

Edge Commission of Inquiry on Future Professionalism

Summaries of Evidence Sessions

Session 4: 22.5.14

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

Sunand Prasad, Senior Partner Penoyre & Prasad, Past President RIBA

A problem at the heart

How significant it is that groups of people engaged in *production* of the built environment formed into professions modeled on the Clergy, Law, and Medicine – none of whom *make* anything. The reasons were a complex mix of self-image (as ethical and independent actors) and self-interest. There is a particular parallel between entry to professions and the priesthood – and the rules that make expulsion unlikely. It may not be easy to get in; but it's a damn sight harder to get you out.

In short, as far as the Built Environment professions are concerned, there is an internal contradiction intrinsic to the idea of the profession with its ideal of professional behavior as understood for the last 200 years. We need to understand the way this is playing out. For example, architects were not allowed to be directors of building companies until that was changed during Owen Luder's first presidency. The old rule followed one ethic; the new one, another, completely different.

In the future everyone will be a professional

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:

- a body of knowledge;
- a claim to ethical behavior that is higher than the law; and
- 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.

Knowledge and ethics

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. Ethics are of course essential but it is knowledge on which is based our service to both clients and public.

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. So how can the institutes do the difficult thing of 'criticising' the members who pay their subs; such holding to account being the mark of the policing of quality? A possible answer lies in the **institutes becoming the agents for disclosure** – perhaps with a Tripadvisor 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.

Collaboration and lobbying

This is one area where real change should not be too difficult. (And if it proves to be, the built environment professions will be shown to be dinosaurs.)

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 feet and overcome a glamour problem – which is in the main an age and gender problem.

Education...

...needs to be revolutionised, and I am glad to say such thinking is already under way in the RIBA. I see the reform as **resetting the DNA of the Chartered Architect** – maybe the same goes for the other professions.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On the capacity of the CIC to take on the role of an exclusive channel for lobbying

The CIC does not have the vision it was originally set up for, but it is not for the CIC to tell institutions what to do: it's up to the professions and their members to impose a bit of collective self-discipline on themselves and work through the CIC. The RIBA's HomeWise campaign is a good example. Housing is a big issue, and there are a lot of discussions going on, but it makes no sense for a built environment institution to run a campaign without really discussing it with other institutions (such as the RICS) who have a lot to say on the subject. There is an enormous amount of common ground, and it would have huge clout with the government if we acted collectively.

On the funding of institutional programmes and the resulting conservatism

It might be observed that at the RIBA (for example) all the good things are being done by volunteers, and all the routine things are allocated funds. That is partly because the running of professions has itself become a profession. They are also intrinsically "small c" conservative - so anything new, anything radical or progressive, has to be volunteered for, whilst all that is about preserving and carrying on as you are is funded.

Lee Franck, Structural Engineer at Arup

To many young professionals, becoming a member of one of the Institutions is a means to an end, a hurdle to pass to be able to put some letters behind one's name and a door opener to a level of higher seniority within the firm. Some, having gone through the painful process of rigorously recording knowledge gained, late nights of studying and hour-long exams, might actually admit that the whole process has reinforced their understanding of technical fundamentals and highlighted gaps, which had to be filled. Having gone through this process recently, I can confirm that I can now be trusted to design, in my case, a safe structure, but saying that I have gained the required skills which will allow me to tackle some of the most pressing challenges of today and the future, is a completely different question.

The future challenges will be dominated by an increase in population, globalisation, resource scarcity and climate change. As a global practitioner I will need to embrace different cultures, languages and business practices. I will not only need to be aware, but define society's problems and be able to solve them. I will need to be able to deal with increasing complexity and make use of appropriate technology, think laterally and work together in collaborative, multi-disciplinary teams. I will need to use imagination and show leadership and entrepreneurship to come up with new solutions to tackle resource scarcity.

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. They will need to work closely with academia to review curricula of academic courses as well as their own professional development requirements to align them with the required skills sets of the future. They will need to address the post-chartership vacuum and give new meaning and value not only to becoming, but staying a member of the institutions.

