As specific objectives, by the end of the course students should be able to:

- Classify soils and assess their fundamental properties.
- Specify appropriate compaction criteria from soil laboratory data.
- Calculate vertical profiles of pore water pressure, total and effective stresses.
- Determine soil compressibility and calculate uniform ground settlements.
- Determine isochrones of excess pore pressure for 1D transient flows.
- Determine time-rate of consolidation and ground settlement.
- Specify “drained” or “undrained” direct shear tests, and interpret them.
- Use Mohr circles to interpret triaxial tests.
- Perform basic upper and lower bound limit analyses.
- Analyse limiting equilibrium with slip planes and slip circles as mechanisms.
- Search for the least optimistic mechanism of failure in soil.
- Perform simple design calculations of a strip footing on clay and sand.
- Perform basic estimates for the settlement of foundations.

Content

Structures depend for their stability on the ground which supports their foundations. Furthermore, many structures are actually built of soil (road, rail and flood embankments, dams, road bases and rail beds, waste repositories) or have to retain soil as their prime purpose (basement walls, quay walls, tunnels and pipes). So all civil and structural engineers should understand soil behaviour and be able to apply this understanding in geotechnical engineering design and construction. This course introduces soil as a product of nature and focuses on its material properties and behaviour in engineering applications. Soil comprises solid grains, water and sometimes air. The solid phase is an interlocking aggregate of soil grains that can deform and rearrange. The fluid phase inhabits an interconnected pore space through which flow can take place. Total stresses, arising from loads and from the self-weight of the soil itself, have to be partitioned between these two phases. Pore pressures arise firstly from hydrostatics, but are modified by the effects of viscous drag when the fluid is flowing. Once pore pressures have been discounted, the remaining effective stresses must act between the grains, giving rise to deformations of the granular skeleton and therefore to displacements at the ground surface and possible distortions of any connected superstructures. This partition of stress is known as the principle of effective stress and is the key to understanding soil behaviour.
If loads or deformations are imposed on a saturated soil, whose pore fluid can therefore be regarded as incompressible, and if the loads are applied so quickly that fluid has no time to escape, then the process is described as undrained and the soil must deform at constant volume. If, on the other hand, the loads or deformations are imposed so slowly that the fluid can move completely freely, the process is described as drained and the soil deforms at constant pore pressure. The process of transient flow, taking soil from an undrained to a drained state, can lead either to consolidation (fluid drains out, and soil gets denser and stronger) or swelling. In addition to being prone to volume changes, soils are also relatively weak in shear – perhaps three orders of magnitude weaker than concrete. Once again, the possibility of transient flow dictates the outcome. After large shear distortions, undrained soils ultimately display a constant undrained strength. In drained conditions, the strength of the soil is dictated by friction and interlocking between its grains. Ultimately the soil will display a constant internal angle of friction, familiar as the angle of repose of dry sand in sand dunes. Given enough time, underwater slopes in clay also rest at their angle of repose, as do sands. Tests to establish the drained (sand-like) or undrained (clay-like) strengths of soils, will be introduced and explained.

Once it has been established that a given undrained shear strength, or alternatively a given angle of internal friction, can be relied upon, the next step is to be able to make calculations to demonstrate whether a soil body will remain stable under applied loads, for example by a structural foundation. This module extends the plastic analysis of structures, first encountered in Part IB Structures, to bodies made of soil. Both “upper bound” style calculations based on assumed failure mechanisms, and “lower bound” calculations based on demonstrating equilibrium through Mohr’s circles, will be introduced.

**Topic 1: The granular continuum**

*Basic definitions of soil constituents and their packing*

Phase relationships. Density of grains and water; voids ratio and saturation; water content, unit weight. Classification of soils using particle size distribution curves; Relative density of sands. Consistency limit tests – plastic limit, liquid limit, and plasticity index of clayey soils.

*Soils in nature and the principle of effective stress*


*Steady state seepage*

Steady 1D flow through soil: seepage potential, hydraulic gradient, hydraulic conductivity

**Topic 2: Compression and Compaction**

*Artificially formed soils: compaction*

Compaction tests: compaction energy, dry density, optimum water content, degree of saturation. Controlling compaction in the field: tools and techniques, monitoring dry density, relative compaction. Brittleness and wetting-collapse of clayey soils if compacted dry of optimum, softness if compacted wet of optimum.

*Compressibility and stiffness*


**Topic 3: Consolidation**

*Transient flow & the oedometer test*
Excess pore pressures due to 1D loading. 1D consolidation of a unit cell with single drainage: the use of isochrones to describe transient flow. Interpreting transient compression in oedometer tests: consolidation parameters. Time-rate of consolidation for normally consolidated and overconsolidated soils (including swelling). Creep.

One-dimensional consolidation in the field

Using representative oedometer data to assess field settlements and time-rate of settlement. Application to land reclamation. Use of surcharging to reduce consolidation times. Consolidation due to changes in the groundwater regime.

Topic 4: The shear strength of soil

“Direct” and “simple” shear tests: undrained and drained


Topic 5: Limiting equilibrium of geotechnical structures

Shallow foundation design in clay: vertical loading

Bearing capacity of a shallow strip footing on clay. Upper bounds; kinematically admissible mechanism, shear strength, global work or equilibrium. Slip circles and slip planes for non-dilatant soils. Lower bounds; statically admissible stress field, shear strength, equilibrium everywhere. Uniform undrained shear resistance.

Shallow foundation design in sand: vertical loading

Bearing capacity of a shallow strip footing on sand. Uniform angle of friction; stress discontinuities, dry sand. Weightless soil. Upper and lower bounds.

Settlement of foundations

Boussinesq’s solution. Stresses beneath a loaded area. Settlement prediction for shallow foundations

Examples papers

There will be three examples papers directly related to the lecture course, given out in weeks 1, 3 and 6 on the following topics:

- Basic relationships for a granular continuum
- Consolidation and swelling
- Soil strength, and the limiting equilibrium of soil bodies

Coursework

Atterberg Limit Tests

Learning objectives:

- Determine the water content of a soil
- Determine the liquid limit of fine-grained soils
- Determine the plastic limit of fine-grained soils
Classify soils
Assess the strength of soils at the liquid limit

Practical information:

- Sessions will take place in the Structures Research Laboratory, during the first 3-5 weeks of the term
- Sign up for laboratory sessions will be on moodle, as advertised on the site.
- This activity involves a preliminary quiz, available on the moodle site, to be completed prior to the laboratory session

Full Technical Report:

Students will have the option to submit a Full Technical Report.

Booklists

Please refer to the Booklist for Part IIA Courses for references to this module, this can be found on the associated Moodle course.

Examination Guidelines

Please refer to Form & conduct of the examinations [2].

UK-SPEC

The UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC) [3] describes the requirements that have to be met in order to become a Chartered Engineer, and gives examples of ways of doing this.

UK-SPEC is published by the Engineering Council on behalf of the UK engineering profession. The standard has been developed, and is regularly updated, by panels representing professional engineering institutions, employers and engineering educators. Of particular relevance here is the ‘Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes’ (AHEP) document [4] which sets out the standard for degree accreditation.

The Output Standards Matrices [5] indicate where each of the Output Criteria as specified in the AHEP 3rd edition document is addressed within the Engineering and Manufacturing Engineering Triposes.

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Links
[1] mailto:sas229@cam.ac.uk