

Kevin Mitchell CEng FCIBSE

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Inspiring the next generation



Thank you very much for the kind introduction, and thank you everyone, for the very warm welcome – it really is great to see so many of you here in person. I would also like to thank everyone joining us online. As you know, this is the first ever hybrid CIBSE Presidential Address – I hope the technology manages to keep up with us this evening!

Now, I have quite a bit to say this evening, so I hope you will forgive me if I get straight to the point of my address.

My role – and your role – **must** be to inspire the next generation.

This has long been the case, but it feels especially important now for a number of reasons.

One: Climate Change

Climate change is no longer a distant threat – it's a looming disaster. Forest fires, catastrophic flooding, hurricanes, typhoons and extreme heat have become so commonplace, and events that once would have made headlines around the world hardly merit more than a passing mention.

Our complacency will not protect us.

We must inspire and equip the next generation to work with us to respond to this threat.

TWO: Covid

COVID-19 has roared across the world. Seemingly unstoppable, it's still a long way from being over and it's impact has raised urgent questions about our buildings and our cities. Indeed, it has put the quality of the indoor environment and its relationship with the health and wellbeing of occupants under intense scrutiny.

It has prompted me to think of this story. You may know it.

In August 1854, an outbreak of cholera in Soho in London killed 127 people in three days. And 616 people within a month. No one understood why. The district Doctor, John Snow, studied the pattern of death and the pattern of sickness and identified that the epidemic stemmed from "Contamination of the water of the most frequented pump on Broad Street".

It was the first time that city infrastructure was identified as causing sickness and death.

While the short term response to the discovery was to remove the pump handle, it took a lot longer to formulate and agree on how to prevent and treat the disease in the long term.

Consider our response to a similarly frightening threat.

Over the last two years, our hurriedly assembled screens between desks, opening of windows, donning of masks, and efforts to socially distance may have stopped the spread of COVID, but they did not and will not equip us to thrive in a world where globalisation means deadly viruses can race around the world at the speed of a jet engine.

Healthy and resilient buildings have never mattered more. And not just to deal with COVID but also to manage the next threat – whatever and wherever that might be.

We must inspire and equip the next generation to work with us to achieve this.

Three: War

The horrors of the conflict in the Ukraine are impossible to overstate. The wholesale destruction of cities that were home to millions is terrible to witness. I have children and for me, it is almost unbearably painful to see images like a bombed apartment block, its wall sheared away to reveal the colourful wallpaper of a child's bedroom.

As building services engineers, our first thought of how to respond to this may be a practical one. How can we repair those cities – the bricks and mortar, the water and electrical systems?

But I would remind you that in doing so, we are actually helping to repair lives, communities, and society.

We must support and inspire each other to tackle these existential threats.

This year, CIBSE celebrates our 125th anniversary. I've been reflecting on the fact that innovating to enable more sustainable, safer and healthier buildings that support society and communities to flourish is one thing we have been doing since 1897.

I'm thinking of clean heating and the move away from burning coal in our rooms to passive methods, or central heating systems that use clean fuels, or renewable energy.

I'm thinking of the move away from candles to provide light. Firstly to gas lighting, then to electric lighting and now to ever more energy efficient lighting solutions.

I'm thinking of the development of modern plumbing systems that enabled the introduction of indoor toilets and bathrooms.

These are all innovations that have transformed lives around the world. They are also innovations that have extended lives by producing safer and healthier buildings.

Like Dr John Snow, we should be using all of our critical thinking faculties, our experience and our innovation to look beyond the accepted wisdom to deliver real and lasting change.

Now, no one loves an award ceremony more than me. It's fantastic to celebrate the results of so much endeavour, and to see the really outstanding receive the accolades that are truly deserved.

But inspiring the next generation isn't about selecting a handful of stars and pinning our hope on them. It's about encouraging, mentoring, and cheering on a whole generation of engineers who, with our support – will solve the big technical and scientific problems of the future.

When we celebrate the achievements of all and demonstrate, publicly, the real-world impact of their work it helps us to broaden the appeal of our profession.

Research shows that the most talented young people – those who have a choice of profession – are increasingly drawn to careers where they believe their work will have a positive impact on the world. I would argue that there are very few careers indeed that offer more opportunity to deliver real change than that of a Building Services Engineer.

If we can inspire people to join us – people from a range of backgrounds who reflect the communities that we serve – if we can do that, our ability to problem solve and innovate in the future will increase exponentially.



Kevin Mitchell, 1996, First CIBSE ASHRAE Graduate of the Year

My own CIBSE journey started in 1996 when I was the first recipient of the CIBSE graduate of the year. When I said earlier that I liked award ceremonies, I have to admit that I especially enjoy being the recipient of an award, who doesn't?

But me receiving the award didn't happen in a vacuum. Right from the start of my career, I have been lucky enough to be surrounded by brilliantly supportive and inspiring people that make up the CIBSE community. While there was only one name on that trophy in 1996, there should have also been a number of other names too: Treve Mitchell, who introduced me to the wonderful world of engineering. Alan Knight who brought me into Building Services Engineering and, in his words, saved me from a lifetime of designing exhaust pipes if I had followed my initial instinct to work in the automotive industry! Terry Wyatt who encouraged me to investigate the links between the indoor environment, health and productivity, Tim Dwyer who led the excellent MSC course at London South Bank where I learned so much and, of course Simone, who is, has always been and always will be the wind beneath my wings.

