



New President for ACEI 2023-2024

# Kavanagh fully committed to ACEI Sustainability Vision



James Kavanagh, the newly-elected President of the Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI).

**James Kavanagh was** recently elected President of the Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI) for the 2023-2024 term. James is the CEO of Varming Consulting Engineers, a building services engineer and a 1990 graduate from DIT Bolton Street College of Technology, DIT (now the Technological University Dublin). His first active involvement in ACEI was as a member of the Mechanical & Electrical (M&E) subcommittee and, since then, he has served on the Executive Board as ordinary member, Honorary Treasurer and Vice-President.

Established in 1938, ACEI is a voluntary, self-regulatory, professional body representing the business and professional interests of firms and individuals engaged in consulting engineering on the island of Ireland. Currently there are 105 ACEI member firms of all sizes – micro, SMEs and multinationals – with offices all over the country employing more than 4600 people.

As the voice of the consulting engineering profession, the Association assists in resolving issues of importance for consultants and their clients, and contributes to the development of relevant public policy through participation in industry fora and Government committees. Its nine sub-committees work very hard to support members, including the development of model conditions of engagement and policy papers.

ACEI provides a suite of important services to members, including CPD, communications and awards. Among other categories,

two of the annual Engineering Excellence Project Awards focus on sustainability, in both the natural and built environments. The Association also has a key role in lobbying local, national and European politicians on important issues for the sector. These cover everything from progressing the National Development Plan (NDP) through to strategic planning, Government contracts, Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) and construction health and safety.

During James's term of office, in conjunction with the Executive members, Secretariat staff and sub-committees, ACEI will continue implementing key initiatives already underway, including its client and stakeholder engagement programme. This initiative successfully highlights the value member-firms bring to projects, focusing on design for performance. It also helps to identify the importance of introducing innovative and sustainable modern methods of construction (MMC) to the sector, addresses the integral role consultants play in the delivery of the NDP, and

outlines the sustainability and other challenges member firms are facing.

A fully-mobilised construction sector is essential to the delivery of important housing, infrastructure and other projects central to the country's further development. It is also crucial to consider making a change, from a transactional-type construction approach towards one based on partnership, quality, whole-life costs and sustainability.

In this context, ACEI has advocated in lobbying Government that the NDP should prioritise the delivery of projects that make us more resilient as a society, better transitions us to a sustainable low-carbon community, and enable the development of renewables that are critical to addressing climate action.

The Association has also suggested that a senior Government appointment should be made in relation to

responsibility for retrofit initiatives, reporting directly to the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, to provide leadership in this area, particularly in relation to the 500,000 homes needing renovations.

The continuing provision of energy in the existing environmental climate is also a key concern to ACEI. Its recommendations to Government to address the situation using renewables include:

- Develop a solar energy strategy;
- Strengthen policy framework to incentivise electricity storage and interconnection;
- Promote research and development in "green" hydrogen;
- Develop a long-term plan to take advantage of a potential of at least 30GW of offshore floating wind power in the Atlantic.

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In 2021, ACEI's active Sustainability Committee developed the *ACEI Sustainability Vision*, which looks to a future "shaped by socially and environmentally responsible design, where true long-term costs and benefits are considered across entire project lifecycles." In effect, this aspiration addresses the important requirement to move from a linear to a circular economy.

The vision statement also notes that ACEI "will continue to help shape policy and to influence consulting engineering firms and their clients to pursue well-conceived projects for the benefit of communities and the environment. Such projects will be planned and designed to go beyond the traditional focus on function, cost minimisation and programme, to also address resilience, long-term sustainability and societal impacts."

Within the vision, the ACEI commitment to climate action is a recognition of "the existential crises that humankind faces resulting from climate change; the significant influence that consulting engineers have on the built environment of the future; the potential for client decisions to contribute positively to future climate outcomes; and the crucial nature of the sustainability advice that member firms provide to clients."

Building on the *Sustainability Vision*, one of the most important current ACEI activities is the Association's leadership in the built environment sector in relation to acting on climate change. In 2022, ACEI made a firm commitment to the international Pledge to Net Zero (PtNZ) programme and partnered with the UK-based PtNZ campaign. PtNZ is led by a steering committee that includes the Society for the Environment (SocEnv), the Institute of Environmental



**The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to create a better, fairer world by 2030.**

Management and Assessment (IEMA), the Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE), and the Environmental Industries Commission (EIC). Leading environmental consultancies WSP and AECOM are also part of the initiative.

The ACEI PtNZ commitment has been made to provide ACEI member firms with a science-based greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction programme, which comes with support and guidance as well as the sharing of good practice. More than 165 organisations worldwide have signed up to the pledge so far, with all signatories committing to:

- Setting, and committing to deliver, a greenhouse gas target in line with either a 1.5°C or well below 2°C climate change scenario covering buildings and travel as a minimum;
- Publicly report greenhouse gas emissions and progress against this target annually;
- Publish one piece of research or thought-leadership piece annually on practical steps to deliver a net zero greenhouse gas economy.

Alternatively, signatories may choose to provide mentoring and support for smaller signatory companies in setting targets, reporting and meeting the requirements of the pledge.

ACEI continues to advocate for climate action and members are at the forefront of designing innovative energy solutions to help reduce carbon emissions from homes and from the environment. By registering for the PtNZ commitment, ACEI consulting engineering practices demonstrate their actions as leaders in the field by making a real difference within their own operations, and by working in an integrated way to continue providing world-class advice on sustainability and environmental concerns to clients. ACEI members are committed to helping deliver greenhouse gas targets in line with necessary climate change scenarios, covering buildings and travel as a minimum.

As President, James Kavanagh plans to continue the leadership on the ACEI Strategy 2022-2025 to support a vibrant consulting engineering community. In this context the strategy's vision outlines "a future shaped by social and environmentally-responsible design." It continues with a mission "to support a vibrant consulting engineering community, within which member firms can grow successful businesses that deliver sustainable engineering solutions for the benefit of humankind."

James also aims to uphold and maintain the high standards set by the ACEI to date, and looks forward to building on the work already undertaken by the Association. Key to this objective will be delivering value to ACEI members, while fostering and enhancing their standing in the consulting engineering profession and Irish built environment sector. ■