This does not mean introducing a series of additional exams to enforce continuous professional development, but offering stimulating, relevant, multi-disciplinary learning opportunities and networking events, which can be organised in flexible and dynamic ways, ensuring the transfer of existing knowledge to the younger generation whilst at the same time allowing the older generation to keep up to date with recent developments.

But not only do they need to invest in post-chartership learning programmes, 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. A culture of vocally sharing the value, satisfaction and excitement of a career in the built environment needs to be encouraged and nurtured both by the institutions and the design and construction companies, not only to attract new blood into the profession, but also not to lose the most talented young professionals to better paying industries.

As we have heard in these debates, 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.

They will need to lead by example by creating a vibrant, innovative, inclusive and diverse environment, come up with creative and compelling ideas to communicate the opportunities the built environment has to offer, and be vocal about the urgent role that professionals need to play in devising solutions to current and future challenges

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. Women are often faced with the option of either changing to a better paying career to care for their family, to rely on the salary of their husband or to give up on their career to save on child care. Society still assumes women to be the primary carer and there is still a stigma attached to men taking up flexible working hours or part-time employment. Women with young children are often pushed into low profile jobs with no promotion or salary rise.

This behaviour neither makes long-term business sense, nor can be considered as fair, and must stop. Institutions need to promote much more strongly 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.

This is our future and we need to take charge of it – we will still be in practice in 2050 when it will be seen if all of our combined efforts now have been successful enough or not. We can't expect the current leaders of our institutions to solve all these problems for us, but we need them to make sure now that we are equipped with the right skills to set us off on that journey, treat us as equal partners in discussions and give us exposure, confidence and responsibility to take the future into our hands.

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. Our sustainability thinking should not be shaped through a box-ticking approach, but by an in-depth understanding of (often complex and competing issues) social, economic and environmental factors delivered by inspiring industry role models or obtained through short, snappy, well-designed information pieces shared by modern media.

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.

Additional point made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On looking back in 2025, and what improvements might have been as a result of recommendations made now

I think we all recognise that it's important for us to become chartered, and people learn a lot whilst they are doing it. But the institutions need to step into the gap of what happens after qualification; and not just prepare its members technically, but also take them on the journey of developing a way of thinking and help them get their head around why we are designing certain things in certain ways and engage with all of the challenges we face.

I'm not sure if I'm really qualified to give the opinion of a young professional as I'm unchartered and therefore not technically a professional, but hopefully I can fulfil the young criteria. And I'm aware that I'm an engineer, but when preparing for this evening, I spoke to professionals from as wide a net as I could so I could try and offer a more general opinion. That actually taught me a lot about how small my net is and how hard I had to try to expand it. Lastly, I consider myself to be new but informed, but I don't assume to know everything about our industry and if I suggest something that is already in practice, then in some ways that may indicate that it's not working as effectively as it could be.

So I'd like to start with the good news; 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. I don't find it surprising that with these varying introductions young professionals don't feel connected to their institutions let alone other institutions.

The real turning point in one of my discussions was when someone said; "I don't really know much about the other institutions and I don't really care about the other sectors. But I probably should". Most of the excuses were that it didn't matter to them or that they were already too busy working towards becoming qualified and didn't think it would be useful. What a caring bunch we are.

But they weren't happy about it and felt understanding and working with the other institutions should be a cornerstone of our industry's 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. That all institutes should cooperate and communicate more and this was particularly true in regional areas where the numbers of single institutions 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 play an important role in shaping professionals and 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. The institutions need to lead by example, work together to help us feel proud about what we do and ready to face whole new challenges.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On looking back in 2025, and what improvements might have been as a result of recommendations made now

It would be good to see that the melting pot between professions has been going on for a while, and is going really well; most projects have an architect an engineer and a contractor involved at pretty much every stage throughout the entire process; there are age requirements, so you have to have people from different stages being in that group; there are younger people thrown up into the councils, and older people thrown down into schools; there are middle people thrown across into academia, and professionals and academics thrown sideways into government; there are no systems; everyone should talk and everyone would be heard.

Daisy Froud, The Bartlett School of Architecture (formerly AOC)

I am not a professional. However, I did set up an architecture practice with 3 architects. My early background was in local community regeneration. 10 years in, I guess I've been pretty socialised; but I occupy a hinterland, and work hard to stay in that hinterland.

