

CIB as International Broker?

Can CIB fulfil a meaningful role as a facilitator for international collaboration to share the benefits of exploiting a "product" generated by one member?

This is the idea put forward by Roger Courtney, now Deputy Chairman of the Building Research Establishment in the UK.

He calls it a "form of trade between research bodies" and cites instances where something similar is already in operation to good effect.

It is offered purely for consideration and comment by CIB members.

If you think the idea merits further discussion, please let us know. Alternatively you may have strong reasons for regarding the whole concept as a non-starter. If so, inform us of that too. Whatever your reaction, the views of the CIB Membership are paramount in CIB's planning.

Building research organisations everywhere - whether national bodies, specialist centres or university departments - are under pressure to earn more income from the market place. Public research funds are continually under pressure and so research organisations seek to exploit their expertise and facilities in testing, consultancy, product assessment and many other services.

Sometimes these services can be encapsulated in "products" such as software packages, product appraisal methodologies and patented inventions which may be capable of being marketed not only in the country where they originated, but more widely. If this could be achieved, it potentially generates income not only for the local agent, but also, through royalty agreements, for the originating institute or university.

I believe that there is a potential role for CIB in facilitating such international collaboration and trade. CIB members form an international, highly knowledgeable audience. From a description of a product, they would be able to judge whether there might be a market opportunity in their home country. Of course, some tailoring to local needs might be required. Major research institutions might have resources in-house to do this; smaller research units or universities might need to form partnerships. But in principle, through CIB, there could be access to a much wider range of markets than could be achieved cost-effectively by any individual organisation working on its own.

This form of trade between research bodies already happens. The core of the BRE wind loading software packages BREWS was developed by CSIR in South Africa. BRE's Environmental Assessment Method BREEAM has been adapted for local circumstances in several countries, e.g. Canada and New Zealand, and is now promoted as a service by local organisations including CIB member BRANZ. But mutual cooperation could, I believe, happen on a larger scale if CIB offered the opportunity. I therefore suggest that there might be a section in the Bulletin which provided a brief description of "products" originating from CIB member institutes that were thought to have wider market opportunities. A contact person in the originating institute would be named and it would then be for CIB members to respond to them and to negotiate directly the terms under which the product might be marketed in their own countries.

This proposal exploits CIB's world-wide audience with minimum extra demand on the CIB Secretariat. CIB would have developed a further way of helping its members be successful in the increasingly competitive research environment.

R.G. Courtney