

Podcast: UCEM in conversation with... Philip Goldstone

Andrew Belt: [00:00:00] Welcome to the third episode of 'UCEM in conversation with...' where I am joined by UCEM's 2020 Academic Excellence award winner, Philip Goldstone. Hi Philip.

Philip Goldstone: [00:00:11] Hi Andrew.

Andrew Belt: [00:00:11] How are you today?

Philip Goldstone: [00:00:13] I'm very well thank you.

Andrew Belt: [00:00:14] Philip gained a Distinction from our MSc Quantity Surveying programme and won the Academic Excellence Award for his dissertation on '*How ethics can be embedded into construction projects.*'

Congratulations on the award Philip.

Philip Goldstone: [00:00:29] Thank you Andrew. I'm proud of the achievements and I hope that I can use the publicity to promote the topic of ethics in construction in the future.

Andrew Belt: [00:00:37] So firstly, what inspired you to write on embedding ethics into construction projects?

Philip Goldstone: [00:00:45] When considering a topic for my final year Master's dissertation, I brainstormed a number of potential areas of research. For instance, I considered the topic of claims in construction contracts. I also thought about a project on whole life costing and social housing. At one point I was thinking of researching the potential for sensors and RFID [radio frequency identification] tagging on building sites. However, the subject of ethics and how they could be better embedded in construction project caught my imagination.

Working as an Employer's Agent and Contract Administrator at a Consultancy, I could see that I played a potentially pivotal role as the member of a project team who could influence ethical conduct, so I set out to discover how this could best be effected. Another reason was that I knew the emphasis the RICS places on ethics as a core component of becoming Chartered, and as an APC student I thought, why not become knowledgeable in this area.

Andrew Belt: [00:01:42] So you went through a few different options before landing on sticking with the ethics side of things. Can you talk me through the dissertation process?

When did you begin working on it? What did it involve in terms of time and how did it fit into your daily life?

Philip Goldstone: [00:02:03] I opted to complete the dissertation over the course of one semester along with one other module. It was a lot to take on, but I knew that once done, I would have completed my studies. So, the motivation was there to push hard and finish strong.

I found that the process of completing the dissertation at UCEM was well structured. Students are supported by a taught component that covers the critically important areas of how to select a topic; how to go about doing the research; and preparing a literature review; and what research methods, qualitative or quantitative, a student can utilise.

In around week 7, I submitted a graded research proposal and throughout this period I was supported by my Project Supervisor. This enabled me to have one-to-one feedback and guidance to ensure I was on the right track and ready to embark upon the primary and secondary research gathering, critical analysis and report writing.

In terms of time, I had to be disciplined and compartmentalise the commitments I had be it work, family, or study.

I used some days of annual leave leading up to hand-in deadlines so that I could completely immerse myself and focus. At times I have to say I felt a little selfish and guilty that I was locking myself away from the family but comforted myself in the knowledge that it was all for a good cause!

Andrew Belt: [00:03:22] That's a really great commitment to getting it complete and trying to finish it off by just saying: 'I'm going to get this done now'. So, you say that that was over one semester which is six months. Is that correct?

Philip Goldstone: [00:03:38] Yes, it was approximately 22 weeks.

Andrew Belt: [00:03:42] How did it feel when you did complete it? Did you expect it to be as well received as it has been?

Philip Goldstone: [00:03:50] On completion of my dissertation, I was enormously relieved to click on the submit button and step back from my desk. No last-minute IT glitches. It was all done!

The results came through around seven weeks later. It was 17 April and I have to say it was a strange situation to be celebrating a personal achievement whilst the country was in the prelude to the coronavirus lockdown.

I didn't expect it to be as well received as it has been. It was a complete surprise to receive the email from UCEM's Principal, Ashley Wheaton, first congratulating me on the nomination and more recently again congratulating me on winning the 2020 Academic Excellence Award.

Andrew Belt: [00:04:31] Which of course we only announced last week, and you join our Hall of Fame winners from the past six years since the award was inaugurated back in 2015. That's a really fantastic achievement.

You were among a group of people who'd submitted some excellent dissertations so to win this award is huge. Currently at UCEM we are looking to push your research more widely. So, what impact do you think your research could have if publicised more widely in the built environment sector?

Philip Goldstone: [00:05:08] To recap, the purpose of my dissertation was to investigate how the Quantity Surveyor, performing the role of Employer's Agent or Contract Administrator, can best achieve positive project outcomes for their Clients through the promotion of ethics at the Project Team level.

I posited that the CA should act as a change agent, or what I call an ethics ambassador, using different tools and techniques to allow this to happen.

The QS as CA is ideally suited for the role of ethics ambassador, being an RICS qualified Chartered Surveyor, or on the road to being so. The training of a QS is not only in technical skills but also in upholding ethical principles.

So, the QS should go ahead and preach what they already practise to the assembled project team and influence project outcomes for the better.

I investigated how this 'preaching' could take place on a practical level – be it overt or subtle tools and techniques.

The baseline was to say: 'what is out there in, terms of ethics training, that the QS receives during the Assessment of Professional Competency or APC, and once qualified in terms of Continuing Professional Development, or CPD?'

