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School children build bridges with University of Birmingham engineers

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The University is committed to public engagement and this new scheme demonstrates important dialogue between engineers and the local community through innovative fun activities.The School of Civil Engineering at the University of Birmingham is pioneering a new initiative to take bridge construction out to local schools and sixth forms to engage young people in the discipline. Visiting 10 and 11 year-olds at a local primary school in April was the first session of an exciting new idea to encourage school children to get hands on with engineering.

A pop-up construction site enables pupils to piece together a real 15 metre-long cable-stayed bridge using scale drawings and assisted by experts from the University. The challenge helps budding engineers understand the complexities of bridge design and construction and 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 (ICE), the bridge has been created to replicate a common cable-stayed bridge design with 1m x 0.5m base panels, cables and supports, which can be pieced together to form a full working structure. Pupils taking part in the project learn about working on a construction site, health and safety and they have 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 look forward to constructing our bridge in schools and seeing how the children engage in 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 took place at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Primary School, Harborne, Birmingham, and the programme is planned to roll out at schools and sixth forms across the city in the next school term.

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