



European federation EFCA represents 26 member associations across the continent and works closely with FIDIC on the key issues facing the industry. EFCA president Kevin Rudden thinks engineers need to be much bolder about what they do, writes *Ryan Tute*.



“Engineers are too modest to shout out about achievements”

The man at the helm of the body that represents 26 professional associations from across Europe believes it's time engineers came out from the shadows and finally started to shout about the many incredible achievements they accomplish on a day-to-day basis.

Kevin Rudden, president of the European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations (EFCA), which represents FIDIC in Europe, was speaking ahead of the 2018 FIDIC International Infrastructure Conference. He believes the theme of the conference – mobility and smart infrastructure – is a worthy one with technological advancements and digitalisation set to play an extremely important role going forward.

“I think that it gives us a unique opportunity to take the mucky boots out of construction,” said Rudden. “Digital advancements make us far more attractive to a lot more people who would have previously not considered our industry for a career. We are in the midst of a technological revolution in the way we design, construct and operate, not just our infrastructure but also our businesses, and our business models are constantly changing. We really need to reinvent the way we carry out our business to fully utilise these new technologies,” Rudden said.

Change is inevitable and it's up to firms around the world to choose whether to adopt change now or face the consequences of ignoring them at a later date, Rudden added. “It's irrelevant whether we decide to support these new trends because they are going to happen

anyway,” he said. “As an industry we need to reinvent ourselves and abandon the preconceived frameworks. We need to embrace these new models and try new experiences which allow us to truly evolve as an industry and society. The transformation won't be easy, there will be many obstacles and shattering this status quo is going to be disruptive but it will be very important,” Rudden added.

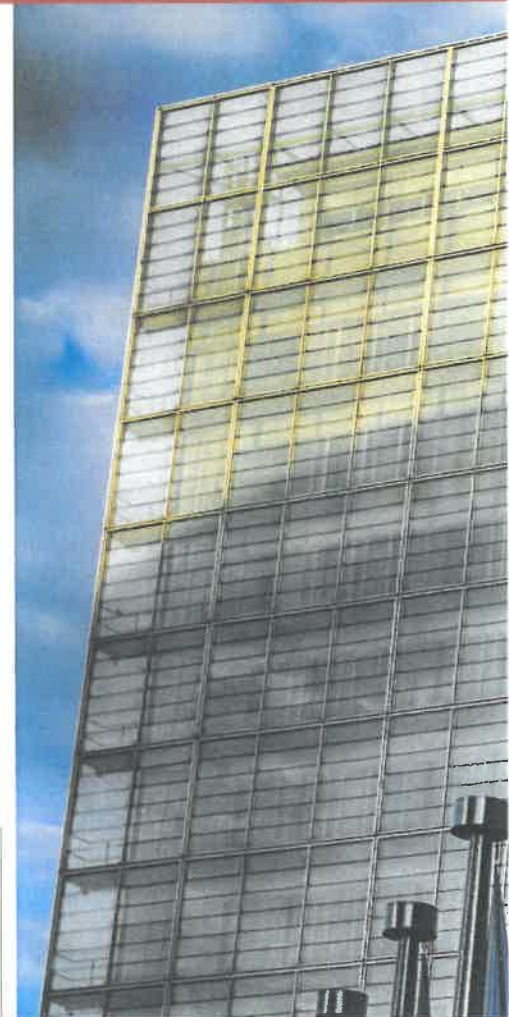
Key role to play

EFCA's prime role is to promote the European consulting industry within the continent and internationally and to represent it to European institutions. The president says those within the association also have a key role to play in ensuring new, exciting talent is always on the conveyor belt to take up engineering positions.

“Consulting engineers tend to be in the back room and we need to get out of there and come into the limelight,” Rudden said. “It's vital that we demonstrate our

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President, EFCA



significance more and contributions to economic growth and proven investments globally. Engineers save more lives in the developing world than doctors do, but we are too modest to shout out about our achievements. For too long consulting engineers have allowed themselves to become the pawns to political masters and only come to the fore to explain disasters after they have actually occurred, which we saw recently in Genoa with the collapse of a highway bridge,” said Rudden.

