

Some Top Tips for a brief

- Aim to describe your need, not focus on imagined solutions
- Think about the activities you want to accommodate, approximate numbers, and which activities need access to which other facilities
- Once you have a list of activities, think about which of these activities needs a dedicated space, and which can share. Then think again and press yourselves on this!
- For example, if your vision includes providing weekday childcare, do you want this to operate from dedicated space, or can other groups use the space in the evenings and/or weekends? Similarly, if you want to create a semi-commercial cafe, will other building users be able to use the kitchen out of hours?
- You don't have to have decided everything! It is perfectly fine to say 'At this stage we are unclear whether the kitchen should be usable out of hours' – the important thing is to make sure the issue is out on the table
- Distinguish, if you can, between present patterns of activity, and what you want to create. This particularly affects churches that have a building they are looking to change. People often assume they need to replicate all the spaces they currently have, and then add on top of that
- What we all fail to grasp adequately is how much our current patterns of activity are formed by the physical pattern of our buildings. An 'existing plus 50%' model tends to result in wasteful and potentially unaffordable building projects
- It is fine and often useful to provide supporting documents to help your architect understand your thinking and what is important to you. What is not helpful is to provide reams and reams of undigested wish-lists
- Expect your architect to challenge and question what you have put down – and if they're not doing so you are they the right people for the job? Design development is a creative conversation, and an outsider's view can be really helpful in clarifying what it is that you really need
- Don't be surprised, therefore, if your brief is refined and changes, but ensure that any change you make moves the brief closer to addressing your overall purpose, as discussed in earlier
- Think about how you might sum the project up in a single sentence. You could put this in terms such as 'The most important thing about this project is...' This can be a great group exercise

Compromise has become something of a dirty word – we often see it as failure, as a necessary evil, the worst of all worlds. Perhaps we need a different word, because compromise can be creative, and when a church is functioning well it can offer the world a model of a community creating a better result than any individual could have got to on their own. Compromise can be radical! And that process starts with a good brief.