To do this, I used what's termed the lens of ethical theory to critique the current RICS ethics training and their suite of ethics documentation.

What I found was normative ethics theory, what one 'should' or 'ought' to do, is well represented in the RICS training. Also, descriptive ethics, represented by a 'rational' and 'fully cognitive' practitioner, is well represented by RICS, through rules-based documentation, guidance and training.

Significantly, what I found to be missing was the embracing of behavioural ethics and the impact of psychological factors that influence ethical choices.

So, in answer to your question, I hope that by publicising my research to a wider audience in the built environment sector, the impact will be to raise awareness of the importance of providing training in behavioural ethics and more broadly, behavioural psychology.

Andrew Belt: [00:07:17] That's an interesting introduction to those different theories and you mentioning how behavioral ethics is the one which is missing.

You previously said that you were quite impressed when you looked at RICS and what they've done in terms of ethics and they seem to have a fair bit of it covered. So, do you think this is something that you perhaps go directly to the RICS and it could become perhaps embedded as part of the APC process?

Philip Goldstone: [00:07:47] I would be very keen to approach them and to show them the research that I've carried out and to see if it's of interest and if they would like me to assist or be part of a working group to develop that further.

Andrew Belt: [00:08:03] I hope someone from RICS is listening and we could see if we could make that become a reality, but in the meantime we can publicise it through

a number of streams so it can start to be talked about more widely in the sector and perhaps we will see some action.

You currently work as a Quantity Surveyor for a construction consultancy in London. How long have you been working in the construction industry? Can you talk me through your career to date.

Philip Goldstone: [00:08:34] You could say that I've taken the scenic route to becoming a QS and working at a construction consultancy.

The potted history of my career is that after graduating from what was UMIST [University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology which, today, is part of The University of Manchester], with a degree in International Management, I headed into accountancy at PwC, followed by time working at the rating agency Standard & Poor's and then a period at J.P. Morgan.

Then I switched away from the City to begin a new career in the built environment. I got involved in a couple of businesses that offered turnkey timber-framed buildings and over 10-plus years, learned the ropes in construction, as well as the trials, tribulations, and occasional moments of euphoria of running a small business.

After getting married and starting a family I decided that it was time, once again, to adjust my career plan. So, in early 2017 I leveraged off my construction experience and joined a construction consultancy in London where I remain today.

Andrew Belt: [00:09:35] So, why did you move from accountancy to construction?

Philip Goldstone: [00:09:39] There was a moment where my eyes were opened to really wanting to do something that's tangible.

And I may have become a little bit cynical of my time in the city. So, it was a moment in time where I thought I had no responsibilities in terms of family and it was time to do something that I'd wanted to do for a while, which is something that will be entrepreneurial.

Also, as I said it was a scenic route, but I had experience learning about construction and that has served me well now as a QS.

Andrew Belt: [00:10:29] Now that you've made that move and you've been in the construction industry for a few years, what do you enjoy about working in construction?

Philip Goldstone: [00:10:37] Without being too dramatic, I absolutely love working as a professional Quantity Surveyor and believe that I've found my true vocation.

What I enjoy about working in the field of construction is that it offers such a broad array of interesting areas of intellectual pursuit. Construction touches on all subjects: on science, think about the properties of materials; on social science, think ethical conduct, or housing policy; on geography, think substructure and soils, on history, think listed buildings; on maths, think estimating. I could go on.

In one industry, construction, you have a whole syllabus and the opportunity for learning never stops.

Andrew Belt: [00:11:23] That was really lovely when you're talking about the different subjects which most of us would be familiar with at school. It's certainly something which we would like to publicise more at that age and, by offering those examples of subjects which most of us would be familiar with that we would have studied to some degree, I think that's a really powerful way of showing the impact the subjects can have with construction and it just shows the breadth of the industry, which perhaps isn't widely acknowledged or understood. So, that's a really great answer and certainly something we would like to push more.

Philip Goldstone: [00:12:20] Absolutely. I remember not knowing the words built environment or architecture or town planning; anything in that realm was never mentioned as a career choice or discussed in school.

So, you could think about maths and doing trigonometry and wondering why. If you apply it to the setting of construction, then you've got the simple answer - if you want to know how many tiles go on a roof, trigonometry would give you the answer. So, it serves as a very useful subject that you can point to and say, this is why you need the skills.

And I think that could be an inspiration to many.

Andrew Belt: [00:13:11] Definitely. I think that that is something which is very important. That's a perfect example. Certainly maths beyond GCSE level you can be studying and think why do I need to learn this?

The gap between the skills you're learning at that age and seeing the tangible impact of what you can do with these skills, I think is lacking. That would be something which I think we can do far more in terms of saying these are the skills which you can then go on to use within the industry. It's really important and something which, at school level could be of massive impact by showing how those skills can be used moving forward.

What are your aspirations now in your career?

Philip Goldstone: [00:14:08] The first is to become Chartered and achieve the gold standard qualification of the built environment, which is Membership of the RICS, and I will apply at the next session in Spring.

