

Chief Executive's report on the Institution 2012



Martin Powell Chief Executive of The Institution of Structural Engineers

When talking to a non-member, how would you summarise and define the Institution? Would you tend to think of it holistically or as a series of distinct parts and groupings?

There is of course no right or wrong answer and much depends on what it is you are considering at the time or the view you are trying to express.

Collectively it is often the case that we make statements about what the Institution is and what it isn't. In many ways this can be as accurate as presuming all structural engineers are the same; do the same sort of things and have the same areas of expertise and interests.

By way of example, one of the common statements often made is that this is a family friendly Institution. It is, but whether you can ascribe that statement to the Institution as a whole or whether more aptly it applies to a distinct grouping within the membership arguably will depend on where you feel you fit within your Institution.

Many members certainly do feel they are part of a close family and yet from comments made to me by many others, I know they feel equally passionate about their Institution but don't feel the need to be a close family member.

In short, I commence this review of 2012 from the same position as my article a year ago in acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of life and interests that comprise this great Institution and recognising that

what is important to one is of significantly less relevance to another. Ultimately however, this Institution derives its strength, influence and reputation from alignment with the immortal words attributed to Aristotle that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

My rationale for airing this is quite simple. In 2012 as in 2011, the Institution has continued to make great progress in much that it does and yet there remains so much opportunity to do even more. It is easy to draft a report celebrating all we have achieved in the year and yet it is important to be equally candid that the collective desire we all have to make the Institution even greater, means there are some areas in which we have barely begun to scratch the surface. For some members and indeed staff alike, this can sometimes create a sense of frustration.

Nevertheless, I take the opportunity, under three broad headings, to share with you just some of the progress we have made during 2012 and commend this year to you as another one of excellent work in progress.

The Members' Institution

Both from within the Institution and externally, the development of *The Structural Engineer* to a monthly title has been very well received. Combined with a new e-newsletter being circulated to over 40,000, the reach of the Institution has grown significantly during the past year.

Near record numbers of candidates sat the chartered examinations and whilst pass rates remain stubbornly below 40% we can take great heart from the interest and importance attached to Institution membership.

Some of the changes within our governance structure approved during 2011 came into force and perhaps most noteworthy was the move to full voting rights for Graduate Members – the cohort who will one day lead the Institution and who have much to contribute to our development. Young member's representatives have been welcomed as participants on Council and from 2013, provision has been made for 4 UK and 4 internationally based Graduate Members to formally sit as members of Council.

In paying tribute to the considerable role

played by members running the Institution's Regional Groups, the pleasing increase in representation from young members is something I've noticed during my regional visits. Much of this is down to local initiatives and is a further healthy sign of the Institution planning for the future.

I am pleased to be able to applaud the endeavours of 2012 President John Nolan in his efforts to raise the profile of the profession. His article ([page 14](#)) highlights some of the activities with which he has become involved and therefore no further amplification is required here. The appointment of Tina Cardy as our Director of Communications will enable us to build on many aspects of raising the profile of both the profession and this Institution. We can look forward with confidence to improved communication messages whether they be internal or externally facing.

The International Institution

In 2012 more than half of our chartered examination candidates came from outside the UK with participation from all corners of the world with the exception of South America. This widespread interest is further evidence of the international credentials of this Institution and our progression on a path that may, in as little as five years, lead to an Institution where overall international membership reaches 50% of the total.

This raises significant issues as well as opportunities and, as in so many other ways, the Board has spent considerable time during its meetings wisely considering the impacts of an International Strategy.

Membership involvement is a core part of International Development since local knowledge is often the key to understanding how we can make progress in promoting the Institution and how our examination and membership opportunities are complementary and not a rival to the qualification structures within other countries. From South Africa where local members are working hard to promote Associate Membership, to Singapore where members are working with their contacts in South Vietnam towards the establishment of a new Regional Group, these really are examples where the sum of the parts will lead to a greater whole!

A Developing Institution

Behind the scenes work continues in ensuring the Institution operates effectively in its Head Office function. With 10% fewer staff than in 2008 we continue to review processes and protocols such that we can continue to deliver more value to and for the membership and profession at large. The appointment during the year of a Commercial Manager will enhance our ability to generate revenues beyond those received from member subscriptions with the primary aim of increasing what can be invested in new products and services with minimal impact on subscription levels.

The time for reflection on financial performance will quite properly come in a few months' time with the formal reports accompanying the year end audit. For the purposes of this general update, it is pleasing to report that the overall position remains satisfactorily healthy. Progress has been made in reducing some of the Institution's historic pension liability and together with a continued push to secure an alternative headquarters building, the prognosis is that this repositioning of our finances will help secure the long term future of the Institution way beyond the remaining 24 years of our leasehold interest in Upper Belgrave Street.

Looking ahead to 2013

Operating plans for 2013 were approved by the Board in early November and it will be my intention to share more information on the many initiatives planned via the members' e-bulletin.

Amongst the most significant challenges is the progression of a review into the Institution's examination structure. The Board approved a revision to the routes to membership during 2012 and this will include development of new opportunities for graduates that we believe will also be welcomed by potential employees. We have much to offer as well as much to learn from examination systems elsewhere in the world and this review is timely as we look to extend and expand our international reach.

Development of the Institution's education activity will feature strongly in 2013. Enormous good work already exists in the way educational support is offered by the Institution as the body corporate; by the membership in various guises; through the Institution's engagement with the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Engineering Council. The overall approach however is not effectively synchronised to ensure a robust alignment of "cradle to grave" support. The Board have approved the separation of education from within the Membership Committee such that

Education will form a Committee of equal standing. To support our policy development in the education arena we will shortly be recruiting a Manager to lead this aspect of our work in conjunction with the new Committee.

I have paid tribute to President John Nolan's tremendous appetite for raising the profile of the Institution during 2012. Much of this has had a strong UK focus, however there are parallels elsewhere in the world on similar issues. I know John hopes that wherever they are based, members will be able to draw upon his experiences.

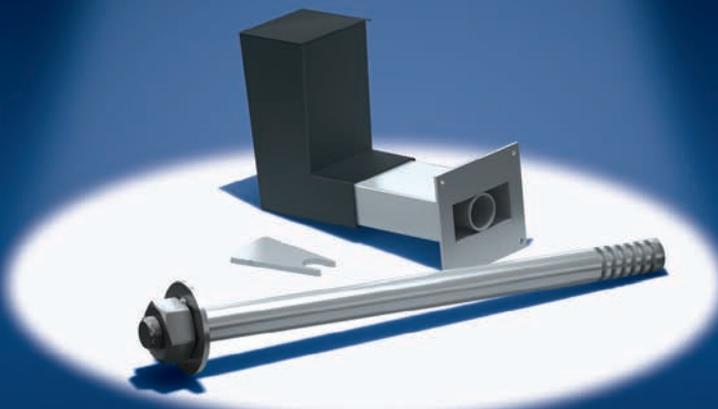
One of the strengths of this Institution is that Presidents come through a period of working as one of a number of Vice Presidents. This ensures continuity of purpose and direction yet at the same time allows each President to focus on areas of the Institution's strategy where he/she feels they have most to contribute.

We look forward to YK Cheng's year as President. It will I am sure have a very strong international flavour. The parallel with John's year is that I am confident UK members will have much to learn from YK's international perspective.

That of course returns us to my starting position: that together we are strengthened through the sum of our many diverse parts.

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The award was presented to Stuart Maxwell, Managing Director, by the Lord Lieutenant of South Yorkshire on behalf of The Queen.



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