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Jean Venables becomes President of ICE

On Tuesday 4 November ICE inaugurated the first woman president in its 190 year history – Jean Venables, Chairman of Crane Environmental and Director of Venables Consultancy.

Jean Venables FREng OBE has taken office and pledged to use the platform of her presidency to promote debate on key issues such as climate change and risk management, as well as focusing on diversity within the profession.

A leading engineer in the field of flood risk management, Jean plans to highlight the importance of civil engineers in mitigating the effects of natural phenomena, and position them at the heart of infrastructure policy-making.

Our biggest challenge

In her Presidential address, Jean Venables said: "Climate change is widely regarded as the biggest risk and challenge we face today. Action must be taken now if we are to have any hope of meeting our targets in 2050, and investment must continue despite the current financial problems.

"What we are building now is actually going to dictate what greenhouse gases are emitted from our buildings and infrastructure in the decades to come. We have got to engender the same sense of urgency and importance about climate change that the recent banking crisis has had.

"Engineers have the skills to deliver the solutions to climate change that the country and indeed the entire world needs. It's time to ensure they are placed right at the heart of infrastructure policy decision making, advising the government every step of the way."

PRACTICAL CONSULTANCY TO IMPROVE THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Encouraging women into the profession

Jean, who was awarded an OBE for her services to flood defence, joined the ICE as a student in 1967, became only the 16th female Chartered Member, and is keen to encourage more women into the profession.

Jean Venables continued: "ICE currently has only 8% female membership across all grades, so clearly there is much to be done to get more women into civil engineering. However, the landscape is already changing with 20% of the student and graduate member grades being women.

"And it's not just about women. If we are to truly encourage diversity we must also look at the proportion of ethnic minorities and disabled workers and recruit from the whole pool to get the best talent.

"Considering I was only the 16th woman to become a Chartered Member of the ICE and the 12th to become a Fellow, it's not surprising there's never been a woman president. But with the increasing proportion of women it should not be long before we have another one!"

President's Apprentices

Jean will be supported in her role by five President's Apprentices. These are graduate members of ICE who have been selected by the President to work closely with her throughout the year. They will gain an invaluable insight into the role of a senior engineer and the workings of the institution.

The 5 apprentices are:

Blessing Gwena, Kier London

Emer Owens, Lagan Construction

Alastair Smith, WSP Development & Transportation

Lili Tao, Atkins

Ben Ward, Faber Maunsell.

See the ICE website for more information about Jean Venables – go to:

http://www.ice.org.uk/about_ice/aboutice_president.asp .