

# Attracting new members vital says incoming ECA President

Ger O’Leary is the new President of the Electrical Contractors’ Association. Here he outlines his thoughts on the future of the ECA and issues that need to be tackled.

“**T**he economic outlook continues to be very challenging for members. While there has been some improvement in the amount of work coming on stream, and this is most evident in Dublin, the uplift is from an extremely low base. What the electrical sector needs, and likewise the construction industry in general, is a sustained and strong growth rate over a number of years. The economy may have has some way to go before this becomes a reality.

## Strong ECA

It is vitally important that the ECA continues to have a strong voice within the electrical sector and in this regard we must continue to work to attract new members. Similar to the other associations within the CIF, the ECA membership has been declining over the last number of years. The ECA represents essentially all of the larger contractors, however, to ensure we remain the leading representative association within the sector we must continue to ensure we are relevant and central to the needs of small and medium sized contractors.

## Industrial relations

Industrial relations has been very challenging recently. The fall of the REA has resulted in instability in the sector and an inequality in tendering with members noting that they are tendering at a rate well above what many contractors outside of the ECA are tendering at. While the TEEU Union threat of a national strike and their more recent targeted activity on specific sites is a direct consequence of the inequality in rates, it is also a consequence of the race to the bottom pursued by many main contractors. The ECA strongly welcomes the draft framework legislation providing for wage agreements in an industry. We believe this is



Outgoing ECA President Joe Conway (left) congratulates Ger O’Leary on assuming the role of ECA President

urgently needed to bring stability and clarity to our sector and we would call on the CIF to look at all means possible to ensure that the government prioritises the introduction of this legislation. A strong ECA with a diverse membership will be important down the line with a view to the “substantially representative” clause within the draft framework.

## Payment certainty

The long awaited Construction Contracts Act legislation will be a welcome development for electrical contractors once it is introduced as expected later this year. It is important that the CIF continues to do all in its power to ensure its introduction without further delay, however, as the possibility of insolvency further up the supply chain is still a real risk, cash flow through the payment chain remains a very significant issue for our members. The ECA supports the introduction of Project Bank Accounts (PBAs) for use on both public and private contracts in Ireland. It is important that the CIF adopt a positive approach to the concept of PBAs and also call for the GCCC to trial PBA on a public project in Ireland as soon as possible.

## Training and development

The provision of relevant and innovative training and development opportunities to our members and their employees is an area that Sean Downey, CIF Director of Specialist services is very passionate about. The M&ECA associations have introduced some important new training initiatives such as a “Lean Construction” initiative aimed at providing a measure of the level of waste within a company’s projects and a “Step Up” programme aimed at promising trades people, providing them with communication, leadership and cost management skills necessary for a foreman or supervisor position. These initiatives are invaluable in meeting the up-skilling challenge of delivering the competitiveness and productivity gains required of the electrical contracting sector, which is heavily reliant on FDI companies. Finally, a vibrant electrical contracting sector needs to retain its long held capacity to attract high quality school leavers to become electrical apprentices. To ensure this occurs, we need to address the public perception, formed as a result of the recession, of construction trades as not providing a viable profession with long term stable opportunity. Both the M&ECA associations along with the TEEU have taken an initial step towards meeting this objective.”