On the centre stage

The man in charge at EFCA claims consultancy and engineering firms will play a big part in raising their profile on the world stage and being seen as leaders. Rudden says the industry suffers from a “boom and bust” way of working that is far too “cyclical” and there needs to be more consistent and steady streams of work to attract talent.

“Engineers have to capitalise on the areas of influence that capture the public's attention to form a position that puts engineers on the centre stage, he said. “We have to focus on the areas the public are interested in such as the commitment to achieving the Paris 2021 agreement and the huge input engineers have on that.



“It’s absolutely essential that we present a united voice,” he said. “We are there to highlight the issues of most concern and help produce agreed solutions. It’s vitally important that organisations like FIDIC and EFCA can represent the membership directly to the power brokers, be that international and financial institutions or be that the Commission. In Europe we have somewhat of a unique situation and political identity where we have 28 members or one political union that comes up with common directives that are implemented totally different in 28 countries and our role is to try and ensure the directive that is agreed is implementable in each country,” said Rudden.

Expert knowledge broker

Commenting on EFCA’s real strength, the man in charge says the association has a two-fold job to act as a collective body representing the business interests of members and concentrating on policy matters influencing the EU.

“Our role is to represent the EU to the commission and positively influence legislation that impacts our industry,” Rudden said. “For example, if there is a directive on procurement or any such activity then what we want is a fair transparent directive that can be implemented equally in all member states rather than leave problems there for it to be corrected 28 different times. We have a very good relationship with the EU and all aspects of the Commission and we meet on a regular basis. We see ourselves as an expert knowledge broker which actually comes up with the solutions,” said Rudden.

On the FIDIC conference itself, Rudden is particularly looking forward to Richard van Hooijdonk’s futurist and trendwatcher sessions, while the event provides the perfect chance to network with a large section of people across the industry.

“We at EFCA are delighted to join and work with the international engineering community in Berlin,” he said. “Personally, I am particularly looking forward to the futurist and trendwatcher sessions and also the future leaders’ forum which is always of great interest. But the conference itself is a unique networking event with ample opportunities to meet global leaders in the industry in an informal and relaxed setting,” Rudden said.

You can download the EFCA report, *Future Trends in Consulting Engineering Industry*, at <http://futuretrendreport.efcanet.org/#p=1>

“FIDIC have put huge effort into the UN environment guidebook for procuring-sustainable buildings and construction and we have also put a large amount of time and effort into smart city development. These are all areas firmly within the control of consulting engineers and in the limelight of public thinking,” said Rudden. “We need to shout about the work we do in these areas and highlighting any work within these areas will go a long way in attracting some of the brightest young minds to the industry and addressing concerns with skills shortages,” he said.

Staff shortages are just one of the future challenges that the EFCA boss predicts, along with salary increases and political uncertainties across the globe.

“At EFCA, what we are finding now is that staff shortages and salary increases are becoming a bigger challenge in the European market and that in turn has an impact on profitability,” Rudden added. “Profit margins are still only half of what is achieved in the US. As an industry we really have to stop undervaluing our services and charge a fair fee for what is actually done,” he said.

Reflecting on other challenges, Rudden said: “There are always political uncertainties and unpredictability

brought about by things like Brexit. Furthermore, there is the rise in populist governments across Europe and the political tensions which are ever apparent. Finally, we see the security threats across Europe – it’s frightening to see soldiers on so many of the streets of major European cities we visit,” he said.

Moving forward

Organisations like EFCA and FIDIC will continue to play an ever-increasing role in representing the voice of the engineering and consultancy sector moving forward, according to Rudden, and conferences like the one in Berlin are crucial in starting dialogue between members.

