

AGM Acceptance Address, DR KIERAN FEIGHAN, President, 31 May 2017

Engineers Ireland 2017-2018 Session

Distinguished guests, fellow members of the Institution, family, friends, ladies and Gentlemen:

My sincerest thanks to all of you present and to all 23,000 plus members of Engineers Ireland for conferring this great honour on me as President of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland. Our institution was founded in 1835 and we pre-date almost all other professional engineering institutions worldwide. Based on calculations from the listing of my predecessors in the Presidents Room, I have just become the 125th President of this Institution and I am deeply grateful, honoured and excited to take on this role for the coming year.

I have been privileged to work beside our immediate Past President, Dermot Byrne for the past two years. Dermot has committed a huge amount of his valuable time and invaluable experience to sustaining and improving Engineers Ireland across a wide range of topics. His background was extremely influential in the production of last year's State of Ireland report which focussed in detail on the Energy sector.

He has leveraged his previous experiences as CEO of EirGrid to greatly help Engineers Ireland in the areas of governance and strategy development. Dermot initiated and led an external "fit for purpose" review of the organisation's structures and processes. He has led the creation of a new Audit and Risk committee to complement the existing scope covered by the Finance committee.

In Dermot's presidency, the new Strategic Plan for Engineers Ireland, 2017 to 2020, took shape through extensive discussions with members at all levels of the organisation and with the Secretariat. The plan defines a new Vision, Mission, Values and a set of key goals for the Institution.

Dermot is an easy person to work with, always good humoured and good company, but with a steely focus on achieving the desired outcome for Engineers Ireland and for the profession generally. He leaves a very strong, lasting legacy of improvement for which we are all extremely grateful.

I have also worked very closely over the past two years with Bill Grimson. Bill has reached the end of his four year term as an Officer of Engineers Ireland. He has taken great delight and mischievous pleasure in giving me an exact countdown to the AGM date every time we meet, starting at last year's AGM.

All of us who have been in contact with Bill appreciate his wisdom and thoughtfulness, his kindness and consideration of others, and of course his wicked sense of humour. Bill, on behalf of Engineers Ireland, I want to thank you for the lifelong commitment and loyalty that

you have given to our organisation. I am sure that you and Jane will continue as you have always done to play an enormously valuable role in a diversity of ways in helping and strengthening our Institution, and the profession of Engineering.

Happily for me, I will continue to enjoy working with Peter Quinn our Vice President. Like Bill, Peter has been a stalwart of Engineers Ireland for many years and is a great source of wisdom and insight as well as a great friend and companion.

I am delighted, both personally and on behalf of the member body, to welcome Marguerite Sayers as Vice President of Engineers Ireland. I have worked beside Marguerite at Council and Executive over the past few years, and she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to bear based on her career to date, and in particular in her role as CEO of ESB Networks.

I am really looking forward to working closely with my fellow officers, Dermot, Peter and Marguerite, over the coming year to advance the standing and status of Engineers Ireland. As many of you know, Marguerite hails from the Kingdom, and with my strong allegiance to Mayo, we have an Officer from each of the four provinces, with Dublin, Mayo, Tyrone and Kerry represented. A very strong GAA line-up, and I will do my level best to make sure that Mayo comes out on top. First order of business is to change the Engineers Ireland hashtag to MayoforSam2017!

In 1969, nearly 50 years ago, John Fogerty of *Creedence Clearwater Revival* wrote the classic anti-Vietnam anthem, *Fortunate Son*:

It ain't me, It ain't me, I ain't no Senator's son

It ain't me, It ain't me, I ain't no Fortunate one.

Well, I ain't no Senator's son but I am definitely a Fortunate Son and a Fortunate One. At all stages in my life, I have been lucky and blessed to be surrounded by positive influences – kind, loving, supportive people who helped me to move up and move forward.

So, as Jimmy Rabbitte in *The Commitments* asks – Who are your influences?

