



# **Kevin Kelly, CEng FCIBSE FSL**

Presidential Address

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**Leading Inclusive Change**

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Firstly let me thank you for placing your trust in me to lead this great Institution of 20,000+ members, spread across the world in over 100 countries, for 2021/22. I believe I am the second Irish CIBSE President following Eoin Kenny who was President in 1986.



*1986 CIBSE President  
Eoin Kenny*

It is humbling to follow so many great CIBSE Presidents and I would particularly like to thank Eoin who inspired me. The President last year, Stuart MacPherson spoke about the challenges of COVID-19, Lynne Jack the year before spoke about improving diversity and Stephen Lisk three years ago spoke about change. I will follow up on all of those themes in this address.

## **Change**

What is clear in this era and going forward is that the only constant in our lives will be change. The last 15 months has seen quite profound change and many new challenges for the world. COVID-19 hit us like a hammer blow and has not given up. Our industry responded well and of course we have all learned to work, meet and indeed shop online.

Whilst many people have tragically lost their lives, everyone has been affected. This is what our future may look like with a continually changing health environment and challenges we have not faced before.

The development of the vaccine is an interesting and inspirational example of what educated and talented researchers can achieve when challenged with such a sudden and devastating event. However, COVID-19 did not come out of nowhere. SARS, MERS and Ebola all came before it. We had warnings from the World Bank and even Bill Gates to prepare for a pandemic. This reminds me of the example of reactions to change and the analogy of placing a frog in boiling water – it jumps out, or so it is claimed. Alternatively, if the frog is placed in a pot and the water is slowly boiled then the frog will go to sleep and not respond adequately to save its life. This is a colourful example of how it is often more difficult to respond to a slower changing environment than a fast changing one. The world was like a sleeping frog as we ignored the risk of a pandemic.

*And by the way, no wildlife were harmed in the writing of this address.*



**But let me present some examples of this analogy:**

Putting the frog in boiling water or to put this into reality, a very fast changing environment, is one that can lead to fundamental change. COVID-19 required such a response from governments who took urgent action and applied resources, and everyone had to change their behaviour promptly.

Our industry was not found wanting as it responded to this challenge. Examples of this outstanding response include the CIBSE experts who responded early and fast to the building of various Nightingale Hospitals, others who developed CIBSE's guidance for ventilation and the reopening of buildings and also contributions to the work by REHVA, the European federation for heating and ventilation bodies, and to scholarly papers addressing the new challenges of COVID-19 and of course there are many more examples, not least the response of all of you and every organisation to the demand for changed working environments and methods.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, resulting in 72 deaths, is another horrific example of a very fast-changing environment. CIBSE engaged with and responded to the Independent Review of building regulations and fire safety by Dame Judith Hackitt. This, too, is leading to fundamental change. We continue to be engaged in the development of the new building safety regime, contributing for example, through the work of the Society of Façade Engineering and through our digital experts to the development of the Golden Thread policy to encourage transparency and accountability in order to support culture change in the construction industry.



The appointment of a chief inspector of buildings in England is a key appointment in the drive to transform the construction sector and marks an important milestone in the implementation of Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review.

After Grenfell it was realised that current regulations were not fit for purpose, were not being complied with and that standards of competence were lacking. From the subsequent findings, it is clear that the industry was asleep, like the frog in a slowly changing environment; and indeed that those who did express concerns did not, or could not, jolt the industry into change. This lack of ability to respond to a slowly changing environment is a very serious human frailty. It beholds all of us to do all we can to avoid anything like Grenfell ever happening again.

There are important lessons to learn. Not just about improved building and fire safety regulations but about everything we do. If we were sleeping frogs about the building regulations, then what else are we sleeping through?

### **Climate Change Maybe?**

Global warming may also be a sleeping frog issue. We face enormous challenges to reduce our carbon emissions. I am not convinced that everybody in our industry fully appreciates the extent of the challenges climate change poses, or the urgent need to take action across the built environment, in how we educate undergraduates in the built environment professions and the training and CPD we undertake.

