

BESA urges employers to 'walk the walk' on apprenticeships

2 years ago



The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has called for building services employers to seize the opportunities created by this year's [National Apprenticeship Week](#) (NAW) to reset their approach to recruitment and take advantage of the business benefits delivered by apprentices.

The 17th NAW (#NAW2024) runs from February 5 to 11 and its theme 'Skills for Life' highlights the availability of apprenticeships to suit people of all ages and at any stage in their career.

With the building engineering industry struggling with an ageing workforce and a skills shortage, the Association believes there has never been a more critical time for employers to apply for the government funding on offer for apprenticeships to bring in fresh talent and upskill existing workers.

It has also relaunched its '[Future Skills' pledge](#) to coincide with NAW 2024 and is urging all building services employers to show their commitment to training and recruitment.

By taking the pledge, employers can help the Association and its college partners identify and prepare the training resources needed to meet demand. BESA will also contact the employer to get a better understanding of their requirements and provide advice about possible training providers, funding, and access to suitable candidates.

More than 60 employers took the pledge last year and the Association hopes to beat that figure in 2024.

Aspiring

The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt also announced plans for a £50 million scheme to "stimulate apprenticeship training" in engineering in his [autumn statement](#). He promised to back a two-year 'apprenticeship growth

sector pilot' that would increase the number of aspiring engineers who opt for the apprenticeship route to help address skills shortages.

The minimum hourly wage for apprentices is also set to rise by 21% from April to £6.40 up from £5.28.

"The cost-of-living crisis has made it even more likely that a young person looking for their next step after school will not go to university," said BESA's director of training and skills Helen Yeulet (right). "The chance to 'earn as you learn' has never looked more appealing and organisations like the [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#) (IfATE) have worked hard to make apprenticeships more flexible to suit the needs of employers and employees at different stages of their careers.

"However, while there is plenty of promising rhetoric from employers around this topic more of them need to step up and 'walk the walk' by committing to take on more apprentices."

Yeulet pointed out that as much as 95% of an apprentice's training and assessment costs are covered by the government via the apprenticeship levy – and because they are directly employed, an apprentice starts contributing to the business immediately.

80% of businesses who employ apprentices enjoy better productivity, according to the Department for Education, and 74% of employers said apprenticeships had helped them improve the quality of their product or service.

"We desperately need the new ideas and perspectives that apprentices bring to our businesses," said Yeulet. "This is particularly crucial as we adopt more emerging technologies and processes to address climate change and make buildings safer and healthier."

BESA pointed to the 49% surge in applications for the government's [Boiler Upgrade Scheme](#) which provides grant funding for heat pump installations as an example of why the industry desperately needed to grow its pool of skilled labour.

"There is little point in the government incentivising market growth if the industry cannot supply the skilled manpower to keep up with demand," said Yeulet.

BESA member company SES Engineering Services currently employs 98 apprentices, ranging from Level 3 to Level 7, and has already pledged to add to that number later in the year. Steve Joyce, regional managing director, said the company believed that investment in its workforce was crucial to keep pace with industry growth.

Pipeline

"Employing apprentices helps us to develop skills relevant to our organisation, helps us grow our own future talent pipeline and ensures we have a skilled and qualified workforce," he said. "We recommend anyone working in the built environment to take on apprentices.

"It's so important that we ensure young people coming into our industry are receiving the correct training that aligns with the business. This also helps create our future leaders."

Shakira Green, who is a building services maintenance apprentice at Dalkia, said the experience she had gained during her apprenticeship was invaluable.

“My BSE apprenticeship allows me to work and learn simultaneously,” she added. “It presents tasks and challenges you would never find in a classroom such as fixing faults and arranging for replacement equipment.

“It gives me an insight into the world of work and allows opportunities to progress all while gaining a recognised qualification.”

For more information about apprenticeships and BESA’s Future Skills pledge go to:

[National Apprenticeship Week | Apprenticeships | BESA \(thebesa.com\)](#)