

Chief Executive's report on the Institution 2011



It was allegedly Mark Twain who, by way of an apology to a correspondent said: 'I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I've written a long one instead.' I offer no such apologies however. Such is the level of activity that takes place within the Institution, it is indeed a struggle to do justice briefly in a short year-end article.

If there is one thing I continue to learn as Chief Executive of this Institution it is of the great diversity of interests and passions amongst the membership such that what is important to one is of significantly less relevance to another.

So how do we adjudge if 2011 has been a successful year for the Institution and what does success look like?

The Members' Institution

The President in his article (p13-16) eloquently highlights several of the human interest and 'family' stories and events of his year in office. They represent many of the facets that members regard as the 'essential dimension' of belonging to this Institution. With improved e-communications to all members and the introduction of a special e-newsletter to those active in Institution affairs, HQ has worked hard to engage and harness the enthusiasm and understanding of members in our Regional Groups. The interactions of regional representatives on Council and in other places and the contributions to structured topics of debate suggest that 2011 has been successful and represents 'good work in progress'.

Near record numbers taking the chartered examination in 2011 is once more a cause for celebration since it reinforces the Institution's reputation and credibility. Coupled with record numbers submitting CPD returns then the year can be adjudged a success both for the seamless way in which mandatory reporting of CPD has been introduced but more importantly because it says so much about both the corporate and individual desire to

maintain high professional standards in a competitive world.

Of course, the Institution cannot solely look at itself in determining whether it has been a successful year. All too painfully for many, the year has not been good with continued economic pressure leading to difficulties for employers and employees alike. Whilst some find niches in which to prosper and grow, this has not been the case for others. Understandably, the question gets asked 'what is our Institution doing for us in these circumstances?' There is no easy answer but the overarching solution must be that whilst the network of regional groups provides caring support and a safe haven, the Institution must continue to develop its portfolio of technical support services and products; to improve its linkages to valuable technical materials produced by others and to engage appropriately with business partners and kindred organisations such that members can set themselves apart from non-members and are able to demonstrate the significant professional advantages afforded by belonging to the Institution. We have made progress in these ambitions during the year and more, much more remains the goal.

The International Institution

It is quite feasible that in a 5-year timeframe, international membership will reach 50% of our total, adding considerable weight to our headline external message that we are a 'global Institution for a global profession'.

There has been encouraging progress on a number of fronts during 2011 not least in China, where through our newly developed 'comparability route to membership' we have made significant advances with Chinese regulatory authorities. Early in 2012 we expect to hold interviews and comparability tests in China paving the way for a new cohort of international members and the commencement of an annual 'recruitment process' in this major economy.

Intelligent strategy is the key to developing our international networks. There is no 'one solution fits all' for promoting the Institution and encouraging participation. Even in areas where the Institution has traditionally enjoyed strong allegiance, there is no room for complacency. Accordingly country specific plans are required and being progressively developed and implemented in conjunction with our regional groups who understand far better than HQ what is required in their local jurisdiction. Work has commenced to establish legal Institution entities in China, India and the Gulf States to enable the next phase of development work.

Elsewhere and following for example the recent Institution visit to South Africa, work can now commence on developing appropriate routes to raise our profile and potential for growth.

What is common throughout, is a recognition that the Institution's chartered examination is not in competition with local tests of competence but rather that it serves as a valuable passport of acknowledged competence to ease and enable practice internationally. Little wonder therefore that student communities throughout many parts of the world identify closely with us. The huge challenge is how to satisfy that appetite of interest. Continued growth in the appointment of Student Liaison Officers helps greatly and we have high hopes that the travelling ambassador scheme launched this year might afford visiting members an opportunity to engage with students and deliver technical presentations as a way of personifying the Institution as

well as nurturing contacts with local members. The soon-to-be re-launched Institution website and the outputs of an educational project launched in 2011 will add considerable weight to this support.

