

Meet the AIA Irish Advisory Committee Chair

Welcome to an insightful interview with Vincent Harney, Chair of the Irish Advisory Committee. In this conversation, Vincent offers a glimpse into his role within the real estate sector and his company's unique one-stop-shop approach for property developers. From his international client base to his involvement in professional organisations and charity work, Vincent shares personal anecdotes and professional insights.

As the recently appointed Irish Advisory Committee Chair, he explores the challenges and opportunities facing the accounting profession in Ireland, including the integration of AI, sustainability, and ethical considerations.

Join us as we explore Vincent's perspectives on CPD delivery, the importance of face-to-face networking, and his vision for the future of the Irish Advisory Committee.

AIA: Can you tell our readers a little bit about yourself, your business, and your professional affiliations?

VH: Absolutely. My company operates within the real estate sector, offering comprehensive services to SMEs, including accountancy, taxation, and surveying. Essentially, we serve as a one-stop shop for property developers in the marketplace. As for my role, I'm the owner of the company and run the day-to-day management of the business.

We're based in Dublin, Ireland, with offices situated in the heart of the city. Our team is relatively small, consisting of two additional staff members besides myself. Interestingly however, our client base extends beyond the local jurisdiction, encompassing international clients in both Dubai and Saudi Arabia.

Regarding my professional affiliations, I'm a member of several organisations, including the ICAEW, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Society of Chartered Surveyors in Ireland, and the Chartered Institute of Tax. Additionally, I serve on the Committee as the Vice Chair for the Sustainability Group of the SCSl.

And on a more personal note, I'm an avid football fan and cricket enthusiast, closely following Cricket Ireland and holding membership with the Malahide Cricket Club. While my playing days are behind me, I'm also a devoted spectator of Manchester United, proudly holding a season ticket.

AIA: We also know you work with the community on a variety of initiatives. Can you explain these to our readers?

VH: Certainly. I'm actively engaged in both charity work and community initiatives. I'm currently a member of Landaid, where I offer pro-bono advisory services. And previously, I have been involved with a sustainability charity in Dublin called Ecounesco, providing financial services to support their initiatives.

Regarding career guidance, I've contributed my expertise, particularly in the surveying field, to students at Methodist College in Belfast. Through presentations and advice sessions, I've helped guide students on their future career paths, which has included the promotion of opportunities within the accountancy sector.

AIA: Moving on to the Irish Advisory Committee. How do you perceive your role as Chair?

VH: For me, in large part it is a facilitator role. Initially it will be bringing all the committee members together, making sure we understand our role and purpose. We must then work collaboratively to harness our individual skillsets, of which there are many, to achieve our common goals. So, it's really to lead them along the path of where we need to get to.

AIA: How do you see the committee activities giving a voice to members?

VH: I think it's going to be great. I believe the impact will be significant. There's a definite eagerness among our membership for increased interaction. Building on the success of recent conferences in Dublin, the feedback from our members has been very positive, signaling a strong desire for greater engagement within the committee.

As we progress, I anticipate establishing a more interactive platform, we are fully equipped to connect with our members in Ireland, offering a diverse range of events, including social gatherings. It's about enriching our calendar with meaningful experiences for our community here.

AIA: What opportunities and challenges will the committee have in gaining recognition, by regulators, employers and society?

VH: Collaboration will be key. There are always challenges, but collaboration with likeminded organisations will be essential. I firmly believe there is a willingness which I have witnessed first-hand for regulators, employers, and professional bodies to work together hand in hand. Undoubtedly, there might be hurdles along the way, but I think given the rich history and pedigree of AIA we can overcome them and continue to gain recognition.

AIA: What do you think are the most important challenges to the accounting profession, for example sustainability, AI, ethics?

VH: What a difficult question to answer, as all three which you have referenced are crucial. Currently, I would probably say the number one challenge globally will be AI, ensuring it is harnessed in the right way with proper controls and measures in place. I think it can be a fantastic support tool if used correctly.

Sustainability is perennial and should be at the forefront of everything we do, I think given the current climate and where the legislation is going, accountants are going to be leading the field in reporting on sustainability.

And underpinning everything is ethics. It's an intrinsic part of everything we do. We must uphold ethical standards in all our interactions, affirming our credibility as trusted professionals providing essential services.

AIA: What are your views on the delivery of CPD? Do you feel it's better to have face-to-face events, online or a combination of both?

VH: Personally, I am all for a blended approach. In-person live events undoubtedly offer greater engagement and networking opportunities compared to webinars, where full participation can sometimes be challenging due to the technology. However, certain aspects of CPD lend themselves well to online platforms like Zoom. For instance, a tax update seminar in Ireland might benefit from face-to-face interaction, while supplementary materials can be conveniently shared in a virtual setting. I believe there's value in incorporating both formats to cater to diverse learning preferences and optimise the CPD experience.

AIA: Do you think professional networking and building social capital is possible online or do you think that's only possible face-to-face?

VH: Honestly, I believe face-to-face interactions offer greater potential. Online platforms have their limitations; it's often just a matter of clicking someone on. In contrast, in-person interactions allow for the development of genuine relationships and rapport. The visibility of face-to-face encounters often tips the scales in various situations.

AIA: In terms of support what are your top priorities for the committee?

VH: Firstly, establishing our presence is paramount – clarifying who we are, our objectives, and our significance within Ireland. Secondly, prioritising services for our membership is crucial; ensuring our Advisory Committee can effectively meet their needs. Thirdly, engaging with other institutions and regulators to enhance our profile through various avenues. Fourthly, emphasising social engagement, possibly through events like an annual dinner, to foster community connections and inclusivity. These initiatives will be instrumental in our progression forward.

AIA: So, what activities do you think the committee should hold going forward?

VH: I've already mentioned a selection, but certainly social events ranging from pub quizzes to formal dinners could be on the agenda. Additionally, there could be activities that blend business and social aspects, such as team-building sessions or workshops on negotiation skills. These would provide opportunities to develop core business competencies in a social setting. Of course, traditional CPD sessions would also remain an integral part of our offerings.



AIA: And finally, do you have any life lessons that you can pass on to our members?

VH: Absolutely, 'Never say never' stands out as a key lesson. Opportunities have a way of presenting themselves when least expected. In my experience, maintaining a positive mindset and taking proactive steps often lead to success. It's crucial not to lose heart during challenging times; there's always something valuable to be gained from every situation.