

MBA Programme Member Profile

Colin Robertson, Chartered Surveyor and
Construction Dispute Consultant, United Kingdom





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What motivated you to think about taking an MBA?

I originally trained as a Chartered Surveyor involved in the day-to-day financial side of construction. I then worked for myself in a year long semi-project management role with a design and manufacturing company to create production lines as part of turn-key factories in Saudia Arabia and Australia. I impressed the lead engineer so much with my lateral thinking from the construction industry that he suggested I would benefit from an MBA to formalise this expertise. I needed to stretch my intellectual horizons.

Why did you choose Henley?

Henley brought the double benefit of reputation and a course that I could afford as well as fitting in with work. Without Henley's distance learning module-based course I would never have been able to afford either the full or part-time alternatives along with the consequential loss of income and career disruption.

How far are you into the programme?

I completed my dissertation in 1995 and was awarded the MBA at the graduation ceremony in May 1996.

What were the highlights?

Without doubt the most enjoyable and stimulating memories were the in-house workshops, meeting the other students and the excellent tutors. Another bonus was the atmosphere and setting at Henley, which helped me enormously to wind down from work and concentrate on the course.

What have been the greatest challenges?

The main problem I had was fitting in the workload with my working life. At the time I was doing a lot of travelling, working long hours and often working away from home, though the latter helped in doing assignments without distractions.

Tips for managing your studies alongside work/ personal life?

As someone who has spent many years as a sole practitioner consultant I was always used to being very self-disciplined, and with my office being based at home I had superb technological support in a very comfortable environment. Your family does need to know that you require that isolation and lack of disruption to maintain concentration. Without the support and understanding of your spouse/partner it would be difficult to stay the course.

Tips on being a successful flexible learner?

You have to start by having a real interest in the subjects and that they have a relevance to your career and/or life. Without this it will be a chore not a potential adventure.

How has your performance at work changed since you graduated?

I believe that the MBA has sharpened my ability to focus and rationalise on the forensic examination of delay and disruption documentation – i.e. to get to the nub of a problem.

What have been your greatest achievements?

I've been involved with some very high-profile projects and their subsequent construction disputes ranging through Canary Wharf to major power generation plants taking me throughout the UK, Spain, Holland, Italy and the USA to face the now infamous Enron, in Houston. Recently, I was involved in my first dispute on a project based in Russia.

Advice to those thinking about studying an MBA at Henley?

Be true to yourself. Don't believe that it will automatically set you on the road to the boardroom. It is a very useful aid to achieving goals at any level and in any business or organisation. Finally, if you still want to do it then you will not regret taking a Henley MBA – full stop.


What were you hoping for when you finished your MBA?

First, I would love to take a PhD programme. I have subsequently become a member of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and am considering becoming an accredited mediator.

I am also in the process of starting an internet-based company, as a side-line. For the sheer challenge, the thought of potentially reaching the billions on the other end of the web is fantastically exciting – and all on a relative shoestring. When I completed my MBA none of this was possible for one man and a laptop, but the course content is as relevant today as it was in 1996. Who knows where it will lead to? Now, that is managing change!

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