

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

EMERGING THEMES

- Plea for institutes to collaborate more – particularly amongst young people
- Need for the CIC to speak for the professions particularly on the big issues. The CIC doesn't think this will work because they all want their own voice and to promote their own brand. And don't have enough views in common.
- It may be time to refresh the CIC? But it would need buy in from membership of institutions
- Institutes formal way of doing things is being left behind by social media and unofficial 'pub clubs', where professionals and non-professionals come together to debate and share information
- But institutes' infrastructure and resources are needed to ensure things get taken forward; pub clubs don't take things forward and ensure information is more widely disseminated
- Young people look to the institutes for leadership, judgment and guidance – particularly on sustainability - but feel it's not there
- Institutes need to think and debate – and there is widespread approval for organisations like RIBA Futures group with draws in experts from across professions to ask 'the right questions'
- Institutes could encourage more young people to be involved through lowering their fees in exchange for them volunteering on groups and committees and events

SPEAKERS

Sunand Prasad, Penoyre & Prasad & Past President RIBA

The trend is for more and more occupations to become professions. The "professional occupation" category increased by 50% between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. There are multiple definitions of what a profession is but let us agree on three points: 1. a body of knowledge, 2. a claim to ethical behavior that is higher than the law and 3. a membership institution keeping the gate.

Focusing too much on the ethical dimension is problematic. The ethical issue comes down to the dilemma of choosing between public and client interest when there is a conflict between the two – the other issues such as honesty are uncontroversial. The idea that professionals are uniquely ethical is a remnant of class superiority, on which the formation of the professions was based in the first place.

What our clients and customers want is our knowledge and the judgments it enables. Society also wants that and where I think Institutes are falling short is in being floppy about the knowledge and judgment of their members, not so much about their ethical behavior.

The public does not regard the Institutes very highly as guardians of quality and the failure of buildings to perform as intended shows this to be justified at least to some extent. The institutes becoming the agents for disclosure – perhaps with a Trip advisor type public feedback system for individual performance but with safeguards. The RIBA should develop the awards system to be a truer reflection of the performance of buildings. The ultimate accolade should be to have designed and built a building that after 10 years of use out-performs others in all respects – commodity, firmness and delight.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

All built environment institutes must lobby through the CIC only excepting situations where that is clearly not appropriate. They need to collaborate on relationships with central government, local government and key public institutions. The advantages are huge and obvious.

They don't need to merge and they don't need to abandon their tribal differences, which are essential to solidarity and energy. CIC will need to get lighter on its feet and overcome a glamour problem – which is in the main an age and gender problem.

Education needs to be revolutionised – which the RIBA is already on to.

Daisy Froud, AOC

1. That institutes should be working together to promote their members' interests. Not in the sense of 'giss-a-job', but to ensure that people are aware of the benefit to them, in specific contexts and cases, of specialized knowledge.
2. That interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals should be nurtured by their institutes for the many benefits this may bring to both their interests and that of the public i.e. in doing a job well. They should aim to promote a culture where individual professions, move easily within those of others. Architects for example, should focus on doing, and promoting, the specific and unique skills they offer, and on using those in partnership with others. Coming from a community background, I was terrified by some of RIBA discussions around neighbourhood planning. While I felt it was important that architects were considering the implications and possibilities of neighbourhood planning, I did not agree with assumptions that it might be in the public interest for architects to facilitate neighbourhood plans. Most architects I know simply don't have the skills to do that, and it just perpetuates the idea of a know-it-all, I know best professional. But that they might play a valuable and specific role in partnership with others.

So I would welcome more formalised interdisciplinary collaboration. Returning to that basic principle of association: once it may have made sense – given their socially homogenous nature – for architecture professionals to congregate together. But these days, a small young practice like my own probably has more in common in values, experience and approach with similar practitioners of other disciplines than we do with corporate behemoths within our own profession, although it's useful and interesting to associate with them too.

3. One area where institutes can share and cooperate to add value – and to be 'of interest to the public' - is in asking the right questions, even if the 'right' answer is more elusive. I've been lucky to be involved in the RIBA's Building Futures think-tank. A valuable model, it brings together experts from different disciplines as a 'community of practice' who give their time for free to undertake futures thinking and research. As a non-professional, I was aware of their work before my assimilation into architecture.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

QUESTIONS

Question: *you started by saying you're not a professional and then you talked like a professional, you clearly act like a professional, so what do you think you are missing by not being whatever it is you think it means if you're not a professional? And do you think you might be taking a free ride?*

DF: I don't feel I am missing anything. I imagine I could probably track down some institute that would make me a community engagement professional if I really wanted to, but I don't feel it's necessary. I have complete respect for those professions and what I like is that definable code around ethics and behaviour, that set of skills that they work hard to gain, and then they collaborate with me who has a much softer set of skills I guess. I'm a great advocate for the professions, but with a defined remit that isn't straying into a nonprofessional territory too much.