I've been interested in the debates so far on the focus on 'public interest'. And the majority opinion that it's more important for institutes to promote that than the interests of their members. As a relative outsider, this surprised me. Given that,

(a) as sociologists and historians tell us the focus on 'public interest' is relatively new to professional associations, primarily a C19 invention, as part of a benevolent cultural shift influenced by Bentham's utilitarianism

(b) apart from in specific cases i.e. where we are preventing death or physical harm, I'm not sure how anyone can be clear what the 'public interest' is. Although all kinds of problematic assumptions appear to be made about it.

Maybe it felt a lot clearer in the C19, when those defining it – largely privileged white men – knew what was 'good' for people. But I'm not sure it's a helpful focus now.

I would in contrast suggest a return to the 'public interest' idea of earlier professional associations, seen as inseparable from a focus on members interests: making clear and promoting the nature of service provided and ensuring that it is done well, thus helping generate work for, and define the status of, its members. This relatively modest focus is still very much the theme of the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct.

Although the origin of the idea of the professional is debated by academics, it seems clear that if there is any 'timeless' quality of a professional body, it is that idea of the 'associative group' – bringing people of similar skills and interests together for the benefits that generates. That's quite liberating, to think that we are not bound to a 19th century model, and we can reinvent and improve this any way we like.

One form of association that is seen as very valuable in today's world, now commonly understood as diverse, systemic, networked, mutable etc is that of collaboration across specialisms, including between professionals and non-professionals. As per the theme of today's debate

Professional Institutions need to reinvent themselves, my suggestions are:

- **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 specialised knowledge. Of professionalism. As a non-professional, who nonetheless greatly respects – and makes good use of – her professional colleagues, I worry about professional distrust we have inherited from the C20, despite understanding where it came from. Scepticism is healthy. Distrust is not. In tone, this promotion should be less 'This Is What A Professional Can Do For You', and more 'How You Can Make Use of These Things Called Professionals.'
- **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, rather than expanding their own territory, move easily within those ease 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 its useful and interesting to associate with them too.

- **Institutions can share and cooperate to add value – and be 'of interest to the public' - 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.

In contrast to institutional policy papers, which appeal to a narrow audience and can appear reactive and opportunistic, think tanks like Building Futures produce independent publications and events to provoke broader discussions about spatial politics and production. This sort of application of expertise is does not aim to educate the public ABOUT architecture, in a benevolent way, but treats them/us as equals and draws out conversations about possible futures and the role of professionals *and* non-professionals in these. I would like to see more of that kind of thing.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On what might be missed by not being a member of an institution, and whether declining membership might amount to a free ride

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, their definable code of ethics and behaviour, and 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 non-professional territory too much.

On what the institutions could do to encourage associative groups

I constantly meet interesting young built environment professionals of all types, but I tend to do that through Twitter. Once I've met people once I belong to various "pub clubs" where we meet up once a month. And then I began to wonder whether the professions are necessary in that networking way - but I did then go on to think about how valuable the RIBA had been in terms of the think tank I have talked about. 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 and deliver output, or you just end up with endless minutes of good intentions.

On how the knowledge gained by working in practice should be passed down and spread to others, given that one of the points of an institution is not to just meet and exchange with the people directly around you, but to formalise knowledge in a way that others can understand and use.

We all teach. I teach in architecture schools, and I think it's very important that all practising 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 feel I add something through being a non-professional who is at ease in that world, through the professional experience of education - and then we take our Part 1s in and we mentor people through. At the informal level that nurturing helps both professionals and non-professional practices, but I don't think it is a replacement for that very specific role of an institutional maternal figure.

Graham Watts, Chief Executive Construction Industry Council

Professional Institutions across the built environment already share and cooperate through the CIC.

