

Case Study : Briefing stage

Newcastle PFI Schools Fletcher Architects

Fletcher Architects is committed to design quality and concentrates on the importance of communication and stakeholder involvement on all their projects; they achieve this by ensuring all users have the ability to share their views and opinions from the beginning of a project through to the procurement and construction of their building. The DQI has fitted naturally into the approach of the practice and proves a useful tool as part of their work. It now forms an integral part of their 'Participation in Design' consultancy service, which is led by Grace Comely.

Practice principal, Paul Fletcher, acts as facilitator and has provided the necessary link between projects and the DQI tool. Paul uses his experience and knowledge of design and construction to communicate with participants in a language they understand, empowering the users within a scheme. Newcastle LEA appointed Fletcher Architects to assist in the brief development of a five school bundled PFI project. As part of the exercise they were asked to apply the briefing version of the DQI, with the intention of informing the Invitation to Negotiation (ITN) documentation and positively influencing design quality through the PFI project.

Fletcher Architects began work with the schools at a two-day design festival run by School Works. Paul and Grace both ran workshops focusing on key elements of school design, including 'Valuing the Past', 'Access and Security' and 'Best Use of Space'. Workshop participants included pupils, teaching staff, maintenance staff and members of Newcastle Local Authority. The workshops raised awareness of the importance design quality in schools and allowed end users to express their own ideas in their own words and drawings.

Paul and Grace then visited each school to run participatory DQI workshops. These workshops focused the participant's aspirations of design quality in the three key areas of; functionality, build quality and impact. Working within the framework of the DQI, Paul tailored the tool by developing more child friendly and school appropriate resources to help engage the pupils and the other users. This generated a simpler and reduced version of the 97 question standard tool. During the workshops each key section and typically each question was discussed and explained to ensure that all understood what was being asked. Each participant completed his or her own assessment and was given the questionnaire section by section. Respondents were encouraged to think about and discuss openly their views on each question; this eliminated careless statements and gave the children time to form and document properly considered opinions. The completed paper assessments were entered into the web tool allowing collating each user group's responses and enabling comparison between respondent groups. The on-line results were collated into a

report that also provided commentary on the process and interpretation and advice on using the results.

Newcastle LEA believes that this report will eventually help to inform more fully an enhanced procedure which all of their future PFI projects should follow. Paul stated that the DQI was extremely useful when structuring and capturing the views and needs of end-users at the briefing stage and hopes that Newcastle LEA will continue to apply the tool throughout the project using all four versions to ensure emphasis on the user's objectives continues.

The DQI has helped to provide a design quality benchmark for the Newcastle schools PFI project, ensuring that design teams remained focused on the most important aspect of a project, design quality, something that is easy to lose in PFI. By ensuring the user's voice is heard, covering all elements of design from all perspectives, the potential for a project to truly succeed is certainly enhanced. The four versions of this fundamentally flexible tool, briefing stage, mid design stage, completion and post occupancy, allow for the constant monitoring of quality control, an aspect many projects easily lose sight of.

Frank Jordan, Newcastle LEA Design Champion said;

"Fletcher Architects' concept designs (and DQI workshops) have empowered our schools to really engage with the PFI process, inspiring meaningful debate around their needs, and demonstrating the potential of their particular sites. I believe that our investment in initial design will go a long way to ensuring that the PFI process delivers excellent schools for Newcastle ."

Paul Fletcher
Grace Comely
Fletcher Architects