT IS UBT?

The Usable Buildings Trust (UBT) is dedicated to achieving buildings with better all-round performance through the effective use of feedback at all stages in their life cycles - not just in their initial construction, but including all aspects of feasibility, briefing, design, commissioning, occupation, use, management and adaptation. Our current focus is on public, commercial and educational buildings. Although based in the UK, we have an international perspective, which is supported by our website www.usablebuildings.co.uk

WHAT DO WE DO?

We have four main areas of activity:

- 1 Research.** UBT promotes and liaises with research into understanding and improving building performance and undertakes its own research where necessary. Recent projects include making feedback and knowledge management routine for designers and clients, making building evaluation techniques more accessible, and better reporting of energy performance to help close the gaps between expectations and outcomes.
- 2 Development.** Frequently new ideas or research outcomes need development before they can be used effectively in practice. We then shape these prototypes into more usable products. Incubator projects currently requiring funding and technical support for further development include:
 - *A portfolio of techniques*, to help people to undertake feedback and benchmarking activities.
 - *A code of practice* to make follow-through and feedback a routine part of building procurement.
 - *A portfolio of results* of building performance studies. We have developed a prototype database and general-purpose web user interface. We now seek sponsorship for putting this into production.
 - *Better information interchange*. Many building performance techniques do much the same thing a little bit differently. We are promoting common standards and ways of linking disparate data sources.
 - *An approach to building energy performance reporting*, assessment and benchmarking which includes principles of reporting and allows statutory and voluntary activities to be integrated in a meaningful way.
 - *A new series of published building performance studies* as a successor to Probe (see below), but which can now draw on a wider range of assessment techniques (e.g. from the portfolio of techniques). These studies will also provide more raw material for the Portfolio of Results.
- 3 Networks and capacity building.** UBT works with individuals, organisations and networks who are, or are planning to, put feedback principles into practice and exchange information. For example:
 - In 2003, as part of a research project co-funded by DTI, we set up a feedback user group with designers and their clients. The group undertook fourteen case studies of feedback in action on their projects (before, during and after implementation). Three papers on this work were published in a special issue of *Building Research & Information* on building performance evaluation, Volume 33, No 4 (Jul-Aug 2005).
 - In 2004, after DTI funding ceased, UBT has continued to host the Feedback User Group. In 2005, its members began to set up specialist user groups, currently in health, housing and schools. Other specialist groups in higher education, public buildings and commercial buildings are planned.
 - In 2005, we started work on two projects with the British Property Federation: a scoping study on a sustainability framework for commercial property for DTI; and a method of assessment, benchmarking and improvement of the energy performance of rented office buildings with Carbon Trust funding.
 - In 2006, we provided feedback data for DfES for a publication on sustainable schools and are starting work with the Building Controls Industry Association and BSRIA on improving the usability of controls. We are also working with the Office of Government Commerce on feedback for public sector clients.
- 4 Dissemination** of feedback techniques and results: on our website; through conferences and other events; by technical writing, and in education. We also contribute to in-house and institutional sessions and MSc courses on building performance assessment, post-occupancy evaluation (POE), usability and manageability.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

UBT has a board of trustees - Jim Meikle, Joanna Eley and Roderic Bunn. Our work is directed by Adrian Leaman, who also looks after education and dissemination; and Bill Bordass, who deals with research and policy development. They are supported by Mark Standeven for our energy-related work, Isabel Carmona on sustainability assessment, and a network of consultants and volunteers around the world. Bill and Adrian each have over thirty years' experience of assessing building performance. Adrian's background is in the human side - studying occupant attitudes and behaviour and management practices and priorities, and influencing briefing and client requirements. Bill's is technical, having been responsible for building services, energy and environmental design at the multi-skilled practice, RMJM London, where he also became involved in client and design advice and research, monitoring and troubleshooting - which he continued in his own practice. Adrian and Bill were members of the Probe Team, which published a series of twenty building performance studies in Building Services - the CIBSE Journal between 1995 and 2002 - the year when government funding ceased and UBT obtained charitable status in order to continue to provide good quality information on building performance in the public domain.

www.usablebuildings.co.uk

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