



Midyear report

Nick Russell 2014 President
The Institution of Structural Engineers

This is the first of two reports that I intend to write during my year as president. Six months have already passed and I have been busy visiting many of the Regional Groups. At this stage my visits have taken place mainly in the UK and as the year progresses I will be making international visits to South Africa, Canada and Hong Kong and will report on these later in the year.

Those who attended or read my Inaugural Address will recall that two of my aims were:

- to help increase the support that our Institution provides to those who work in small practices
- to align the interests of successive presidents, such that the message they give is consistent

Well, on both fronts progress has been made.

A number of initial steps have been taken to increase the assistance that we provide to members that work either alone or in small organisations. We have set up a Small Traders'

Panel which has started to discuss ways in which we can help. Of course, this will only be effective if members come forward and get involved – or at least tell us what we can do to make a difference. I have now visited 11 of the UK based Regional Groups and in each case there is support for this initiative; not only from those who work in small practices currently, but also those who used to and now work for larger organisations.

The Institution's 'Client's Guide' to the work that small practices undertake is in the final stages of preparation and will be issued later in the year. You will have noticed also that

Peter Westlake of solicitors Browne Jacobson has written short articles in *The Structural Engineer* on matters that affect us all, but that are of particular relevance to smaller practices.

Looking ahead, not only to my own interests, but to those of our next president, Tim Ibell, progress on the Institution's own structural behaviour test continues apace. As an educational tool it will be invaluable in reinforcing and developing knowledge gained at university, in a way that graduates and their employers can develop the learning of the individual. This has attracted considerable interest among employers, not only in the consulting world but in contracting as well.

Outside the UK I have visited Boston in the US and attended the Structural Engineering Institute's Structures Congress 2014. There I gave a talk on the Institution's examinations and how they might be used to assess competence in other countries. I mentioned in my Presidential Address that the Institution's examination is sat throughout the world, is seen as a world class test of competence and is recognised internationally as such.

In many parts of the world, countries set their own examinations to test the competence of structural engineers and the Institution is looking at ways to benchmark our examination against these. In this way we can be more inclusive and admit prospective members by testing them on the areas that their own country's examination does not cover. So far, these have been very successful in China where I have now been twice to help examine candidates. We are currently looking at other parts of the world where this approach can enable the Institution to reach out and attract members. However, please do not think for a moment that such an approach offers an easy route to membership. The process has thus far demonstrated that the countries involved set very

high standards for membership of their organisations and the route to joining is at least as demanding as taking our own examination.

The conference in Boston also provided us with an excellent opportunity for three of our members to make presentations on how small practices can succeed on a global basis.

You will all be aware that the Institution has now vacated 11 Upper Belgrave Street which had been our home for the last 75 years. Our lease on the building had reached the point where in a few years' time it would have had no value and the costs of finding a new home would have been prohibitive. Work is now well advanced on the refurbishment of our new International Headquarters in Bastwick Street, London and we intend to be firmly established there at the end of this year. It is a big step for the Institution but an important one that secures our future and allows us to continue our own development and support for our 27 000 members.

Looking to the future, the Institution's Trustee Board and Staff Directors met recently over a period of two days to discuss and plan our strategy for the next five years and to consider what the Institution might look like beyond that. The results of this will be developed during the summer and I expect to be able to report to you at the end of this year, that the Institution has in place some ambitious but robust plans for its immediate and longer-term future; not only in the UK but globally.

There is much to do and the future of the Institution (and indeed for structural engineers) is good. As I said in my Address, a year in the life of the Institution is a short time, but one in which the president can help in promoting its strategies. While I have been able to do this, I am also greatly encouraged that my vision of aligning the interests of successive presidents, such that the aspirations we have and the message that we give is stronger, is having some effect.