



The People-First Acoustics Manifesto

Buildings are designed for people.
Their acoustics should be too.

For decades, acoustic design has been measured by technical performance.

The Metrics We've Used

- Reverberation times.
- Noise levels.
- Sound insulation.
- Compliance with standards.

These things matter. They always will.

But they are not why buildings exist.

Buildings exist for people.



for people to learn



for people to work



for people to recover



for people to perform



for people to communicate



for people to belong

The true purpose of acoustic design is not simply to control sound.

It is to help people experience buildings in the way they were intended.

That is the philosophy behind People-First Acoustics.

We have measured buildings.
It is time we measured human experience.

The Classroom

A classroom can satisfy every acoustic standard and still leave a child struggling to hear the teacher.

The Office

An office can comply with every guideline and still leave employees mentally exhausted by constant distraction.

The Care Home

A care home can meet every regulation while leaving residents isolated because conversation has become difficult.

The Theatre

A theatre can achieve technical perfection yet fail to immerse its audience.

Compliance is essential. But compliance is only the starting point.

Success should be judged by what people are able to do because of the environment around them.

Communicate

Can they communicate
effortlessly?

Concentrate

Can they concentrate?

Participate

Can they participate?

Feel Included

Can they feel included?

Enjoy

Can they enjoy the space?

Those are the outcomes that matter.

Every building has a human purpose.

Acoustic design should begin by asking a simple question: **What are people trying to achieve here?**

- In a school, they are **learning**.
- In a workplace, they are **collaborating**.
- In a hospital, they are **healing**.
- In a theatre, they are **sharing an experience**.
- In a leisure centre, they are **enjoying being active**.
- In a retirement community, they are **maintaining independence, confidence and connection**.

Each environment deserves an acoustic design that supports those goals.

There is no such thing as a universally "good" acoustic environment.

There are only environments that are right for the people who use them.

Design for the people at the edges.

For too long, buildings have been designed around the average occupant. But there is no such person.

- Some people experience hearing loss.
- Some process sound differently.
- Some are neurodivergent.
- Some are living with dementia.
- Some simply find noisy environments exhausting.
-

When we design spaces that work for those with the greatest sensory or communication challenges, we almost always create better environments for everyone else.

Inclusive acoustic design is not a compromise.

It is better design.



Communication is infrastructure.

The Problem

We often think of communication as something people do. In reality, buildings either support it or prevent it.

Poor acoustics increase listening effort. They create fatigue. Misunderstanding. Isolation. Stress.

The Solution

Good acoustics disappear into the background. They allow conversations to happen naturally. Ideas to be shared. Relationships to develop. Communities to form.

The most successful acoustic design is rarely noticed. Its effects are.

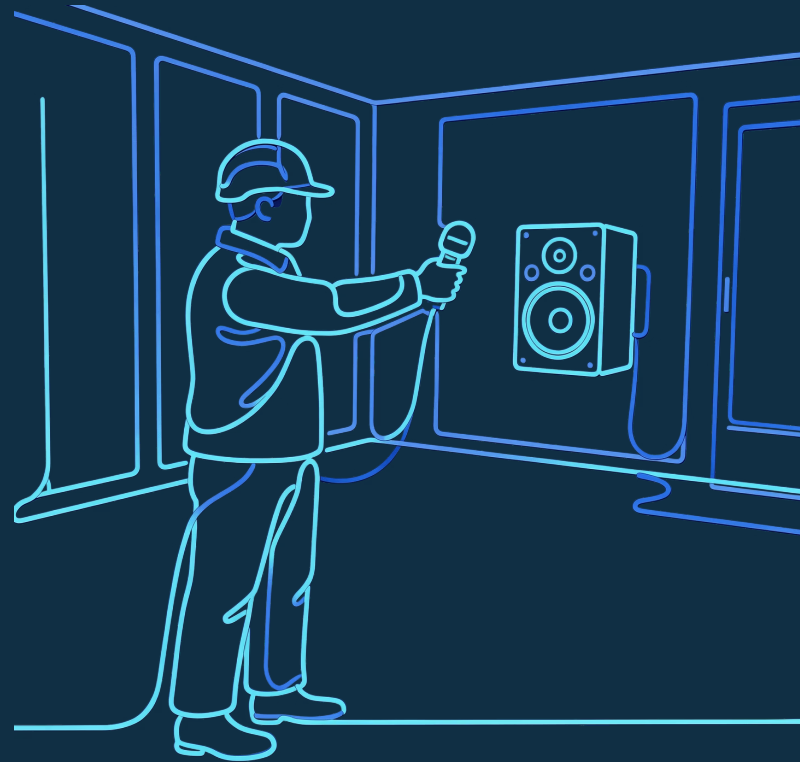
Engineering remains essential.

People-First Acoustics is not about replacing science with sentiment. It is about remembering why the science exists.

The Tools of Engineering

- Modelling.
- Measurement.
- Prediction.
- Testing.
- Standards.
-and subjective experience!

These remain fundamental.



Engineering provides the evidence.

Human experience provides the purpose.

One without the other is incomplete.



Buildings shape lives.

Every day we experience buildings that make communication harder than it should be.

Open-Plan Offices

where concentration becomes impossible.

Restaurants

where conversation requires shouting.

Schools

where children struggle to hear.

Care Environments

where background noise contributes to anxiety and withdrawal.

These are not merely acoustic problems.

They are human problems.

And they can be solved.

A different measure of success.



Imagine judging every building by one question:

Does this environment help people thrive?

Not simply:

Does it comply?

Does it pass inspection?

Does it meet the specification?

Does it improve lives?

If the answer is yes, then the acoustic design has succeeded.

The Seven Principles of People-First Acoustics

01

Buildings are for people.

Acoustic design begins with understanding the needs of the people who will use the space.

02

Every space has a human purpose.

The acoustic environment should support the activities the building exists to enable.

03

Design for inclusion.

Spaces should work for the widest possible range of people, recognising the diversity of hearing, cognition and sensory experience.

04

Communication matters.

Good acoustic design enables conversation, collaboration, learning and connection.

05

Wellbeing is measurable.

Reducing listening effort improves comfort, confidence and quality of life.

06

Engineering serves experience.

Technical excellence remains essential, but it exists to improve human outcomes.

07

Great acoustics become invisible.

The best acoustic environments allow people to focus on life rather than on the building itself.

Our commitment

We believe acoustic design should be judged not only by what can be measured, but by what people experience.

That every building should help people hear more clearly.

Communicate more naturally.

Participate more fully.

And feel that they belong.

Because buildings are not built for decibels.

They are built for people.



The background of the slide features two dark blue silhouettes of human figures from the waist up, facing each other. Between them are several concentric, light blue circular lines representing sound waves or a field of energy. The overall color scheme is a gradient of dark blues.

People-First Acoustics is the design
philosophy developed and championed
by Performance Acoustics.

PerformanceAcoustics.com