

Building Services Engineering Degree Course, University of Liverpool

Background

The University of Liverpool was the first university in the world to offer a degree course in architecture and so it was appropriate that the United Kingdom's first degree course in Building Services Engineering should be inaugurated there. There had been a Building Science Unit at the University in the late 1950s which primarily serviced the architecture course. This group, which by then incorporated the Pilkington Research Unit, was merged with the Acoustics Research Unit from the Physics Department to form the Department of Building Science in the Faculty of Engineering in 1961 under Professor Arnold Hendry, who was the driving force behind the setting up of the Department and the Degree Course. John Page, who had also figured in the Building Science service teaching and research being carried out at the University at the time, left in 1961 to become Professor at the University of Sheffield.

Other staff involved at that time included Tony Benson (Lighting), Bert Whitehead (O & M) and Arthur Britch (Construction). Peter Manning was in charge of the Pilkington Research Unit. They were later joined by John Randell (Building Services) and Barrie Wilson (Environmental Science and Climatology).

History

All Engineering undergraduate courses at that time were four year duration, although students with outstanding (and appropriate) A Level passes were sometimes admitted straight into the Second Year. In September 1961 six students were duly enrolled for the degree of BEng (Hons) in Building Science. The course was to offer two options during the final two years. These were Construction Management and Thermal Environmental Engineering.

In the event only four students in the first cohort passed the first two years and only one of those chose the Construction Management option. Of the three who were to become the UK's first graduates in Building Services Engineering, with full exemption from the Corporate Membership Examinations of The Institution of Heating & Ventilating Engineers, only two were awarded Honours Degrees. These were Roger Gross (Rodney Environmental Consultants) and Neil Sturrock (Liverpool John Moores University). Neil then went on to become the first UK graduate in Building Services Engineering to obtain a PhD.

It is known that in each of the next two cohorts there were only two students who opted to study Thermal Environment Engineering but the breakdown of numbers in the two options does not appear to have been recorded from 1967 to 1980. John Randell moved to Robert Gordon Institute at the University of Aberdeen in 1966 and the third cohort was actually taught by Roger Gross and Neil Sturrock, who were both post-graduate students at the time. Roger was appointed to the full-time post in 1967 and when he left in 1973 the teaching was taken over by Mike Barber who was still in post when the course folded through lack of numbers in 1997.

The Department of Building Science changed its name to the Department of Building Engineering in 1973 and amalgamated with the School of Architecture in 1986 to become the School of Architecture and Building Engineering.

Interest in the course was quite slow to start with but built up to a regular intake of 10 to 15 during the 1980s and the number graduating peaked at 24 in 1994. However, the fall to 10 in 1996 followed by 5 in 1997 sounded the death-knell for Building Services Engineering as a viable separate undergraduate course and the course was duly closed.

Update

In a joint venture between Liverpool Community College and Liverpool John Moores University, a Foundation Course was started in 2006 and it is good to be able to report that a new Degree Course in Building Services Engineering is currently under development in the city.