

# DESC (Design Engagement for School Communities) Toolkit

First draft of guidance notes for facilitators and users

## Background

[Kent Architecture Centre](#) (KAC) with funding through the [CABE](#) Regional Funding Programme 08-10, have been developing a toolkit, linked to the [Design Quality Indicators for Schools](#) (DQIfS), to support the early engagement of school stakeholders in the design process for Building Schools for the Future (BSF), and other school building programmes. In developing this toolkit, KAC have worked closely with the [Architecture Centre Network](#), [Partnerships for Schools](#), [DCSF](#), [CIC](#), CABE Enabling and CABE Education.

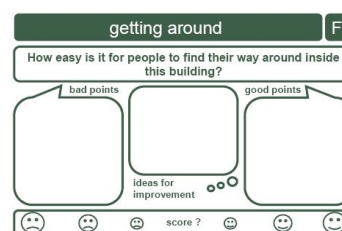
## WHAT is the DESC toolkit?

The DESC toolkit is, in essence, a set of 24 Question Cards. The Question Cards are based on the framework of the DQIfS, which considers design under the three [Vitruvian principles](#) of commodity, firmness and delight, translated into modern parlance as Functionality, Build Quality and Impact.



The Question Cards are designed to help people 'interrogate' or explore an existing building- this could be their existing school buildings and grounds, or it could be an exemplar or other building which they are visiting. In addition to responding to the questions on the cards, users are encouraged to take photographs of the building they are exploring to illustrate their observations about design aspects.

The cards are designed to be used by a representative group of stakeholders from a school, which would include teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils, parents, governors, and building managers, plus representatives from the Local Education Authority. We have found that the tool works best when this stakeholder group is split into smaller teams of 3-5 people, and the Question Cards are shared out between these teams. Each team considers between 3 and 6 questions as they walk around the building and grounds, noting as they go their observations and responses on the cards. After the walkabout the groups gather back together, and feed back their findings to the rest of the group through a structured, facilitated discussion, so that each team contributes to the overall picture. The feedback is structured around the sequence of the DQIfS statements. The cards provide the opportunity for the teams to 'score' the building in response to each question- this enables comparisons to be made between different stakeholders or different buildings.

A sample question card titled "getting around" with a small "F" icon in the top right corner. The main question is "How easy is it for people to find their way around inside this building?". Below the question are three rounded rectangular boxes: "bad points" on the left, "good points" on the right, and "ideas for improvement" in the center. At the bottom, there is a "score ?" field with a scale of five smiley faces (from sad to happy).

A typical visit agenda is shown below:

Time	Activity
10.00	Stakeholder group arrive at Building X. Brief introductions from all present. Facilitator gives a very brief introduction to the DQIfS framework, and the 24 Question Cards
10.20	Stakeholder group is split into small teams, with a mix of stakeholders in each, and the Question Cards (and cameras) are distributed. The teams are then guided around by a representative from Building X, and they use the Question Cards and camera to collect information about the design aspects of the building referred to in their particular questions. (The time allowed for this exploration will depend on a number of factors, including size of group, and the size, scale and complexity of the building, but as a minimum 45 mins to an hour should be factored in to timetable)
11.20	Whole stakeholder group gathers in one space or room, with Facilitator(s) and Flip Chart. If practicable, images from cameras can be downloaded onto laptop/projector to illustrate feedback discussions. Each team feeds back their findings about Building X, structured around the framework and sequence of the DQIfS tool.
12.20	Facilitator summarises the findings from the visit/exploration. Facilitator asks each stakeholder in turn to identify what they consider to be the design priorities for the project, and records them
12.50	Close



The Facilitator follows up this visit by preparing a short illustrated report/presentation which summarises the feedback on the visited building, and the design priorities that have been identified.

## **WHO are the stakeholders?**

The stakeholders in the BSF or other school building programme might include the following (not in any particular order):

Head Teacher  
Senior Management Team  
Teaching staff  
Non-teaching staff  
Premises or facilities Manager  
Pupils  
Governors  
Parents  
Local community representative  
LEA Education team  
LEA Property team  
Design team  
Client Design Adviser  
DQI Facilitator  
CABE Enabler  
PfS staff  
DCSF staff  
Local Authority Councillor  
LEA Project Management team  
Design Champion  
Local Authority Sports/Leisure/Culture team  
Contractor

A manageable stakeholder group for both visits and workshops would generally be between 10-20 people, and as a minimum should include at least one person representing teachers, pupils, non-teaching staff, governors, parents and facilities managers.

## **WHY is stakeholder engagement important?**

The benefits of early and wide stakeholder engagement in the design process for LEA, School, Teachers, Pupils, Learning, in the context of both DQI and 'participation' being mandatory include the following:

- Better designed schools
- Pupils with a better understanding/awareness of design
- Reduced vandalism in school buildings
- Sense of ownership of school
- Connections made between the educational ethos and functionality of the building
- Inspiring buildings which enable better learning to take place
- Improved understanding among building users of how the building functions
- Raising young people's aspirations
- Opportunity to engage in meaningful participation and consultation
- More informed clients

- Participation for pupils in a real life process
- Gives stakeholders the language to talk to the design team
- Widens participation

Key messages in relation to stakeholder engagement:

- Important to manage aspirations
- Use constraints of budget to focus priorities
- Collect examples of evidence to support stakeholder engagement

## **WHEN and HOW can the DESC Question Cards be used within the BSF process?**

### **Visioning**

The cards will be useful in helping the LEA and Schools develop their design awareness, language, vocabulary and thinking, as they develop their Vision for Educational Transformation, and consider the physical implications. They can be used as an aide to help assess their current buildings and grounds, or to evaluate the design of a building they are visiting. The cards will also be useful for CABA Enablers to use in their early discussions with LEA and Schools.

### **Brief Development**

The cards provide a series of prompts for discussions between client group and design team. They can introduce school stakeholder representatives to design awareness, vocabulary and thinking to support their early engagement in developing the brief.

The cards are particularly useful in helping to prepare the client stakeholder group for participation in the Briefing Stage DQI workshop, as the questions relate directly to those within the DQIFS. The cards provide a curriculum resource for teachers and students to help prepare for their involvement as informed clients.

### **Design Stages**

The cards can provide a useful framework and series of prompts to help the client group assess proposals, at different stages of the design process. As at brief development stage, the cards can also be used to help prepare new stakeholders for participation in the Mid-Design Stage DQI workshop.

### **Occupation and Evaluation**

The cards provide the framework to enable the school and LEA stakeholders to evaluate the design aspects of the completed building, and to enable comparisons to be made between different users' views