

Real feedback on real buildings

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**Building Use Studies
and the Usable Buildings Trust**

This is about ...

- **What happened to Probe.**
 - **The work and plans of the The Usable Buildings Trust.**
- More detailed information is available on www.usablebuildings.co.uk.

What was Probe?

- Between 1997 and 2002, *Building Services Journal* published the **Probe** (Post-occupancy Review Of Buildings and their Engineering) series of articles.
- Most of these (20 articles of typically six pages each) were **post-occupancy evaluations** (building performance studies) of the performance in use of interesting buildings that had been featured in *Building Services* when newly-completed, typically between two and five years beforehand.
- A few, in 2000-2001, were **interventions**, in which Probe team members applied their insights to reviews (with clients, designers, users and managers) of buildings during the processes of briefing, design and early operation.
- Others, at intervals throughout the series, introduced Probe and its research methods; drew conclusions on **wider topics** including technical and environmental performance, occupant satisfaction and productivity; and **reviewed responses** to the series and to the findings by the designers of the buildings concerned.



BORDASS W and LEAMAN A, Probe: How it happened, what it found, and did it get us anywhere? Closing the Loop Conference, Windsor, 2004. Downloadable from www.usablebuildings.co.uk

So what ... ?

- Probe struck a chord. Its formula of a well-written and balanced journal article, fronting detailed factual research about named buildings was **popular**.
- The methods used in Probe worked well in combination. Probe did not attempt to do everything or re-invent the wheel. It used **benchmarked, tried-and-tested methods**, examined a few important topics thoroughly and did not try to please everyone.
- Probe was **original and groundbreaking**, well-known overseas as well as in Britain.
- Probe was **liked by critics**.
- Probe was even **quite liked by the team** who did it!

More generally ...

- We now prefer the original term 'building performance studies' to 'post-occupancy evaluation'.
- **Few building performance studies are actually carried out, and often then not placed in the public domain.** Only about one-fifth of building performance studies ever see the light of day in any form.
- **Studies are often hard to compare because they are not properly benchmarked.** Too many are one-offs.
- **Many have too little scope.** They based on e.g. a single lighting study, and then dressed up as something bigger. They do not fully cover soft and hard variables across the total system.
- **Many do not speak to designers or building managers.** They are too academic or too technical or badly written.
- **Some underestimate how difficult building performance studies are to do properly.** They keep asking for more and more (e.g. physical measurements, space utilisation, aesthetics, costs, energy, occupants) when less is probably much better.

What happened ... ?

- The funding ran out after the third series. 'More of the same' did not fit the criteria.
- But people still seem to think that Probe is a live project!
- Probe found a home on Usable Buildings, the website of the Usable Buildings Trust, where the full set of articles and follow-up papers may be found.
- The methods on which Probe was based continue to be developed by Building Use Studies, William Bordass Associates, ESD and Target Energy Services as part of other projects e.g. Europrosper (energy certification) and the Feedback Project (building evaluation).
- The 'Portfolio' approach to building evaluation, pioneered in Probe, has been taken a step further.

 Follow the Probe menu item on www.usablebuildings.co.uk

The Usable Buildings Trust

The Usable Buildings Trust (UBT):

- was born out of frustration in not getting building evaluation work, like Probe, properly ;
- gives a focus for independent building evaluation studies;
- disseminates findings when we have permission to do so;
- encourages and helps those trying to carry out studies of their own;
- is a UK registered charity.

Usable Buildings website

The Usable Buildings website:

- was gifted to Trust by BUS and WBA in 2002;
- has 100,000 hits a month, with
- 4,000 pdf downloads a month;
- goes mainly to design practice and postgraduate education audiences;
- about half from UK of users.

**Usable
BUILDINGS**

... for
feedback
and
strategy

... from the Usable Buildings Trust

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The Usable Buildings Trust is an independent charity, registered in the United Kingdom.

AIMS

We want to improve buildings through better understanding of their performance in use, and more care with their design, construction and management. We promote independent post-occupancy studies and the management of feedback. We try to make findings available to everyone, where this is possible.

DONATIONS

We welcome donations. Please use the Donations and Gift Aid form on the Sponsorship section of our [Brochure](#). Thank you.

LOW OVERHEADS

We keep administration costs and other overheads as low as practically possible.

WEBSITE

Our website is text-based and designed primarily to deliver pdf files. [More on website set-up](#).

Leader

Most recent update: Sunday, September 26, 2004

Latest one liners :

"Is that from the front of the sprinkler head, or back?" Bernhard Langer to caddie Pete Coleman when Langer's ball landed next to a sprinkler head on the fairway, and he was told by Coleman that the distance was 167 yards to the front of the green.

