

**URBAN
DESIGN
SKILLS
WORKING
GROUP**

Report to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, DTLR

September 2001

Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC
Minister for Housing,
Planning and Regeneration
Department for Transport, Local
Government and the Regions
Eland House
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Dear Charles

REPORT OF THE URBAN DESIGN SKILLS WORKING GROUP

I am pleased to submit to you the report of the Urban Design Skills Working Group.

When your predecessor, Nick Raynsford, set up the Working Group last year and asked me to chair it, I readily accepted. It was encouraging to have an explicit acknowledgment from Government that all was not well with the way buildings and places have been created in this country in the recent past. And it was encouraging that high standards in building design and urban design were now recognised as a key part of urban regeneration policy.

The usefulness of our report will be judged first and foremost on how far it influences the quality of public space and the quality of life of those who use it. Responsibility for implementation is assigned to various organisations and the Working Group members propose to reconvene next year to review progress in the run-up to the 2002 Urban Summit. The role of your Department is clearly pivotal in delivering improvements within that timescale.

The report contains detailed analysis of how we can acquire - at all levels and across all built environment disciplines - the design skills that will help us to deliver an urban renaissance. But it also points to wider issues which need to be addressed before those skills can be used effectively in making the places we all want.

First, there must be a strong political commitment to excellence in urban design at national, regional and local

level. In particular, local authorities must put their weight behind the drive for quality and put in place the people and the systems to champion it.

We need to recover the civic and municipal pride that created the great public buildings and urban spaces of the past - and which, more recently, has helped to improve the urban environment in a range of places across the UK, from Birmingham at one end of the scale to Horsham at the other.

Second, local authorities must work in full partnership with the communities they serve. Engaging and empowering local communities, so that they are active participants in planning rather than passive bystanders, is a must. It will bring rewards in the form of more durable, successful development and greater public acceptance of the development process, as well as reminding us that back streets and suburbs deserve good urban design as much as city squares.

Third, we must recognise that urban design is not only, or even mainly, about how places look. It is about delivering a whole range of economic, social and environmental benefits. Great places and spaces spell success. They attract investment. They bring tourists. They deliver regeneration and new jobs. They help reduce crime. They get people back on their feet after years spent in traffic jams. They create a feelgood factor. All this means better quality of life for communities and a reduced burden on the public purse. This is an agenda which no one can fail to be enthused by, anywhere in the public and private sectors.

Finally, we must deliver a planning system that recognises and rewards high quality design and innovation rather than putting obstacles in their path. We are all aware that the planning system is not delivering the places we want, but instead too easily gets bogged down in sterile 'style' debates and produces lowest common denominator results. We need a sharper, more focussed and proactive instrument, capable of looking at towns' and cities' strategic

and spatial needs and giving creativity its head. We look to the current review of the planning system to bring forward radical reform.

Within this wider context, a strong skills base is necessary if local authorities and others are to be in a position to carry aspirations for better urban design through into practical improvements. This means access to trained urban designers. It also means that all those who, in their day to day work, have an impact on the built environment - local councillors, engineers, transport planners and surveyors among them - should have a grasp of the principles behind good urban design, so that their different contributions are complementary rather than conflicting.

The Urban Design Skills Working Group has benefited from top-level representation from the professional institutions concerned with the built environment, as well as from key representatives of government, both central and local. It has provided a unique opportunity for multi-disciplinary collaboration. Our report identifies improvements to urban design education and training from early schooling to professional development which many of those who have sat on the group are in a position to help implement. But for the report to be as effective as we would wish, the active cooperation of a wider group will be required: local councillors, funding bodies, house-builders and academic institutions, for example, will need to place an increased value on urban design which recognises the capacity of great spaces and places to enrich lives. We hope that the report will act as a catalyst for that cooperation.

Yours sincerely



Sir Stuart Lipton

Working Group Chairman

Chairman, Commission for
Architecture and the Built
Environment

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1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1

THE WORKING GROUP

- **1.1.1** The Urban Design Skills Working Group was set up in the summer of 2000 at the request of DETR and DCMS Ministers. Chaired and administered by CABE, it comprised the key professional institutions and representatives of higher education and government concerned with the future of the built environment. The Group's objectives were to
 - promote a multi-disciplinary approach to training in urban design
 - consider how local authorities might be encouraged to promote better urban design in their areas
- **1.1.2** The establishment of the Working Group followed a seminar on urban design skills in July 2000 chaired by Nick Raynsford, then Minister for Planning and Construction. This in turn flowed from the work of the Urban Task Force, which identified lack of relevant skills as one of the main barriers to an urban renaissance in England. The importance of the Task Force's work was later endorsed in the Urban White Paper, which set out a comprehensive vision for making the urban renaissance happen and placed urban design at the heart of urban policy-making.
- **1.1.3** The Working Group met five times between November 2000 and July 2001 under the chairmanship of Sir Stuart Lipton, Chairman of CABE. It produced this action plan. What follows is not a list of recommendations; it is a list of committed actions from the members of the group. They are the things we intend to do over the next few years.
- **1.1.4** A full list of Working Group members is given at Annex A.

1.2

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY URBAN DESIGN?

- **1.2.1** Urban design is the art of making places for people – places that function well and inspire pride and a sense of ownership in those who live and work there. The quality of urban design will help determine how easy it is to get around places, how safe they are and how enjoyable they are to spend time in. Urban design has a real impact on how towns and cities perform economically, in terms of capital and rental values, and on how they perform socially, in terms of public safety and security. And urban design is intrinsically linked to concerns about the sustainability of the environment – embracing issues such as traffic levels, air quality and energy efficiency. Good urban design is, in short, a major contributor to quality of life. But it does not happen by accident. It is the result of conscious decisions and joined-up actions by a range of public and private agencies. And it is, above all, a creative endeavour which requires creative skills.



OBJECTIVES OF URBAN DESIGN*

Character

Places with their own identity

To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.

Continuity and enclosure

Places where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished

To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.

Quality of the public realm

Places with attractive and successful outdoor areas

To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.

Ease of movement

Places that are easy to get to and move through

To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.

Legibility

Places that have a clear image and are easy to understand

To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.

Adaptability

Places that can change easily

To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.

Diversity

Places with variety and choice

To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.

*from By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice DETR/CABE 2000

1.3

WHERE HAVE THINGS GONE WRONG?

- **1.2.2** In their everyday work, urban designers use a wide range of skills, including those that enable them to appraise and conceptualise design, undertake community consultation, produce design strategies and develop implementation plans. Urban design is therefore the coming together of a number of professional skills, including those of architects, landscape architects, engineers, surveyors and transport, land use and economic planners. Responsibility for urban design also, however, falls to many others, such as the local councillor making a decision about a planning application or the health authority planning the redevelopment of health centres. In the private sector, housebuilders, developers and utility companies can exert a major influence, for good or ill, on the quality of urban design. While, therefore, we can talk about specialist urban designers – the groups that draw up plans and work out the detail of our streetscapes – there are many more people who should have a strong appreciation, derived from education and experience, of what makes a place work well. This action plan covers both groups of people – professional designer and interested decision-maker.



- **1.3.1** The Urban Task Force Report¹ sets out compellingly why urban design standards have fallen so far in this country during the post-war period. England has a fine urban tradition, from Georgian London to the best of our market towns, but at some point we stopped planning for people. We began to impose generic solutions that failed to understand local character or involve local people in decision-making. Quality, innovation and civic pride were often lost in the pursuit of lowest cost solutions, leading to banal design and soulless places. Lately, we have placed too much trust in the market alone to deliver urban design solutions, many of which failed to meet objectives of social welfare and environmental sustainability.
- **1.3.2** For too long, the message from government was that urban design was relatively unimportant. There was a failure, both centrally and locally, to understand the critical contribution good design could make to economic vitality and social well-being. As a result, public bodies and higher education institutions began to reduce their investment in the training of relevant skills. Classes of professional, such as the architect-planner, became an endangered species. At the same time, the professional groups drifted apart so that interventions in the built environment became segregated. An added problem was that community engagement with the process of designing towns and cities diminished to the point where urban design was something done to communities, rather than with communities. The result was a public disengaged from the development and management of their surroundings.
- **1.3.3** The process of rectifying this state of affairs must begin with four things. First, on the demand side we must reawaken the public's interest in the quality of the spaces outside their own front doors, on the journey to work and in the places they visit. Adequate community participation and the stimulation of grassroots involvement in the development process are essential. Second, on the supply side, we must increase the skills base available to design and produce better places. Third, we must reach a position where local authorities make use of those skills in administering the planning process and other statutory functions. Fourth, we must bridge the divide between different disciplines concerned with the built environment. To some extent this is a cultural divide, mirroring the traditional characterisation of the arts and science as two cultures. But urban design, as an activity which to some degree touches on the work of all built environment disciplines, is well-placed to serve as an agent of rapprochement.

