International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering

Guidelines for organising

Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences

Background

Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences have developed from an idea by Professor Atkinson at City University, London, UK back in the 1980s. They have proved to be an important activity, fostering the new generation of geotechnical engineers who will be important in carrying forward the aims and ideals of the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering. The following guidelines are intended for use and general implementation by organisers of these events.

Though there can and must be variations to organisational procedures depending on whether the events are organised at international, regional or domestic level and on the particular region concerned, the general underlying principles should be followed: that the conferences should be informative, engaging, cheap and fun.

Purpose

The Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences bring together small groups of delegates, typically 50 – 100, who may be studying for a PhD or MSc or at the early stage of their career in industry or academia. An age limit of 35 or less or a corresponding expectation on the upper limit of professional experience is imposed. The idea is to enable delegates to communicate and engage with others who are doing research or starting out in the geotechnical profession and to share their experiences. It is not necessary to communicate only final outcomes of seminal research. In fact it is often just as useful if delegates are able to share the difficulties experienced in their first steps in the geotechnical profession and the solutions that they may have developed or are still seeking. The conference is very much geared towards the delegates – their progress, needs and aspirations – and most definitely is not a showcase for supervisors or mentors or for one country or region to demonstrate its capabilities over others.

International, Regional and Domestic Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences

The International Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conference (iYGEC) was first held in 2000 in Southampton, UK. This started out as a special one-off event for the new millennium. It was heralded as a great success and a second event was organised in 2003 in Mamaia, Romania. The decision was then taken that subsequent iYGEC should be organised in conjunction with the main International Conference on Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering and the 3rd iYGEC was held in 2005 in Osaka, Japan at the time of the 16ICSMGE.

Regional Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences started in the European Region in 1987. Apart from the European event, the take-up on organising Regional YGEC has been rather sporadic but all the feedback indicates that the Regional YGECs are highly appreciated and very rewarding.

Domestic Young Geotechnical Engineering Symposia have been organised in the UK normally every 2 years since 1981. These have been very beneficial to both research students and young professional engineers alike and have often provided delegates to attend subsequent YGECs. A few other countries have organised similar events.
The selection of host for a Regional YGEC requires both initiative from an ISSMGE Vice-President and commitment from a Member Society. The Vice-Presidents will want to a good geographical spread of hosting societies and as well as ensuring that costs of attendance are reasonably spread relative to the ability to pay. Ultimately, it is the Member Societies that are instrumental in making the YGECs successful and their support over the years is highly appreciated.

**Underlying principles**

The main principles are that the events should be informative, engaging, cheap and fun. Other principles are there should be no specific theme, that all delegates should each make a presentation, that all delegates should produce a written version of their work that will form the basis of their presentation and that there must be a permanent archive record (the format of which to be decided by the organising committee concerned). It is important that each delegate produces a paper for which they are the sole author.

For the International YGEC, all Member Societies are invited to send up to two delegates. For a number of reasons, some Member Societies may not be able to take up their quota and the organisers can offer spare places to other Member Societies though there should not be a significant presence of one society over the others. Basically there should be reasonably uniform representation of Member Societies within the event. By following this principle, the iYGEC attracts approximately 100 – 120 delegates. Similar principles are followed for the European YGEC and the event attracts about 50 delegates. The other Regions have fewer Member Societies and consequently there needs to be some leeway to allow a critical mass of 40 – 50 delegates to meet but it is very important that one Member Society does not dominate the event.

**Format – Papers and Presentations**

It is important to emphasise that *ALL* delegates produce a “paper” and make a presentation.

**Delegates:** There is no “call for papers” for regional and international Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences. Instead, ISSMGE Member Societies are invited to nominate delegates they intend to send to the YGEC. In general, a Member Society will nominate two delegates though this may vary as indicated above.

**Papers:** The conference is not intended to be an event at which final outcomes of research or detailed project reports are presented. It is an opportunity for young geotechnical engineers and researchers to meet and to find out what is going on. It is very important that all delegates should feel they can make a contribution and there should be no emphasis that papers must only be of completed research or projects but rather there should be encouragement that papers from delegates at an early stage in their career are welcome. All papers will have a single author as the delegate attending the YGEC; any acknowledgement of supervisors, for example, should be included at the end of the paper.