International growth however has to extend deeper than purely examination activity. I am very encouraged therefore by the progress made in 2011 to 'internationalise' our SCOSS and CROSS activities under a common banner 'structural-safety.org.' The outputs are already highly regarded and the plans to appoint country groups to provide input will provide an invaluable aid to understanding and tackling structural safety interests across the globe as a very real manifestation of the Institution leading in a practical and appropriate way.

A developing Institution

It would be understandable for some to believe that the Institution is largely immune to a recession since the very real pressure is felt by members in their workplaces. It is true that as an Institution we do not have to worry about the rise and fall in order books or contracts and that our business cycle is longer without sharp fluctuations in demand. That said, the growth ambitions of the Institution cannot be fuelled by membership subscriptions alone and we too, have been hampered in our efforts to grow commercial revenues to underpin developmental activity.

Wise organisations use the opportunity of a recession to put in the necessary building blocks for taking advantage of an upturn when it comes and I have therefore welcomed the support of the Board in 2011 (and again in 2012) to permit a draw down on reserves in order to fund modest expansion of our activities as an investment for the future. The fruits of these will increasingly become apparent during 2012 and beyond and thanks to the introduction of a 5-year rolling business plan the Board are now better able to monitor progress and reflect on appropriate forward strategies for development.

During the year, we strengthened our technical team and they are now working hard to develop a new generation of guidance notes that will be regularly published in these pages. Three new publications were released during the year and several are nearing completion for publication in 2012.

Our small PR team are making excellent progress in promoting the Institution and its members via press and radio and are able to track the improvement in coverage we are receiving.

Web development work has been a major priority and the re-launch planned in early January will provide the platform on which to progressively build and introduce new functionality during 2012 and beyond.

Through reorganisation and streamlining of our processes, the staff complement at HQ is some 10% lower than in 2008 and I am proud of the way the team is responding to new ways of working and the ongoing pride they show in supporting the membership. With ambitious and comprehensive work plans approved by the Board for 2012 it is clear that 'fewer are generating more' on behalf of the membership.

The Board spent time during 2011 contemplating the Institution's Governance structures with the primary objective of

ensuring that it remains 'fit for purpose'. This is a necessary task when so much else is changing as we prepare for the future and certainly not a reflection on how things have previously been conducted.

Some of the changes (which will be implemented as quickly as regulations permit) are more symbolic than substantive such as the decision to remove the word 'Executive' from the Board's title. Other changes have potentially far more impact such as the recognition that additional skill sets may be required to complement those freely available from within the membership. Accordingly provision will be made for the possible appointment of Independent non-executive directors to the Board.

In recognising the importance of young members' to the future of the organisation, the Young Members Panel will become a subset of Council rather than reporting through the Membership Committee and, in recognising the various education strands operating within the Institution, the Membership Committee will relinquish its overview on educational matters to a new Education Committee who will take responsibility for co-ordination of such matters.

Looking ahead to 2012

At its November meeting, the Board approved finance and operating plans for 2012. These have been subsequently presented at Council. Amongst the planned activity:

- From January, *The Structural Engineer* will relaunch with a monthly frequency together with a new Institution recruitment jobsite. Proposals are being developed for a series of titles to follow in the years ahead commencing with the first in 2013 and probably with a focus on research.
- The Board has commenced a review of the routes to membership with particular emphasis on routes to and from Associate Membership.
- The publication of a guide specifically aimed at domestic clients appointing a structural engineer. This will be one of five publications and 12 Practice Notes planned for 2012.
- To improve both networking and public visibility it is intended that we commence provision of Special Interest Registers.
- To increase the Institution's involvement in the field of Earthquake Engineering.
- A major one-off promotional activity to raise awareness of structural engineering. This is planned just ahead of the start of the 2012 Olympic Games.
- International visits will include attendance at the ASCE convention in the US where the Institution will host one of the sessions.

There is a very positive energy to all that the Institution has achieved during 2011 through the tremendous support and continued loyalty of members and staff alike. Council and the Board have offered wise counsel and deliberated with integrity and diligence. A robust programme has been developed for 2012 and we have without doubt built on the achievements of 2010.

Accordingly I am pleased to commend 2011 to you as a successful year of work in progress.

D M Powell

CROSS

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