1.4

THE SKILLS DEFICIT

- **1.4.1** The problem of a skills deficit in urban design was also flagged up in the Urban Task Force Report. It was underlined by research carried out in 2000 for DETR by Reading University on the provision of training for urban design and by Arup Economics and Planning on the availability of design skills in local planning authorities¹.
- **1.4.2** The Urban Task Force concluded that skills and innovation were key to urban management and regeneration and that a transformation in professional education and training was necessary to create urban experts capable of delivering the urban renaissance. Achieving the transformation would require a breaking down of traditional barriers between professional groups and their learning experiences. Key recommendations included the development of a network of regional resource centres for urban development, with responsibility for coordinating training, and increasing the urban design content of teaching at all levels from primary schooling to CPD.
- **1.4.3** The Reading Report identified a number of gaps in urban design comprehension and skills; among other things it suggested that more of the professional institutions should consider making appreciation of urban design a requirement for course accreditation.

¹ Towards an Urban Renaissance, Urban Task Force, 1999

² Training for Urban Design, Department of Land Management and Development, University of Reading /DETR, 2000

Survey of Urban Design Skills in Local Government, Arup Economics and Planning /DETR 2000

- **1.4.4** The Arup Report found that less than half of district councils, borough councils and city councils employed urban designers and that there was generally a low level of use of external consultants to provide urban design input, even where authorities did not themselves employ urban designers.
- **1.4.5** Efforts to address the skills deficit identified by these reports were given impetus by three government initiatives. The first was the creation of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in 1999. In setting up CABE, the Government was clear that its remit should extend to the spaces between buildings as well as the buildings themselves. The second was the publication in October 2000 of the Urban White Paper, which envisaged the development of a network of Centres of Excellence to help promote design quality in the urban environment. Again, a role was envisaged for CABE in facilitating and evaluating these Centres. The third initiative was the publication by DETR and CABE in July 2000 of By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice. By Design served as a companion guide to Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (on the general principles of the planning system) and acted on a key recommendation of the Urban Task Force in setting out the Government's expectations of higher standards of urban design within the land use planning system.

- **1.4.6** At the same time, the professional institutions, in the form of the RIBA, RTPI, ICE, RICS and the Landscape Institute, have set up and are building the capacity of the Urban Design Alliance, which also includes the Civic Trust and the Urban Design Group. The Alliance is committed to promoting cross-disciplinary learning throughout the professional education system and will be a key partner in implementing this action plan.

1.5

STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

- **1.5.1** This action plan addresses a range of issues affecting the acquisition and use of urban design skills. Part Two is an assessment of urban design and individual learning, starting with earliest exposure to the built environment at primary level and finishing with a look at urban design content within continuing professional development. Part Three looks at urban design and organisational learning and covers the urban design capacity of public and private bodies, including local authorities and funding agencies. Annex B summarises the action points and assigns responsibility for implementation.



1.6

MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

- **1.6.1** This report is an action plan: it has no value unless most of its commitments are implemented within a reasonable timetable. The report has the explicit support of DTLR, the key professional institutions, the Local Government Association and CABE, but taking the necessary steps forward will require the cooperation of individual local authorities (both at officer and councillor level) and academic institutions, as well as the support of other representative bodies such as the Construction Industry Council.
- **1.6.2** A number of organisations have been assigned sole or joint responsibility for implementing different elements of the plan. To assist monitoring, the Working Group suggests that an implementation programme should be built into each organisation's internal targets. CABE, for example, has included targets for implementation within the performance objectives contained in its funding agreement with DTLR.
- **1.6.3** The Urban Design Alliance, as an umbrella body for some of the professional institutions, will play an important role in encouraging and monitoring implementation. As a starting point, UDAL will host an Urban Design Education Summit, bringing together academic institutions, local authorities and government officials.
- **1.6.4** The Working Group proposes to reconvene in 2002 to assess progress in advance of the Urban Summit, due to be held in 2002 as part of the process of monitoring implementation of the Urban Task Force Report. Thereafter, it is proposed to assess progress annually.



2.0

URBAN DESIGN AND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

2.1 SCHOOLS EDUCATION

General principles

- **2.1.1** The starting point for raising skills levels in urban design is to raise people's appreciation of the importance of creating quality places. This process should begin at the very start of the education process and continue through a child's schooling. In primary and secondary education, the emphasis in teaching about the built environment should be on developing in all pupils a degree of visual awareness and a general understanding and appreciation of their surroundings.
- **2.1.2** The compulsory elements of the national curriculum for England and Wales are set by statutory National Curriculum Orders. Advisory 'Schemes of Work', based on the Orders, identify good teaching and learning practice in each subject area. The Schemes are set by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and are commonly used by schools as a basis for curriculum planning. Several elements within the Orders and Schemes are relevant or potentially relevant to the built environment: for example, 'A sense of place' within the Art, Craft and Design Schemes and 'How can we improve the area we can see from our window?' within the Geography Schemes. A fuller list is given at Annex C.

■ **2.1.3** The Working Group considers that the importance of ‘place’ should be embedded within the cross-curricular theme of citizenship. It should also flow through interpretation of national curriculum requirements in a variety of established subjects, including geography, history, design & technology, art and science. It should include an understanding of how buildings and neighbourhoods are created and maintained. It should also encourage enquiry as to how the quality of the built environment impacts on economic prosperity, social welfare and environmental sustainability. The outcome should be a population of young people who are more aware of the space around them, and a sub-group of this population who go on to become fully-fledged urban designers, working within both public organisations and private practice.

■ **2.1.4** This aspiration is a long way from current reality. The national curriculum is largely silent on the importance of the built environment. Provision is best at primary level but then tails off rapidly thereafter, until there is virtually no content at A-level stage.

Primary education

■ **2.1.5** Exposure to the importance of the built environment should begin at primary level. While provision here is stronger than at secondary level, there are gaps which are at odds with a clear desire amongst teachers to introduce built environment related topics into the classroom. This desire is evidenced by the heavy demand for teaching tools related to the built environment, of which Our Street, produced by CABE, is one example.



LEARNING TO SEE

Our Street: Learning to See is a CABE publication intended to promote visual awareness of the built environment. It starts from the premise that the street is a familiar place where children can learn to make up their own minds about the quality of their physical surroundings. The guide suggests a range of activities to help teachers to

- enhance pupils’ environmental perception and enable them to develop a feel for the built environment
- help pupils reflect on what they see and become more critical of the built environment

The guide has been distributed free to a large number of primary schools in the UK and has recently been revised and reprinted by CABE.



■ **2.1.6** The objective should be to inculcate in primary schoolchildren critical curiosity about their surroundings and a common basic understanding of the physical composition of towns and cities. By encouraging young children to look at and think about their surroundings, expectations of quality will be raised even in those who do not go on to train or work in a built environment discipline. The key at this stage of education is raising awareness.

■ **2.1.7** One way of achieving this is for school buildings themselves to be models of design quality and to provide a stimulating visual environment. All those responsible for commissioning and procuring new schools should regard design quality as a priority, in accordance with the aspirations expressed by the Government in its recent publication Better Public Buildings. On another level, teachers need to be supported (by the Government) in their desire to use urban design as a teaching tool and high-quality teaching material needs to be developed (by the Department for Education and Skills, the professional institutions, CABE and others) to help them do so.

■ **2.1.8** At present, the strongest provision is within the arts curriculum. Geography provision is patchy and does not extend beyond investigation of the very immediate neighbourhood. Design and technology provision is surprisingly weak in relation to the built environment in the early teaching years.

Secondary education

■ **2.1.9** There are even greater gaps in relevant teaching at secondary level. Again, the key objective is to raise awareness. Urban design can be regarded as relevant to many subjects taught at this level, including geography, design & technology, general studies, art, history and environmental studies. Within the GCSE geography course, for example, urban design teaching would provide a useful tool for understanding the development and composition of the urban environment and the wider subject of sustainability. Field trips in the physical geography element of the course might be complemented by studies of good and bad examples of urban design. The proposed development of specialised secondary schools may provide an opportunity for specialisation in a built environment theme.

