

Research update: The Fairclough Report Rethinking construction innovation and research

Dr Graham Owens, Chairman of the Research Panel, writes on *The Fairclough Report: Rethinking construction innovation and research*

The 'Fairclough Report', an independent view of the future role that UK Government should play in supporting construction research, was published on 27 February 2002*.

It is likely to have a major impact on the future of commissioned research. The Government is both the guardian of the public interest and a



major client of construction. It has an interest in funding research:

- as regulator providing scientific underpinning to the Building Regulations;
- as sponsor to increase productivity;
- as client to achieve best value;
- as policymaker where improvements in construction contribute to the wider policy agenda.

The Government is looking to involve industry and the profession fully in the implementation of the report later this year.

At the time of writing the mechanisms are not clear but the Research Panel will ensure that the Institution plays its role fully.

One of the underpinning assumptions of the report is that industry should take greater responsibility for defining and funding the research needed to improve its competitiveness.

In this context, it argues for a stronger direct involvement by the institutions. They have an opportunity to develop direct collaboration with industry to facilitate the setting and dissemination of industry standards.

In my view, this report is to be

welcomed warmly. Construction is approximately 8% of G.D.P. and the quality of the built environment impacts substantially on the quality of life of us all.

A commitment to ongoing support from Government to construction research and development provides an essential underpinning to improvement in all aspects of our performance. Government support will increasingly be concentrated on projects that improve productivity, value for money and strategic issues. This will encourage a more coherent

vision of the future direction for both the profession and the industry we serve.

* The report was commissioned from Sir John Fairclough in May 2001 by Nick Raynsford, then Construction Minister for the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Copies of the report are available from the DTI website: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/construction/cmpntence.html>

The summary and conclusions are reproduced below (with permission).

The Fairclough Report's conclusions

Investment

- Current government investment in construction R&D should be safeguarded
- Increase investment on R&D supporting:
 - productivity
 - value for public sector clients
 - strategic issues

Strategic vision

- Acknowledge construction's contribution to quality of life agenda
- Facilitate a strategic vision owned by the industry
- R&D priorities should be based on strategic analysis of the issues faced by the sector

Mechanisms for change

- The Strategic Forum takes pivotal role in strategic thinking
- New arrangements for prioritising R&D building on foundations laid by CRISP

Commissioning research

- Define longer term programmes of R&D based on analysis of problems
- Procurement of R&D on merit, avoiding monopoly supply
- Encourage collaboration, ensure relevance to industry needs, institute strong quality control mechanisms
- Improve dissemination, evaluate impact, assess return on government investment

Government focus

- Tailor Government R&D procurement to reflect the various motivations for government support:
 - Regulator
 - Sponsor
 - Client
 - Policy maker

Responding to unforeseen events

- Don't maintain government funded research teams 'just in case'
- By procuring R&D on merit, encourage centres and networks of excellence

Skills and recruitment

- Excite researchers by defining programmes of work in terms of quality of life issues and sustainability
- Demand multi-disciplinary teams and more interchange of people between industry and academe
- Centres of excellence will encourage deeper skills and help to recruit and retain research staff
- Facilitate high profile generalist construction qualification

Research base structure

- Encourage closer working between traditional construction research organisations
- Enhance intermediary role of traditional research base, including a remit to distil knowledge, from outside the UK and outside construction, for use by the UK sector

Innovative capacity

- Support the best innovators
- Encourage innovation by providing guidance and encouraging participation in the Teaching Company Scheme