ARCOM Committee Members’ Workshop

When: Tuesday 8th March 2005
Where: University of Loughborough
By: Prof. Farzad Khosrowshahi

With ARCOM entering its 21st year of existence the committee envisaged that it may be the right time to examine the relevance of ARCOM, its vision and key strategic issues that are likely to have an impact on the current and future position of the organisation. To this end, it was agreed to have an away day dedicating the entire session to a constructive and creative discussion. Also, the committee recognised the need for an experienced independent facilitator. Professor John Kelly fitted the requirement and kindly accepted our invitation to act as the facilitator and in a highly effective and professional manner generated a lively forum for debate (making use of lots of yellow post-it sticks, and blue and red dots).

Initially, the discussions took place at a granular level before individual issues were categorised under a number of headings consisting of culture, the ARCOM community, the organisation of ARCOM, the service that ARCOM provides, finance, politics and change.

Due to the strategic nature of most issues and diversity of views, it proved difficult (and somewhat unnecessary) to reach definitive consensus on each point. However, a number of statements emerged and were earmarked for further examination. In a subsequent committee meeting and through a series of coordinated email debate sessions, the committee members examined the key issues listed.

1. Move to a position of no membership fee and introduce a corporate associate.
2. The scope of ARCOM’s activity in terms of discipline boundaries beyond Construction Management.
3. The scope of ARCOM’s organisation in terms of geographical boundaries beyond UK.
4. The scope of ARCOM’s engagement with entities beyond research community.
5. The scope of ARCOM’s activity in between annual conferences.

In most cases the implementation will take the form of a number of action plans, but a few might have constitutional implications, thus will be submitted at the next AGM for debate as motions.

Finally, this may be another appropriate opportunity to express thanks to Professor Kelly for his contribution and the impressive manner in which he conducted the event. Professor Kelly summarised the event in a report which will be available on ARCOM website.

ARCOM Conference 2005 and AGM

It is that time of the year again, when the members of this established community prepare for yet another three days of exchange in the usual ARCOM tranquil manner. Over the past two decades we have managed to increase the standard of the ARCOM conference while maintaining its distinctive characteristic – having fun. This year, the conference is hosted by Salford University and is held in the heart of London. The venue is the professional confer-
ence suit at the Brunei Gallery within SOAS. More than 200 abstracts were submitted and so far we have had around 140 papers processed. Delegates and the review committee continue making use of the web-based conference system at all stages such as abstract and paper submission all the way to the end including registration. The conference covers a variety of themes pertaining to fields within and peripheral to Construction Management. The themes include the following:

- Research and education
- Human resources management and culture
- Planning, productivity and quality
- Cost and financial management
- Information management
- Macro-economic data
- Sustainability in the built environment
- Briefing and design management
- Management of the construction process
- Law and contracts
- Procurement and risk management
- Management of the firm
- Facilities and safety management
- Strategic issues for the industry

The social bonding will commence on the first night with a few glasses of wine and a light dinner on board of the Salient. The ride will commence and end in Westminster or Embankment. On the way we shall see the Dome, the Thames Barriers and some breathtaking scenery. Delegates will have the choice of taking a bus ride or a 50 minutes walking tour of London covering such landmarks as the Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar SQ and the Big Ben. The conference dinner will be on the second night at a nearby hotel.

When: 7th - 9th September 2005
Where: London
By: Professor Farzad Khosrowshahi

Research Assessment Exercise 2008

It is now that time, again, when thoughts turn to preparation for the next Research Assessment due to take place in 2008. Despite the recommendations of the Robert's Review there are distinct similarities to RAE2001, and fortunately action intended to exclude some universities has not come to pass.

A major development is the adoption of a two tier panel system comprising of 15 main panels and 67 sub-panels that deal with individual units of assessment (UoA). The prime role of the main panels is to provide leadership and guidance to reporting sub-panels to ensure consistency in assessment of submissions. Sub-panels will be responsible drafting criteria for the assessment of submissions, which will be used to determine quality profiles. Sub-panels will also advise the main panel and the RAE team on cross referrals to other sub-panels and on the need for specialist advice.

By: Professor Rod Howes
The sub-panels of prime interest to Construction Management are SP27, SP30, and SP31. Sub panels of secondary interest are SP24, SP29, SP64, SP34, SP35 & SP36.