Action

1 CABE will seek to work with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to ensure that the QCA Schemes of Work are strengthened to provide greater impetus for education about the importance of the built environment across the curriculum.

2 The professional institutions will increasingly work (through their regional offices and membership) with education authorities and schools to provide greater opportunities for young people to be introduced to urban design issues through structured projects, school conferences, study trips and open days at relevant workplaces.

Providing support to schools

■ **2.1.10** A number of organisations, including the network of Regional Architecture Centres and Centres of the Built Environment, are actively providing support to schools in the field of the built environment. The Liverpool Architecture and Design Trust, the Hackney Building Exploratory and the Centre for the Understanding of the Built Environment in Manchester all work creatively with teachers and children. Architecture Week, Urban Design Week, National Construction Week and the Urban Design Alliance’s Placecheck initiative are all aimed at encouraging concerted action to improve urban design quality in particular localities. Schools can use Placecheck as a way of introducing children to creative and critical analysis of their surroundings and exposing them to good practice.

- **2.1.11** At present, the support available to schools is relatively fragmented and uncoordinated. Coverage is incomplete and quality of provision is variable. As always, resources are limited and the sector is heavily reliant on voluntary support. To compound the problem, local education authorities are in a much weaker position than they once were to disseminate teaching material and help set teaching priorities. Support agencies need to take over this pivotal position and champion high-quality built environment teaching. There is already considerable willingness among the professional institutions to pool resources and pilot schemes across the country. Building on this, efforts should be made to develop communications between support agencies and to ensure that existing funding opportunities are properly investigated and channelled.
- **2.1.12** CABE will be actively involved in coordinating the work of support agencies through its new Education Foundation, a charitable body due to be set up in 2001. One of the tasks of the Foundation will be to set up a national network of formal and informal educators, including experienced practitioners, to assist coordination, support existing initiatives and help teachers develop and deliver project work. Opportunities for web-based learning should also be explored, as well as opportunities for direct interaction between schools and young professionals using the Young Presenters Scheme funded by the Construction Industry Training Board and coordinated through the Construction Industry Council. The existing network of urban study centres should also be used to provide coordinated training.
- **2.1.13** Effective urban design education in secondary schools requires the provision of teaching material which is relevant, high-quality and readily accessible. One useful model is the Education on Site publication series, produced by the Education Service at English Heritage. This aims to help teachers at all levels make better use of the historic environment by suggesting themes, exercises and project ideas for curriculum work. There is a shortage of such material at present.

Action

3 The professional institutions, coordinated by the Urban Design Alliance and the Construction Industry Council, will extend the number of special initiatives aimed at interesting young people in built environment issues, including out-of-school provision.

4 CABE will establish an Education Foundation to co-ordinate the work of individuals and organisations striving to improve built environment education provision for young people.

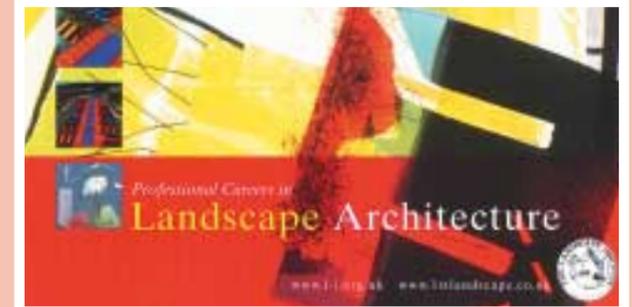
Progression of young people into further and higher education

- **2.1.14** From Year 10 onwards, when greater specialisation starts to take place in earnest, there is a need to provide for those seriously considering a vocational qualification leading to a career in the built environment, where there will be a level of responsibility for urban design issues or at least where a strong appreciation of urban design and an interpretative ability are required.
- **2.1.15** Most of the built environment professions have seen a decline in the numbers of students entering their accredited courses over the last few years. Subjects such as land use planning have been particularly badly affected. This is reflected in recruitment problems across the relevant professions, with the exception of architecture where general demand remains strong - although very few qualifying architects are going on to practise urban design.
- **2.1.16** The fall in the number of students on built environment related courses bears on the skills deficit identified by the Government. At one level it creates a shortage of dedicated urban designers and a reduced understanding of urban design amongst other built environment professionals. At another level it has a knock-on effect on the number of urban design teachers and ultimately on the willingness of academic institutions to offer urban design modules and courses - which in turn reduces the likelihood of good students being attracted onto built environment courses.

- **2.1.17** Many factors affect student decisions and enrolment fluctuations. It can be said, though, that the decline in student numbers for built environment courses partly results from an increase in study opportunities, with subjects such as business studies, marketing, law and media studies rivalling or overtaking traditional subjects in popularity. With some exceptions, students are tending to choose less vocational degree subjects and to opt for broader subjects that leave their options more open after graduation. Enrolment in built environment courses has suffered accordingly. There may also be a perception that urban design offers too few job opportunities of the desired quality (perceived low pay being a particular impediment). This in turn is likely to reduce the quality of the average urban design professional.
- **2.1.18** The decline also, however, results partly from the fact that, between the ages of 16 and 19, students have generally had little exposure to built environment disciplines. Without that exposure, they cannot be expected to have a great deal of interest in pursuing relevant courses at undergraduate level. The majority of support agencies mentioned above focus on the 5-16 year old age group, where built environment concerns (if addressed at all) are grafted onto other disciplines. Thus, although significant gaps remain in the 5-16 sector, it is nevertheless better catered for, both in terms of curriculum provision and agency support, than the 16-19 sector. Here there is a danger of urban design (and indeed architecture) falling through the gaps.
- **2.1.19** Efforts should therefore be made to increase the urban design content in education for 16-19 year olds. This might be done through existing 'A' levels (for example the A Level in Construction and the Built Environment) or through broader AS levels. It might also be achieved through the introduction of relevant Vocational Qualifications, for example a GNVQ equivalent. The establishment of specialised sixth-form Colleges for Excellence and Innovation (announced by the Department for Education and Employment - now DfES - in November 2000 and funded by the Learning and Skills Council) should be seen as an opportunity to increase urban design related education opportunities at pre-university level.

LANDSCAPE INSTITUTE CAREER PATHWAYS

The Landscape Institute has made a strong effort to reach 16-19 year olds who might be interested in pursuing landscape architecture as a career. The Young Person's Guide to Landscape Architecture, A Career in Landscape and Professional Careers in Landscape Architecture provide a range of information, aimed at secondary school children, on relevant university courses, methods of entering the profession and specialisation and diversity within the practice of landscape architecture.



- **2.1.20** To stimulate recruitment onto programmes leading to careers in urban design, all partners - Government, professional institutions and academic bodies - should seek to raise the status and profile of relevant built environment courses. At the same time, the accrediting and academic institutions need to collaborate to ensure that courses are appealing to those entering higher education (i.e. the customer) and that course outputs have a clear connection with urban design practice. In this way, courses will be seen as relevant to the delivery of economic, social and environmental improvements, both locally and nationally, and will be more likely to benefit from a high standard of teaching and research. The Working Group would also strongly support the provision of urban design-related work placements for 16-19 year olds, as well as access courses and university open days for those considering taking a degree in a built environment subject.

Action

5 Each professional institution, in association with academic institutions, will continue to review how it is attracting young people to apply for courses relevant to urban design. They will commit to exchanging best practice and pooling resources.

6 CABE will seek to work with DfES, DTLR, the Learning and Skills Council and the design and construction industries to ensure that young people's interest in the built environment is fostered through post-16 education, both in terms of academic and vocational qualifications.

2.2

HIGHER EDUCATION

Increasing the urban design content of relevant curricula at undergraduate level

- **2.2.1** Urban design is a cross-disciplinary set of skills and also an activity in which every built environment professional working in an urban setting is involved. The Working Group considers that, at undergraduate level, urban design should be taught primarily as modules within other subjects, such as architecture, town planning and engineering. We would encourage jointly accredited courses (for example architecture and engineering or architecture and planning) where urban design forms an important part of the interface between the core disciplines. But we do not consider that there should be a separately accredited urban design qualification, distinct from the other recognised professional qualifications at this level. Instead, other disciplines should be seen as routes into the urban design profession, with those undergraduates who choose during their first degree to train as urban designers increasing the urban design content of their course year by year. Full specialisation in urban design should then take place at postgraduate level.
- **2.2.2** In stating that this is our preferred approach, we recognise that some undergraduate courses have an urban design content which is significant enough to label them as specialist urban design courses. We would not discourage this provision, but believe that separate accreditation should be considered only where an undergraduate course places such emphasis on urban design that it is effectively the equivalent of an additional one-year postgraduate course.

