



Exceeding the minimum: consumer perspectives



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What does exceeding the minimum mean?

- New buildings that go beyond performance levels set out in the New Zealand Building Code and standards.
- New buildings that incorporate features and/or considering aspects that are not covered in the New Zealand Building Code and standards e.g. access, environmental performance.
- Existing buildings that are brought up closer to current New Zealand Building Code performance levels, meeting or exceeding these.
- Existing buildings that incorporate features and/or considering aspects that are not covered in the New Zealand Building Code and standards.



Doing better than code means...

- James and others (2017) suggest that buildings in New Zealand can 'do better' than code in two ways:
 1. Consumers can demand, and the building industry can deliver new-build and renovated dwellings that exceed the standards set out in the NZBC.
 2. Consumers can demand, and the building industry can deliver new-build and renovated dwellings with dimensions of performance that are not specified within the NZBC.

Exceeding the minimum means...

- **Exceeding the minimum has a number of benefits**, such as increased thermal comfort, greater energy efficiency and create warmer, drier and healthier homes.
- **A number of barriers exist** – with build cost being the most common, followed by an unwillingness of consumers to pay additional costs.
- Despite the health benefits of exceed the minimum, **the benefits of exceeding the minimum are not shared evenly.**
- Exceeding the minimum houses should be re-framed from the willingness to pay, to one about the **willingness to afford** - the re-distribution of risk and cost within the market to allow greater uptake of the benefits of exceeding the minimum.

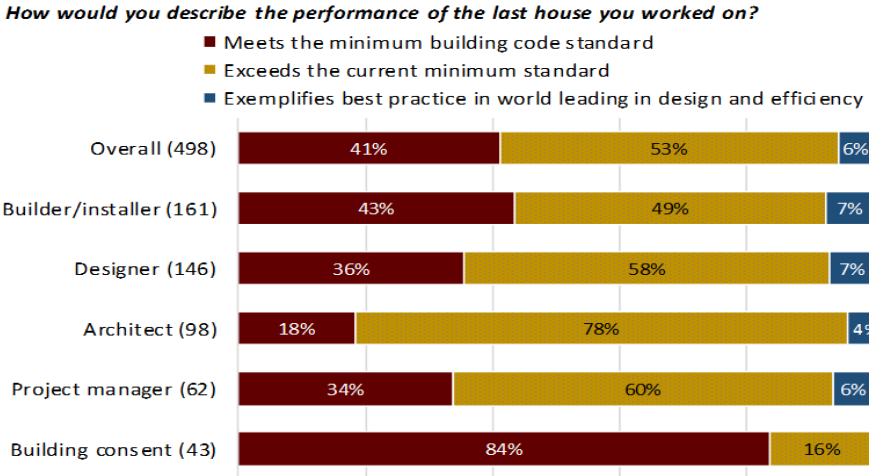
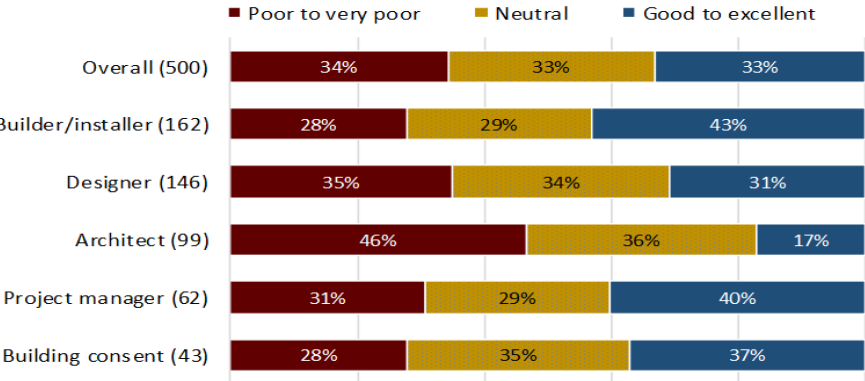
Industry perspectives

In terms of their perception of the quality of houses and their performance, Respondents were asked to describe the last house they worked on, using three possible categories:

- 1) Meets the minimum building code standard;
- 2) Exceeds the current minimum standard (incorporates selected high-performance aspects, such as renewable energy, but is not comprehensive across the whole house)
- 3) Exemplifies best practice in world, leading in design and efficiency standards'

Architects had the lowest perception of housing quality, with 46% considering it very poor or poor, while builders were more likely to rate the quality of housing as good (40%) or excellent (4%).

Over half of respondents (53%) rated the last house they worked on in the second category – exceeding current minimum standards. Very few (6% overall) fell into the 'best practice' category.



Perception of housing quality in New Zealand, overall and by role type (base count for each category of respondent shown in brackets)

The Choice to exceed- consumer perspectives

Research aim:

- To understand how consumers makes choices about exceeding minimum building standards.
- What information and advice is currently available to consumers to make meaningful choices around exceeding the minimum?

Methodology

- Qualitative social research
- Literature review
- Information audit
- Interviews and focus groups: 42 people
 - Consumer focus groups : Wellington and Christchurch (randomly selected from building consent applications)
 - Interviews with stakeholders esp builders, architects, sustainability organisations etc
 - Expert focus group: government, industry researchers, building professionals, academic, media advisors.

Information audit

- Main sources: The Building Guide, ECCA, Homestar, Consumer NZ, Eco-Design Advisor service, Beacon Pathway, BRANZ UpSpec and LEVEL and others.
- Good resources to build upon – but more needs to be done.
- Lots of what needs to be done, but the question is *how* to promote cultural change.



Consumer experiences

- Consumer inability to access relevant information.
- New Zealand's poor housing conditions as the New Zealand Building Code is seen as a quality assurance mechanism rather than the minimum standard.
- Consumer trust and confidence in building professionals, such as a lack of shared beliefs or values in things like sustainability or exceeding the minimum meant project success or failure.



Challenges of exceeding the minimum

- Getting the design right at the very early stages for building whole of life gains.
- Getting people (consumers and industry) to consider a whole of building, whole of life approach when designing and building their home.
- Raising awareness of benefits of higher-performing homes, such as energy efficiency, and that they are warmer, drier and healthier homes than code minimum houses.
- For consumers – a greater integration of resources and information flows.

Why is exceeding the minimum so difficult?

- When building a new house, **the main purchasing decision is not housing quality, but incorporate a number of social and material considerations**, such as the surrounding neighbourhood like parks, walkability, quality of local schools and distance to employment.
- Consumer demand for higher-performing housing is often limited to certain subsections of market.
- Consumer preferences for new products are unlikely to be fully developed within the market unless individuals have had the opportunity to interact with different types of housing that exceeds the minimum.
- Barlow and Ozaki (2003 emphasis added) explains:

Defining user requirements and adding value to increase 'satisfaction' pre-supposes that people know what they want and that their needs can be captured and translated into realisable [housing] products.

Future research and action is required:

- A **behaviour change framework** that outlines how to encourage the changing of consumer and industry practices to adopt exceeding the minimum.
- Examine how to **encourage industry** to adopt building performance, information and communicating advice about exceeding the minimum to consumers.
- Industry is supported to develop **better information and advice** on exceeding the minimum for itself and consumers.
- Research that outlines the performance requirements of what exceeding the minimum means in 'real' terms for building performance that can **differentiate between Code minimum, better, and best practice building performance.**