The support that I received enabled me to grow my skills and my confidence and it saw me working across the UK and Europe, in Canada for four years and the Middle East for eight years, and a very exciting six months in Hong Kong.

It is a particularly rewarding for me to know that I've worked in sectors that help to make communities stronger by providing better education and better healthcare outcomes. I've been able to contribute to projects that hold sporting and cultural events and buildings that inspire creativity and support people to develop and communities to flourish.

Now, it has brought me here, able to speak to you, as CIBSE's President. I am proud to be promoting CIBSE's values and its global recognition that has been earned by you, it's 21,000 members, located across 95 countries worldwide.

Thinking back to my 28-year-old self, I could never have imagined how rich and rewarding my journey would be. Now, I want to be part of the team that inspires others to believe that anything is possible for them too.

Today our Young Engineers Awards are bigger and better than ever with 20 fantastic candidates in contention for the 2021 graduate and apprentice awards.

Their energy and promise is striking and they fill me with hope and expectation for the future. For CIBSE, for our profession of course but, most importantly, for the world.

That's why I have chosen **one theme** for our 125-year Celebration

Inspire the next generation.

And I have identified **two goals**:

- The first goal is for you and me to pay forward the support that we have received to the next generation
- The second goal is to share how building services engineers are key in the transition to net zero and fighting climate change.

And I have set **five challenges** – tying together 1-2-5, 125 years of celebrations.

The challenges are the spark – rather than a rule. I want them to be inclusive, flexible, memorable, celebratory, and for them to be accessible for organisations, individuals, networks, regions, groups and societies. And I want them to be shared as widely as possible to inspire others and to amplify the voice of CIBSE.

In developing the challenges, I have had an opportunity to discuss them with a number of groups across CIBSE, including YEN, Patrons, a focus group and HCNE, and I am buoyed by the enthusiastic response they have received and the eagerness of members to support them. I am also delighted to share with you

that we will soon have a newly invigorated Fellows Network, and I look forward to the engagement and support that I know the Fellows Network will provide to my challenges.

So, let's take a look at the challenges.

1. CELEBRATE— your building services icons

Your icon might be a person, an invention, a company, a project, technique or technology. It could be a publication, a group, or someone who taught or mentored you. However, crucially, it must be someone or something that inspired you to develop as a Building Services Engineer.

2. INSPIRE – future engineers to consider our profession

This challenge aims to inspire young people to consider a career in engineering and specifically building services engineering. We know there aren't enough teachers who can engage with students about engineering and that Universities aren't consistently talking about building services as an engineering option. I ask you to reach out to students from primary and secondary school through to colleges and universities and engage with them about engineering as a career and tell them about the wonders of Building Services Engineering.

3. BOOST – the development of an early careers engineer

The talent, energy and innovation of the early careers engineers I meet truly inspires me, and they make me even more optimistic for the future of our profession.

Now, companies can help by setting up a mentoring scheme, an exchange programme, a shadow board, or a CIBSE Training and Development Scheme.

And Individuals can encourage and sponsor an early careers engineer in their journey to IEng, EngTech or CEng.

As I have mentioned earlier, winning an award can be transformational for an early careers engineer. Consider nominating someone for an award, including the CIBSE Young Engineers Awards.

4. SHARE – your building services story

I have a story about my journey which led me to become a building services engineer, and each of us has one. Some of you have come through university or apprenticeship knowing you wanted to be a building services engineer; others came from other routes. Each of those routes will resonate with someone and you sharing your journey could just be the spark they need to become involved. Each of your stories is important and relevant.

5. ENGAGE – with your peers to share climate impact reduction knowledge

As building services engineers, we understand how our work can improve outcomes for the built environment, but the great work that we do is often unheard and not widely understood.

I challenge you to share your knowledge publicly, and to broaden the role that you play in delivering your projects and your work. The right way is often the hard way and we have a collective challenge in communicating the value of environmentally responsible solutions, above or alongside economic considerations.

I challenge you to communicate how your work and expertise is driving the move to net zero and positively impacting climate change.

We all have a part to play to in meeting the 2025 and 2050 climate targets.

And I urge you to be ever more climate ambitious in your approach, your conversations and your proposals.

I've been inspired by my fellow engineers, by CIBSE and its work and by the fantastic profession of building services engineering. So, this year it will be my challenge, helped by the CIBSE team, to inspire you and to inspire the next generation. I look forward to working with you on the five 1-2-5 challenges.



Collectively we need to raise the Voice of CIBSE, the Voice of Building Services Engineering, and it is my hope that if each one of us undertakes at least one of these challenges then our collective voice will be heard. And listened to.

And make no mistake. There are mountains to climb and the journey ahead will not be easy. We need the next generation to lead the way but our expectations can weigh heavily on young shoulders. That's why we **MUST** be by their side to support and inspire them. Every step of the way.

Thank you.

To find out more about Kevin Mitchell's 1-2-5 Challenges

Please visit the cibse.org/125

Rise to the #CIBSE125Challenges, #Celebrate #Inspire #Boost #Share #Engage

Share your challenge

- A blog
- A social media post
- Photos
- Video
- Podcast

Tag in Social Media using

#CIBSE125Challenges

Keep us up to date on your challenges: challenges@cibse.org