BETTER TOGETHER: INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Sheffield Hallam University, Kingston University and Oxford Brookes University are investigating how inter-professional collaboration can be fostered and reflected in the built environment curriculum at undergraduate level. The objectives of this three-year, HEFCE-funded research project, running from 2000 to 2003, are to identify the specific educational implications of inter-professionalism, disseminate successful curricular examples, clarify the needs of stakeholders and explore the implications of the findings with the professional institutions. Oxford Brookes will be undertaking case studies to identify the problems and opportunities for achieving a multi-disciplinary approach to work in the built environment.

FLEXIBILITY AND VARIETY AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

The University of the West of England is one of the forerunners in offering comprehensive and flexible urban design education. UWE

- runs the only integrated jointly accredited (RTPI and RIBA) Architecture and Planning degree course in the UK
- offers twelve urban design short courses each year, lasting from one to six days
- includes mandatory modules on inter-professionalism in each year of its twenty-two undergraduate degree courses
- will be launching a distance learning version of the Postgraduate Certificate and MA in Urban Design in September 2001

- **2.2.3** In considering the relevant content of undergraduate courses, it would be helpful if the professional institutions developed a common understanding of what is meant by urban design higher education. Partnerships between accrediting institutions and academic providers provide an opportunity for constructive guidance on curriculum content. Through partnerships, accrediting bodies can maintain a regular dialogue with universities, with representatives of the institutions taking part in annual course reviews and course development meetings. In this respect, there is a need for urban design to feature more strongly in accreditation guidelines for built environment courses.

- **2.2.4** Many academic programmes have industry advisory boards which are consulted on course development. It would be useful (through for example the partnerships mentioned above) to establish a set of common learning outcomes for urban design at undergraduate level which could be promoted by professional bodies and serve as guidance for their accredited programmes. The Construction Industry Board's 'Common Learning Outcomes for Degree Courses in the Built Environment' is one example of a tool for kitemarking multi-disciplinary elements in built environment courses.

Urban design content of courses accredited by professional institutions which are members of UDAL (adapted from Reading Report)

	RIBA	RTPI	RICS	LI	ICE	Total%
With an explicit Urban Design specialisation	6	31	13	21	0	13
With some modules relevant to urban design	56	54	23	36	32	39
With few or any modules relevant to urban design	39	15	63	43	68	48
total – rounded %	100	100	100	100	100	100
(number of courses for which sufficient information was available)	(18)	(26)	(30)	(14)	(31)	(119)

The above table is not intended to imply any qualitative assessment of the courses in question

Non-accredited urban design and related courses (adapted from Reading Report)

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Total number of courses	5	37
Named courses in urban design	2	9
Named courses in urban design in combination		
with related fields of policy, practice and/or academic study	-	5
Related courses		
with some core modules relevant to urban design	3	12
with few if any modules relevant to urban design	-	5
with insufficient or no data on titles or content of modules	-	6

- **2.2.5** The development of high-quality urban design modules at undergraduate level requires joint working by academic and accrediting institutions. In the first instance, the universities must be persuaded that urban design is a worthwhile component of their portfolio of courses; in crude terms, it must be seen as a paying proposition which attracts adequate research funding or preferential funding of students from Government. Only then will accreditation by the professional institutions become truly relevant. It follows from this that access to research funding is an important driver in delivering high-quality urban design courses and secondly that a prescriptive approach to course content by the accrediting institutions is unlikely to be sufficient in itself.

- **2.2.6** Work placements, sponsoring and mentoring in urban design-related fields should be encouraged for both built environment and non-built environment undergraduates, to enable them to experience practical urban design at first hand. This should in itself attract more graduates into specialising in urban design at postgraduate level and/or becoming practising urban designers.

- **2.2.7** Universities should improve information sources on the nature and content of the urban design-related education and training they offer. They should also consider innovative ways of increasing student participation and enrolment (for example through student sponsorship schemes or by offering non-traditional course delivery such as part-time, residential, block release and distance-learning modes of study, making use of the internet where appropriate).

- **2.2.8** We should not lose sight of the fact that a significant proportion of young people who eventually become urban designers will undertake undergraduate courses that have little or no direct relationship with the built environment. The professional institutions should therefore also be looking for opportunities within courses such as geography, environment studies and land economics to make the connections and linkages to possible postgraduate study that would enable graduates from a variety of disciplines to pursue a career involving urban design. In other words, we must avoid becoming too introspective.

■ **2.2.9** A second form of introspection is a failure to exchange best practice with overseas institutions. Increasingly, we would like to see UK students spending time learning urban design skills in overseas institutions as part of their undergraduate (and indeed postgraduate) education. We would therefore like to see the relevant faculties strengthening their ties with equivalent institutions, particularly in countries with a strong record in urban design such as the Netherlands, Germany and those in Scandinavia.

Action

7 CABE, UDAL and the professional institutions will seek to work with the Economic and Social Research Council and other relevant research institutions to ensure that proposals for high quality academic research in urban design are adequately funded.

8 The professional institutions will ensure that accreditation guidelines for undergraduate built environment courses encourage a cross-disciplinary perspective. This will be achieved in part through expansion of core and optional project-based modules in urban design, which should also be available to students in other relevant courses (for example geography, environmental studies and engineering).

9 CABE and the professional institutions will look at options for additional recognition of undergraduate achievement in urban design, for example in the form of special certification.

10 CABE will work with local authorities, the professional institutions, academic institutions and private practices to increase the level and quality of undergraduate work placements in the urban design field and to improve links with best practice overseas.

Increasing the range of options for specialising in urban design at postgraduate level

■ **2.2.10** Postgraduate study in urban design serves two distinct needs and should be tailored accordingly. On the one hand, it caters for people who wish to have a general appreciation of urban design but have no intention of practising as urban designers. This might include planning officers seeking to specialise in development control, quantity surveyors seeking to work in regeneration delivery bodies, or engineers working in regeneration or transportation. On the other hand, it must also cater for those training to be professional urban designers, principally architects, landscape architects, engineers and strategic planners, but also in some cases individuals making a leap from other undergraduate disciplines, such as economics or estates development. It is right that both needs should be catered for but, at present, the distinction is blurred and needs to be more clearly reflected in the range of courses available.

■ **2.2.11** The Working Group takes the view that, at present, there are probably sufficient postgraduate urban design programmes in total. On the whole, however, these do not recruit large numbers of students. The issue is not therefore one of under-supply but one of recruitment and quality of provision.

■ **2.2.12** An appreciation of urban design should be built into all relevant postgraduate courses but there should also be specialised centres of excellence (within universities) for those seeking vocational urban design courses leading to a career as an urban designer. There is a clear need for curricula to meet employers' needs so that they are attractive to the demand side – in this sense, all courses need a strong practical emphasis. More superficially, making these courses more attractive may to some degree be a simple matter of nomenclature: for marketing purposes 'urban engineering' (or similar) may be a more compelling title than 'urban design' if an institution is seeking to attract engineers onto a relevant course.

■ **2.2.13** Alternative ways of delivering postgraduate courses need to be developed. These include

- block-release approaches involving intensive periods of attendance at a university over a two-year period;
- distance learning, with use where appropriate of the internet for the delivery of course material and the submission and return of coursework assignments;
- credit accumulation over variable time periods.

■ **2.2.14** Most importantly, potential students need to be guided more clearly through the educational opportunities. Courses tend to be tailored to a quite specific market. For example, the London School of Economics course adopts an international perspective and seeks to develop detailed design skills. The new University of North London course presents urban design as a much broader package of urban regeneration and development education, and will therefore probably attract a very different type of student.

■ **2.2.15** Given this diversity, the Working Group believes that further consideration should be given to whether some form of accreditation or certification should be extended to postgraduate urban design courses so that students are given the benefit of a qualitative judgement on the respective content and relative quality of courses at this level.

