Building bridges with local schoolchildren

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The School of Civil Engineering is pioneering a new initiative to take bridge construction out to local schools and sixth forms to engage young people in the discipline and raise awareness of the range of courses provided by the University.

On 29 April, academics from the School of Civil Engineering and representatives from **Interserve (http://www.interserve.com/)** visited 10 and 11 year-olds at Lady of Fatima Catholic Primary School in Harborne. The visit formed the first session of this exciting new scheme to encourage school children to get hands on with engineering.

A pop-up construction site and assistance by University experts enabled pupils to piece together a real 15 metre-long cable-stayed bridge using scale drawings. The challenge helped budding engineers to understand the complexities of bridge design and construction and to get real experience of the kind of projects they could be involved with if they study civil engineering at university.

Working in partnership with Interserve and with the support of the **Institution of Civil Engineers (http://www.ice.org.uk/)** (ICE), the bridge was created to replicate a common cable-stayed bridge design with 1mx0.5m base panels, cables and supports, which was pieced together to form a full working structure. Pupils taking part in the project learned about working on a construction site, including health and safety and had the opportunity to speak with senior engineers about what it is like to study or work as an engineer.

Professor Mark Sterling, Head of the School of Civil Engineering, said "*we are looking forward to constructing our bridge at the first school today and seeing how the school children engage with engineering, an integral part of our society. The University is committed to public engagement and this new scheme demonstrates important dialogue between engineers and the local community through innovative fun activities*".

This first session was a great example of outreach and engagement between the University, local communities, and potential students. There are plans to roll the programme out to schools and sixth forms across the city in the next school term.

For more information on Civil Engineering courses and engagement visit the **School website. (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/civil-engineering/index.aspx)**

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