

BESA launches NextGen network to support young engineers

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The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has launched a dedicated group for young engineers and newcomers to the industry.

The [BESA NextGen network](#) replaces the Association's 'Future Leaders' group which was formed in 2017 to support young engineers working for member companies who were seen to have future management potential.

The new network is more broadly based and aims to provide technical knowledge, career support, and networking opportunities for younger engineers and those in the early stages of a building engineering career working for both member and non-member companies. It is also open to young people employed in non-engineering roles in the building services sector.

Ryan Walton, specification engineer at [Panasonic Heating and Cooling](#), is the first chair of the network having already served as chair of the Future Leaders group since April last year.

"It is a real honour and a great opportunity to work with my fellow young engineers through this exciting initiative," he said. "We have a lot to offer the Association and the wider industry, but it is often hard for us to make our collective voice heard."

"It can also be an intimidating experience for younger people to network with older, more experienced engineers, particularly when they are just finding their feet in the industry. So, we believe having our own community will help us develop our own priorities and then use BESA's established and respected platform to help shape the industry's agenda."

BESA identified encouraging young engineers to “shape the future” as one of its strategic priorities for its 120th anniversary this year. It sees younger members playing a key role in improving collaboration and spearheading the sector’s attempts to embrace digital technologies.

It also wants the network to help bring about the culture change building services firms must embrace to attract the more diverse talent they need to meet future challenges. The Association will also encourage the network to contribute to more technical content aimed specifically at young engineers.

“Business relationships are all about networking – developing connections and friendships which are crucial to making the construction industry work,” said BESA technical director Graeme Fox. “The [BESA Next Gen network](#) is a critical pathway to creating those connections for people still relatively new to the sector.

“This will be of huge benefit in developing their own knowledge and careers, but also for their employers as the network can help generate business and promote their brand as a forward thinking and progressive organisation,” he added.

The network has already started to help shape the content for this year’s BESA [Annual Conference](#), which takes place in London on October 17. Members will host their own panel discussion focused on issues of most interest to younger people and will take part in several sessions to ensure the event reflects their opinions and priorities.

Fox said the new generation of engineers, who had grown up in a world powered by digital technologies and social media, was “more naturally collaborative” and this would be crucial to helping the industry improve and meet its long-term goals.

“Our NextGen network will help us develop a more diverse workforce and provide our companies with fresh, new ideas to drive fast-evolving projects,” he said. “It will also help us champion our younger role models and improve the industry’s image so we can attract our fair share of the best and brightest.”

Tackling the skills gap is a priority for the network and it identified mentoring as an important way for experienced colleagues to provide support. Its members have also suggested ‘shadowing’ a senior colleague or someone in a different role as a good way to gain broader industry experience.

Mentoring

They also believe there is an important place for ‘reverse mentoring’ where younger members of staff provide advice and guidance to management. This can be particularly useful around emerging technologies and new ideas for projects.

There will be a strong social element to the group’s activities to encourage membership and foster good networking across the industry, including with younger members of other industry bodies. The NextGen network also plans to make wide use of social networks with a [particular emphasis on LinkedIn](#).

“Networking should not just be at the senior level – we need to make it easier for young building services professionals to meet and connect,” said Walton. “We will be inclusive, collaborative, and push mentoring to help address our skills shortages and open career paths for more young people.

“There is pressing need for a younger perspective in the industry, and we aim to provide it,” he added.



For more information about the group and how to get involved [visit the website.](#)