



## OPERATING AGAINST AN UNCERTAIN ECONOMIC BACKDROP

*The MCRMA's Carlton Jones looks back at 2012 and looks forward to 2013.*

The construction industry has been through a tough year with all in the roofing and cladding sector operating against an uncertain and challenging economic backdrop. Construction has continued to drop in opportunities, mainly from the public sector. Demand in the private sector has also been sluggish although there have been the occasional bright spots.

The industrial buildings market has seen a slight increase; albeit this is being driven by growth in factories rather than in warehouses which continue to see a further drop with declining consumer confidence and incomes.

There has been modest growth in the private commercial market although this is from a very low base where the market has seen a decline of over 50 per cent from the peak of the boom in 2008 to 2011 however, there has been a small upturn driven mainly by gains in the offices and education sectors.

Payment difficulties have continued throughout the year and we really need to see more robust action in dealing with this issue from main contractors as late payment has forced many good companies to the wall. Government can help in this regard by ensuring that payment legislation is properly enforced to ensure sub-contractors get paid what is due, in accordance with their contracts.

Looking ahead to 2013, growth is likely to remain fairly flat before more significant growth comes through in 2014 and beyond. However 2013 will also present opportunities for innovative roofing and cladding companies.



*The ExCeL exhibition and conference centre, London. Image courtesy of Kalzip*

Building Information Modelling (BIM) is poised to become a key means to deliver increased productivity and reduced risk within the construction sectors. Increasing use of BIM throughout architectural practices in the United Kingdom will have a significant impact in the way roofing and cladding products are specified.

Because the structure is built 'virtually' before any construction activity takes place, all associated information such as material specification is attached thus giving greater transparency to the selected products. There will be an increased commitment to using materials that are both responsibly sourced and have the highest environmental credentials.

BIM seeks to encourage all parties to work in a collaborative fashion; essentially BIM is about a new way that firms across the construction supply chain should work together to increase efficiency and reduce build costs. Ultimately, using BIM should save both time and expense by preventing clashes in design, accommodating design change and reducing the number of defects. Many MCRMA members are already BIM-enabled and are working with the technology to develop bespoke solutions to meet exacting specification criteria for the most demanding projects.

Changes to Part L come into force next year as part of the government's strategy to achieve a zero carbon building programme for non-domestic buildings by 2019. For some time the Part L Building Regulations have taken a fabric first approach which has driven down U values and given an overall improvement in thermal performance of the building envelope however, both industry and academia have recognised that the fabric first approach in the non-domestic sector has reached an optimum level and further changes in this sector need to focus on other means of achieving a reduction in carbon emissions.

Specifiers and designers will need to redouble their efforts to develop sustainable building solutions to achieve government targets in order to significantly reduce the country's carbon emissions.

Metal has much to offer in this regard; MCRMA members are at the forefront of developing innovative solutions in the areas of green technology and sustainability, for example green roofing systems that can improve the thermal performance of a building by providing protection against heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer.

Other examples include metal solar cladding systems that enable buildings to generate their own electricity or deliver naturally warmed fresh air into the building. Members have also developed functional coated steel products based on renewable energy for use in the roofs and walls of buildings.



*Sisters of Mary Retirement Home, Castlebar, Co Mayo. Image courtesy of Ash & Lacy Building Products*

Architects and designers need to consider materials and structural systems which are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to meet future changes to the building function and which will facilitate the re-use and recycling of material at the end of its life. Whilst at the specification stage, designers should also take into account life cycle costs including the cost of manufacture, construction, operation, dismantling and disposal to meet sustainability requirements.

The falling cost of renewables technology has made it more affordable and with the zero carbon deadline approaching, renewables technology will continue to play an important role in the development of sustainable buildings next year.

Metal roofing systems in conjunction with renewable energy technology systems provide a sustainable and environmentally sensible solution which with due consideration can provide an economic and trouble free installation.

MCRMA members offer cost effective and sustainable solutions to meet the requirements of the forthcoming legislation and members will be in good position to take full advantage of the anticipated growth in construction output which is forecast to return next year when a stronger economic recovery is expected to drive construction growth.

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