

Royal Institute of British Architects Makes Recommendations for Research on Prison Design

Following disturbances in the spring of 1989 at some British correctional institutions, including Strangeways Prison, an enquiry into Britain's prison system was commissioned. This enquiry was conducted by Lord Justice Woolf. As part of the study process, he requested a report from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) on prison architecture and on the process of design and construction for new and renovated correctional institutions.

The report of the RIBA, prepared in November 1990 by a panel of consultant architects experienced in prison design, addresses many issues related to institutional design, including research and communication; procurement and processes; briefing and consultation; design and development; resources and costs; staff training and motivation; and the phasing out of some existing correctional institutions.

A host of recommendations respond to each of these issues. For this brief article, however, we have chosen to highlight only those recommendations that deal with research and communication in prison design. This section of the report deplors the lack of research, monitoring, feedback and communication on the operation, design and effectiveness of correctional institutions.

Recommendations The RIBA has recommended that action be taken with respect to:

- the lack of fundamental research, monitoring of results and application of those results to the design of new prisons;
- the lack of effective communication between the Home Office and correctional workers through to external architects and consultants; and
- the limited base of knowledge on such important issues as:
 - How much does the success of correctional institutions depend on policy and management, and how much on design?
 - How should "success" be defined and measured?
 - How do different prison designs affect the behaviour (and misbehaviour) of inmates and correctional officers?
 - What is the underlying logic behind changes in design during the last decade?
 - Why is the ideal housing group size thought to be 50 inmates?
 - What is the sociology of imprisonment and of prisoner-family relationships, and what are the related implications for the location and design of correctional institutions?
 - What is the relationship between the design and management of prisons and recidivism?
 - What have the correctional accomplishments and failures of other jurisdictions (not just the United States) been?

The RIBA has further recommended that:

- there be increased feedback on the performance of prisons feedback is still the exception rather than the rule and errors in design are therefore perpetuated;
- input and feedback from the users of new designs be solicited before and after these designs are used;

- architects working on different correctional institutions be encouraged to compare and exchange experiences;
 - the long-term results of the guidelines in the Prison Design Briefing System of the Home Office, a first step in the improvement of design standards, be examined;
 - the effects of the design of correctional institutions in the United Kingdom and in other jurisdictions be continuously observed and evaluated;
 - a more extensive public debate over, and involvement in, the design and management of correctional institutions (i.e., seminars and conferences) be encouraged; and
 - the United Kingdom be encouraged to participate more fully in information exchanges with other jurisdictions.
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"Report on Prison Design by the Royal Institute of British Architects for Lord Justice Woolf." Report prepared by the Royal Institute of British Architects, November 1990.