Question: *What do you think the institutions could do more of to encourage associative groups, the kind that you were advocating and describing as very effective in terms of output?*

DF: I constantly meet interesting young built environment professionals of all types, but I will tend to do that through Twitter. Once I've met people once I belong to various things that call themselves pub clubs where we'll meet up once a month. And when I began to think about that I thought are the professions as necessary in that networking way anyway? Nonetheless I did then come on to think about how valuable the RIBA had been in terms of the think tank I talked about. And that would not be able to survive as well as an informal group because like any voluntary or community group it requires resource to keep it running to keep your output, otherwise you just end up with endless minutes of good intentions.

Question: *I was wondering with all the knowledge you are learning and gaining as you work in your practice, how do you think that should be passed down and spread to others? Because in my view, one of the points of an institution is not to just meet in the pub and exchange with the people directly around you, it's to pass the things that cluster of people know, formalise it in a way that others can understand and use. And I just wondered what you thought about that?*

DF: we all teach, I teach in architecture schools, I think it's very important that all practicing architects do occupy some of that world of ideas and think about the political and social implications of what they're doing through theory, so I guess I feel I add something through being a nonprofessional who is at ease in that world to the professional experience of education, and then we take our part ones in and we mentor people through.

I think that at the informal level that nurturing that helps both professionals and nonprofessional practices is good too, but I don't think that'd be a replacement for that very specific role of an institutional maternal figure

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

Graham Watts, Chief Executive, Construction Industry Council

Like many Professional Institutions across the built environment already share and cooperate through the CIC. It formed in 1988 as the Building Industry Council with five founder members. In 2013, celebrated its 25th Anniversary now with 31 Full members and 15 Associate bodies.

CIC does many things that by definition require cooperation:

- Represents construction professionals across government including at the Construction Leadership Council, the Strategic Forum for Construction, ConstructionSkills etc. To do this we bring representatives of members together to set policy in each area of our activity
- Owns, runs and manages many generic cross-industry initiatives (Considerate Constructors Scheme, Approved Inspectors, Adjudication, Design Quality Indicators)
- All of these require institutions to work together and collaborate, but the key point is that they can only be encouraged to share in these activities voluntarily

Today, the professional bodies that existed in 1988 are largely still the same in contrast to almost all of the major construction trade associations that were around in 1988 have disappeared (or substantially changed). However, there is no doubt that the PIs collaborate and cooperate more (perhaps because of CIC) in 2014 than they did in 1988. And this is not just through CIC, but in other formal and informal groupings aligned to a particular purpose

The CIC is very much a servant to its members and has no authority over members. It is not a federation – no federated services and it's difficult to specifically fund joint activity or cede activity to one member on behalf of others. Also it has no direct contact with individual members (CIR, company membership)

Is CIC still fit for purpose? Is it time for a refit? The time for a vehicle that has more emphasis on joined-up activity and federated services? It's a question that needs asking, but actually CIC itself is not the right body to ask the question. That initiative has to come from our members, and that momentum needs to start with their members

It has happened before and 12 years have passed since that study, but within a couple of years the whole exercise was forgotten.

The institutions of 1988 are still largely unchanged in 2014 but in the main they are successful and they are growing – internationally; and commercially.

The 2050 group of young professionals and the various hubs that have sprung up in relation to the development of new technology show that there are different and more flexible way of cooperation and the barriers between professions are certainly eroding in this new age.

But the professional institutions exist because generations of people have wanted to join them and I don't see that changing. The institutions of today will still exist in 2050. They will certainly be more global in nature, but they will still be there.

Enhancing the role of the umbrella bodies as vehicles for sharing and collaborating is the clearest way to achieve progress.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

Bill Bordass, Usable Buildings Trust

Sustainability has come along and changed all the rules and yet we're working on things that might have been fit a while ago when we thought situations were more stable. We've got essentially a super wicked problem, we've got a complex system, weak central authority, and the people who try and provide solutions are actually part of the problems themselves.