The CIBSE Climate Action Plan sets out many of the ways that CIBSE is already committed to responding to the growing sense of a climate emergency.

Sometimes the problems and challenges we face in our everyday lives appear somewhat overwhelming to us as individuals; however, we are not acting alone.

We do have to play our part in our organisations to help them respond to these creeping changes in the external environment and not behave like sleeping frogs? As building professionals, we need to be aware of best practice in our specialist areas, reading the latest research and properly evaluating new innovations we implement; and at an advanced level, publishing insightful findings to evaluate what we do and to inform others of the outcomes. This is what leaders of the industry do. Research in our industry is about a diverse community of engineering professionals innovating, evaluating and publishing. CIBSE publishes two world leading research journals in our field in Building Services Engineering Research & Technology and Lighting Research & Technology.

### **How do we best prepare our organisations, given the volatility of the external environment?**

To respond adequately to slow moving change, our organisations need to be more agile than most are at present. We can more easily achieve agility by being inclusive, increasing diversity and promoting equality in our organisations; by giving life to a wider voice representing the wider community and ensuring we have a greater awareness of changes to our environment. An inclusive organisation is made up of people of different ages, backgrounds, religions, sexual orientation, race, and physical abilities. It seeks to represent the society it is set in.

There are often challenges and difficulties for people of minority groups entering and fully engaging in these organisations. For example, Melinda Gates in her book *The Moment of Lift*, talks about the difficulties for women contributing ideas in the early stages of Microsoft, because of the male dominant culture there at that time. Although Microsoft changed, such cultures need to be challenged. Male dominant cultures and those excluding minorities, intentionally or accidentally, don't just miss a trick, they miss a lot of what is going on. It can be compared to a video call where some of the message is missed as WiFi drops out, a loss of bandwidth.

Being inclusive in our organisations is not an act of generosity, it is essential for our organisations to survive in this changing world. Inclusivity is the way we can stay connected and alert, particularly when change is in a slowly changing environment, where frogs fall asleep. Inclusive organisations are more capable, more agile, and can be more responsive to changes in either a fast or slower-moving external environment.

Addressing deficiencies with respect to inclusion is not a comfortable discussion to have. I certainly claim no expertise in this matter. I have offended in this regard during my career. About ten years ago, my employer Technological University Dublin mandated that all interview panels would have a minimum of 40% representation of male and female. In an engineering college and industry that was 90% male, I only foresaw difficulties for myself because of the shortage of women at senior level to find to participate in interview panels. I thought finding qualified women would be very difficult. Actually, it wasn't. I just had to look harder. Women and other minority groups in our industry are out there, and maybe we are just not seeing them. Maybe we are guilty of unconscious bias, and we need to look at things differently.

The effect of the gender balance policy in our university was that candidates were interviewed by a more balanced panel rather than a "sea of dudes". And guess what happened? We increased the number of female staff in engineering. Our previously self-perpetuating policy of male dominance took a dent. Furthermore, female academics going out to schools to recruit engineering students also inspired more young women/girls to go into engineering. Not only that, but it quickly became apparent to me that we had been missing aspects of the candidate's character when we had used all male panels. Women panellists helped us see things differently and to see some things that we previously missed, in both male and female candidates; and overall, we performed much better in our staff selections.

Those presently underrepresented need allies in senior positions to act as mentors or sponsors. It is necessary to provide face time, listen to people's issues and even risk saying the wrong thing occasionally. We need to lean into the discomfort in order to facilitate change. We need as managers to accept criticism when it comes our way, reflect on it and empower minority ethnic and other groups.

CIBSE's Inclusivity Statement states that an inclusive culture brings resilience, creativity and innovation. CIBSE's collective goal is to ensure that the organisation, together with the building services engineering profession and community, are welcoming to all, improves our capacity to address the challenges of ongoing change. We need to make this an ongoing conversation in CIBSE and throughout our industry.

