

The Design Brief

The Purpose of the Design Brief

The principle aim of the design brief is to communicate your expectations to the design team. It is a written document, which will be translated spatially and technically by the design team – it doesn't need to fix the form of the design but instead to provide a clear framework for the development of a design that meets your needs and aspirations.

The brief should provide a coherent description of the project, which can be understood by all those likely to use it. It should clearly identify the objectives and main priorities of the project. The brief will need to articulate your specific needs and aspirations as a client organisation and also the issues relating to the policy and funding context, the site and situation which you wish the design team to address and respond to in their design.

Every Brief should set out:

- the mission
- the objectives
- performance requirements and measures
- priorities
- management decisions and responsibilities
- timeframe
- who is expected to respond
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Source: Managing the brief for better Design, Spon Press London 2001 – Blyth, A and Worthington, J

Who will compile the brief?

Prior to the appointment of a design team, the brief writer may be someone in the client organisation or an expert employed specially to fulfil this task. For large projects you may require the expert advice of a project manager to compile the brief. The project champion will be responsible for ensuring that the project aims and vision are clearly expressed and these are pursued throughout the project.

Who will contribute?

The brief can draw together the expertise of an organisation including the staff that will use and run the building. It can be a useful consultative tool inside and outside the organisation. The process of producing a brief can be carried out by developing a series of drafts, which contributors can review and amend. For example staff, key stakeholders and partners may make a useful input to the brief's development. Through consultation the experience and expertise of users and the public can also be included.

What will inform the Design Brief?

The Design Brief will draw together and synthesise diverse sources of information. It will follow on from a Strategic Brief and/or concluded Feasibility Study and will give a précis of the decisions arrived at here. It will be informed by your Development Plan and Business Plan. Including the outcome of specific technical studies for example an access audit.

- **Existing Sources of Information** - The brief writer may wish to refer to existing sources the following may be helpful: briefs for a similar scale/ type of project, generic guidance and empirical evidence about space standards and performance requirements and specific points of reference or exemplars, for example; existing buildings and spaces as a qualitative reference. Generic guidance should always be tuned to your specific site and requirements.
- **New Sources of Information** - A process of 'public consultation as research' can inform the brief. The writer may also draw on new research into the use of spaces: For example:

THE BIG SINK - An investigation into the ideal spaces for creative, and specifically visual arts, explorations in schools, galleries, and museums. Aim to create guidelines on what creative spaces could be like in terms of their design equipment, management and use.

www.art-works.org.uk/news/bigsink/intro.html

Commissioned by Artworks: Young Artists of The Year Awards, devised and funded by The Clore Foundation.

What does the Design Brief need to do?

- State your vision for the Project.
- Set limits; the budget and timescale
- Set the scene and state where you are in the process, how you got there and your aspirations for the Capital Project.
- Describe the arts activities, the planned development of your organisation and arts activities.
- Design criteria and principles for the design, likely to include reference to the ACE criteria for example: for quality of design and construction, accessibility and the involvement of artists.
- Set out the practical requirements for the relationship between spaces and the proposed spaces, focusing on performance requirements rather than detail. You may wish to give a schedule of areas (possibly arising from a feasibility study) but you should expect the design team to review these figures as they develop a spatial strategy for the project.
- Provide relevant information about the funding context and information about significant partners.
- Make the design team aware of the Regeneration Context and the contact you have had so far with the Local Authority planning and regeneration officers.
- Communicate as much factual information about the current condition of your building/site as is available – give a summary in the brief and include relevant drawings and document in the appendix.
- The brief should not re-iterate government guidance and regulations, as design teams should have a knowledge of these, though you may wish to list sources that you consider a priority.

The Contents Page and Framework for The Design Brief

The contents page should give a skeletal overview of the content of the Design Brief. The headings will organise the information and give a framework to the brief, these headings should make sense in the context of your organisation. See the Exemplar from The New Walsall Art Gallery below.

