

## **WORKING WITH CLIENTS 1:**

### **PREPARING TO MEET THE CLIENT – DECIDING THE QUESTIONS TO ASK**

This workshop uses preparation for a forthcoming meeting between students and a project client to get students to think about architect/client communication and in particular the formulation of questions to use in the early stages of brief development. The workshop fosters the development of students' skills in verbal communication and extends their experience of productive group work. The questions are developed by student subgroups, using the technique of assembling a pool of possible questions before discussing and refining the ones they will actually ask. This is the sort of group activity that can reveal differences in perceptions and skills and lead to increased respect for fellow students' abilities as well as extending individual thinking. Students are encouraged to explain the purpose behind the questions they propose and check their understanding of each other's proposals through paraphrasing what they have heard. In these ways they get practice in improving both the transmission and reception responsibilities for effective verbal communication.

**Student Numbers:** Ideally no more than 15/20 students working in subgroups of 5 (run more than once for larger overall groups)

**Time required:** 1 hour and 40 minutes. The workshop should be run within a day or two of the students' meeting with the client.

#### **Aims:**

- To encourage students to think about the nature of the architect/client relationship, what makes it successful and what are the architect's responsibilities for ensuring the briefing stage gets off to a good start.
- To consider some of the inherent difficulties with questions in the context of architect/client communication
- To plan an appropriate form for an initial meeting between architecture students and a client.

#### **Workshop Outputs:**

1. An agreed set of questions to put to the client, with a clear rationale for why the questions are being asked. The questions have been tried out within the group.
2. An agreed plan for running the meeting.

## CUDE workshop tutor support packs

### Step 1: Introduction (5 Mins)

Tutor explains the purpose and outcomes of the workshop:

- to prepare for the forthcoming meeting with the client
- to promote thinking about the architect/client relationship
- to introduce communication skills relevant to the early stages in developing a brief with a client

and summarises what will happen during the session.

Tutor emphasise the vital importance of client briefing and input during the design process:

- Architects need well developed skills in developing a brief with the client; knowing what questions to ask; being able to explain why they are asking these questions; listening carefully to the answers and checking they have understood what is intended; presenting suppositions and proposals about the brief as a way of opening up discussion of the client's intentions.
- As well as eliciting information about what the client needs and hopes for, these early sessions with the client are also an important way of forming a collaborative relationship.

### Step 2 - What We Already Know About The Client And The Client's Requirements. (10 Mins)

**Aim** - The purpose of this session is to get students, working in groups, to share their impressions and what they already know as the basis for generating useful questions. (NB - they are not at this stage generating the questions.)

Each group assembles sets of headlines summarising what they already know, or imagine, about this client's objectives and aspirations. For example:

- Any constraints on the client
- Values
- Priorities
- What the client wants

### Step 3 - Questions And Questioning (35 Minutes)

**Aim** - The purpose of the short input which begins this section of the workshop is to raise students' awareness of what is involved in asking good questions before they go on to develop their own.

***Tutor (5 mins)***

Get students to suggest ways in which we commonly use questions, for example: to elicit factual information; to intimidate or demonstrate superiority; to show interest in the person questioned; to conceal an idea which the speaker isn't confident enough to propose.

Often people assume they know what is being asked for and attempt to give an answer in an effort to please the questioner or avoid recriminations. Or they don't understand the purpose of the question, feel intimidated and don't speak.

Explaining the purpose of your question is an effective way of getting over these difficulties. This enables the person questioned to give you a helpful answer. (Tutor gives examples from his/her own practice.)

Architects need to be able to ask a range of questions from simple eliciting of factual information through to questions designed to uncover hopes and wishes.

***Students (30 mins)***

Subgroups draw up a long list of possible questions, with everybody contributing. Then the groups reduce these to an agreed 5 or 6, each one expressed as clearly as possible, with an explanation of its purpose.

**Step 4 – Practice (30 Mins)**

Questions from the subgroups are tried out in the whole group and agreement reached on which will be the questions to be asked in the client meeting. Taking it in turns, each subgroup presents a question for feedback from the rest of the group and then from design tutors drawing on their professional client experience. Each question is refined where necessary and the agreed questions listed with decisions taken on who will ask them.

**Step 5 - Managing The Meeting (20 Minutes)**

Each subgroup is invited to make suggestions for the running of the meeting: for example, how the client can be put at ease; how all the questions can be asked; how to ensure everybody contributes; whether notes will be taken and by whom.