The most relevant sub-panel for Construction Management would appear the be "Architecture and The Built Environment", however the main difference compared with RAE2001 is the inclusion of Architecture as a discrete named element separated from the main body of the Built Environment. This is reflected in the membership of SP30 where only 2 of the 16 or so panel members have a construction management background. It would seem that the sub-panel is dominated by architects! Assessment made in RAE2001 relied on criteria based on scientific research and resulted in the current allocation of funding. It is highly likely that this will not be repeated in RAE2008 because panels have been given much more discretion to recognise a wide range of research and practical approaches. Therefore it is probable that considerably more recognition will be given to investigation necessary for the creation design solutions. Hence, I predict that the amount of funding awarded to Built Environment and specifically Construction Management research will be proportionately reduced. The extent of this reduction will depend on the allocation of funding made available to SP30. If this is similar to RAE2001, allowing for inflation, then this will be bad news. HEFCE has gone out of its way to ensure an even handed approach and transparency in the assessment of submissions and it would seem that ARCOM has a role to play in making representations to SP30 through its Chairman Professor Alan Penn from University College London.

Content of Submissions
These will follow the same broad principles of RAE2001 and will comprise:

- Research-active staff details (RA1)
- Research output (RA2)
- Research students (RA3a)
- Research studentships (RA3b)
- External income (RA4)
- Research environment & esteem (RA5a)
- Individual staff circumstances (RA5b)

Quality Profiles and definitions of Quality Levels
Research quality will be defined by a system of grading that awards star ratings as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four Star</td>
<td>Quality that is world-leading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Star</td>
<td>Quality that is internationally excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Star</td>
<td>Quality that is internationally recognised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Star</td>
<td>Quality recognised nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>Quality falling below national recognised work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A quality profile will be built up for each unit of assessment submitted by a university. For example:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Unit of Assessment</th>
<th>FTE staff submitted for Assessment</th>
<th>Percentage of research activity in submission judged to meet the standard for:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University X</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Y</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-panels will use their professional judgement based on the assessment criteria they have determined subject to the approval of the Main Panel.

To determine the overall quality profile shown above, research activity will be graded according to the star rating system for the elements of "research output", "research environment" and "esteem indicators". Sub-panels will be able to determine the weighting attached to each element e.g.

- Research Outputs: 70% (Minimum 50%)
- Research Environment: 20% (Minimum 5%)
- Esteem Indicators: 10% (Minimum 5%)

The overall research quality profile comprises the aggregate of the weighted profiles produced for research outputs, research environment and esteem indicators.

Timetable
1. In 2005 two documents will be published by RAE, namely "Guidance to institutions in preparing their RAE2008 submissions" and "Panel statements of criteria and working methods;
2. Institutions will make submissions by 30 November 2007. The staff census date will be 31 October 2007. Note: Also required are details of publications and other forms of assessable output which they have produced during the publication period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2007, plus data about students and research income and a textual commentary relating to the assessment period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2007.
3. A quality profile for each submission will be published in December 2008.

Note: In the event that universities wish to collaborate and submit a joint submission, this will be treated as a single submission by RAE.
Will’s Corner—Keywords: their choice and their importance

How should we choose our keywords?
(This article is continued from the February edition of the newsletter…)

The advice from Emerald quoted in the last article is indeed useful (http://cers.emeraldinsight.com/vl=5229420/cl=96/nw=1/rpsv/literaticlub/authors/selecting.htm). It is best to keep keywords simple by using common words, and by not inventing new words for familiar concepts. In choosing specific keywords, it may be useful to consider choosing words from a series of categories, as follows:

- **Discipline**: e.g. economics, architecture, statistics, management, organization, financial accounting, psychology, social science.
- **Methods**: e.g. analytical, grounded theory, case study, interviews, experiment.
- **Phenomenon**: e.g. information systems, control systems, quality systems, cost systems, procurement, business process, culture.
- **Data source**: e.g. construction sector, civil engineering, property development, commercial building, housebuilding.
- **Location**: e.g. town, country, region.
- **Unit of analysis**: e.g. industry, profession, construction firm, consultancy firm, construction project, design project, briefing, documentation, tendering, construction, occupation, maintenance, disposal, individual.

Choosing a keyword for the discipline of a piece of research is important, but not obvious. For example, in Construction Management and Economics, it is pointless including the word “construction” as a keyword, because, to the extent that it is relevant to one paper, it would be relevant to them all. But a similar paper in Journal of Law and Economics would need it. On the other hand, a database of papers including both journals may need what appears to be obvious keywords, but these would need to be added by the database compiler, as they would not belong in the published version of the paper.