SELECTED POSTGRADUATE COURSES IN URBAN DESIGN

- Edinburgh College of Art
Diploma in Urban Design
- University of Greenwich
MA in Urban Design
- Leeds Metropolitan University
MA in Urban Environmental Design
- University of Lincolnshire & Humberside
Diploma in Urban Design
- University of Liverpool
Diploma in Civic Design
- Liverpool John Moores University
MSc/Diploma in Urban Renewal
- LSE
MSc in City Design and Social Science
- University College London
MSc in Building and Urban Design Development
- MSc in Urban Design
- University of Newcastle
MA/Diploma in Urban Design
- MA in Urban Design and Planning
- Oxford Brookes University
MA and Diploma in Urban Design
- South Bank University
PG Certificate in Specialised Planning Studies
- Sheffield Hallam University
MA/PG Diploma and PG Certificate in Urban Design
- University of Strathclyde
Diploma and MSc courses
- University of Westminster
MA or Diploma Course in Urban Design
- University of the West of England
Diploma in Urban Design
MA in Urban Design

Source: Urban Design Sourcebook (Urban Design Group). The courses listed above are not necessarily directly comparable, either in content or quality.

Action

11 In collaboration with the academic community, CABE and the professional institutions will consider whether it would be useful to develop an accreditation or certification process for urban design postgraduate courses.

12 Relevant professional institutions, such as the Institution of Civil Engineers, will review why graduate members are not attracted by current postgraduate provision and will encourage development of more relevant postgraduate courses.



2.3

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **2.3.1** Appreciation and understanding of urban design is required across the professions involved in creating and shaping the built environment - including developers, architects, engineers and quantity surveyors. The point is worth making again that urban design is not owned by any one profession: those involved in it at a practical level come from a range of built environment professions and there is a need for continuing professional development to impact upon each of their professional urban design skills requirements.
- **2.3.2** The Working Group regards CPD as one area where there is scope for the professional institutions to be proactive in ensuring quality. Increasingly, professionals are taking seriously the benefits of a structured approach to life-long learning. With greater demand for urban design skills, an increasing number of professionals across the built environment disciplines will be considering how they can extend their skills-base through additional education and training.

- **2.3.3** As a starting point, the Group welcomes the fact that the Urban Design Alliance (in association with the institutions themselves) has initiated a review of the requirements, provision and effectiveness of CPD as a vehicle for promoting widespread awareness of urban design. This review is considering the usefulness of setting up criteria for CPD and introducing accreditation for courses.
- **2.3.4** When it is provided in the workplace or as part of a structured programme, CPD can be a useful way of creating a broad awareness of urban design and of improving the skills of people already working in the field. All relevant professional institutions (and relevant employers, such as local authorities) should therefore encourage members to make urban design a key ingredient of their CPD.
- **2.3.5** Quality is, however, more important than quantity. A substantial amount of urban design-related CPD is already on offer (some of which does not use the term in its title) but there is a need for high-quality, tailored programmes to ensure focus and usefulness. While there is a market for simple urban design CPD which teaches a basic ability to read and interpret the built environment, more in-depth instruction must also be made available. There is always a danger that people will feel that they have 'learnt urban design' by attending a single one-day course, whereas true

appreciation of urban design emerges through a process of lifelong learning and practice. Quality control is also important. This can be achieved by the kitemarking of CPD, by closer cooperation between the professional institutions in the production of CPD course material and by making suitable versions of undergraduate and postgraduate modules in urban design available as 'catch-up' CPD.

- **2.3.6** With the risk of prejudging the results of the review mentioned above (2.3.3), the Working Group does not believe that prescription of CPD content is desirable. At present hours are prescribed (for example, twenty hours per year over three years for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) but content is often not prescribed. Imposing subject specific CPD on members is probably not the best way to foster a lifelong learning environment. Members should be encouraged, against the background of personal professional development plans, to consider a wide range of development opportunities including IT, business, management, finance and languages in addition to technical skills.

ROYAL INSTITUTION OF CHARTERED SURVEYORS TRAINING PATHWAYS

The RICS is committed to reviewing and enhancing the scope of urban design in the education and training of chartered surveyors. There are 11,000 chartered surveyors who belong to the new RICS Planning and Development Faculty, making it one of the largest groups in the RICS. The Faculty is currently reviewing professional training requirements for graduates seeking to qualify in this area. It has already committed to significantly enhancing the urban design content of planning and development training competencies, which will in turn drive the development of a greater urban design input into related courses recognised by the RICS. The Faculty will be seeking the support of employers before developing a new training pathway in urban design and will actively promote the inclusion of the new urban design competencies in all RICS built environment training pathways.

- **2.3.7** Within this broadly permissive framework, uptake of urban design-related CPD might be encouraged in a number of ways. First, CPD must be made appealing and relevant to members of all ages and types so that attendance is positively desired rather than undertaken perfunctorily; this can be achieved by relating urban design to the concerns of employers and demonstrating its commercial relevance, so that there are clear incentives to take up urban design CPD. Part of the usefulness of CPD lies in reaching those who would not ordinarily consider urban design an important topic, and persuading them of the value it can add to their everyday work. Second (and related to the first point) urban design CPD needs where possible to offer clear and tangible rewards, in the form of recognition of acquired knowledge and skills. Third, it needs to be widely advertised and made easily available.

Continuing Professional Development provision (from Reading Report)

Provision by the institutions	RIBA	RTPI	RICS	LI	ICE	Total
	Specific urban design events	2	7	3	1	2
Events with some relevance	13	32	27	14	27	113
Events with little or no relevance	32	22	214	11	125	404
Total events, nationally and 2 branches	47	61	244	26	154	532

Provision by third parties	Architecture	Planning	Surveying	Landscape	Engineering	Events
	Specific urban design events	15	21	15	16	15
Events with some relevance	16	63	31	27	5	81
Events with little or no relevance	208	70	26	22	10	276
Total events	239	154	72	65	30	386

Provision by universities	Built Environment						Total
	Architecture	Planning	Surveying	Landscape	Engineering		
Number of universities	4	8	11	11	2	4	22
Urban design short courses	3	24	10	5	4	3	49
Current modules on offer	115	24	45	31	N/a	41	256
relevant to urban design	32	5	36	10	N/a	19	102

Action

13 The relevant professional institutions will develop, introduce and promote a recognised inter-professional certificate in urban design, awarded to members of the affiliated professional institutions who complete recognised programmes of study.

14 The Working Group members will work together to promote events such as inter-professional seminars or conferences and an Urban Design Spring School, and to develop relevant self-learning toolkits and online modules

15 The professional institutions are committed to reviewing and improving information sharing, across the professions, of urban design CPD opportunities and providers. The professions will promote and publicise urban design CPD through their publications, e-mail newsletters and websites and through the media.



3.0

URBAN DESIGN AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

3.1

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Improving the urban design capacity of local authorities

- **3.1.1** At the start of this report, we made clear that good urban design is key to the creation of places that are economically, socially and environmentally successful. High quality urban design has been shown to contribute to commercial success, enhanced inward investment and reduced crime. It helps deliver regeneration, new jobs, public safety and quality public spaces, and in this sense it lies at the heart of local authorities' social and economic agenda. Achieving good design must therefore be a central concern within local government (and increasingly is a requirement imposed by central government guidance). Authorities must therefore be equipped to recognise and help deliver it, partly through their development control function but also by taking a proactive role in setting spatial strategies and putting together the kind of high-quality briefs and masterplans without which major urban developments will always under-perform. Recent DETR/CABE research (published as *The Value of Urban Design, 2001*) suggests that where local authorities are capable of fulfilling such a role effectively, the quality of the end product is significantly enhanced.

■ **3.1.2** Not enough local authorities have properly staffed in-house design teams which routinely vet the design aspects of proposed developments. This is partly a result of limited resources, which the Working Group fully acknowledges is a serious problem in local government; it is also a function of the hands-off approach to detailed design instilled in the development control system over the past twenty years. At the same time, with a small number of exceptions, local government has tended to fund relatively little urban design work and has become rather unaccustomed to employing its own staff or using consultants for this purpose. As one small example of this, it is notable that the House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee has recently taken the view that 'with certain exceptions, local authorities have not given sufficient priority to walking in their Local Transport Plans', in spite of the fact that walking has an important role to play in the urban renaissance³.

³Walking in Towns and Cities, Eleventh Report of the Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Vol 1, 2001

■ **3.1.3** To help address these points, the Working Group believes that every local authority should ensure that it has access to the right professional skills at the right time. One way of achieving this is to seek outside help when required, for example through CABE's design review and project enabling services. Ideally, though, each local authority would have access to in-house design skills, although there is a clear need to avoid the danger of a merely token urban design presence which has little influence on wider local authority practice or policy development. To help avoid this, the Working Group would support the establishment of urban design teams within larger local authorities to develop coherent strategies for the public realm and facilitate coordination across departments. Smaller authorities might consider pooling resources at county level so that the financial burden is shared. We would also see scope for those authorities that have developed best practice expertise in urban design selling those services to other authorities, in the way that, for example, Hampshire County Council Architect's Department undertakes projects in different parts of the country.

