

Michael Scott explains the background behind the RICS *Design and specification* guidance note



Leading the design



Gone are the days when the client could rely on one designer, often referred to as the 'architect', to formulate, procure and supervise their construction projects. The professional development of the specifier, the architectural technician and the growth of integrated construction products and building systems after the Second World War saw this illusionary role fade from larger commercial projects, although a cosy sense of single point control for smaller scale projects remained.

The growing part played by the professional developer client and the proliferation of interventions from third party user and UK investor interests sounded the end of complacency towards design responsibility in building specifications. Expressions of the longer term interests in project outcomes were manifest in the 1970s with the growth of product and system guarantees, a wider application of collateral warranties and the emergence of life cycle analysis and other critical facility management techniques.

The subsequent focus on the building specification as a fundamental tool in solving the client brief and meeting their perception of success has had two important influences in the UK construction market:

- change in the organisation of professional project services
- move towards the standard technical specification writing.

The 1980s saw the emergence of the multidisciplinary consulting practice, an

organisational structure that sought to manage the diverse process of design and specification in the UK under a single management umbrella. These service models grew through the 1990s, suiting the market trend towards a consolidation of professional resources.

However, the drawbacks of the multidisciplinary practice for the small- to medium-sized project can be high consultant overheads and the ever increasing distance in relationships between the client, their project representative(s) and the end specifier.

Lead consultant

Enter the role of the lead consultant and their task of co-ordinating and integrating design services into a project-based specification. In the *Design and specification* guide, recently published by the RICS, the lead consultant is portrayed as an experienced professional working within a service-based consulting organisation with limited or narrow in-house design resources.

The guide is aimed at the small- to medium-sized construction project. Meanwhile, the RICS publication *Managing the design delivery* provides good practice guidance for lead consultant and other project team professionals on larger projects.

The project model adopted by the *Design and specification* guide reflects a staging of tasks and specification processes familiar to the experienced professional.

The recently updated RIBA Plan of Work is a useful tool for the lead consultant in reviewing their work and that of others in the project team during and at the end of each stage.

Staging	RIBA Plan of Work
Project team appointments	Work Stage 1
Establishment of the brief	Work Stage 1
Resource planning	Work Stage 1
Outline proposals and scheme endorsement	Work Stages 2 and 3
Production of detailed design	Work Stage 4

A key task during the development of the brief is to establish a system of risk management that can identify and monitor design uncertainty and positions the client to make suitable and timely commitments in design resources. The lead consultant will need to anticipate and advise on the impact of some or all of the following pathways:

- procurement methods i.e. design and tender v design and build
- selection or nomination of products, systems and service providers
- client attitudes towards design risk and project uncertainty
- specific performance benchmarks
- application of life cycle costs and building information modelling (BIM).

Technology

It is hard to over-exaggerate the influence that ICT has had on professional practice in the past 20 years. The challenge for the effective lead consultant is to keep abreast of technological change, not only in their own sphere of service provision but also from inside their client's business and the project supply chain.

ICT systems provide an undeniable resource and yet pose a co-ordination and integration challenge. No better an example can be seen than the slow application of BIM, especially in the small to medium-sized project.

The resource benefits of ICT and BIM:

- productivity in generating the design and specification
- maximising the potential of standardisation in specification
- quicker reactions to design change
- inclusive communications within the project team (in theory) and across the wider supply chain
- accurate and focused project feedback.

The challenge is in:

- maintaining the creative approach and original thinking
- avoiding the use of closed and near redundant data systems that cause confusion and poor post-completion feedback

- communication of elaborate and unfamiliar system specific protocols.

The handling of ICT throughout the project timeframe (and beyond) is emphasised by the *Design and specification* guide as a common theme in good practice that no lead consultant can afford to ignore, however small the project.

Traditional practice still remains part of modern project services. The detailed bill of quantities prepared in accordance with the latest national rules of measurement may have been consigned to the larger project environment, but the familiar triple partitioned specification; (A) preliminaries, (B) materials and workmanship and (C) the work schedule has endured.

The guide highlights the support given for the specification format by the common arrangement of work convention and its role in promoting clear and effective communications between the project team. It makes reference to the important update in 2005 as part of the code of procedure for the construction industry by the Construction Project Information Committee.

The role of the lead consultant will extend into procurement, project completion and occupation. Good practice is described in

the RICS publications *Developing an appropriate procurement strategy* and *Contract administration*.

Design and specification factors affecting occupation and post-completion performance criteria must be subject to continual review by the lead consultant from project inception.

Not unlike the challenge posed by the application of ICT systems, the lead consultant must gauge their experience and that of the design team against the demands of the client and the project for facilities management (FM) services.

The relationship between design and post-completion performance is set to strengthen with the steadily increasing application of BIM and FM principles. The lead consultant engaged on medium and even small-scale project work would do well to cast their eye over the RICS guide *The strategic role of facilities management in business performance* and take a collective breath for us all. ●

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More information

> *Design and specification* guidance note <http://bit.ly/1blHui>

Managing the design delivery guidance note <http://bit.ly/1hfiO47>

Production information: a code of procedure for the construction industry <http://bit.ly/16PP48e>

Developing an appropriate procurement strategy and selecting an appropriate route guidance note <http://bit.ly/1bmo0Wx>

Contract administration guidance note <http://bit.ly/17jrF32>

The strategic role of facilities management in business performance guidance note <http://bit.ly/19Qus1h>

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