- It was formed in 1988 as the Building Industry Council with five founder members - CIBSE, CIOB, IStructE, RIBA and RICS;
- became the Construction Industry Council in 1991 with several new members – including the ICE, LI and RTPI; and
- celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 2013, now with 31 Full members and 15 Associate bodies, representing all of the professional institutions across the built environment, and the professional services sector plus a range of associated “professional” groupings

Today, the CIC does many things that by definition require cooperation:

- It represents construction professionals across government including at the Construction Leadership Council, the Strategic Forum for Construction, ConstructionSkills etc, bringing representatives of members together to set policy in each area of activity.
- It owns, runs and manages many generic cross-industry initiatives (Considerate Constructors Scheme, Approved Inspectors, Adjudication, Design Quality Indicators)

These activities require institutions to work together and collaborate, but the key point is that they can only be encouraged to share in these activities voluntarily

The professional bodies that existed in 1988 are largely still the same – some that were not chartered have become chartered (CIAT, CABE, CICES, CIPHE etc) – a few (a very few) have merged (IET) – some have moved away from palatial HQs (CIOB, IStructE); but by and large they are still the same

Incidentally, almost all of the major construction trade associations that were around in 1988 have disappeared (or substantially changed) – BEC, FCEC, BMP, MCG, Construction Confederation etc.

However, there is no doubt that the professional institutions collaborate and cooperate more in 2014 than they did in 1988. This is perhaps because of CIC, but it is not just through CIC, but also in other formal and informal groupings aligned to a particular purpose

The CIC is a creature of its time. In 1988 the only way that the organisation could exist was to have the lightest touch possible with members, so it is very much a servant to its members. It has no authority over members, and it is not a federation – providing no federated services. Nor does it have direct contact with individual members. It is consequently difficult to fund joint activity or cede activity to one member on behalf of others.

Is the CIC still fit for purpose? Is it time for a refit - a version 2 which has more emphasis on joined-up activity and federated services? It's a question that needs asking, but the 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

At the turn of the Millennium, and inspired by the then ICE President, the CIC set up a Futures Group to look at how the institutions might co-operate more – at the bottom end was the status quo (membership of CIC) and at the top end was a single Institute of the Built Environment - the first step in which was merger of the ICE with other engineering institutions.

The output of the Group was a set of 18 recommendations for further areas of joint working. Few were pursued, the mergers of engineering institutions did not occur, within a couple of years the whole exercise was forgotten, and the institutions of 1988 are still largely unchanged in 2014.

However, in the main they are successful and they are growing. International and commercial growth is significant, and both play against more collaborative activity

Changes in the way professional bodies collaborate will only occur organically, from the bottom up – they will not be imposed – and any attempt at imposition has always ended in failure.

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.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On the proposal for an experimental period of lobbying exclusively through the CIC

It's a lovely idea, a sort of utopian ideal - but is unlikely to happen, because it would mean everybody else has got to stop speaking, and why should they? Each is there to represent the interests of its own members, and there is never going to be a situation where the individual professions stop lobbying for their own interests. To all the institutions at the moment their own brand is what is most important. The idea that the institutions' voices can somehow be closed off and that CIC speaks for all is not going to happen.

However, there would be a lot to be gained by collaborating more on generic issues through the CIC, and to an extent that is already happening; but there are a few issues where there is consensus, and there needs to be consensus before an umbrella body can move forward and do the job. The focus should be on the big, strategic issues - the things that join the professions together, and there aren't that many issues that do join all the professions together. The CIC does not represent just the construction industry: it is a built environment council, and 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. Skills, diversity, health and safety are the kind of issues the CIC is there to deal with, not the single discipline things.

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's very hard to determine how the professions could fit into all of that individually. 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. The Construction Leadership Council is an opportunity for bringing the industry together, but it's also the last in a long line of opportunities, going all the way back to Latham, the Construction Industry Board, Egan's *Rethinking Construction*, the Strategic Forum for Construction - a lot of single voice links that are partnerships between industry and government, but the CLC is probably the highest level in the sense that it's co-chaired by the Secretary of State, and the CIC has a seat at the table, so why not use it to influence things?

On the future of diversity as a key issue, and how it might be made more glamorous - how a 13 year old school girl might be encouraged to go into engineering

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.

There is also a huge amount going on amongst the various institutions, but part of the problem is it's all happening in its isolated pockets. What we try and do is develop a strategy that spans over all of this, and make sure that all the individual initiatives are being promoted so that people know about them.