LOCAL AUTHORITY ADVISORY PANEL

The Liverpool Urban Design and Conservation Advisory Panel was set up by the City Council's Planning, Transportation and Licensing Committee in response to a recognition that the quality of Liverpool's urban environment played a major part in promoting the city's image, encouraging tourism and attracting new business and retail investment. The panel's members are drawn from the Council's Development Control sub-committee and from outside organisations, including Liverpool Architecture and Design Trust and the former Liverpool Heritage Bureau. The panel's principal roles are to advise the Council on design and conservation strategies and the design aspects of proposed developments at both pre- and post-planning stage.

■ **3.1.4** The Government and local authorities should encourage the training of planning professionals in urban design (including clientship and briefing skills) by publicising CPD training opportunities, by ensuring time is made available to staff for training and by providing funding for training. Local authorities should consider contracting urban design practitioners to help devise and provide this training. The professional institutions will assist local authorities in identifying suitable postgraduate programmes and short courses in urban design. Because of the interrelationship of a local authority's work, training should be available not just to planners but also to technical staff in planning departments, enforcement officers, highway engineers and housing managers. All departments need to 'buy in' to the urban design agenda.

TRAINING LOCAL AUTHORITY OFFICERS

The Joint Centre for Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University has been engaged by Dorset County Council to train officers whose work impacts on the built environment. The eight officers involved come from varied backgrounds in architecture, planning, surveying, landscape and conservation and are based in different departments. They are working together, within the academic framework of the Centre's Certificate and Diploma Programmes, on a live regeneration project for the market town of Bridport. As well as training individual officers, the emphasis on group work is intended to build a cross-disciplinary culture across departments within the team; and it is hoped that the relatively large number of officers involved will trigger a culture change, which in turn will promote a wider engagement with urban design ideas throughout the authority.

■ **3.1.5** Local authorities should ensure that relevant staff are fully aware of the content and recommendations of urban design-related guidance, such as By Design (CABE/DETR 2000) and the Urban Design Compendium (English Partnerships 2000). CABE, English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation and DTLR will run a series of seminars around England in 2001 to disseminate By Design and the Urban Design Compendium. Best practice in management and process should be publicised so that other authorities are able to learn from examples of excellence. CABE's digital photo library, planned for development in 2001, will aim to be a tool for disseminating best practice amongst local authorities.

■ **3.1.6** The Working Group supports the proposal in the Urban White Paper for secondments of international experts to DTLR, to a national body such as CABE and to local or regional projects such as one of the new Urban Regeneration Companies. Part of the purpose of these secondments would be to consider the differences in skills and training that exist between the UK and other countries and how international experience could help.

Action

16 CABE will seek to work with partners, including the LGA, the professional institutions and DTLR, to encourage greater allocation of resources for the employment of design skills by local authorities, and will consider appropriate ways of monitoring progress.

17 CABE will provide two-day training events in urban design at venues across the country, aimed specifically at local and regional decision-makers.

Evaluating local authority design performance

■ **3.1.7** The Working Group has concluded that a key element of improving local authority capacity and performance in urban design is to provide a series of clearly defined performance outcomes. Local authorities must be given clear evaluation criteria (so that they know how to assess their own performance or are clear how it is assessed by others); measurable performance indicators (so that they know when they have done well), and clear rewards (so that they have incentives to deliver good urban design).

■ **3.1.8** Some output and outcome measures must be provided which cover all authorities, regardless of their willingness to participate. The Working Group welcomes the intention (flowing from the Urban White Paper) to adopt urban design as a Beacon Council theme, with local authorities competing to demonstrate excellence. Opt-in schemes of this kind are a crucial part of delivering better performance but need to be complemented by initiatives which do not rely on authorities taking the first step.

■ **3.1.9** The Best Value initiative is a key element in the Government's plans for modernising local government and is an important means of improving the urban design capabilities of local authorities. The initiative sets out a vision of councils listening to the people they serve, building up their communities, working in partnership with others and delivering efficient services to high standards. Best Value also recognises that cooperation between professions and local authority departments is necessary for effective service provision. It requires authorities to review their functions and publish annual plans showing past and projected performance. And it introduces a rigorous programme of audit and inspection.

Provision of urban design training by local authorities (by % of authorities responding to Arup survey) Arup Report, 2000

	Authorities without urban design staff		Authorities with urban design staff	
	In-house	External	In-house	External
Type of training				
No training support	8%	0%	0%	0%
Induction of new staff	11%	11%	20%	6%
Sponsorship on courses	11%	38%	35%	44%
On the job training	38%	4%	50%	20%
Regular seminars	15%	58%	38%	50%
Members training	11%	11%	41%	15%

■ **3.1.10** The Working Group believes that urban design should be made an integral part of the Best Value regime. Different options need to be considered for measuring, monitoring and evaluating design performance. One beneficial initiative (which has the advantage of being translatable into quantitative measures) would be to place a general requirement on local authorities to measure levels of public satisfaction with the quality of their local environment, the quality of new buildings and the management of the public realm. There is also a case to be made for the introduction of structured design audits. The Urban Design Alliance's Placecheck initiative, designed to gauge the urban design attributes of an area, offers a ready-made methodology for assessing public satisfaction with urban spaces.

■ **3.1.11** The Working Group also notes that Public Service Agreements will be increasingly important in the context of the next Comprehensive Spending Review. The opportunity should be taken to link these agreements to quality of public space and to the standing of urban design within local government.

Action

18 CABE will explore with DTLR and other partners, including the LGA, the potential for developing best value performance criteria that could be adapted for use in the context of a Beacon Council theme relating to urban design, and for developing a series of structured performance audits for local authorities in receipt of significant levels of regeneration funding.

19 CABE, DTI and the Construction Industry Council will develop a small package of key performance indicators for local authorities to help measure their urban design capacity and monitor performance over time.

Training local authority members

■ **3.1.12** Local councillors are elected representatives and have a direct democratic link to their electors. As a result, they are potentially a more difficult group to influence or train than officers. However, the commitment and input of councillors is essential if urban design is to be prioritised at the strategic level and the political impetus for quality spaces is to be provided.

■ **3.1.13** The Working Group believes that those making decisions of long-term strategic importance to the future of neighbourhoods, towns and cities (whether they are elected or not) should have relevant training. In training and educating councillors, the focus should be on examples of where good design in the built environment has raised the image and profile of an area, increased site values, raised expectations, provided a magnet for investment, created a more attractive environment for employees and enhanced social inclusion. In other words, urban design can be presented, not as something chiefly concerned with aesthetics, but as a key part of delivering councillors' socio-economic priorities. Attention should be paid as much to process as to product, so that lessons can be learnt and applied elsewhere.

■ **3.1.14** Good practice guides and practice-based training (either specifically for councillors or suitable for them) are available and should be actively promoted by the Local Government Association and local authorities. The professional institutions will endeavour to ensure that all councillors (not only those on planning committees) have access to their online training information, such as the RICS CPD Providers database at www.riconline.org.

■ **3.1.15** Additionally, CABE has targeted much of the effort of its regional programme on reaching local authority members. Last year, it managed a direct dialogue with 116 authorities in England, just over a quarter of all authorities. It will be unable to increase this provision much further without extra resources. The support of Regional Development Agencies would be welcome here.

TRAINING FOR COUNCILLORS

The annual Town and Country Planning Summer School, run under the auspices of the Royal Town Planning Institute, includes a 4-day Councillors' School. This provides educational opportunities for councillors engaged in the work of planning committees and enables them, through a mixture of presentations, workshops and study tours, to discuss planning problems and achievements with colleagues across the UK. Papers relating to architecture and urban design are generally included in the programme.

Action

20 The Working Group partners will establish joint events on urban design aimed specifically at local councillors. These events will be facilitated by the Urban Design Alliance with the support of CABE, DTLR and others.

21 Through its regional programme and connections with the Regional Development Agencies and Centres for the Built Environment, CABE will continue to develop links with councillors and coordinate the development of targeted training material. It will provide evening briefing sessions for groups of members in different localities across the country. Selected members of planning committees will also be invited to attend parts of CABE's design review committee meetings.

