

IWF **Rebecca, congratulations of winning the 1st Ian Whittingham Foundation annual prize. When did you find out that you had won and were you surprised?**

RC I had no idea and I was very surprised. I found out in September 2009. There was some delay in finding out because I had recently moved house and the notification letter was sent to my old address. When I received the letter it was a real shock. I was surprised and very happy!

IWF **Have you always wanted to be an engineer in the construction industry and what influenced you to take up this career path?**

RC It wasn't a conscious decision. I lived with my grandparents for a few years as a child. My granddad was an engineer in the Navy and I think it was him that influenced me to take up a career in engineering. I was a bit dyslexic at school and found the arts subjects to be a struggle, so I was naturally attracted to the maths and physics classes. The rest just flowed on from there.

IWF **Tell us about your day-to-day job. What's involved in being an engineer with Sir Robert McAlpine?**

RC My role is vary varied. I am currently working on a site called Archer's Hall in Edinburgh where we have a number of activities going on, for example, concrete work, excavation and some refurbishment. I'm the site engineer and my role is to keep an eye on the other engineers and to always make sure that we are doing what we should be doing. It's a managerial role really and unfortunately there's lots of paperwork to do. Managing health and safety is an integral part of the job.

IWF **Apart from your role as an engineer, I notice that you are also a first aider, a safety coach and a COSHH controller. What drives this interest in health & safety?**

RC I think it's a moral thing. I initially trained as a first aider on site and I've always been keen to make sure that no one gets hurt. But now it's not just at work, but even when I'm walking down the street and see something that's dangerous – I just have to do something about it. I don't think that I could live with myself if I heard the next day that someone got hurt because I walked by and failed to act in some way. Safety has become integral to the way I think, work and live.

I'm very interested in human behaviour and I think that when guys on construction sites work on auto-pilot the risk of an accident increases greatly. On our sites, we all learn about the psychology of safety and that helps a lot. Recently, about 150 of us went on a Behavioural Safety seminar organised by the company and it was really great. It was the first time that I had seen a safety course delivered to everyone at all levels in the company at the same time. There was a very positive outcome and the guys on site immediately started looking out for each other. I think it challenged a lot of misconceptions about safety management and whose job it really is.

I'm responsible for safety and legal compliance on my sites but I think that legislation is only really useful for helping you to see company safety procedures in a new light. The real driver for me is the moral one; for me it's about avoiding personal suffering, not to mention all that paperwork if someone were to fall off a truck or something!

IWF **Did you opt for studying the NEBOSH Construction Certificate course or was this expected as part of your role as an engineer?**

RC A bit of both. At Sir Robert McAlpine, all young engineers are enrolled onto the NEBOSH course as part and parcel of their ongoing company training. However I asked to go on the course earlier than normal because I was keen to get it done as soon as possible. I was also keen to visit other sites to see how safety is managed there and to understand any differences. I think it helps a lot to transfer knowledge around the company.

IWF **What are your thoughts on safety in the UK construction industry today? Are we getting any better at controlling risks and reducing injuries?**

RC We are getting better at systems and procedures, but we need to ensure that we actually do what we say we are going to do on site. Risk assessments and method statements are okay but its often not until the work begins on site that we involve the on-site guys who will actually be undertaking the work. My view is that we need to ask the guys on site for their input much earlier in the process. Paperwork alone is not the answer, worker involvement is the key.

IWF **What else do you think needs to be done to improve health and safety performance in the UK construction industry?**

RC I think that we need to improve the role of the CDM Regulations. CDM is simply not good enough. Often the designers have not had any real site experience and we're often having to tell our designers to go back and re-design because we can't safely build what they have initially designed.

We really do need to think 'buildability' and get it right at the design stage. I've been involved on a number of projects where we were installing double height, overhanging curtain walling. We just never seem to get this right at the design stage. My view is that if we can't build this safely, we should design it out from the start.

IWF **We hear a lot of talk about achieving the goal of Zero Accidents / Zero Lost Time / Injury Free Working; do you think this is realistic and achievable in the UK construction industry today?**

RC I think that it should be achievable, yes. We will always have a guy cut his finger on something sharp or trip on a kerb but I believe that all major injuries are avoidable. Near-miss reporting is crucial here. If we get this right I think that it will help a lot in reducing lost time injuries.

At Sir Robert McAlpine we have an initiative called the Zest Awards. These are monthly awards for achieving zero accidents on site. We donate money to charities every month that we are zero. If we have an injury in any month we don't donate for that month. It's weird but it really is a useful tool that delivers noticeable improvements in safety behaviour on site.

IWF **Tell us about your career plans and ambitions for the future. Have they changed since winning the Ian Whittingham Foundation annual prize?**

RC My plans have not changed and I've always had a clear career goal. I want to be a project manager working on high profile projects, for example a project like the Velodrome planned for the Commonwealth Ggames in Glasgow. I'd love to be involved with high profile projects like that with Sir Robert McAlpine and being professionally qualified in health and safety helps a lot.

IWF **And finally, did you know about the Ian Whittingham Foundation before you won the prize?**

RC No, I didn't know about the Foundation before; in fact I didn't know that NEBOSH had any prizes associated with it at all. However I was aware of Ian Whittingham from a video that I saw on a previous training course. The training video was excellent and I think that the Foundation should continue spreading Ian's story. This is 'real life' and I think that it helps get young people interested in safety at an early stage in their careers.
