

## BESA welcomes Budget boost for 'older skills'

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**The Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) has welcomed government measures aimed at encouraging experienced workers to return to work unveiled in this week's Budget.**

The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced increased funding for 'Returnships' to bring more over-50s back into the workforce and the Association believes this could also help to fuel more support for retraining and upskilling experienced building services engineers.

Returnships were first introduced in 2014 and are designed to help experienced professionals who have taken a career break get back into employment. These high-level internships could help to plug skills gaps in a range of industries struggling with ageing workforces and a shortage of new entrants, according to BESA.

They are part of a package of measures announced in the Budget aimed at encouraging workers over 50, those with children, and those with disabilities and long-term sickness back into work. The Returnships are supported by £63 million of additional funding.

BESA's director of training and skills Helen Yeulet said the building engineering industry needed to urgently address problems created by its rapidly ageing workforce with a high proportion of employees already over 60 and nearing retirement plus a sharp drop in the number of workers under 30.

### **Refresh**

"The Chancellor's support for Returnships could unlock a new source of skills provided by older workers and encourage those coming closer to retirement age to remain in the sector and refresh their skills through apprenticeships," she said.

“This focus on unlocking the potential in the older generation is an important part of the wider challenge to increase diversity across our sector. Returnships and apprenticeships can help to replenish the thinning ranks of senior engineers with valuable experience and provide the workforce with valuable new skills.”

BESA is promoting apprenticeships through its ‘**Future Skills**’ **pledge** which encourages employers to take on at least one new apprentice this year and promote the career opportunities available in the industry.

It is a way for building services employers to show their commitment to bringing new talent into the sector, grow the skills of existing workers through apprenticeships and make sure they have a workforce that can meet future challenges in areas such as indoor air quality, decarbonisation of heating, and renewables.

“Our industry has a wide range of really exciting opportunities due to its central role in addressing climate change, helping people reduce their energy costs and making buildings safer and healthier, but we often struggle to get that message over to a wide enough audience,” said Yeulet.

“The Budget announcements are an opportunity to show that the focus on new skills is not solely about young people. It is important to stress that apprenticeships are not just for new entrants or those of school leaving age,” she added.

The **BESA ‘Future Skills’ pledge** **does not require the pledger to commit to taking on an apprentice immediately but** will help the Association and its college partners identify and prepare the training resources needed to meet demand.

Once the pledge has been made, BESA will contact the employer to get a better understanding of their requirements and provide advice about possible training providers, funding, and access to suitable candidates. The pledger can also access the Association’s Skills Advisory Service for a wide range of support and advice.