

The Whole Life Carbon Assessment for the Built Environment RICS Professional Standard, 2nd Edition

EDGE response to Consultation

April 2023



the Edge is a built and natural environment think tank and network. It is multi-disciplinary in a landscape remarkable for its abundance of single-discipline institutions. Started as a means of creating a shared space between the architectural and engineering institutions, the Edge is a voluntary group with no staff and multiple stakeholders across the built and natural environment professions. We encourage cross-disciplinary debate and campaign for change that will improve outcomes for society.

This response has been generated by the core membership of the Edge to represent views from across built and natural environment perspectives.

The Whole Life Carbon Assessment (WLCA) for the Built Environment, RICS Professional Standard, 2nd Edition – Consultation Response

the Edge has considered the full consultation draft of the WLCA document and instead of responding to it point by point prefers to make the following, more general, comments:

1. the Edge is fully in support of the principle of the Standard and believes that it is vitally important to agree and maintain a coherent and consistent cross-industry method for assessing, recording and sharing the whole life carbon emissions from built and natural environment projects. This fulfils one of the Actions (3i) in the Carbon Zero: the profession institutions' climate action plan, written by the Edge for the Construction Industry Council (CIC).
2. the Edge believes that the studious neutrality of the WLCA, e.g. with regard to requirements for nations to meet international treaty obligations - such as those enshrined in the 2015 Paris Climate Accords, is misplaced and that measurement of WLC should absolutely have definition and purpose. Date-marked and regularly improved benchmarks and comparators should be introduced into the Assessment - designed to drive down carbon emissions year on year. In particular this should require owners and operators of buildings and other facilities to commit to planned upgrades in the predictable future to deliver on net zero carbon emission requirements. The WLCA should be more than just a measurement tool.
3. There is a considerable and often animated discussion over the use and carbon impact of biogenic materials, particularly timber, in construction; including whether there is sufficient resource available to responsibly encourage their use. The WLCA standard should allow for a limited and supply-led allocation of biogenic materials, including appropriate factors for the efficiency of their use and the extent of their design life. The section on biogenic materials needs both greater clarity and encouragement for the intelligent use of this valuable resource.
4. While the consultation is an important part of agreeing the WLCA methodology by the wider construction and property sectors it should not replace the need to rigorously trial and test the assessment method against real life buildings and infrastructure. the Edge proposes that a range of projects should be identified with typical available data and that a mix of different consultants should assess these using the assessment tool to iron out - so far as is possible - the potential for misunderstanding, difficulty and variation in the outcomes. Beta-testing the WLCA tool before it is finalised is an essential step to getting it right.

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5. the Edge considers the complexity of making WLC assessments using this method to be excessively daunting for the majority of built and natural environment practitioners and believes that everything should be done to help with making it as easy to use as possible. To assist this we recommend the inclusion of worked examples, both as part of the document and available in software form, showing how it can be, relatively straightforwardly, completed.

the Edge April 2023
contact@edgedebate.com