My father, Oliver Feighan, was a Civil Engineer, a local authority engineer, County Engineer in Carlow, and a person who throughout his life was hugely committed to the power of engineering to improve people's lives. He was President of this Institution in 1984-85 and I am very proud and fortunate to say that we are only the second Father-Son presidential combination in the long history of this great Institution. Patrick Raftery was President for the 1944/45 term (exactly 40 years before my dad) and his son, also Patrick Raftery was President for the 1967/68 term (exactly 50 years before me). A nice piece of historical symmetry.

My mother Mairin worked as a muinteoir scoile and both of her parents were also primary teachers, as were her sister, her brother and many of her in-laws. Both of my sisters are primary teachers, and I have many cousins that are teaching at primary and third level. My wife, Aisling, is Professor of Transport Economics in UCD so I am surrounded by teachers and have been all my life!

Following on the Fortunate One theme, I was educated by the De La Salle Brothers in Castlebar and the Christian Brothers in Carlow. These schools, based in provincial towns, had a stimulating mix of all social backgrounds, and a huge emphasis on the power of education to “improve your lot”. I had an inspirational teacher for 4 years in primary school from 3rd to 6th class, Brother Pius Gerrard. We learned in the classroom through the folk revolution, we listened to Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Woody Guthrie, and John Fogerty. There were songs of protest and songs of freedom and a huge emphasis on social justice and equality.

I studied Civil Engineering at University College Galway from 1979 to 1983 where the Professor of Civil Engineering was An tOllamh Deaglan O’Caoimh. The Professor had a strong belief that the technical content of the four years was relatively unimportant. What was most important was learning to approach problems as a good Engineer should – defining the problem critically, seeking a range of possible solutions, and finding the most economic or most suitable or most practical solution from the range of options defined. I value his wisdom in this approach more and more as I progress through life.

I was also fortunate to study and work in the United States for a number of years. I worked with a fantastic professor at Purdue University, Kumares Sinha. Professor Sinha has a razor-sharp intellect and has been the recipient of many awards and honours in the US and further afield. But what impressed me most was the work-rate that he applied in conjunction with this intellect – recruiting and pushing through graduates from all over the world, chasing large grants to fund postgraduate research, encouraging and debating research topics over a wide range of areas - and always trying to raise the profile of Purdue University and of Engineering through his work and through the subsequent careers of his students.

While registered as a Purdue student, I spent most of my time in Champaign, Illinois, working at the US Army Corps of Engineers Research Laboratory and subsequently with a pavement consultancy firm. I thoroughly enjoyed my 5 years plus in the Mid-West – very friendly and hospitable people in a country that had a “Just Do It” attitude with so much more energy and entrepreneurship than I was used to in 1980’s Ireland.

I am so pleased to have seen how that has changed completely in Ireland , the willingness to back yourself and believe in yourself is so much stronger in our engineering companies and our young engineers. This can be seen most clearly in the IT and software space, but more

generally in commercial semi-state bodies, engineering contractor and consultancy firms as well as in the manufacturing sector.

I also want to acknowledge my friend and colleague Katie Zimmerman. Katie is a highly respected leader and teacher worldwide in the pavement management and transportation asset management areas. We started working together over 30 years ago at the Corps of Engineers. Katie became a member of Engineers Ireland earlier this year so she could officially attend the AGM, and she flew in from Chicago at the beginning of this week to be here tonight. You make such good friends and meet so many genuinely nice people through Engineering – I really appreciate the effort Katie.

What am I looking forward to in the coming year?

I believe that the Strategic Plan developed for the organisation is an excellent roadmap. Together with my Vice Presidents, Peter and Marguerite, we are committed over the next 3 years to delivering on the three strategic goals of

- Building and Enhancing the status and reputation of the engineering profession
- Supporting and growing our membership while also encouraging and educating future generations of engineers
- Ensuring the standard and competence of our members is world class

As members of Engineers Ireland, we are very lucky to have such a dedicated and hardworking staff, mainly non-Engineers, who are committed to making Engineers Ireland the best organisation it can be both for the members, and for all of the citizens of Ireland.

I look forward to working closely with Caroline, Damien, Michelle, John, Dee, Cariosa and Lisa and the entire staff at Engineers Ireland to deliver on the outcomes and measure the impacts of the implementation of the plan.