On the loss of fora and time for thinking that have been cut out over the last few years through recession, even though intellectual standing within each of these professional institutions is absolutely vital.

I agree with that: part of the austerity problem is that you lose those things that you don't absolutely need to do.

I mentioned very briefly in my talk that over the last two years we set up organically a whole series of BIM4 hubs - BIM4regulation, BIM4design etc. There are 41 of them. They don't have any government funding or any funding from the institutions; they have been created organically; people want them, and people go along and have discussions, because they're interested. That's where a lot of this thinking takes place

On looking back in 2025, and what improvements might have been as a result of recommendations made now

Lee said that the membership was a means to an end. I was really interested in that because I think that's how the professional bodies have changed over the last 30 years. The traditional model for the professions was that people joined and there was a kind of circular thing - their careers developed, they started to give back, 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 the need to put things back. Also times have changed: everybody is busy, and people don't have the spare time that they used to have to give back to the professions. So I think that's a big issue, and as a result institutions are generally now run by a professional elite. They report to governing bodies and boards and all the rest of it, but their power is much greater than it was 30 years ago. And it's another factor that militates against collaboration, because we shouldn't underestimate the competitiveness between institutions.

On leadership and the development of a single vision for the industry, given that although the industry is full of leaders, that is not the same thing as an industry that is lead.

The leadership issue is a difficult one. I have to say I'm probably more on the side of the argument that says 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 ends. For the leadership of the institutions, the election of presidents, we have to hope the right people are elected. Some are very good, some not so good. But this is an industry with 250,000 companies, and 510,000 members of the professional institutions; and everybody needs to be a leader really.

... climate change is a collective problem demanding collective action ... Yet it entered mainstream consciousness in the midst of an ideological war being waged on the very idea of the collective sphere ... Naomi Klein

The situation

Now sustainability has changed all the rules, we are at last realising that many new buildings do not perform as anticipated; and that the knowledge base for improving the existing built environment leaves a lot to be desired.

Case studies have been exposing such discrepancies for years, so why has it been so difficult to embed feedback from how buildings actually perform in use into everyday practice?

I see a number of principal causes:

- Good building performance is in the public interest, but government has preferred to leave it to markets.
- In a diffuse market with many principal-agent problems, government also failed to provide the leadership and public domain infrastructure that could focus all the players involved on better building performance.
- As government abandoned the area and lost its institutional memory, professional institutions did not rise to the occasion as learned societies and protectors of the public interest, to fill the gaps that opened up.
- The educational system has not provided individual building professionals with a shared vision and ethic.
- Academic criteria have also made it difficult to do multi-disciplinary research of direct relevance to practice.
- Denial, a propensity for organisations to want to bury bad news, for a multitude of reasons.

Speakers in earlier debates advocated building professionals taking better custody of building performance in use and more account of the feedback provided, some mentioning the RIBA Plan of Work 2013. However, in 1963 the original RIBA Plan of Work included Stage M, Feedback. To have taken half a century for the penny to drop (*assuming, of course, that it now has*) signals a massive societal and institutional failure.

What else came up in the earlier sessions?

- Analogies between the challenges we face today and those of the industrial revolution, which triggered the emergence of the building professions. Now there is global demand for the traditional professional qualities of competence, vision, imagination, fairness and concern for the wider interest, we seem to have lost our way - particularly in larger firms, where management objectives increasingly dominate professional ones.
- The need for more discussion of ethics, to help individual professionals to set their moral compasses.
- Institutions that are no longer fit for purpose, needing to work together to agree a direction of travel, pursue their learned society role, skill-up their members, and make follow-through and feedback routine. If their members do not appreciate the consequences of their own actions, then they are not acting professionally.
- Looming skills shortages, and the need to enthuse young people about the diversity of prospects.
- A need for Institutions to stand up and say (after deep reflection) what they think is right, in debates about the big issues, e.g. housing policy, tall buildings, nuclear power, and whether to expand airport capacity.
- Somewhere for the government to go for good advice.

These echoed findings from previous Edge debates, as summarised below.

Edge debates in 2011 and 2013

In September 2011, Edge Debate 46 discussed the role of the building professional in the 21st century. Speakers identified a number of gaps: between professions; between practice and academe; and between design assumptions and how buildings work in use, owing to a failure to develop a shared knowledge base.

