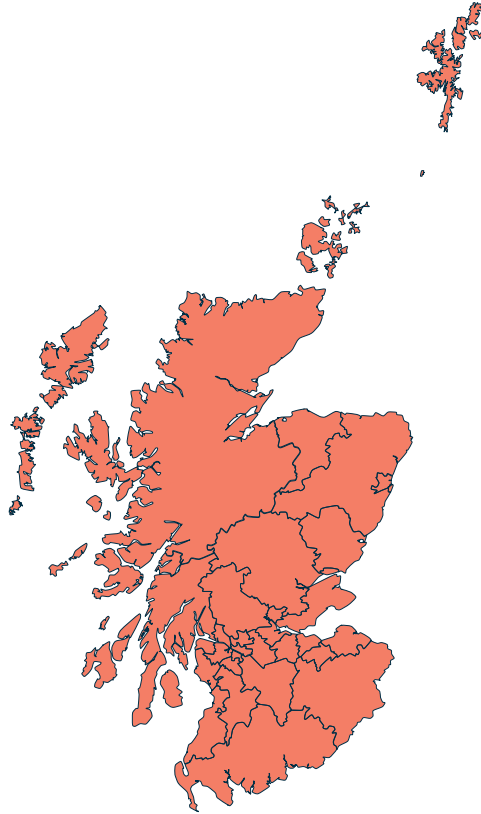


Transforming the Value of Consultancy - raising the standard at RIBA Stage 3



LOCATION: Scotland

DATE: Ongoing

OUTCOME:  Delivery

The challenge

Public sector capital projects depend on high-quality consultancy to deliver successful outcomes, yet the way consultancy services are procured has often made this harder to achieve. Across the sector, where poorly defined scopes, fragmented procurement, limited opportunities for innovation, and increasing pressure on fees leads to poorer outcomes from consultancy commissions within projects.

One of the greatest opportunities in any project is the early design phases. Research by Patrick MacLeamy suggested that 80% of a project's total lifecycle costs are locked in during the first 20% of the design phase. However in projects, there is a lack of clear, consistent expectations for what early design outputs should be and a key design milestone for any project is RIBA Stage 3 – Spatial Coordination.



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Without a clear definition of what constitutes best practice for Stage 3 deliverables, projects are not creating the conditions for success. The implications of inadequate stage 3 design can lead to inconsistent



design information, cost overruns, programme delays and avoidable issues later in construction. At the same time, the growing reliance on Contractor Design Portions (CDPs) created further uncertainty where responsibilities were not defined early enough.

Building a better standard together

To address this challenge as well as wider transformation relating to consultancy in the construction sector, Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) has facilitated the Transforming the Value of Consultancy (TVC) initiative, bringing together public sector clients and professional representatives around a shared mission: to improve the value delivered through consultancy engagement.



Rather than focusing on individual projects, partners have examined the wider system – policy, procurement, scopes of service, legislation and industry competency initiatives – to identify the barriers preventing better outcomes. The TVC initiative produced [practical resources](#), including technical templates, stage validation tools and guidance promoting more collaborative ways of working.

Building on this foundation, SFT convened a collaborative working group with four specialist design consultancies to tackle one of the sector's biggest pain points: defining the deliverables required at RIBA Stage 3.

Together, the group developed a Stage 3 Deliverables Workbook, establishing a shared benchmark for the minimum information, reports, drawings, specifications and model outputs expected at this critical gateway. The work also embedded early consideration of CDPs, aligning with [Construction Quality Improvement Collaborative](#) best practice to improve clarity of responsibilities from the outset.

The result is a practical framework designed to support more consistent design information, stronger client decision-making and a more transparent basis for defining consultancy scopes.

Creating confidence, consistency and better value

The Stage 3 Deliverables Workbook represents an important step towards transforming how consultancy is commissioned across Scotland's public sector.

By creating a consistent benchmark for Stage 3 outputs, the workbook aims to improve design quality, reduce ambiguity, strengthen programme certainty and minimise downstream design issues. It also provides clients with greater confidence when reviewing project readiness at a critical decision point.

Importantly, the work highlights that improving outcomes is about more than defining deliverables. Consultancy appointments and fee structures must also reflect the complexity and level of information expected at Stage 3. As the workbook is tested and refined through industry adoption, it has the potential to inform future benchmarking of consultancy scopes and fees, helping ensure that expectations and remuneration are better aligned.

The TVC initiative demonstrates that meaningful change comes through collaboration.

By bringing together clients and consultants to solve shared challenges, SFT is helping create a more consistent, value-driven approach to consultancy, one that supports better projects, better decisions and better outcomes for Scotland's public sector.