We will launch the 2017 State of Ireland report in June. This year, we are concentrating on the areas of Transportation and Communications, following on from the 2016 report that concentrated on the Energy sector. I have chaired the Steering Committee for this report for the past two years since we decided to produce a more in-depth view of particular sectors. I have seen the final proofs of the 2017 report and am very impressed with the quality and breadth of the work that has been carried out in both areas with over 40 named expert members of the Institution actively involved over the past six months.

Engineers Ireland will continue to strongly set out the case for increased investment in our key productive infrastructure areas, both in maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure assets and in badly needed new capital investment. We will also continue to press the case for a National Infrastructure Commission to develop and support the case for cross-departmental co-ordination of major capital projects, and to support the goals and development of the new National Planning Framework. The Ireland 2040 plan will be a

hugely important document in laying out the framework for future development and investment in Ireland. I am representing Engineers Ireland on the Advisory Group of Ireland 2040, and will continue to do so through the coming year.

I have spoken about the influence of teachers, particularly primary school teachers, on my world view. I am really proud of Engineers Ireland outreach to young people through our many initiatives, most importantly in the STEPS programme and Engineers Week and I will work diligently to support and strengthen our positive presence in this space.

We have commenced a new, targeted outreach to our third level academic institutions in the past year, led first by Denis and latterly by Lisa from our Membership team. From my experiences in the US, I have seen first-hand how active and continued engagement by the professional engineering institutions with the engineering student body and with the faculty has very positive outcomes for all.

We need to nurture and encourage our connections so that Engineers Ireland become the natural home for our engineers on graduation and throughout their professional lives. I am fully committed to helping the roll-out of this new approach in the coming year.

I also want to acknowledge and congratulate John Power, our former Director General, who has succeeded a former President, PJ Rudden, as President of the UCD Engineering Graduates Association. The EGA is critically important in helping our outreach to the engineering faculty in UCD, and it is an organisation that I would love to see replicated in other key Irish Universities and Institutes of Technology.

I look forward to working closely with the new President of the Irish Academy of Engineering, Brendan Tuohy. In Dermot's year as President, we started discussions with the IAE, and I am confident that together we can clearly define how our two organisations can best work together and support one another in our different but sometimes overlapping roles and aims. Our separate but complementary submissions on the National Planning Framework set a very good example in that regard and I wish to particularly acknowledge our former President Peter Langford's continuing efforts in that area.

John Power has also been of great help to the Institution in our outreach to the IRFU in support of the Rugby World Cup 2023 bid. We have pledged the support of Engineers Ireland both to the bid, and to the many facets of organisation and preparation that will be required in the six year period running up to the World Cup. As an All-Ireland Engineering organisation with strong Regional committees in all parts of the island where the competition will be held, it is vital in the national interest that we are involved and play a full part in ensuring the successful hosting of RWC 2023. Challenges to our infrastructure and logistical capabilities will be huge across the full spectrum, but as Engineers we must embrace the challenge and get stuck in. The bid documents will be submitted tomorrow,

June 1, with a recommended bid in October and a final vote in November of this year. The very best of luck to Dick Spring, Kevin Potts and the bid committee in their submission.

In closing, I would like to thank my wife Aisling and my children, Brian, Ciara and Eoin for their love and pride in me, and for their tolerance in allowing me to commit much of my spare time to Engineers Ireland. I want to thank my family here tonight, my mother Máirin, my sisters Máirin and Anne and brother Aidan, for a lifetime of love and support.

I must acknowledge the support of my work colleagues and friends at PMS, particularly my fellow directors, Owen, Brian and Eoin, all Chartered Engineers, who are shouldering a much greater burden this year to allow me the time and space to commit to this position. And I would like to thank my friends and colleagues in Engineers Ireland, particularly in the Civil Division and the Roads and Transportation Society where we have laboured together for many years, for their company, their friendship and support.

I am really looking forward to working closely with the staff here in Clyde Road, with Council and Executive, with the Regions, Divisions, Societies and Committees of Engineers Ireland to sustain and improve on the goals and aspirations of this great Institution of ours. Thank you again for the privilege of being your President for the 2017-18 term.

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