

Guest editorial

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Changing motivations for concrete research in the UK

BROADLY, THREE GROUPS of organizations may undertake (or sponsor) research in the field of concrete: organizations within industry, government organizations and universities. They may do so for a variety of reasons, but each group has a basic motivation.

Organizations within the construction industry are driven primarily by the need to make a profit. Their interest is essentially in maintaining and growing their businesses. They may undertake research in-house, particularly where product development or troubleshooting is required, or they may pool resources and set up associations to pursue research on their behalf. This requirement manifests itself in several forms as a justification for research. Manufacturers and contractors may support research as a means of improving the performance of their product, of reducing its cost to them or of meeting new requirements of legislation or the market.

Government bodies require research in support of policy objectives and statutory obligations such as those relating to safety or the environment. This research may be carried out in-house or placed with executive agencies, universities or industry.

Universities undertake research essentially in pursuit of academic excellence and the development of learning. This may use funds provided in-house, from research councils or, increasingly, from industry.

As is the case with organizations generally, all who are involved in research also strive constantly for survival. The result is that, while recognizing their differing basic motivations, the three groups increasingly collaborate in order to obtain greater benefits from the outlay of scarce resources for research. Sectoral interests, such as those concerned with cements and concrete construction, are now collaborating with government and universities either directly or under the aegis of the Concrete Society to pursue the objectives of the more efficient use and wider application of concrete.

The R&D Forum, a part of the new Technical Development Centre of the Concrete Society, was established specifically to provide a focus for profiting from collaboration in concrete research. The Forum aims to assist the identification of research needs and priorities, the co-ordination of research and development between organizations, the procurement of funding and the dissemination of results. An understanding and examination of the changes and trends relating to the built environment that may influence the three groups and their basic motivations for supporting research are the implicit starting points for the work of the Forum. Current changes which may be important are in Government policy and the possible implications of the Government White Paper *Realising our potential* concerning wealth creation, the impact of Directives of the European Union concerning safety and the environment, and the European harmonization of technical standards and codes for concrete construction.

Future research collaborations and programmes should be established taking account of existing knowledge and research now in progress. The R&D Forum has set up an R&D database to assist this process. Currently the database includes over 300 projects in progress or recently completed in the UK. A research data service (COSORDS) has been established by the Concrete Society to provide information on these projects. The intention is to extend the data to cover projects in other European countries and for it to be accessible through ICONDA, the International Construction Database.

These initiatives are designed to assist the efficient deployment of resources for research on concrete. They aim to help target research to respond to the changing motivations of industry, government and universities and needs for information.

Is the UK experience reflected in other countries? Is a shift in emphasis and location of original and innovative research into concrete now under way?