I don't think we can get the change we need from the construction industry and its professions alone, or they'd have done it by now. At the last session, the president of the RIBA was talking about 2013 plan of work, and this would close the loop and incorporate feedback, but he might look to the 1963 plan of work which says the same thing. CIC has been there for 25 years, we have actually got a massive societal failure here in terms of the people who produced the built environment getting good feedback and acting on, and government as well and society, there is something really wrong here. My recommendations come in three themes:

- Theme one is a shared vision for practice, education, and ethics. So bringing people in the industry together so they are singing more from the same hymn sheet.
- The second theme is to reinforce the knowledge domain and building performance in use on a multidisciplinary basis, taking account of the fact that there are many more players responsible for that than the construction industry and the associated professions themselves.
- And the third is to develop wider understanding and engagement of the role that we have.

So under these three themes I'd like if I can just pick out a few actions

The as-soon-as-possible theme. We did produce, as the EDGE, about a year ago, a list of 10 things that an individual could do tomorrow. If these were adopted we could have rapid bottom up and middle out change in terms of the attitude we bring to things.

- In terms of reinforcing the knowledge domain, professional practices could rapidly start engaging more with the performance of buildings, start having CPD sessions, starting coming together with clients and colleagues, other professions in regions etc.
- In terms of wider understanding and engagement we really need to initiate serious debate about big issues like housing and nuclear power and all sorts of things which we haven't really taken a considered long-term view and dialogue with society. The professions should get together and come up with something, I know we spoke to Graham a year or so ago and he said don't touch ethics or things like that, we just can't do it, it proves too difficult. But I think somehow the cats have got to be herded and I think they should do that within a year, so there can be some sort of statement of where we think we're going collectively.
- In terms of knowledge domain and building performance in use, Sunand has already come up with that. And in terms of understanding and engagement, widening the public debate on these issues and maybe the Royal Society of Arts could help us there in terms of taking it beyond our particular silos.
- We already heard the education system isn't really doing what we need; even for individual professions let alone collectively. In the longer term I think we need something that is disruptive and challenging, and actually supports and challenges the building industry and the professions and government, but must be independent from them – the Institute of Building Performance.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

QUESTIONS

Question: *How Question: we've heard representatives of the professional institutions talk about the need for a voice that overarches them all, and tonight is the first time I've heard CIC mentioned. Where we do seem to get together successfully is where we make big changes that society recognises, so I'm wondering, and interested in Sunand's experiment of lobbying through CIC for 2 years?*

GW: well it's a lovely idea, but it's unlikely to happen I think because in order to only speak through CIC it means everybody else has got to stop speaking. And you know why should they? RIBA is there to represent architects and such. I think in generic issues there would be a lot more to be gained by collaborating through CIC, and to a large extent that is already happening, but we're never going to get a situation where the professions themselves stop lobbying for their own interests.

The construction leadership Council is an opportunity, but we also shouldn't forget that it's the last in quite a long line of opportunities, you can go all the way back to Latham, the construction industry board, Egan's rethinking construction, strategic forum for construction, you know, there have been a lot of single voice links that are partnerships between industry and government, but I think CLC is probably the highest level in the sense that it's co-chaired by the Secretary of State, and we have a seat at the table so if you want influence, why not use it

Question: *I can't help asking, what are you there for? If all the professions are allowed to speak for themselves, what do you think you are at that table for?*

GW: well to talk about the big issues, the strategic, the things that join the professions together. And believe me there aren't that many issues that do join all the professions together. We're not really the construction industry, we're the built environment council, construction is only a very small part of that, and to find issues that have common ground between say landscape architects and civil engineers working offshore is quite difficult actually.

I mean there are, skills, diversity, health and safety, those are the issues we're there to deal with, we're not there to deal with the mono disciplinary things. The idea that the institutions voices can somehow be closed off and CIC does everything I think is not going to happen.

SP: The CIC does not have the vision it was originally set up for. And I completely agree, you said earlier, it's up to the professions and their members to work through the CIC, not for the CIC to tell institutions what to do, but that's exactly what I'm arguing. I'm asking the institutions to impose a little bit of collective self-discipline on themselves. Take for example currently the RIBA has been running Home Wise, a campaign about housing. Housing is a big issue, there are a lot of discussions going on, but I think it's absolutely potty for a built environment institution to run a campaign without really discussing it with other institutions who have a lot to say about this, especially the RICS. I think there is an enormous amount of common ground, and I think it will have huge clout with the government.

