

Designing the Vision: The Role of the Design Competition in the Delivery of University Buildings

Andrew Hutson

The University of Melbourne

***Andrew Hutson** is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne. Having established and work in his own architectural practice, Andrew returned to the world of academia in the mid 1990's and has extensive expertise in the fields of architectural design, communications, and architectural history. He has written about a diverse range of topics including explorations of Roman architecture, the role of computer modelling in the delivery of design teaching and research into the design competition for a new Australian parliament house. This combination of interests serves him well in his current role as the Faculty's Associate Dean (Resources) where he is currently overseeing the design and construction of the Faculty's new state of the art building. He is also the current chairperson of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria and an executive board member of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia.*

Large University projects are complex beasts which need to accommodate a wide variety of criteria and interest groups. Within this process the selection of the right consultant design team is paramount.

This paper explores the experience of an international design competition as the means for selecting the architectural team for a new University building; in particular how the choice of method for consultant selection can have critical impact on the design process in allowing for experimentation and innovation.

This exploration is undertaken as a case study of the recent international design competition held for the design of a new facility for teaching, learning and research in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne.

The use of a competition is not always the preferred form of consultant selection within the tertiary sector, with many architectural teams selected from standing panels. This process of selection suits a range of University Capital Works ambitions but may be too narrow for larger scale projects intended to have iconic design status. To be satisfied that appropriate consultants with the requisite skills are selected, the broader net cast through an international competition may be a preferable selection process.

The University's use of a competition in this instance was distinctive as it formed the backbone of a three stage process for the evolution of the final design to achieve the lofty intentions of the Faculty. During the first two stages (the competition), entrants were asked to address four key themes arising from the Faculty's aspirational brief – built pedagogy, the academic environment, the design studio and the living building. In the initial round of the competition, 133 submissions were received from around the world. Assessed by an international panel, five teams were then selected to the next stage to present a designed response to the building brief.

Critically, the design presented by the winning architectural team was not the ultimate project scheme. Instead through assessment of the five designs presented, the University was able to select an architectural partner with which to work to deliver the Faculty's vision for a living, pedagogical building that will be an exemplar of sustainable design and transformative teaching

Over the past two years, we have worked with the successful partnership of John Wardle Architects (Melbourne) and NADAAA (Boston) and have recently publically launched the final design. Construction for the new \$100m building will commence at the end of 2012.

Architectural competitions have both benefits and potential pitfalls. This paper will interrogate the competition processes employed to tease out the pros and cons of undertaking such an endeavor.