Second, I hope to continue to serve my clients well, acting in the capacity of Employer's Agent or Contract Administrator. The specialism of the firm I work for, called Walker Construction Consultants, is residential developments for Local Authorities and Housing Associations. I enjoy providing the mix of pre- and post-contract services, and seeing a project develop from the briefing stage through to construction and handover. I have to say that it is gratifying to play a part in the building of much-needed social housing in London's boroughs.

Finally, I have the aspiration that I would like to continue to promote ethics in construction and play a part in changing the culture within the industry towards

greater trust, transparency, cooperation and collaboration. I would especially like to play a part in educating and influencing those at the beginning of their careers to do the right thing when ethical dilemmas present themselves, as they inevitably will.

Andrew Belt: [00:15:24] Good luck with the chartership and continuing to do what you do with your current role. On the ethics side of things, this is certainly the start and hopefully you can play a larger ambassadorial role, whether that's formal, like becoming a tutor with us, or whether that would be becoming a mentor to some degree.

And just to finish off this podcast, I'd like to ask a few quick-fire questions. So, firstly what hobbies do you have outside of work?

Philip Goldstone: [00:16:28] Well, I've been a runner all my life and have chalked up a number of marathons. However, in recent years, my distances are much shorter, and I now use running to de-stress and unwind, and get away from my phone for an hour or so!

Beyond that, it's all about family life. We enjoy our weekend walk on Hampstead Heath, then offsetting the calories burnt with cake in the café!

I also feel it my duty to share with my children my love of 80s music, DJing in the evening around bath time.

Andrew Belt: [00:17:15] Some more educational work from yourself there!

Philip Goldstone: [00:17:19] Absolutely, I think 80s music is a rite of passage.

Andrew Belt: [00:17:25] It seems the 80s are coming back as a cultural touchpoint, certainly in clothing and I think in some music at the moment.

You mentioned that you have a young family with your children only having returned to school. So, what tips would you have for keeping children entertained in the house?

Philip Goldstone: [00:17:50] First tip is a pet. Many of the families at my kids' primary school have acquired a pandemic puppy. However, we went for a hamster! We thought it would be a fun addition to the family which he is. However, the reality is he sleeps all day and runs on his wheel all night.

Andrew Belt: [00:18:21] I remember that from our own experience. We had a hamster for a while and you'd hear the gnawing on the cage when you were trying to get to sleep which didn't always help.

That's a good tip for those who are looking to keep the children entertained in the house. Maybe not a hamster but do you think that a dog would have been better?

Philip Goldstone: [00:18:45] I said to my kids that they are welcome to any dog they want, as long as it's got batteries, so that's probably as far as we're going down the dog route!

Second, I would say, without doubt, an iPad! My kids are addicted to a game called Roblox, and I find it difficult to prize them away, but it can come in useful for when I need to get emails sent off or attend an online meeting when they are home from school.

Andrew Belt: [00:19:16] That sounds like a construction-orientated game. I don't know if it is but certainly the iPad comes in handy. So thirdly, assuming you were able to find a bit of spare time for yourself, what entertainment did you enjoy during lockdown?

Philip Goldstone: [00:19:41] With such good weather during lockdown, we used the garden a lot and really appreciated having it. The inflatable swimming pool was invaluable especially for cooling down on those hot, sticky days.

But lockdown was challenging to say the least. Like many families, we were juggling home learning with the kids, whilst both my wife and I tried to stay on top of our own work. We got into a routine of eating lunch together and then going for a walk afterwards, discovering parts of our neighbourhood we never knew existed.

Andrew Belt: [00:20:15] I think that that's something which a lot of us experienced in terms of appreciating the nature which surrounds us, and certainly came to the fore during lockdown.

So, studying online requires a great deal of self-motivation, what tips would you give for motivating yourself?

Philip Goldstone: [00:20:49] Well, I would recommend that the best way to motivate yourself and be successful in your studies is to not overcomplicate the task at hand and take it step-by-step.

Being organised gets you most of the way. If you are studying at an online university such as UCEM, then it is important to try to find others in a similar situation so once in a while you can catch up over coffee and compare notes.

Andrew Belt: [00:21:21] Working with your peers is really valuable and something which we continually try to work upon, which is the student community side of our online learning offer.

Our last question is what did you learn about yourself through studying with UCEM?

Philip Goldstone: [00:21:39] I learnt that I needn't have worried about returning to academia and whether I was up to the task.

It was a wonderful experience and the very definition of a good investment. I guess that I applied myself well and the dividends are coming through. So, I would encourage anyone considering returning to education and giving their career a boost, to go for it.

Andrew Belt: [00:22:06] I hope that studying with us has been helpful for your career and moving forward with the chartership as well. Thank you for your time Philip.

Philip Goldstone: [00:22:24] Thank you very much for your time.

Andrew Belt: [00:22:26] It's been great discussing your award-winning dissertation, your career and more besides from Hampstead Heath walks with a treat of cake at the end to owning hamsters and the perils which come with that.

If you would like to read up on the awards, head to our website - ucem.ac.uk - and head to the News section.

Thanks for listening.