The role of local design champions

■ **3.1.16** One prerequisite for improving urban design skills in the long-term is to recreate a culture where urban design quality is intrinsic to new development. Achieving this depends as much on will as on resources. Urban design should be in a position of influence within a local authority. And a sense of enterprise, leadership and vision is required at local level if urban development is to contribute to an urban renaissance and the calibre of debate about the shape and form of urban areas is to be enhanced within local government. Bold vision and debate are necessary to create successful schemes such as Brindleyplace in Birmingham or Millennium Square in Leeds.

■ **3.1.17** One mechanism for achieving this culture change might be the appointment of design champions within local authorities, to mirror those recently appointed at Ministerial and official level within Government departments as part of the Prime Minister's Better Public Buildings Initiative. The Working Group would see a design champion having a proactive role, for example commenting on public and private sector development proposals, reviewing the local authority's policy and procurement strategies and instigating interdepartmental training sessions.

■ **3.1.18** Although we do not propose a definitive template for design champions, the role might be undertaken by a senior councillor or a paid part-time private consultant, possibly from among the pool of senior professionals who have taken early retirement. Whichever model is chosen, it is essential that the design champion (who need not be an architect or professional designer) has full support at a political level and from senior management and has sufficient seniority himself to act as a patron. At present, regrettably, those in local authorities with formal design training are generally not employed at a high enough level to have the clout required for a championing role.

LEEDS CITY COUNCIL DESIGN CHAMPIONS

At Leeds City Council, design quality is championed by the Chairman of the Environment Committee, backed by the Civic Architect. The post of Civic Architect was created in 1996 to help create awareness of the importance of architecture and urban design to regeneration. The present incumbent, John Thorp, works across departments from a base within the Council's Development Agency. Strong links have been created with the private and voluntary sectors through design appraisals, project presentations and development assessments. As a result, urban regeneration projects have emerged where design, economic prosperity, sustainability and social issues are understood and encouraged as interdependent strands in urban regeneration.



Action

22 CABE will work with DTLR and relevant local authority bodies to encourage local authorities to appoint design champions by providing and supporting different models of appointment including internal and external individuals, and the use of expert panels.

3.2

OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BODIES

■ **3.2.1** The quality of the urban environment and the public realm is very largely shaped by public investment. Besides planning authorities, a range of public bodies influence (or potentially influence) the quality of urban design in the UK, including many with funding responsibilities such as

- The Arts Council
- British Waterways
- The Community Fund
- English Heritage
- English Partnerships
- The Environment Agency
- Government Offices for the Regions
- The Heritage Lottery Fund
- The Highways Agency
- The Housing Corporation
- The Millennium Commission
- The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
- The New Opportunities Fund
- Regional Development Agencies
- Sport England
- Urban Regeneration Companies

■ **3.2.2** The reverse is also true. Quality of urban design has a significant impact on the effectiveness of these organisations' work and on the effectiveness of their funding programmes. Good urban design contributes to the success of regeneration initiatives and commercial development; well-planned and designed housing developments tend to have lower crime rates. The urban design content of applications for funding must therefore be properly considered if public money is to be spent well. In most cases, funding for physical works should be made conditional upon the quality of the proposed design solution. Quality thresholds for applications would be useful, if the process can be made transparent and the criteria clear. Time for Design (English Partnerships 1997) is a useful example of a funding agency setting out quality-related guidance; other agencies should be encouraged to follow suit so that expectations of design quality are made clear at the outset.

■ **3.2.3** Funding agencies should employ urban design teams, comprising qualified urban designers, to be consulted as part and parcel of the decision-making process. In particular they should assist in the development of briefs, masterplans and urban design strategies for major developments. It may be appropriate for schemes to be referred to expert design panels, either in-house or external. CABE is willing to provide advice on selected strategic schemes through its project enabling panel, which offers expert assistance to clients at an early stage in the development process.

■ **3.2.4** The Government and the professional bodies should ensure that funding bodies have knowledge of and access to the training and development opportunities available.

■ **3.2.5** The second set of public bodies whose remit directly impacts on quality of urban design are government departments and agencies with significant capital expenditure programmes for public buildings that have a direct impact on their surroundings. Examples are hospitals, schools, police stations and court buildings, which will need the full involvement of relevant urban design skills if they are to take their proper place as civic hubs within their communities. The fact that some of these buildings will be procured through the Private Finance Initiative makes it especially important that their connections with their surroundings are properly considered. CABE is already working with each of the relevant bodies to ensure that urban design training is provided to client managers.

■ **3.2.6** Finally, there is the Planning Inspectorate, which has contributed fully as a member of this Working Group. The Inspectorate is committed to increasing the urban design skills of its membership, not just among those inspectors who tend to specialise in design issues. Training was provided by CABE at the 2001 Planning Inspectorate training week and additional regional provision will be encouraged on an ongoing basis.

■ **3.2.7** Although the public sector has a very considerable influence on the quality of public spaces, the fact remains that the majority of development schemes are promoted by the private sector. It is essential, in the Working Group's view, that attempts to improve the level of skills in urban design include the private sector, not least because the planning system can bear only so much of the burden for ensuring that proposed development is of a high enough standard and makes a positive contribution to the quality of the public realm. Ultimately, clients and developers in the private sector have to share responsibility, with planning authorities, for the design quality of schemes they put forward.

■ **3.2.8** Volume housebuilders, for example, have a real collective impact on the quality of urban design. Again, guidance can be produced to help them bring forward schemes that are well laid-out, but it is far better if they themselves regard urban design excellence as a necessary ingredient of new housing developments. To this end, CABE is cooperating on a number of initiatives relating to housing design and layouts, including the Building for Life initiative with the Civic Trust and House Builders' Federation, a companion guide to PPG3 and research into the link between high-quality layouts and net development value. Also worth mentioning in this context is the work of Rethinking Construction, which aims to promote innovation and integration in the design and construction processes.

Action

23 DTLR will ask the public bodies listed at paragraph 3.2.1

to report on the mechanisms they will introduce to ensure that urban design is given adequate priority in schemes for which they have funding or management responsibility;

to appoint a design champion within the organisation (if this has not happened already) to ensure that design issues are kept high up the organisational agenda.

24 CABE will continue to develop partnerships with representative private sector organisations, such as the House Builders' Federation and the British Property Federation, to help ensure that due priority is given to urban design in the planning and development of projects.

3.3

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

The role of proposed Regional Centres of Excellence

- **3.3.1** In the Urban White Paper, the Government proposed a network of regional centres to coordinate training in cross-professional skills and to disseminate evidence of best practice and innovation in urban development. The centres will have a broad remit in that they are concerned with increasing expertise in all aspects of urban regeneration, from neighbourhood management through to land assembly. They should therefore take a holistic approach, covering construction and development issues, partnership and management arrangements and wider strategic issues, including community involvement. More particularly, they should take a role in ensuring that architecture and urban design do not get lost in the debate about urban development.
- **3.3.2** The Working Group regards these centres as potentially important channels for the improvement of skills, in part by bringing together stakeholders from the private and public sectors. It believes the centres should act as gateways, producing and publicising a database of available training in urban design within their regions. They should work with the professional institutions to develop training and advisory initiatives, which should be made available not only to professionals but to community representatives involved in area regeneration.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

The Architecture Foundation Roadshow toured three London Boroughs from 1998-2000, seeking to engage the community in the design of public open spaces, neglected areas, pedestrian connections and amenities and infrastructure. Working with residents, schoolchildren, architects and local authority officers, the Architecture Foundation acted as an independent broker, staging in each Borough a four-month programme of public events: design festivals, an education programme, arts projects and public exhibitions. The results were design proposals that the local authorities concerned committed themselves to finding funds for and implementing.

Following the Roadshow, high demand from regeneration partnerships for effective methods of community engagement led to the production of 'Creative Spaces', a website, book and training programme which forms a toolkit for others to use these methods.

www.creativespaces.org.uk



- **3.3.3** The centres should be seen as a means of providing cooperation and coordination in what remains a crowded and fragmented area. There is a plethora of public and semi-public bodies concerned with the built environment and operating at the regional level. While this is encouraging insofar as it indicates widespread enthusiasm for a better urban environment, it also leads to a risk of duplication, lack of focus, confused messages and inefficient use of resources. One early task of the centres should be to undertake a mapping exercise of provision and resources in this area, with a view to identifying gaps in provision and recommending rationalisation where overprovision exists.
- **3.3.4** The centres should themselves, of course, cooperate closely with existing regional and national networks, making connections with architecture centres and centres for the built environment. Where the centres do not themselves have the relevant expertise to improve urban design provision, they should consider contracting this element to another body; the relationship between the Centre for the Understanding of the Built Environment in Manchester and the North-West Centre for Excellence is a model of the kind of constructive links that can be made. The RTPI, RICS and RIBA are already actively involved at a regional level in promoting training and disseminating best practice and the centres should take care to build on, rather than duplicate, their work. Again, the scope for direct involvement of Regional Development Agencies in administering centres of excellence should be explored.