GW: it's a sort of utopian ideal, but I think there are only a few issues where we can get consensus, and we get the consensus we can do that job, but we have to have the consensus before we can move forward. To all the institutions at the moment the brand is what is the most important.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

Question: *If diversity is one of the issues, what does the CIC see as the future for it, and how are you going to bring the glamour?*

GW: well actually diversity is one of the areas where we are very active. We have diversity panel which has recently been refreshed, has a new chair, has a new deputy chair, and it's an area where all the institutions come together, nominating people to sit on the panel. They have a work plan, they have objectives.

Question: *how are you getting to the 13 year old school girl to get her to want to do engineering?*

GW: There is a huge amount going on amongst the various institutions. Part of the problem is it's all happening in its isolated pockets. What we try and do is get a strategy that overpins all of this, to make sure that all the individual initiatives are being promoted so that people know about them.

Question: *You know it's a kind of no-brainer to me. I think Sunand is right, our institutes need to keep quiet, it's not just a big issue, and the CIC should be the spokesman for everything we do*

GW: At the moment so many things are developing. If you look at the whole BIM revolution, it takes people out of their silos and it makes, it's very hard to determine where the professions fit into all of that in the individual way. So the industry is changing and maybe CIC needs change to. But at the moment the way in which we are organised is that we do what our members tell us to do

Question: *it seems to me that intellectual standing within each of these professional institutions is absolutely vital. And one of the things that has been cut out over the last few years through recession is the thinking forum.*

GW: well I agree with that but I think part of the austerity problem is that you lose those sorts of things, because it's not something absolutely need to do.

GW: I mentioned very briefly in my talk that over the last two years we set up organically a whole series of BIM hubs, and I don't like the title but BIM for clubs, so BIM for regulation, BIM for design. There are 41 of them, they don't have any government funding or any funding from the institutions even, they have been created organically, they are in centres, people want them, and people go along and have discussions, because they're interested in what they're doing. And that happens which is good thing, and that's were a lot of this thinking takes place

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

LEE FRANCK, Arup

The future challenges will be dominated by an increase in population, globalisation, resource scarcity and climate change.

It is the role and responsibility of the institutions to prepare the future generation of built environment professionals to acquire the necessary skills to take up these future challenges, but also opportunities. To do this not only do they need to invest in post-charterhip learning programs, they also need to reinstate and value the art of mentoring as a means of experiential learning both technically, but also at an inspirational level

As we have heard in the last debate, in 2030 there will be more people above the age of 50 within our industry than below and this skills shortage puts at risk future economic development as well as tackling future challenges. Higher tuition fees, job uncertainty and low pay are certainly to blame, but so is the general lack of visibility of what our professions are actually doing or maybe even worse, an image of a conservatism, physical labour and machismo.

Improving the perception of our industry in the eyes of the public as well as securing a future generation of talented and diverse workforce should be the highest priority of institutions to which they allocate the necessary amounts of funds and resources without primarily relying on the volunteering work of their members.

But no industry can hope to excel if it consistently fails to attract and retain members of one half of the population. Women account for only 11% of the construction workforce and the gender pay gap in construction is still wider than in other industries. Institutions need to much stronger promote a no tolerance culture towards sexist behaviour in the workplace, raise awareness of the importance of diverse workforce to the future prosperity of the industry and lobby effectively for a better welfare system which allows a more gender-egalitarian society.

Setting minimum standards for ethical behaviour in codes of conducts is not good enough – we want to be challenged, inspired and guided to do things in a better, more responsible way. To continue doing the same things and expect a different outcome is just insanity. The Institutions need to change, but not only them, we all need to change by taking a more collaborative, vocal and responsible role within society. We should build on the energy, enthusiasm and optimism of the young to take our professions to even greater heights and to contribute to society in a more profound way.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

CIARAN MALIK, Ramboll UK

Most of us love our work; we work with interesting people on a variety of challenges and we enjoy it. We all know how important it is to become accredited, chartered or professionally qualified and most of us are working towards it.

The sad news is that young professionals in the built environment feel their role and even their whole sector isn't rated highly enough. They feel underpaid for the work they do and people who are in the first two years of their careers feel that there may come a point where they will have to consider changing profession to start a family.

There was also an overwhelming consensus that the process to be professionally qualified, is unnecessarily confusing, unclear and largely dependent on the company that you're working for. As our sector evolves and requires specialists in new fields, young professionals are finding that they are falling between institutions and join smaller organisations to fit their niche role. And then they have little idea what other institutions do. But they weren't happy about it and felt understanding and working with the other institutions should be a cornerstone of our industries culture, just as it is with our day to day work.

