

## CASE STUDY: David Miller Architects - Sponsoring a School Pays Back

For most of us, creating a win-win situation is considered a *good thing*. At DMA, in collaboration with Class of Your Own (COYO), we've created a **win-win-win-win** situation and we're absolutely delighted. It's creating tangible social value benefits for our clients; it's broadening horizons and opening exciting new doors for young people; it's promoting the built environment sector as a career destination; it's enabling schools to develop new curriculum paths to engage their students and, on top of all that, it's producing a fantastic range of benefits for our practice. We're talking about the Adopt-a-School programme offered by Class of Your Own for the new Design, Engineer, Construct!® (DEC) qualification.



that the younger generation of “digital natives” can provide.

Since our formation in 2007, David Miller Architects has taken an interest in encouraging young people into our industry. We saw first-hand that many young people found it almost impossible to get work experience in our sector unless their parents already had a connection to help them in. We also recognised that our commitment to developing the digital skills of the practice (we were a leading adopter of BIM) is important in an industry that desperately needs the skills

Together, these two factors galvanised us into creating our own scheme, which has been running successfully for a number of years, providing over 16 week-long structured placements each year. During these, the students work on a set project, carrying out research, planning and design under the guidance and mentoring of one of our team, and learning to use some fairly sophisticated digital technology in a very short time. This award-winning initiative is, for us, a way of addressing the skills shortage in the construction industry and redressing the diversity balance with the added advantage of providing permanent employees in the long run (five in total so far!).

As a small business, however, it's hard to do as much as we'd like, because, ultimately, doing good stuff takes time and resources that are not always readily available. And that's where our relationship with COYO has helped launch a whole new raft of possibilities.

In October 2015, we formed a close working relationship with Class of Your Own (COYO), the organisation behind the new GCSE called Design, Engineer, Construct!®; taking on five individual work-placements through this scheme and providing a number of workshops to larger groups of students. The work-placements acted as a catalyst to make the project assignment more structured and the workshops across a number of London schools provided an eye-opening challenge to the students to design an eco-friendly classroom. To further support COYO and highlight its benefit to employers in the industry, we appeared in the B1M's promotional film, '[Construction SMEs Need You](#)', and we actively promote the course to our clients and consultant collaborators to gain their support.

2018 is our next big step forward together – under COYO's Adopt-a-School scheme we are sponsoring St Joseph's College in Croydon. Together with Henry Riley, another SME who provide cost consultancy and project management, and engineers, Arup, we effectively "gift" the Design, Engineer, Construct!® learning programme to the school, providing both cash funding and a two year commitment of time support to assist the students (about 5 days per

year each). The financial commitment is relatively small (£6000 in total between the consortia of sponsors), but the impact is enormous, supporting specialist teacher training and student opportunities, and ultimately providing recognised qualifications to hundreds of young learners.

At St Joseph's College, the DEC class is now formally underway. The students are working on an exciting, "real" project – the repurposing of the Stratospheric Chamber at Brooklands Museum of cars and aircraft. Built in 1946 as a simulator of atmospheric and climactic conditions for testing aircraft at altitude, this unusual piece of industrial heritage is already stimulating a new generation of ideas for its



future development. Using point cloud surveys translated into Revit, the students are able to develop their designs with fully coordinated 3D models. This project gives the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) subjects real life uses rather than just being academic and theoretical. In the process, the students are encouraged to explore how these tools and environments could become a pathway to their future careers.

DMA has been able to do this as a comparatively small consultant and we are finding that our time commitment to St Joseph's is by far outweighed by the direct benefits to our practice:

- We have a tangible, demonstrable and measurable Social Value benefit which helps us win tenders. Our clients are delighted by this approach, and it's been really helpful in embedding our practice in new geographical locations.
- We have been introduced to new suppliers and consultant partners.
- Our technical team get hands-on leadership and management experience to support their own development by supervising and mentoring the students – the significant cost benefits of this is something we discovered with our work placement programme.
- We have a pipeline of potential work-experience students, some of whom are likely to become employees, without recruitment consultancy fees.
- We access challenging and innovative digital ideas and skills which helps to push our own business R&D.