As well as advice about how to choose keywords, it may be apposite to provide some advice about what not to do. For example, authors sometimes use the same noun-phrases consecutively; one recent example was “careers” and “career development” both for the same paper, another was “timber panel delamination” and “timber panel house construction”. While specificity is a good principle, it appears that it is easy to go too far. Another practice to avoid is the provision of keywords that do not help. Perhaps this arises from teasing words out of a meaningful title; for example, “deployment challenges”, “theoretical framework”, “definition”, words that, out of their context, cease to convey anything at all about the papers to which they have been applied.

In this age of electronic databases, keywords may be thought of as an anachronism, since we now have a wide-ranging facility for free-text searches, which examine every word in a document. However, thinking about the notion of keywords, and trying to find articles about them, was a salutary lesson in the purpose of keywords. Every journal paper contains keywords, preceded by the sub-heading “keywords”. I wanted to find articles and papers written about keywords. But, a free-text search of papers in which the search term is “keywords” simply returns every paper published! Similarly, anyone interested in abstract concepts would find nothing by carrying out a free-text search for “abstract”, since most papers contain this word as a sub-heading. Other examples are words like “building” and “construction” which are more likely to occur in articles from biochemistry and botany than from the construction sector. Thus, the great advantage of searching for some well-chosen keywords is that there (should have been) some intellectual effort applied to identifying which concepts are covered in the document, which is a more useful guide to its relevance than which words are used. Thus, the main use of keywords from a paper is as index entries in a collection of papers.

The British Standard claims to explain the purpose of indexing, but only explains the process. This is not to denigrate it, though, as the process is described as a process intellectual analysis of the content of a document, and transcribing someone’s perception of the concepts into indexing terms, or in our context, keywords. Interestingly, it suggests that it should be performed with the help of indexing tools such as thesauri and classification schemes.

There is no recognised thesaurus of construction management research keywords. However, there is a list of suggested keywords in the ARCOM model paper layout, which is available on the internet. This paper provides a short list of 126 potential keywords, but is probably too short, and somewhat outdated as it was compiled a few years ago. By contrast, a major research project a few years ago was carried out for the Joint Contracts Tribunal with the aim of developing a terminology of roles in construction projects (Hughes and Murdoch 2001). This provided a structured list of definitions of project stages, activities and roles, and is now used as a basis for drafting building projects. Is there a need for similar exercises in other domains of knowledge within construction management?

Research topics come and go as new ideas are disseminated among the research community. But there seems to be a need for a structured list of concepts that could be revised on a regular basis, to enable all of us to navigate our way through the CM literature. Without such a list, keywords will continue to be a wasted opportunity for the research community. Perhaps this is a role for ARCOM?
Abstract of Thesis
Paul W Chan

An Interpretivistic Approach to Understand the Factors that Affect Construction Labour Productivity

This study revisited the concept of construction labour productivity with a view of developing a more holistic understanding of the factors that affect construction labour productivity. A critical appraisal of past research revealed labour productivity to be a complex social phenomenon. Thus, it was considered that the strong positivistic tradition, advocating an egalitarian approach, in past productivity research was inadequate in seeking improvements to the much-publicised low productivity in UK construction.

The concept of construction labour productivity and its associated factors were explored through interviews with site managers and a nationwide questionnaire survey administered to project managers and site operatives in the UK. These were validated through further rounds of confirmatory interviews and site observations that investigated the practical manifestation of the factors that affect construction labour productivity.

The research emphasised that workforce issues (e.g. site welfare, job prospects, skills training and qualifications) were critical to sustaining long-term productivity improvements and found these to underpin much of the shorter-term improvement strategies (e.g. adjustments to resource allocation and scheduling). Moreover, the research reiterated the chasm between white-collar managers and blue-collar operatives, with the former concentrating on more strategic planning issues whilst the latter being more concerned about the operational issues of projects. Through the site observations, it was noted that integrating the differences between white-collar managers and blue-collar operatives led to labour productivity improvements. This required paternalistic supervision, which should emphasise not only technical knowledge, but also the genuine desire to understand and respect the workforce.

Let us know what you think!

Acknowledgements
With thanks to Caroline Collier of CIOB and Maureen Wright, New Caledonia, for their helpful advice during the writing of this article.

