

“Apprentices can power Scottish renewables drive”

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The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has urged building services employers to take advantage of the campaign created by this year’s [Scottish Apprenticeship Week](#) (SAW 2024) to address their skills shortages.

The Association is promoting the opportunities for both employers and employees offered by apprenticeships through its ‘[Future Skills’ pledge](#) which gives companies a chance to register their interest in taking on apprentices and receive advice and support.

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 pledging employer to get a better understanding of their requirements and provide advice about possible training providers, funding, and access to suitable candidates.

Last month’s UK National Apprenticeship Week led to employers pledging to take on a further 100 building engineering apprentices through the BESA initiative at a time when the industry is being challenged to broaden its skills base by attracting more women and people from ethnic minority groups.

There are almost 40,000 apprentices in training across Scotland and around 12,000 apprentice employers of which more than 90% are SMEs. 83% of employers told SAW 2024 that their productivity had improved since they started taking on apprentices.

Modern apprentices earn up to 52% more than people working in similar positions who have not completed an apprenticeship, according to [Skills Development Scotland](#) which administers apprenticeships on behalf of the Scottish government.

Technologies

BESA believes apprentices could provide vital new skills to help Scottish firms work with emerging technologies including heat pumps, heat networks and renewable systems – all of which are playing increasingly important roles in the Scottish economy.

BESA is also an organising partner of [WorldSkills UK](#) which is another opportunity to promote the technical contribution of apprentices. The Association is organising the [refrigeration and air conditioning \(RAC\) category](#) giving students and apprentices aged 16 and above the chance to win a place on the UK team that will compete at the 'Skills Olympics' in Shanghai in 2026.

WorldSkills is a global movement involving more than 80 countries and is a partnership between the education sector, businesses, and governments. It was set up to help young people develop and showcase their talent through competitions-based training, assessment, and benchmarking to support economic growth and create employment opportunities.

The [WorldSkills UK Competitions](#) are open for entry now with applications needed by March 28.

The Association says the building engineering industry is hampered by a lack of both gender and ethnic diversity in its workforce – currently just 12% of engineering positions are held by women, for example.

It also has an ageing workforce and a skills shortage, so BESA 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.

“Scottish building engineering firms need the new ideas and perspectives that apprentices bring,” said Helen Yeulet, director of competence and compliance at BESA. “This is particularly crucial as we adopt more emerging technologies and processes to address climate change and make buildings safer and healthier.

“This week is a great opportunity for employers to take a fresh look at the ways they seek to recruit and retain new talent – not least because of our pressing need to improve both gender and ethnic diversity across our workforces.”

[Get involved with Scottish Apprenticeship Week](#) here and [take BESA's 'Future Skills Pledge'](#).