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New year boost for heat network training

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The Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) has launched an industry-wide training scheme for heat network engineers backed by government funding.

The course, which was developed in collaboration with the Manufacturers of Equipment for Heat Networks Association (MEHNA) and the Thermal Insulation Contractors' Association (TICA), is being delivered through BESA's Training Academy.

The course content is aligned with the CIBSE code of practice (CP1) for heat networks and the sector's developing technical standards. The programme includes a one-hour introductory foundation course and an installation and maintenance course consisting of nine modules. The latter concludes with a practical session delivered by manufacturers Worcester Bosch and Baxi at one of four training centres in Dartford, Wakefield, Warrington and Worcester.

The associations said the courses were being made available at a key moment for the heat network industry. The Energy Act 2023 and the proposed Future Homes and Buildings Standards are expected to lead to a major expansion in the use of this technology.

Just 2% of the country's heat is currently distributed by networks, also known as district heating or district energy systems, but the government aims to grow that to 18% by 2050 in line with its net zero commitments.

New homes and commercial buildings will be able to comply with the Standards, which are due to come into force next year, if they are connected to heat networks that use low carbon technologies or reclaimed waste heat.

Reliability

However, some of the 14,000 systems already installed in the UK have suffered from technical issues and disappointing performance prompting the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to look for ways to raise design and installation standards.

This includes providing funding for the new training courses which allows BESA to offer 800 fully funded places on the introductory course, which is aimed at built environment professionals interested in growing their low carbon skills, and a further 100 on the installer course designed to upskill existing building services engineers.

There are also plans for a quality assurance framework to improve reliability and guarantee levels of performance – all of which will increase demand for a larger workforce of well-trained heat network engineers.

“This is a great opportunity for anyone considering diversifying into heat networks,” said BESA’s director of training and skills Helen Yeulet. “This technology will play an increasingly important role in the transition to net zero, so it is vital that the country has enough trained installers who can help networks meet their full energy and cost saving potential.”

Members of the three trade bodies who developed the course have already had early access to the training, but it is now being made available to the wider industry. And, ultimately, the organisations intend for the installer course to kickstart the development of a formal heat network qualification that will underpin future statutory regulation of the industry.

As well as this training initiative, BESA has developed a test regime for the Heat Interface Units (HIUs) which are used to distribute heat from networks to individual homes and commercial buildings.

For more information or to register your interest for either the Heat Network Foundation Course or the Heat Network Installation and Maintenance Course visit the website and enter the code: BESAHN23 to secure a fully funded training place.