Solutions were seen to lie in ethics, integration, practice based on evidence, and an action-learning culture.

Some thought the UK had all the necessary knowledge and skills, but lacked the resolve to bring them together.

Building Research & Information then issued a call for papers on New Professionalism, leading to a Special Issue on the subject: Volume 41, Number 1 (January 2013). This was discussed at Edge Debate 54 on 20 February 2013, where four authors of papers in the Issue presented their views. Points raised by the audience were then debated with a panel of representatives of RIBA, RICS, CIBSE, CIOB and Keith Clarke, former chair of CIC. Details can be downloaded from www.edgedebate.com/?p=1842.

The challenges of sustainability are revealing inadequacies of regulations and markets, creating a vacuum that building professionals and their institutions could help us to fill. The global situation invites us to be "*more moral than we could ever have imagined*", said Stephen Hill at the debate, quoting the words of Malcolm Bull.

But will building professionals and their institutions be able to rise to the occasion; is their voice loud enough for anyone to be listening if they do; and do they have a sound enough knowledge base to be trusted by society in this role?

Critical needs were identified for:

- A shared vision and identity for practice and education, with more on the ethical aspects and perhaps with something a bit similar to the Hippocratic Oath.
- Better procurement processes, with a proper focus on outcomes.
- Building performance in use to become a properly-recognised and represented knowledge domain.

As the Special Issue was being prepared, the Edge discussed whether there might be some shared principles that any built environment professional could adopt - today.

The ten points that emerged (reproduced on page ... of this report) offer a vision and guidance to individuals, including reflection, sharing of knowledge and development of skills.

Recommendations

I don't think the necessary change will come from the construction industry and related professions alone, or they would have done it by now. We have had the CIC for 25 years, the Plan of Work for 50, and improving in-use performance is about much more than construction. There is what Levin et al call a "super-wicked problem", with weak central authority and those who seek to provide solutions also being a cause of the problem (K Levin, B Cashore, S Bernstein and G Auld, *Overcoming the tragedy of super-wicked problems*, Policy Science 45, 123-152, 2012).

To break such deadlocks, Levin et al advocate "sticky interventions", which over time can entrench support and widen the population they reach. My interpretation is to identify particular themes and how they can be reinforced in the short, medium and longer term. My three recommended themes are:

Theme 1: A shared vision for practice, education and ethics

- ASAP, to encourage people to adopt the Edge values summarised on page ... of this report - or perhaps something tougher, as Paul Morrell suggested in the first session. Edge members and their organisations may want to take the lead. These are things that an individual could do tomorrow, and if they were adopted we could have rapid bottom-up and middle-out change in terms of the attitude we bring to things.
- Within a year, to get the institutions together to develop a common view and publish their conclusions.
- In the longer term, to embed this strategy in institutional systems, practice, education and leadership.

Theme 2: Reinforce the knowledge domain of building performance in use

- ASAP, to encourage professional practices to include and share performance in use as part of their CPD programmes, and/or coming together with clients and colleagues, other professions in regions etc, with analyses of some of their recently-completed projects including independent evaluators.
- Within a year, for the institutions to develop policies to strengthen the obligation on their members to engage properly with the outcomes of their work, and to develop appropriate institutional support.
- For the longer term, we have already heard that the education system isn't really doing what we need; even for individual professions let alone collectively. We need something that is disruptive and challenging, and actually supports and challenges the building industry and the professions and government: an independent, interdisciplinary, technically literate body to help build the knowledge base and connect research, practice, government and the public - an Institute of Building Performance.

Theme 3: Develop wider understanding and engagement

- ASAP. Initiate serious debates on important emerging issues, like housing and nuclear power and things for which we haven't really taken a considered long-term view and dialogue with society, to help develop considered professional views.
- In the medium term, to widen the public debate on the built environment, its contribution to the public good and the role of professionals, maybe with the assistance of the Royal Society of Arts to take us beyond our particular silos.
- For the longer term, to enhance the capabilities of professionals, clients, government, and the general public to work together to improve the built environment in the public interest.