Working with COYO has created a mutually beneficial relationship that exceeds any of our initial expectations and continues to develop. The Adopt-a-School scheme offers all organisations, irrespective of size, the chance to directly contribute relevance and context to learning in schools. And because COYO is a nationwide project, it isn't limited by region - we have been able to locate a school close to our new Liverpool office and extend the win-win-win benefits still further.

### Testimonials

*Design Engineer Construct helped me discover the profession that I am most suited to in the construction industry. I was able to learn how to use an industry standard design tool, Autodesk Revit, as part of the course, in year 10. I was always fond of architecture from childhood and the DEC coursework allowed me to design my building with all the features I want to have in it. It is exciting doing the course work as I am discovering many new things that I was unaware of in the construction industry.*

*In the early stages, I didn't know much about construction and engineering, and my knowledge was very similar to most people of my age – an architect designs something and then it is built on site. I knew of engineers, but I didn't know exactly what they did. I was pleased that, in the early part of the programme, I learned about all of the different roles in construction and therefore had a greater understanding of the construction industry and the career opportunities within it.*

*During the Eco Classroom workshop we met professionals who work in these industries and I was inspired by their ideas of creating a sustainable environment in the community that is needed, equitable and viable. I got a chance to get to know the job types involved in the construction process, their wages and importantly their importance in the project. I have researched various types of sustainable materials and features that could be put into a building so that it can operate efficiently over its life cycle. It is a delight to do the DEC coursework as I really enjoy doing it. I have finished unit 1 in COYO over year 10 and looking forward to finishing the other units. The fun part in this course work is using Autodesk Revit. The industry design tool is really helpful to visualise our building model vividly and develop on your ideas.*

**Sai Rishyanth Visinigiri**

*I like DEC because it is very informative and requires general knowledge, and linking subjects together such as science and geography. It has helped me a lot with architecture. Tuesday's eco classroom workshop was very interesting. It helped me with what an architect needs to be and what they need to think of for a building. DEC on Tuesday also helped me with my team-building skills, working with people I am not used to working with.*

**Alex Awosanya**

*DEC has been fun. DEC gives you information about common knowledge that we should know in general and gives you a challenge and I am happy that most of the work is coursework. DEC allows you to speak your mind and gives you an opportunity to make whatever you would like, it has given me opportunities to think beyond the classroom and about my future career options.*

*The DEC challenge was fun on Tuesday. I got second place and I enjoyed working with other people. It was a hard challenge and speaking in front of people is scary but it gave me more confidence that I can use outside of DEC.*

**Nikhil Patel**

*This year I was given the task of teaching a new course, Design Engineer Construct. This course has not only been a breath of fresh air 15 years into my teaching career, it is also changing the way pupils learn. This new style of course that works closely with partners such as David Miller Architects gives students a real life experience in the classroom. On Tuesday 10th July we ran a DEC in a Day Eco-Classroom project. Akin from David Miller Architects, one of our industry adopters, came in to work with the students. They found this experience invaluable and really engaged with the industry representatives as they work in the real world and can show the students real, relevant, current industry practice. Further to supporting us on the day, David Miller have adopted St Joseph's College for the next 2 years, over this time they will come in and support both the teachers and the pupils and provide work experience for the students on the level 3 (A-level equivalent) course. I am very grateful to DMA for the support they are giving in helping deliver this course and prepare my students for the real world of work in the construction industry.*

**Jane Pemble, Teacher of Design Engineer Construct, St Joseph's College.**

*This interaction with industry is what really makes a difference with our DEC students. It brings the amazing career opportunities in the construction sector to life and inspires them to want to work hard and reach their potential. This trio of Arup, Henry Riley and DMA and their work with St Joseph's College is a brilliant example of how firms, including SMEs can contribute to DEC. In fact DMA's contribution is made even more impressive by the fact that this small company is having more impact than many of the other big businesses out there.*

**Alison Watson MBE – Chief Executive and Founder, Class of Your Own, Founder**

If you are a smaller consultant or contractor and are looking to attract new employees and enhance your Social Value credentials to win more work and if, like us, you don't have much resource, this is a fantastic scheme to get involved in. For more information, go to [Design Engineer Construct](#) or if you would like to know more about our experience, feel free to contact us at [David Miller Architects](#).