There have been a number of templates used for the papers in a YGEC. The simplest “Paper” has been a 2-side synopsis or extended abstract of a delegate’s contribution designed to give only a brief indication of the work with the full details being given in the session presentation. This style has proved particularly useful for the iYGEC at which it is normal for there to be wide variation in quality and sophistication of the projects being described. In addition, the proceedings are relatively easy and economic to produce by standard photocopying and simple binding, which minimises the required budget for printing. However, the volume of proceedings has limited longevity and usefulness. Some YGECs have opted to request that delegates produce papers in a format similar to that commonly used in normal conferences, e.g. 2-column, A4, papers occupying up to 6-sides and printed with photo-reduction onto B5 paper and hard-bound. The exact format chosen depends on how the
final volume is printed and/or published, and when possible university or local printing facilities can be used to avoid involving a publishing company. Though delegates will no doubt like to see their contribution in such a volume of Proceedings, it must be recognised that this can add significantly to costs and may represent 30-40% of the registration fee. It will usually require that the host society obtains significant sponsorship for the YGEC. In summary, the format of the papers is to be decided by the organising committee, and should normally be between 2 and 6 pages in length.

There should always be a printed version of the proceedings since this will assist delegates during the YGEC. Organisers must produce a standard template for the papers so that they are all in a common format. In addition, a CD of the papers could be produced, but this is purely optional and will depend on the resources available to the organisers.

**Presentations:** All delegates make a presentation. Typically, a presentation lasts 10 – 15 minutes with 5 – 10 minutes of questions and discussion immediately after the presentation. That way all delegates are necessarily involved and their work must necessarily be discussed. The precise duration of the presentations and subsequent discussion will vary depending on the period of the conference, the numbers of delegates and the type of event. It is very important that chairmen ensure that there is discussion on all presentations.

**Other lectures:** There is some benefit in having a few special lectures given by enthusiastic professional geotechnical engineers and academics. These lectures should not be too lengthy (say 30 – 40 minutes duration) and must be of interest to the conference delegates, perhaps reflecting on how young engineers can make their way in the profession or on exciting projects and developments. The level at which the lectures are pitched and the enthusiasm with which they are delivered is, of course, very important.

**Session Organisation:** The nature of Young Geotechnical Engineers’ Conferences means that there is no conference theme and “papers” can be on any topic related to geotechnical engineering. Organisers will therefore have to wait until they have been informed of delegates’ work before they will be able to arrange the papers into suitable sessions. In general, all delegates should attend all sessions. This is reasonably easy to schedule for Regional events held over 2 – 3 days but for the iYGEC, it may be necessary to have a limited number of parallel sessions. However, these should be kept to a minimum. Experience indicates that the delegates are quite capable of continuing into evening sessions.

**Chairmen:** Sessions need to be chaired by friendly, professional engineers who can control a session, be an effective timekeeper, organise discussion and ask pertinent questions while offering constructive (never destructive) criticism. The chairmen may be senior engineers and must engage with the young engineer delegates.

**Tours and other social events:** It can be helpful if the YGEC includes some form of technical tour and, if suitably organised, can provide an event to bring the delegates together. Any tour must be appropriate to the delegates and should be informative in demonstrating geotechnical engineering practice. A conference dinner is obviously appreciated though the organisation of this must bear in mind the importance of keeping costs to a minimum.

**Linkage to the ICSMGE:** The general feeling is that the iYGEC should be associated with the ICSMGE. This was first attempted in 20005 in Osaka. Besides attending their own iYGEC at a separate venue, delegates had access to the Keynote and other Special Lectures during the normal ICSMGE. They also organised a special session within the ICSMGE during the penultimate day. Though this worked well, the delegates expressed the view that they would have liked to attend all the ICSMGE. An alternative format is therefore to hold the iYGEC over say 3 days prior to the ICSMGE and to allow the delegates either access to the keynote and other special lectures (they will not receive the conference proceedings etc.) or to register normally for the entire ICSMGE.
**Finance:** The registration fee should cover the costs of a delegate attending the YGEC i.e. meals, accommodation, proceedings and attendance at sessions. In essence, provided a delegate can get to the venue, then there should be no other costs other than the registration fee. Typically, the registration fee has been of the order of EUR350 and this may reduce if the YGEC organiser is able to attract some industry sponsorship or other financial support from the host Member Society. Whenever possible the Member Society nominating delegates to attend a YGEC should make significant contribution to the cost of travel and registration fees of those delegates. For the international YGEC, the organisers may charge a slightly higher registration fee for those delegates from a Member Society who are in excess of the normal quota of two delegates.

**Support:** The iYGEC is a relatively large-scale event and the ISSMGE provides some financial support to the conference organisers. In addition, for both the international and regional events, the ISSMGE provides a limited number of bursaries to assist delegates from less wealthy countries. Individual bursaries generally cover the registration fee, and for financial efficiency it is usual for the bursaries to be paid directly to the conference organisers to allow them to in effect waive the registration fee. Travel to a YGEC can obviously be expensive and it is expected that Member Societies will pay in whole or at least in part the cost of travel and registration of the delegates they are nominating to attend the conference. Accommodation can be an expensive item and often university accommodation or a suitable hostel is used for delegate accommodation and the conference sessions.