Design and build; simply better results.

The business case for a design and build approach to projects.
Simply better results.

In his book Outliers, the author Malcolm Gladwell repeatedly demonstrates that to achieve a significant measure of success in any field requires about 10,000 hours of practice.

Well, at Claremont we have amassed quite a bit more than the requisite amount of time on design and build projects and so we think we are pretty well qualified to know not only how they can deliver exceptional results but also something about the fundamental strengths and weaknesses of this approach. We also know that while it isn’t always the ideal route, it could be used far more frequently.

This is surprising because research, experience and intuition all tell us that in most cases, the simplest systems achieve the best, fastest and least expensive results and that the success of any project will often be measured in inverse proportion to the number of people involved, the number of decisions these people have to make, and the number of times they have to communicate with each other.

This is the underlying principle behind ‘design and build’: often the best, fastest and least expensive method of developing and implementing an office design project, yet also one of the least understood, especially with regard to its ability to deliver exceptional design.

This white paper is aimed both at those who want to find out more about design and build and at those who may have preconceptions. It is an idea based on the most fundamental of principles, that by keeping things as uncomplicated as possible, it can deliver the best value, best design and the best response to a brief in the quickest time and at the lowest cost. Simple, really.

Ann Clarke, Joint Managing Director

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Albert Einstein
What is design and build?

Design and build often offers the simplest way to develop and construct a new workplace because it is based on an arrangement in which you partner with one firm to design, manage and deliver the project rather than one in which you have to manage several relationships.

Complex projects in which you have to manage several relationships can deliver great results but they invariably rely on strong lines of communication and responsibility in the relationships between a base of vendors and suppliers, whereas design and build offers you one point of contact.

In the best cases, design and build also allows elements of the project to be developed concurrently rather than consecutively as they would be with a diverse base of suppliers. In the majority of cases this reduces the time taken to complete a project.

The success of design and build as a concept is easy to measure. A 2010 study by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) concluded that there was clear empirical evidence that design and build ‘projects performed better in terms of construction costs, unit costs, construction speed and intensity of construction. This is despite the fact that projects tendered under design and build method were more complex, of greater value and larger than those tendered using traditional methods.’

Similar research from the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) found similar results. Design and build achieves this without sacrificing the standard of design and the excellence of the end result. Little wonder that nearly a third of all new construction is now accounted for by design and build.

As with all such principles, there is some variation within the design and build model that may influence your choice of how to proceed.

At its most straightforward, design and build is based on an integrated contract, with your partner developing, designing and constructing the building based on a brief. This may be based on a simple, minimal statement or may have been developed in detail by an external consultant. Novated design and build contracts are closer to traditional models, in that the client’s in-house team develops the design which is then passed to a contractor who takes responsibility for design from that point and constructs the building.

What are the advantages?

So, can we be sure that design and build is so much better than other methods? Well, the simple answer is that we can’t in every case.

Each project is different and the right methods must always be applied depending on the objectives and circumstances of a particular client. What we do know is that when design and build is right for a specific project, it can provide substantial, quantifiable and irrefutable benefits, not least of which is a great place to work.

Rather than having a series of designers and contractors completing their part of a project before handing it over for the next stage, the design and build contractor can successfully manage tasks to run in parallel to help the project stick to a critical path. Instead of a team of runners passing a baton to each other in relay, nearly everybody can be running at the same time. That is where the time savings come in over traditional methods.

The research by RICS into the speed of design and build projects is unequivocal. The construction speed of an average design and build project is some 46 per cent quicker than an alternative procurement method.
Cost.
Again, according to the 2010 RICS research, design and build projects are typically around 15 per cent cheaper than projects using traditional methods. In large part, this can be attributed to the greater use of in-house resource from the contractor, shorter project times and simpler contractual arrangements.

The other good news is that this saving is not significantly influenced by any detail specified in the brief so you can be fairly sure that what you get will be exactly what you are expecting at the lowest possible cost.

And the other good news is that it typically won’t go over budget. According to the Chartered Institute of Building, around 76 per cent of design and build projects based on a minimal design statement are completed to budget or below.

End results.
Speaking more subjectively, in the majority of cases, design and build will deliver better results than traditional methods, notably in terms of cost and speed to complete. But it also offers exceptional designs and end results when you work with the right partner.

Of course, there is no guarantee that any procurement process will provide you with a better design than any other so the outcome of any project is entirely down to the skill and experience of the people working on it. This is what makes a project come alive and this should be the most important factor for you when deciding the company with whom you want to work.

76% of design and build projects are completed to budget or below.
What is the process?

Whether you use design and build or a more traditional approach to your project will ultimately depend on your own objectives and your own understanding of the best method to deliver them. This goes right back to how you would like to develop the brief and how much risk you want to take on with a project.

What is beyond doubt is that design and build is the route for you if you need to minimise costs, want certainty about budget, need the project to be completed on time, demand an exceptionally well designed and practical end result, are happy to work directly with one firm that is responsible for all major aspects of the project and are looking for a project that will be completed to a high standard - your own.

Before choosing a partner, you should look beyond their business model and ask pragmatic questions. Look closely at certain key factors about how they work including the skill and experience of the designers working on the job, your own budget and expectations and, finally, the ability of firms to implement the design to the right standard. Not only can design and build offer outstanding end results, you are also less likely to face divided opinions and a backlash from people who don’t like the sort of workplace that has been designed as much to look ‘interesting’ in a portfolio as it is to meet your own needs.

Another important point in favour of design and build is the contractor’s ability to better integrate the complex demands placed on modern workplaces, especially legislative, health and safety, technological and environmental concerns. The solution delivered by the contractor should be practical as well as elegant.

One significant thing to bear in mind is that around a fifth of all projects, regardless of how they are developed, will have major defects of some sort. The way that design and build projects are set up means that in the majority of cases, the costs to put problems right are absorbed by the contractor, whereas problems associated with traditional projects are more frequently left to clients to resolve.

Finally, if problems do arise, using a design and build contractor as a single point of contact means there is usually significantly less scope for contractors to get involved in blaming each other for any defects and overruns that may have occurred. To put it at its most simple; you’ll only have one backside to kick. Getting too involved with what happens outside your direct relationship with your design and build partner is a diversion.

The quality of a design is not an intrinsic benefit of any system. That comes down to the talent and experience of individual designers working on the project. A design and build firm is at least as able to employ these skilled individuals as an architectural practice, probably more so.

Working with the right design and build partner means that you will achieve exceptional results. You are also far less likely to divide opinion about the merits of your workplace and can sleep at night knowing the people you’re working with are focused exclusively on your own objectives to ensure that the project is completed on time, to budget and to the right standard. In the majority of cases, it’s simply a better way of completing a project.
About Claremont.

We do more than office interior design, fit-out, furniture and technology. We understand the relationship between technology, people and space - seamlessly integrating all three to deliver real commercial gains to clients. Gains in terms of property, productivity, communication, personal wellbeing and environment.

With offices in Warrington, Bristol and London we make every square foot count and deliver environments that really work for businesses across the UK.

Founded in 1977, we are one of the UK’s largest and longest established interior design and fit-out businesses. We have built an enviable client list, including O2, Shoosmiths, McDonald’s, Royal Liver, Acxiom and Cable & Wireless amongst others and have a clutch of awards to our name too.