References


Abstract of Thesis
Kate Carter

ConSus: A Decision Support Tool for the Procurement of Sustainable

In terms of policy level interpretation there is a general consensus on the principal of sustainability. The UK Government has adopted the principles of sustainable development and encourages its integration into all publicly funded construction work. Social housing projects have a requirement to demonstrate sustainability, yet the people involved in their procurement have a varied understanding of the term. The research explores the interpretation of sustainability from the perspective of a housing association and develops a model of sustainability for the procurement of social housing.

A grounded theory approach is used to explore the interpretation of sustainability in the procurement of social housing. A set of paradigm models are developed that explain the fundamental contextual issues and actions relating to sustainable development of social housing. The findings are confirmed by a national survey of the social housing sector that provides a snapshot of the industry. This confirms that a gap exists between policy and practice and highlights a need for a structured approach to delivering sustainability in a building project. A mixed methodology is used to develop a framework for stakeholders to reach consensus on sustainability in the procurement system. Based on the Delphi method, ConSus, is a web-based decision support tool enabling the explicit integration of sustainability into the procurement process. This approach provides a practical tool for use in the social housing sector.

Let us know what you think!

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Lecturer in Construction Management, School of the Built Environment, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh, EH14 4AS
Profile—Will Hughes

It was 2002 when I joined the ARCOM committee. A family of intellectuals that hold a particular passion for this association. Dr. Will Hughes is one leading example in this family. A unique intellect, sharp, quick, funny, interesting and argumentative but only to make a valid point. While most of us make our journeys tiredly to meetings by car or train, Will often turns up on his ‘Yamaha 650 Drag Star cruiser’ motorcycle and leather suit adding to his academic joy his own personal touch. Not forgetting to mention his mobile office that hides in his pocket in a small wireless device. It is rare that one gets the opportunity to meet such a character that amalgamates success in his field with broad interests in life. Therefore, it is a great pleasure to share Dr. Hughes’s profile with our ARCOM community.

Without any doubt, Will Hughes is one of the pioneers in the field of construction. He obtained a degree in Building Technology from UMIST (1980) and a PhD in Organizational analysis of building projects from Liverpool Polytechnic (1989). Will cut through the long journey of his academic career since 1972 until he became a Reader at the School of Construction Management and Engineering, University of Reading in 2002 and has recently taken over the position of head of school in the same department. Over the years Will engaged in and lead more than 13 research projects, some of which are EPSRC funded, acted as a member of at least 15 research and academic committees, nationally and internationally, and an advisor on many editorial boards and panels. Beside his visiting fellowships in Australia, Japan, Hong Kong and various parts of the UK, Will is the author of 17 books, two book sections, 16 Journal publications, 30 conference papers along with 30 other publications and over 25 PhD and Masters supervision.

As a community, we are as proud as Will is of the high profile journal, Construction Management and Economics to which Will is the editor and grateful to his knowledge sharing through the ‘construction contract law’ text book, the compiling of ARCOM abstracts and defining procurement variables that encompass all procurement alternatives.

With his great passion for research, Will’s advice to our community of researchers is to be confident about pushing out their findings in many different formats to many different audiences, whenever there is a strong and well-supported set of findings for industry. They should aim to incorporate their research findings into their teaching, and follow completed research with further work along the same direction to develop a unique capability. Researchers must be clear about what problems they are solving, and try to avoid being distracted by the ever-changing “business improvement agenda” which can distract researchers from important, evidence-based research. They should get close to policymakers by constantly reminding them of their latest findings and sending them off-prints of papers, and visit experts and talk to them about their concerns and to engage as fully as possible with all steps in the loop of enquiry, research, dissemination, teaching and practice and enquiry.

Will’s vision into the future, is that of a construction sector that would invest in research, and pay attention to results, because research would give construction companies a competitive advantage in their market places, adding a challenge for construction researchers.

Beside Will’s success in the construction field, he is a proud father of two and a family oriented person with many rich interests. His talents extend from playing the trumpet within his local community wind band and in a local symphony orchestra, to playing the guitar, horse riding, ice skating, cooking and even baking.

On behalf of the ARCOM community and the readers of this newsletter, we wish Dr. Will Hughes continued success and acknowledge his input in the field with gratitude and admiration.

