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Accepted manuscript

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Manuscript title: A brief commentary on my route to Fellowship of the Institution of Civil Engineers

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Being elected to Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers is one of the greatest professional honours in our industry and is a measure of esteem from one's peers. It is a milestone event in the career of a Civil Engineer, and its significance is evidenced by the high regard in which this status is held around the world. There are a number of benefits to becoming FICE, but recognition from colleagues is at the top of the list. In addition, Fellow's have the opportunity to be an ambassador.

I had the honour of being elected to Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers (FICE), in 2021, following 9 years of being a Chartered member, MICE. This commentary in my journey to FICE status was prompted by Professor Wendel Sebastian, Editor-in-Chief of this journal, and aligns with ICS's recent launch of the "Women in Fellowship" group, aimed at encouraging more female engineers to apply for Fellowship. After attending a number of events hosted by the group, there were some stark and concerning statistics regarding our female colleagues applying for Fellowship. There are a wide variety of contributing factors for this, but one which was articulated particularly well at one of these events, is that women just don't seem to think they are "ready", or are in possession of the appropriate level of professional experience and leadership, to apply. Perhaps they are not receiving the right steer from mentors, or there is a lack of role models. One way of dealing with this, perhaps, is to have "case studies" or commentaries such as this, made more readily available. So, here I am, writing about my route to Fellowship, hopefully helping some readers to feel that they are ready to make their own applications and that it is not an impossible aspiration to achieve! The first thing to say is that I have a very fulfilling, and personally-successful career, as a civil and structural engineer – but it is not particularly exceptional! Going back to the beginning, my route in to Civil Engineering was fairly standard (I chose to do a degree at University) but my rationale was perhaps more unusual. I didn't know what an engineer was, didn't think I knew any engineers, and chose my degree, basically, by process of elimination! I was naïve, and not nearly as clued-in as today's students seem to be, but it was a risk that thankfully paid off. After my first degree from University College Cork, I did a MSc at University College Dublin and came to London to do a PhD, at Imperial College London. I worked in a number of roles after this, including at High-Point Rendel and the Steel Construction Institute (SCI) and then returned to academia at Brunel University London. I was at Brunel for 10 years, teaching and researching on all sorts of structural engineering topics, before joining University College London (UCL) very recently, in November 2022. I was very fortunate to work at SCI for a couple of years, under the amazing leadership of Nancy Baddoo FICE. She has continued to be a key figure in my professional development, and encouraged and mentored me towards Chartership in 2012. There was (and still are no other) Fellows of ICE at Brunel, so the idea of applying for Fellowship was really planted through my contacts, colleagues and friends externally. This immediately identifies a key requirement I believe for all Fellows; that is to suggest, encourage and support our colleagues who are in and around the right level of contribution to the profession, to apply for Fellowship. As Fellows we have a responsibility to look out for and inspire our civil engineering colleagues.

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In my experience, it seems that many people simply don't think they are experienced enough, or have contributed enough, until someone else tells them that they are! For me, I began to see other people, with similar levels of experience and contribution, advertising their lovely FICE credentials, so decided to investigate further. My regional support team at ICE were most helpful, doing an initial review of my CV and then telling me what I needed to do, discussing my attributes, etc. The process felt very supportive. I would encourage all would-be Fellows to contact their regional support team, or the membership team at ICE, as a first step. Thereafter, it was a case of filling in the application documents and selecting my supporters. Again, this latter point can be quite challenging for potential Fellows who do not encounter Fellows on a regular basis – your regional support team can again help with this. As a final statement, I wish to encourage all members of the ICE, chartered and unchartered, to keep Fellowship in mind as you progress through your career. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, I urge existing Fellows to mentor, support and encourage our colleagues in their professional journey, hopefully resulting in Fellowship. For me, being elected to Fellow was a significant milestone, and honour, in my professional life, and something that brings immediate recognition amongst peers around the world. It is a privilege to be a Fellow of the ICE and, to me, signifies the highest standing in the profession of civil engineering.