Review

When the first draft is completed you can review the content of the brief as a whole:

- Does the brief communicate succinctly the particular qualities of your organisation and your existing and planned arts activities?
- Does it clearly state your aims for the project and set limits for cost and time?
- Does it clearly state your expectations for design quality?
- Does it require the design team to devise a method for including the input of artists?
- Does it ask the design team exploit the opportunities for making links to adjacent public space and the wider context?
- Have you considered future flexibility and changing needs?

(See also checklists pg 41- 43 of the Client Guide)

Scenarios to guide and test the design

The work from the development plan about the arts activities and the planned development of your organisation will inform the brief.

The brief will distil your expertise in your arts activities; their content and management. See the CG 3.5.6 “it is important to specify the main operational features of the building as early as possible”. As well as using this general review to inform the development of the Design Brief you could describe a set of key scenarios for example: a private view, a conference, a series of performances, a visiting company which you can outline in the brief and use to test and review the design as it progresses.

Developing the design

The design team should make a thoughtful considered response to the brief at the outset of their appointment – exploring the opportunities, costs and constraints. They will begin to give shape to the brief and may propose altering or rearranging the content. At this stage you will be engaged in a creative and interactive process with the design team. Your aims stated in the brief will help to steer this process.

Costs

The costs defined in the feasibility study will give a baseline through out the project. The design team will develop a cost plan and programme in tandem with their design proposals. The brief should outline cost priorities and be explicit about whether costs outlined include design fees, VAT and landscaping.

Time

Include a preliminary programme and target deadlines.

Key Headings for the Brief at Different RIBA Stages

The emphasis of the brief alters as the project develops. Once a design team is appointed the brief will be developed and tested through drawings and detailed in the specification. Elements of the brief which directly affect the future operation of the building will need to be highlighted for detailed review and will be translated into part of the

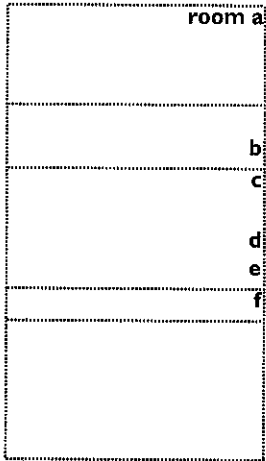
A/B	C	D	E-H
STRATEGIC BRIEF	DESIGN BRIEF	DESIGN BRIEF	DETAILED BRIEF

the vision

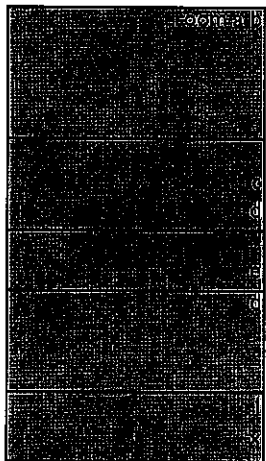
budget	budget & timescale	cost plan & program	revised cost plan & program
arts activity	arts activity	with the design team test design against the criteria set out in the brief and develop in detail	
existing assets	existing assets		
constraints	constraints		
business case	business case		

the new facility	design aspirations quality & innovation accessibility flexibility sustainability services /energy IT security maintenance	design aspirations quality & innovation accessibility flexibility sustainability services /energy IT security maintenance	 <p>ventilation heating/light air installation security/fire alarm maintenance manual</p>
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	relationships between spaces space standards	relationships between spaces outline designs	operation in detail detailed design
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planning brief and regeneration context



planning application & urban design strategy

the decision making framework and procurement plan

design team appointed to develop design
 <p>DRAWINGS outline specification detailed drawings specification</p>

maintenance manual.

Design Brief Exemplar

The new Walsall Art Gallery was the subject of an international design competition in 1996. Five design teams were short listed and invited to prepare concept designs based on the design brief developed by the client organization following extensive consultation with stakeholders. The brief, which was subdivided into five principal subjects, may be a useful point of reference.

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4 THE COMPETITION

5 ACOMPANYING PLANS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

The Brief: A New Art Gallery for Walsall Competition to Select an Architect is available from Sue Rankin at The New Art Gallery Walsall, Gallery Square, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 8LG. Price £10 - cheques should be made payable to Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.