The Editor

Knowledge Mapping and Bringing About Change for the Sustainable Urban Environment

By: Professor Charles Egbu

This is an EPSRC funded collaborative project. It is run by a consortium of researchers and practitioners as well as generators, suppliers and users of sustainability knowledge. This project commenced in April 2005 and involves Glasgow Caledonian University, Open University, The University of Manchester, University of Cambridge, London South Bank University.

The scoping study aims to undertake a feasibility study on improving the creation, transfer within and between organisations, and the application of knowledge on specific sustainable environment issues. The study will track and analyse how different users with differing perspectives and differing applications contexts access, map, and use knowledge on GLASS RECYCLING. The project will examine the feasibility of developing methods to systematically discriminate knowledge according to user needs profiles whilst preserving the resilience and comprehensiveness required for users to confidently map knowledge for complex real world sustainability issues.

As Principal Investigator, Professor Charles Egbeu received £134,446 from EPSRC as transition funding for a period of 6 months. This has also led to the submission of larger core project bids to EPSRC and the outcome of the bid is awaited. More details about the project can be found at: www.sue-km.org.

We wish Charles and the project consortium every success with this exciting and interesting research.
The primary aims of IMRCs are to:

- create, deliver, disseminate and exploit a coherent and unified programme of novel and innovative research in manufacturing
- focus on the integration of engineering and management science to deliver novel, competitive and relevant research outputs; and
- generate significant world class new knowledge and provide support to the UK manufacturing sector, in its broadest sense.

The EPSRC has also realised that there are opportunities that should be explored as part of the setting up of the IMRCs and they include:

- more time for research, dissemination and technology transfer
- stability for researchers/RAs
- opportunities for introspection, strategic thinking, pilot studies, new collaborations, quick responses
- flexibility to work outside a traditional project based framework
- flexibility when collaborating with industrial partners and ability to develop strategic partnerships
- an increased national and international profile.

More than three and a half years in the five year cycle for most centres, it was recently announced that all main Built and Human Environment IMRCs have been suggested for renewal, taking their existence to 2011. This will probably be officially finalised early 2006, and the result has been the output of yearly assessments, incorporating an annual report and visits by international panel of experts.

On reflection I can comment for the Salford Centre for Research and Innovation (SCRI) in the built and human environment (the Salford IMRC), that the formation of our centre, with support from our international steering committee, has been the catalyst for improved collaboration within and across disciplines and it has allowed us to:

- develop a cohesive and implementable vision
- establish a robust strategy that will enable us to achieve our vision
- develop a dynamic portfolio of activity across the spectrum of research, teaching, dissemination and exploitation, minimising the limitations of project based environments
- retain key researchers and provide highly trained people to industry and academia
- liaise with other IMRCs through joined projects and encourage collaborations with non-IMRC institutions, such as the recently announced EPSRC funded project with Heriot-Watt on Photogrammetry
- increase our research output year after year
- strengthen existing and develop new partnerships with industry

The journey so far has been challenging, and it was rewarding for everyone at SCRI to be singled out as an exemplar for renewal of research and strategy driven innovation at the IMRC conference in September 2004.

I believe the second phase of funding will fully realise the benefits of the IMRC mechanism and we are looking forward to increased collaboration with other IMRCs, non-IMRCs, industrial collaborators and the community as a whole.

By: Mike Kagioglou
Congratulations to Patricia!!!

Congratulations to Patricia Carrillo who has been appointed Professor of Strategic Management in Construction within Loughborough University's Department of Civil and Building Engineering. Pat graduated from the University of the West Indies in 1984 with a BSc in Civil Engineering. She then worked as a civil engineer in Trinidad for a client organisation and an engineering consulting company. In 1987 she won a British Council Scholarship to complete an MSc in Construction Management at Loughborough and she returned to the University as a Lecturer in Construction Management in 1989. Her PhD was on Mergers and Acquisitions in the Construction Industry. She is Postgraduate Programme Tutor for the renowned MSc in Construction Management and MSc in Construction Project Management programmes.

Congratulations to David!!!

Congratulations to David Langford who will be leaving the service of Strathclyde University during the summer of 2005. He will leave Strathclyde in order to take up a new post in the School of the Built and Natural Environment at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Get in touch with us and contribute

For comments, ideas, articles, events, photographs, news in general, research experiences, achievements, workshops, funny stories, serious stories - anything that you would like to share with other members, through this newsletter please contact the editor, Dr Vian Ahmed.

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