

Firstly I'd like to welcome you all today to the FIS Contractors Awards. In my view the premier, fit out event, of the calendar year - What an honour.

I don't think as a 15-year-old Apprentice I would ever have imagined that one day I'd be standing here as your President.....I suspect my old boss wouldn't have either!

But me standing here is testament to the amazing opportunity that this industry offers.

Those of you who were here last year will have heard Helen, our immediate Past President talk passionately of the challenges that we face;

uncertainty, inflation, regulatory reform,
poor payment and procurement practices,
and the dark shadow of Grenfell.

Challenges almost as big as the shoes she left for me to fill, challenges that have sadly driven record numbers of insolvencies across the sector.

But we are still here.

We are still delivering awe inspiring, award worthy projects and whilst the challenges continue, there is still a pipeline of work and we are **stronger** because we are here together.

And this is the first reason I stand here today.....

When I was asked if I would be willing to serve as FIS President, I had to really think hard,..... these challenges impact my business as they do yours.

But, I also know my business is in better shape because of the guidance and support I get from FIS,.....and the strength I draw from this community.

I'll leave it to Iain to talk specifically about the sterling work FIS is doing to attack these challenges,.... it's quite impressive - I will only add that I and my fellow Board members believe we have a great team in place, fighting hard for this community and as a result, by every measure - this organisation continues to grow year on year.

FIS is a strong voice and platform for action and is now seen by Government and the wider industry as one of the leading construction trade bodies.....So I said yes to support this effort.

But also, because I feel I have a debt to the next generation of aspiring young Apprentices.

I want to do all I can to help the next generation see the possibilities and to join an industry that has given so much to me.

There is no doubt that we have an acute skills shortages..... almost **a third** of members in our recent 'State of Trade Survey' are concerned this will impact their ability to grow in the next 12 months,but **100% of us know** it's more than that.

We know we are, at times, on the back foot because of how society sees "construction" and we know we haven't invested enough in training.

It is time to push back and **push back hard**, we want to be **inclusive**, to **welcome people of all abilities**, we don't want to be the sector of **last choice**, but a **credible** and **exciting place to work**.

I know FIS do a lot in this space, but I want more – I want **more from the FIS** and I want **more from our community**.

To shift the dial we need to harness the crowd to become better ambassadors,**to flood our schools and colleges with sensible careers advice**.

We also need to deliver on our promises and that means stepping up how we train, find more ways to offer apprenticeships and wider training ,.....show we aren't **just promising careers**,...but that we're **delivering careers**.

Our new Head of Skills, Beena, has a huge task ahead and can only succeed with our support.

I also owe the future generation a more responsible industry when it comes to sustainability.

If we want to attract the best, we need to be the best and frankly we can't keep borrowing from the future.

There are **1000s of tonnes** of fit-out waste hitting the landfill every day in the UK – **that isn't good enough.** We need to understand why up to 30% of new plasterboard is ending up in skips, we need to focus on re-use and the wasteful transition from Cat A to Cat B.

Why? because **that's** what modern progressive industries do.

FIS last year, set up the Sustainability Leadership Group and this is now the fastest growing group within FIS, with an ambitious programme of activity underway.

I am proud to be one of the inaugural members of this working group and **inspired** and **encouraged** by the **knowledge** and **enthusiasm** I am seeing from our Sustainability Champion Flavie and those joining the group.

I was delighted to see we had a higher attendance for the sustainability sessions than for compliance at our recent Fit-out Day – a sign the industry is waking up.

This subject is important to me....it is of growing significance to our clients, and it is important to those potentially joining our sector.

I believe that this redoubling of efforts on sustainability is the right thing to do.... but it's also the key that will unlock better supply chain relationships and drive that early engagement that we have so long talked about.

With better planning, supply chain partnerships can continue to encourage collaboration outside of the project.

Sustainable relationships will deliver better sustainable projects and resilient businesses that can compete on more than just **time** and **price**.

Finally I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Boardfor all your support and the FIS teamfor all your hard work.

I would also like to make a special thank you to Helen Tapper for her sterling shift as President.

Helen's legacy as FIS President is assured. Without doubt she was the Unprecedented President and left the biggest boots for me to fill!

She took the role in November 2019 and around her chaos descended. The pandemic was the most challenging time many of us will have known in business, for FIS too, but our trade body came through stronger, having been a beacon of light in our darkest hour. This was in no small part thanks to Helen and her stoic leadership in our then weekly Board meetings.

The pandemic wasn't the only event - Helen has steered us through Brexit, material shortages, labour shortages, unabated inflation, not to mention the introduction of the Building Safety Act – all unprecedented. And undeterred after all that she agreed to do another year... unprecedented. The scale of the challenge was matched with her efforts and

outstanding leadership. For this reason, I am going to maintain the unprecedented theme and invite Helen to please come to the stage to collect the inaugural President's Award for outstanding service.

Before I hand across to Iain I'd like to congratulate all of you who have projects shortlisted and to thank all of our sponsors and members who have supported this event and continue to support the amazing organisation that is FIS.