Action

25 CABE will work with regional partners to establish the Centres of Excellence as robust bodies capable of contributing over time to the development of urban design skills. In association with the Regional Development Agencies, the centres should produce annual reports on the development of design skills within their regions.

The role of the Urban Design Alliance (UDAL)

- **3.3.5** The role of the Urban Design Alliance is to promote, through an inter-disciplinary approach, a better understanding of urban design in the planning and development process.
- **3.3.6** UDAL has achieved a number of successes, including the commissioning of research into the scope of urban design in the higher education curriculum, the establishment of Urban Design Week and the development of the Placecheck initiative. It has been successful in encouraging cooperation between the professions and raising the profile of urban design amongst the various professions concerned with the development and management of the built environment.

MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN ALLIANCE

The Civic Trust
The Institution of Civil Engineers
The Landscape Institute
The Royal Institute of British Architects
The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
The Royal Town Planning Institute
The Urban Design Group

- **3.3.7** Administrative responsibility for UDAL currently rotates between its member bodies, as a result of which there is no permanent secretariat. UDAL has recently agreed to establish a permanent staff base (based at the Urban Design Group) supported by contributions from each of its professional body representatives. This is a significant step towards a more secure and proactive approach. To be truly effective, however, UDAL needs to be properly funded and set up on a permanent basis, with a full-time and adequately staffed secretariat.

Action

26 The professional institutions will work together over the next three years to strengthen UDAL and place it on a firmer financial footing so that it can play a fuller role in implementing this action plan.

ANNEX A

MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN SKILLS WORKING GROUP

Sir Stuart Lipton
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Chairman)

Dr Matthew Carmona
Royal Town Planning Institute

Jeff Channing
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Michael Dickson
Construction Industry Council

Meredith Evans
Urban Design Alliance

Professor Colin Fudge
University of the West of England

Tim Gale
Landscape Institute

David Hanchet
Planning Inspectorate

Richard Hastilow
Royal Institute of British Architects

Simon Kolesar
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

Dr Sebastian Loew
Urban Design Group

Lee Searles
Local Government Association

Les Sparks OBE
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

Professor Sir Colin Stansfield Smith CBE

Robert Upton
Royal Town Planning Institute

Mark Whitby
Institution of Civil Engineers and Urban Design Alliance

SECRETARIAT

Jon Rouse
Chief Executive, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

Robert Bargery
Policy and Research Manager, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

ANNEX B

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS, WITH RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

URBAN DESIGN EDUCATION

ACTION

01 Strengthen the QCA Schemes of Work to provide greater impetus for education about the importance of the built environment across the curriculum.

02 Provide greater opportunities for young people to be introduced to urban design issues through structured projects, school conferences, study trips and open days at relevant workplaces.

03 Extend the number of special initiatives aimed at interesting young people in built environment issues, including out-of-school provision.

04 Establish an Education Foundation to co-ordinate the work of individuals and organisations striving to improve built environment education provision for young people.

05 Review how young people can be attracted to apply for courses relevant to urban design. Exchange best practice and pool resources.

06 Ensure that young people's interest in the built environment is fostered through post-16 education, both in terms of academic and vocational qualifications.

07 Ensure that proposals for high quality academic research in urban design are adequately funded.

08 Ensure that accreditation guidelines for undergraduate built environment courses encourage a cross-disciplinary perspective.

09 Assess options for additional recognition of undergraduate achievement in urban design.

10 Increase the level and quality of undergraduate work placements in the urban design field and improve links with best practice overseas.

11 Consider development of an accreditation or certification process for urban design postgraduate courses.

12 Review why graduate members of professional institutions are not attracted by current postgraduate provision and encourage development of more relevant postgraduate courses.

13 Develop, introduce and promote a recognised inter-professional certificate in urban design.

14 Promote events such as inter-professional seminars or conferences and an Urban Design Spring School and develop relevant self-learning toolkits and online modules.

15 Review and improve sharing of information about urban design CPD opportunities and providers.

Responsibility

CABE, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), QCA

DfES, the professional institutions, CABE, Construction Industry Council, Construction Industry Training Board

Professional institutions, supported by the Urban Design Alliance and the Construction Industry Council

CABE

Professional and academic institutions

CABE, DfES, DTLR, Learning and Skills Council, design and construction industries

CABE, UDAL and professional institutions, in association with relevant research institutions

Professional institutions

CABE, professional institutions

CABE, local authorities, academic institutions, private practices

CABE and professional institutions, in collaboration with the academic community

Professional institutions

Relevant professional institutions

Working Group members

Professional institutions, CABE

URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC BODIES: CAPACITY AND DISSEMINATION

ACTION

Responsibility

16 Encourage greater allocation of resources for the employment of design skills by local authorities, and consider appropriate ways of monitoring progress.	CABE, LGA, the professional institutions and DTLR
17 Provide two-day training events in urban design aimed specifically at local and regional decision-makers.	CABE, DTLR, local government
18 Consider potential for developing best value performance criteria that could be adapted for use in the context of a Beacon Council theme relating to urban design, and for developing a series of structured audits for local authorities in receipt of significant levels of regeneration funding.	CABE, DTLR, LGA
19 Develop a small package of key performance indicators for local authorities to help measure their urban design capacity and performance; monitor performance over time.	CABE, DTI and the Construction Industry Council
20 Establish joint events on urban design aimed at local councillors.	UDAL with the support of CABE, DTLR and others
21 Develop links with councillors and coordinate the development of targeted urban design training material.	CABE, Regional Development Agencies, Centres for the Built Environment
22 Encourage local authorities to appoint design champions, including internal and external individuals and the use of expert panels.	CABE, DTLR, relevant local authority bodies

OTHER BODIES

ACTION

Responsibility

23 Public bodies whose remit bears on urban design to be asked to appoint an internal design champion and to report on the mechanisms they will introduce to ensure that urban design is given adequate priority in schemes for which they have funding or management responsibility.	DTLR
24 Develop partnerships with representative private sector organisations to help ensure that due priority is given to urban design in the planning and development of projects.	CABE
25 Establish the Regional Centres of Excellence as robust bodies capable of contributing to the development of urban design skills.	CABE, DTLR
26 Strengthen UDAL and place it on a firmer financial footing.	Relevant professional institutions

ANNEX C

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CURRICULUM AUTHORITY SCHEMES OF WORKS RELEVANT TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Art, Craft and Design

Year 1-2 Unit 2c	'Can buildings speak?'
Year 3-4 Unit 3c	'Can we change places?'
Year 5-6 Unit 6c	'A sense of place'
Year 7 Unit 7b	'What's in a building?'
Year 9 Unit 9c	'Personal places, public spaces'

Design and Technology

Year 1 Unit 1b	'Playgrounds'
Year 1 Unit 1d	'Homes'
Year 6 Unit 6a	'Shelters'

Geography

Year 1 Unit 1	'Around our school – the local area'
Year 3 Unit 6	'Investigating the local area'
Year 3-4 Unit 21	'How can we improve the area we can see from our window?'

History

Year 3-4 Unit 18	'What was it like to live here in the past?'
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Religious education

Year 1 Unit 1	'What can we learn from visiting a church?'
Year 6 Unit 6	'What can we learn from Christian religious buildings?'

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Urban design is the art of making places for people - places that function well and inspire pride and a sense of ownership in those who live and work there. Good urban design is, in short, a major contributor to quality of life. But it does not happen by accident. It is the result of conscious decisions and joined-up actions by a range of public and private agencies. And it is, above all, a creative endeavour which requires creative skills.

A lack of these skills has been identified, by the Urban Task Force and others, as one of the main barriers to an urban renaissance in England. It was in an effort to tackle this deficit that the Government set up the Urban Design Skills Working Group in the summer of 2000. Chaired and administered by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Group comprised the key professional institutions and representatives of higher education and government concerned with the future of the built environment.

This report analyses how we can acquire - at all levels and across all built environment disciplines - the design skills that will help to deliver urban renewal. It is relevant not only to specialist urban designers but to all those who, in their day to day work, have an impact on the built environment - local councillors, engineers, transport planners and surveyors among them. And its recommendations are relevant to a range of public and private sector bodies, from local authorities and funding agencies to developers and academic institutions.