

Masterclass on Invited Design Competitions

As part of the HEDQF's ongoing initiative to develop a programme of workshops for estates professionals within the University sector, we ran a Masterclass on Design Competitions. The aim was to assist university project teams, understand the potential benefits competitions offer and also to highlight the key items to consider.

The masterclass was held at the LSE's new Students' Centre on 23 March 2014. It was introduced by Julian Robinson and concluded with a lively Q & A session chaired by the NLA's Peter Murray.

Top Ten Tips:

1. **Brief:** Make sure you have an initial brief developed. If necessary, split into pre and post competition versions. The strategic brief should convey the values and aspirations of the client and how you want your building to be perceived and the messages you want it to convey.
2. **Workshop:** The use of mid tender design workshops is vital to allow both client and architects the opportunity to raise questions, ascertain how you will work with them and comment on how the design addresses the brief so the competition response is relevant and targeted to match the client's expectations.
3. **Reference Visits:** It is recommended to include reference visits to works by the architect to best demonstrate their design ability, talk to previous clients and also show how some elements of the brief may be addressed.
4. **Information:** Take care not to overload practices with too much information. This should be targeted summaries; they can always request additional information. The key documents will always be the design brief, budget, project timescales and competition programme.
5. **Engagement:** The engagement process has a key role to play in terms of key stakeholders but it's also important to involve the wider University community where relevant by inviting user comments. An open voting system has been demonstrated to make connections with staff, students and alumni.
6. **Jury Membership:** Whilst it may sometimes be extremely politicalized, the makeup of the Jury is absolutely key in choosing the right scheme. The panel should be balanced with academic and professional members, a number of which may be external to the HEI.
7. **Costs:** One of the key factors for success of a competition is to understand that what is presented is affordable. Therefore it's imperative that a QS is appointed as part of the evaluation team. It's also important for the architects to provide their own analysis of costs of their design proposals. However it should be recognised that this will mean additional expense for architects and should be factored into the honorarium paid to each shortlisted design team.
8. **Outputs:** The value of the honorarium should be proportionate to the output requirements, which should be clearly specified. A typical example may be: a maximum of 3x A1 boards and an A3 bound report. It's also helpful to outline what aspects the report headings need to cover. A model of circa 1:100 may also be required.
9. **Interview Day:** It's equally important to ensure that the Interview day is fully managed to get the best out of the presentations. A key tip is to have two rooms not too distant and in the same building set up identically. The jury panel should alternate between the two. This gives the architects time to set up, iron out any IT glitches and practice. This will mean they are relaxed when the jury comes in and affords the best starting point for all.
10. **Feedback:** Design competitions are time consuming and expensive for consultants. Formal feedback, ideally both written and face to face is essential to help them for future competitions. You should also ask them for their feedback on the process.