Latest posted :

[Logistical City update](#) [Outside the Comfort Zone: buildings and basic human needs](#) [Architecture, Science and Feedback, Probe: How it happened](#) [Streamlining Survey Techniques](#)

Follow [Latest](#) for more.

We are hosting the [Feedback Portfolio for Techniques](#) which gives details about techniques for obtaining feedback from buildings.

We are developing a new [Feedback Portfolio for Results](#), which will contain results from public-domain building evaluation studies. We hope to have the first version ready before December.

Searching :

Most of the material available here is in pdf files, about two-thirds of which are password protected.

If you wish to search within files that are not password protected use the Google syntax:

"filetype:pdf site:www.usablebuildings.co.uk *search term*"

The Usable Buildings Trust plans to ...

- Develop a new Results Portfolio, so that all available building evaluation studies (like Probe) may be found in one place.
- Refresh the existing Techniques Portfolio.
- Develop User Groups for practitioners and researchers actively carrying out building evaluation studies;
- Offer postgraduate course modules in building performance studies to selected UK universities.
- Create new Probe series e.g. Australia.
- Develop a subscriber and donor base e.g. sponsor for the new Results portfolio

What is UBT?

The Usable Buildings Trust

The Usable Buildings Trust (UBT) is a charity dedicated to achieving buildings with better all-round performance through the effective routine use of feedback at all stages in the life cycle.

What do we do?

We consider the technical, economic and environmental performance of new and existing buildings and how well they meet the needs of their owners, occupiers, users, managers and other stakeholders. We get hold of the information and make techniques and results available to everybody. Our current focus is on public, commercial and educational buildings. Although based in the UK, we have an international perspective.

Why do we need to do it?

Not enough feedback currently happens, so we do not learn fast enough from how buildings actually perform in use. The situation is now beginning to improve, e.g. with more emphasis on integrated teams and better outcomes. However, there is a lot of ground to make up: new processes and teams can only be as good as the experience and information available.

Our main activities

The three main areas are outlined briefly in this introductory leaflet:

1. Our website. This is the main gateway to all our material and contacts.
2. Education and dissemination, using the website and face-to-face activities.
3. Research and technical, filling in gaps where techniques and data are not available.

These are supported by administration and fundraising, with minimum overheads.

Trustees and Faculty are listed overleaf.

www.usablebuildings.co.uk

Our website

www.usablebuildings.co.uk is the main gateway into UBT, its data, its contacts, and its programme. The site was set up over five years ago by members of our Faculty and has an established international reputation, with some 100,000 "hits" per month and over 1,000 registered subscribers who are able to download additional information. In 2003, the website was donated to UBT, which is now broadening its content, as outlined below.

The Techniques Portfolio

The portfolio of feedback techniques is a product of a Partners in Innovation (PII) research project completed in 2004. The PII was sponsored by the UK's Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and undertaken with the support of a User Group, clients, and industry bodies including CCC, CIBSE, CIC and RIBA. A simple but powerful user interface provides access to the ten general-purpose UK techniques tested in the project, plus supporting information and contacts. More techniques will be added as appropriate to widen the scope of the portfolio to more issues, more sectors and more countries.

The Results Portfolio

www.usablebuildings.co.uk already contains the results of post-occupancy evaluations (POEs) of buildings from around the world; and in particular the 20 studies from the Probe series published in the UK's Building Services Journal from 1995 to 2002. We intend to add many more, to develop a new user interface, and to include results from all forms of feedback in the Techniques Portfolio.

Education and CPD

The website already contains a range of papers, conference announcements, links and other materials. More targeted educational modules will be added for advanced courses and continual professional development (CPD).

See our education and dissemination programme overleaf.

Can you help?

Making feedback routine

Leading organisations of all sizes are coming to realise how important feedback is to getting better value from their buildings: for people, for themselves, for the economy, for the environment. However, the feedback loop has been difficult to close: although everybody benefits nobody wants to pay. This is where the UBT Charity comes in: promoting feedback techniques and results for the general good.

Financial and in-kind support

UBT is looking for three types of financial support:

1. One-off donations, to assist UBT's work.
2. Core supporters. Donors will provide us with regular support to ensure continuity for UBT's work and influence what we do.
3. Project sponsors. Specific activities may attract dedicated full or partial sponsorship, for example running the website, managing a user group, undertaking or supporting a specific research or educational activity ... or giving us some of your time.

See overleaf for more details.

Technical support

Have you got feedback results?

You may be able to put them on our website.

Are you developing or operating feedback techniques? **If the technique is well-established and you want to put results in the public domain, please let us know.**

Are you using or keen to learn about or to discuss feedback techniques?

You may wish to join or even set-up a user group.

Do you have any comments or suggestions?
Please email us or write in above.