Unqualified professionals don't feel they can really have any impact and feel the institutes are best placed to identify common objectives and work together to change them. They think that:

- All institutes should cooperate and communicate more and this was particularly true in regional areas where the numbers of single institution might be quite low. I'm not talking becoming a single organisation, yet, but simpler things like supporting, encouraging and advertising events, work and campaigns from other disciplines.
- Institutes should be creating ways for young professionals to collaborate and reward them for it. Engineers really benefit from the need to have design experience and site experience, but could there be more swaps between other roles?
- And as technology develops and the lines between our roles blur, pushing what we can design and build to the limit, we should be encouraged to understand the work of our colleagues so we can deliver even better solutions.

We're a group who has had our tuition fees raised, graduated in a recession and have had difficulty finding work; I'm not surprised most of us want to keep our heads down and ignore issues on the horizon. This is exactly why the institutes need to lead by example, work together to help us feel proud about what we do and ready to face whole new challenges.

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

QUESTIONS

Question: *its 2025, you've come back and talked to us again, and you're much more positive about the profession, so what things have we recommended that have improved it?*

LF: I think we all recognise that it's important for us to become chartered; people learn a lot whilst they are doing it. But I think if the institutions could step into this gap with what happens afterwards and prepare us not only technically but also take us on this journey of developing a way of thinking and help us really get our head around more than the technical stuff and understand why we're designing certain things certain ways and engaging all of these challenges.

CM: in 2025, I'm in charge of the CIC. The melting pot between professions has been going on for a while now, and so that's going really well, most projects have an architect an engineer and a contractor involved at pretty much every stage throughout the whole entire thing. Interestingly enough there are age requirements, so you have to have people from different stages being in that group to do that. There are younger people thrown up into the councils, there's older people thrown down into schools, there are middle people thrown across into academia, there are people and academics thrown sideways into government. And it's all jumbled up and there are no systems and people are talking and it's working in my mind. I just think everyone should talk and everyone would be heard, and I just think it'd be really nice

SP: it's something Lee said that's got me thinking, she's mentioned allocate funds and don't rely on bond trees, and I thought that's, I used to feel that at the RIBA all the good things were being done by volunteers, all the routine things were allocated funds. So anything new had to be volunteered for, i.e. anything radical or progressive needed volunteers, and all that was about preserving and carrying on as you are has funds allocated to it. And I think partly it's because professions, the running of professions has become a profession. It is actually intrinsically conservative, you know with a small c.

GRAHAM: (says a few words away from the mike that I can't really hear) reacting to one of the many excellent things Lee said, she said that the membership was a means to an end. And I was really interested in that because I think that's how the professional bodies have changed over the last 30 years. Because the traditional model for the professions was that people joined and that there was a kind of circular thing, their careers developed, they started to give back, and institutions were self-regulating organisms and the decisions, the governance, everything came from the members. That has changed a great deal. People are joining the institutions now for the commodity, the commodity of the letters after their name. They don't really see so much the need to put things back. And also times have changed; people don't have the spare time now that they used to have to give back to the professions. Everybody is busy. So I think that's a big issue, and as a result of those institutions are generally now run by the professional elite who run institutions. They report to governing bodies and boards and all the rest of it, but their power today is much greater than it was 30 years ago. And it's another factor I think that militates against collaboration, because we shouldn't underestimate the competitiveness between institutions.

Edge Debate 63 – Edge Commission on Future Professionalism: Session 4 – Future Value

How can institutes share and co-operate to improve the quality, standing and value of professionals?

22nd May 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

QUESTION: *Joining the RIBA is very expensive, is there any way that I can maybe have a lower fee, but I'll donate my time instead?*

QUESTION: *I just have a point about, I know we're debating, we're debating all the problems but to me it felt like we're being a bit pessimistic, and we're all telling each other what the problems are and what problems are with this Institute and this institute and you know the CIC should do this better and the whole industry should do everything better, and I had a feeling of 'oh I'm quite young, should I just leave?'*

PM: it's a huge issue, and I got beaten up by Jonathan Porrit for saying that the industry lacks leadership, because he says the industry is full of leaders. And I said it is, but that's not the same thing. We don't have a single vision for the industry. Privately lots of people do, but collectively it seems that once again we go to helplessness

GW: well I think the leadership issue's a difficult one, I have to say I'm probably more on Porrit's side of the argument the industry has a lot of leaders. It is very difficult to imagine that it would have one or two leaders, because you don't know where the industry starts and it ends. Leadership of institutions, elected presidents, we have to hope it elects rights people. Some are very good, some not so good. But you know this is an industry with 250,000 companies, there are 510,000 members of the professional institutions, and everybody needs to be a leader really.