In her book *Invisible Women* Caroline Criado Perez highlights a modern first world for women where instruments are too big, cars are far less safe, and drugs are incorrectly prescribed. This is because research studies are male dominated with subjects.

And of course, we know that women face greater dangers in society, undertake most of the unpaid work associated with child rearing and housework; and are paid less for equivalent work along with being underrepresented in senior positions.

Perez cites the example of the NY Philharmonic orchestra, which had almost no women for many years. The women just weren't as good as the men UNTIL the 1970s when the number of women recruited reached about 50% of the total. So, what happened? Did the women get better? No.

Blind auditions happened, and with it the elimination of unconscious bias.

We are all on a journey together, learning as we go, improving our organisations and creating an atmosphere of trust and support. We must watch out for and identify bias in order to address it. As professional engineers, blatant discrimination or bullying in your presence must be called out at the time for what it is. This is part of behaving ethically in a modern society. Point 11 of the Code of Professional Conduct states that we must “treat all persons fairly and with respect and embrace equality of opportunity, diversity and the elimination of discrimination.”

We should also consider the role of positive discrimination where appropriate to achieve a better balance of opportunities.

### **Flexible Routes for progression**

Opportunities for progression in our industry are vital at every stage. Ladders of opportunity are something we must always be conscious of creating. Historically poor management looked at what a person couldn't do and identified barriers to their progression. Modern successful managers look at what a person can do and give people a chance and a clear pathway forward. Modern inspirational and successful leaders see the potential in everyone and guide it and indeed mentor it or act as sponsors.



Modern apprenticeships allow young people to earn and learn. Anyone watching Graduate of the Year competitions could only be impressed. We had our first Apprentice of the Year at the CIBSE Young Engineers Awards this year. In September 2019, CIBSE became the End Point Assessment organisation for four trailblazer apprenticeships, giving CIBSE the responsibility of the final assessment of an apprentice to ensure that they can do the job they have been training for.

CIBSE have also established non-standard routes to C Eng and I Eng. for those with sufficient industrial experience but without the accredited qualifications. We ask applicants to demonstrate competence and to offer robust evidence in this regard. This is enlightened in my view and allows us to encourage applicants from a diversity of backgrounds to take advantage of our non-standard routes to membership.

Sometimes people need mentors. We need to help those people climbing the ladders by identifying or acting as mentors or sponsors for them. Most of us through our careers got a lucky break with someone who inspired us, helped us or was just there for us when we needed guidance. If you are senior then find the time to offer a guiding hand to those advancing their careers and if you are climbing the ladder, always be on the lookout for someone who can help you and ask for help. Mentoring can be time consuming but sponsoring of people may be easier. This is about offering face time and facilitating ways to overcome hurdles. Sponsors identify mentors for junior or new staff and set aside time for them occasionally.

## **Succession Planning**

CIBSE has taken an active position in succession planning.

We actively encourage our Regions, Groups and the CIBSE Divisions to seek wider participation in their committees and amongst their leadership. We want to develop a steady and more diverse flow of volunteers to these roles. We are also very grateful to those who have served loyally in these positions for many years and for their dedication to CIBSE.

We will develop our website to better advertise panel and committee vacancies, including person specs and time commitments and to ensure we are inclusive and transparent in all opportunities. This is part of our determination to maintain a fresh flow of talent into leadership positions, increase our bandwidth, and provide wider representation of the industry, our people and the society we serve. I would ask senior people and companies to encourage and facilitate all their employees, junior and senior to participate in these opportunities which allow personal and professional development, networking and a better functioning professional community. Volunteering also builds social networks and can be fun.

We have a long and tricky road ahead, but we have a talented team of volunteers and CIBSE staff to address it. Our volunteers exemplify CIBSE values. CIBSE empower others with knowledge, champion talented people, inspire others to join and contribute and lead across the CIBSE community. Of course, we face many difficulties and challenges. In order to maintain a full bandwidth and understand the whole story, we have to be willing to have the awkward and difficult conversations ahead and lean into them in order to change our industry for the better by making it more inclusive and welcoming to all.