The subgroups' suggestions are drawn together into a plan for the meeting which everybody agrees to follow.

## **WORKING WITH CLIENTS 2:**

### **USING DESIGN PROPOSALS TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE WITH USERS**

This workshop is intended to prepare students for discussing design proposals with clients and building users. It assumes students have already done some work on the brief.

During their time at University, students mostly present their work to tutors and fellow students who share ways of looking at, representing and talking about architecture. The perceptions and values of the architectural community become predominant. Access to real 'users' helps students appreciate that users come from very different starting points from themselves as architects. They have different images of what they want, different preconceptions and different ways of responding to buildings. In addition to these differences in perception, they have a different language for talking about buildings and they may not be able to 'read' drawings. Working with users requires particular skills on the part of the architectural student. They have to be able to present proposals, in ways which respect the users' perceptions, in order to set up a dialogue through which to refine the proposals.

The workshop addresses two crucial elements:

- recognising differences in perception
- developing relevant communication skills.

**Time allocation:** One and a half hours

**Programming** - The workshop is run a day or two before a meeting with users.

#### **Aims**

- To help students understand that there are many different ways of perceiving and responding to buildings.
- To develop students' skills in representing design proposals – graphic and verbal - in ways that can be understood by different audiences.
- To develop students' skills in using design proposals to promote dialogue with users.

#### **Outputs**

By the end of the workshop each student will have prepared and tried out what he or she will present at the meeting with the users and been given feedback by a fellow student. The group will have also agreed how to manage the users' meeting.

### **Step 1 – Raising Student Awareness (35 Minutes)**

The workshop tutor explains the reason for the workshop, its outcomes and how it will be run. (5 mins)

The workshop starts with a session intended to raise students' awareness of the different ways in which people perceive buildings. (30 minutes)

One way of doing this is through discussion, drawing on other activities going on in the School, such as projects which involve working with school children, or on individual students' experience of people in the world outside the School in the course, for instance, of their part time jobs.

Another way is to set up an awareness raising exercise, using role play. Students work in small groups to describe the building they are currently working in from the perspective of a particular potential building user, selecting the roles to give a wide spread of response. (Each group takes one role.) For example: primary school children; retired people; building maintenance officers. Each group reports back to the large group and the significance of the exercise to the forthcoming meeting is discussed and emphasised.

### **Step 2 - Structuring And Describing The Content Of The Design Proposals For Presentation To Clients And Users (30 Minutes)**

The purpose of this session is to get the students to think about their design proposals from the perspective of the user who will be trying to understand and comment on them.

The tutor asks the students to adapt the presentation development technique introduced in the workshop on constructive criticism (see CUDE workshop tutor support pack: Enriching the review) as follows:

- 1 Individually, they note down the main concepts underlying their proposals and the particular aspects on which they would like user feedback. The intention of this is to create a structure for the presentation, which the users will easily be able to follow.
- 2 Working in pairs, they then take turns to explain to each other, in everyday language, the intention of their designs, using drawings and models, and ask for comments. The listening student adopts the imagined perspective of the 'user' and gives feedback to the presenting student on how easy it was to follow what was being said, in particular, clarity of structure of the presentation, absence of jargon, appropriateness of chosen forms of graphic representation.

### **Step 3 - Managing The User's Input And Response To The Proposals (20 Minutes)**

The tutor explains to the students the need to find ways of helping the users understand what the architect needs from them in order to bring the design in line with user requirements. This includes:

- Giving the users a clear picture of what will happen during the meeting, setting up a simple agenda, so that users know what the intended outcomes are.
- Explaining the reasons for asking about particular aspects – why does the architect need to know?
- Demonstrating interest in the users' view by paraphrasing back what they have heard and checking that this is what the user intended.
- Keeping the user to the point, whilst being sensitive enough to let valuable digressions develop.
- Creating the opportunity for users to raise other issues and make other suggestions, (listening carefully to these even if they appear to conflict with pet design intentions)
- Summarising how a student will use what has been heard.
- This step could be developed through a group brainstorm, with the tutor contributing some summary points. Students take notes on what needs to be managed and use these to review their own experience after their meeting with the users.

### **Step 4 - How To Run The Meeting (5 Minutes)**

The tutor draws from the group suggestions for how to manage the meetings with the users, assuming that there will be many students and few users.

*Note: CUDE's experience is that getting students to take a professional responsibility for the conduct of the meetings increases the seriousness with which they treat the outcome of the meeting and their project motivation generally.*

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