

Progress Report

Educational Trust – IDBE Course

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I embarked on the Interdisciplinary Design for the Built Environment (IDBE) masters course with 10 years experience as a chartered consulting structural engineer gained whilst working for a large, international, multidisciplinary firm. I had been involved in several large, high-profile, and technically challenging projects but felt that I would be able to contribute more to the built environment if I had an advanced understanding of the interface between engineering, architecture and building services disciplines.

The IDBE course was perfectly suited to this purpose because it was designed for individuals who were working in, and had significant experience of, the built environment. The advantage of this audience is that it assembles like-minded individuals who enhance understanding of what others do through their substantial practical experience, as well as the knowledge of the instructors. An unexpected additional benefit has been the expansion of my network of industry professionals.

The two-year course was divided into seven, week-long residential sessions, comprising a mixture of lectures and group project work, in combination with written pieces that were researched and composed remotely. The quality and diversity of many of the lectures was outstanding. They provided exposure to specific topics currently impacting the built environment, as well as to ideas peripheral to engineering but which help to stimulate creative thinking, and to broader current and historical affairs. Topics for the written pieces (a case study, two essays and a dissertation) were limited only insofar as to ensure they addressed issues of concern in the built environment. Choosing to research topics from disciplines outside my own significantly broadened my understanding. The accompanying tutorials with academics well versed in the subject matter, enhanced my knowledge base and substantially improved my written and verbal communication skills.

The case study, titled 'Updating the Oval' explored the political and contractual issues surrounding the structural design and construction of the Oval Cricket Ground in Kennington, London. The first essay, 'Image or imagination', examined the role and questioned the accuracy of architectural photography in communicating the built environment to the general public. The second essay explored master planning and urban regeneration ideas in a piece entitled 'An urban masterpiece? An essay on the regeneration of Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, Germany'. The largest and most comprehensive study was the dissertation: The compatibility of aesthetics and sustainability. This thesis reported the comparison of a small number of 'neutral', 'objective' facts about the buildings shortlisted for the RIBA's Stirling Prize and its Sustainable Architecture Awards between 2000 and 2007, with a critical view as to whether these two qualities can co-exist in architecturally meritorious buildings.

The scholarship from the Institution of Structural Engineers' Educational Trust enabled me to explore the interface between structural engineering, architecture and services in the built environment. However, I now also possess a much richer appreciation of the many other specialists who shape the built environment, as well as a deeper understanding of regulatory and economic factors that steer the direction of our industry. I believe that it is important for the

professional development of engineers that they gain a broad appreciation of other disciplines that contribute to the built environment and I strongly endorse the initiative that the Institution has taken to support this programme. Midway through the course, I co-established a consulting structural engineering practice in London and have already found the experience from the IDBE course invaluable in starting and running a successful practice.