

BESA urges young engineers to use their vote

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Young building services engineers have particularly strong reasons to vote in the general election, according to the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA).

[BESA's NextGen Network](#), which represents younger industry members, said the emerging generation often felt frustrated and ignored by the UK's politicians – and so was less engaged in the political process, but had “most to gain from voting”.

“We are troubled by the cost-of-living crisis, social inequality, lack of progress on climate change, the shortage of affordable housing for younger people, and poor rates of pay that make it harder to save for our future,” said BESA's group digital marketing co-ordinator Curtis Armstrong.

“However, we also have to live for longer with the consequences of the decisions made by the next government...and the incoming Prime Minister has a bulging in-tray: Climate change, energy security, health & wellbeing, economic growth/stagnation among just a few,” added Armstrong, writing in the latest [BESA NextGen Blog](#) entitled: ‘Vote because your lives depend on it’.

He said the emerging generation of engineers was in the “privileged position” of being able to influence many of these issues directly during their careers. This should make them keener than most to influence the outcome of an election that will decide who will be making crucial policy decisions.

However, recent pre-election analysis suggests that members of Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) and Millennials (1981-1996) are far less likely to use their vote than Generation X (1965-1980) and Baby Boomers (1946-1964).

Pressure

BESA has been working with other industry bodies and political lobbyists to put pressure on the main parties to make commitments around key built environment activities including the urgency of improving the condition of the UK's existing 30 million buildings.

It calculated that annual retrofit rates would need to rise from around 2% a year to 5% to meet climate change goals. The Association also said the country needed to get to grips with "whole life carbon" to achieve the UK's legally binding net zero commitments. This is the combination of operational and embodied carbon, 21% of which is accounted for by building services systems and equipment.

Members of [BESA's NextGen Network](#) said their work would be central to these issues as well as the health and wellbeing of building occupants through improved building ventilation design and maintenance. This is urgently needed to address increasingly poor indoor air quality (IAQ), along with mould and damp in homes and public buildings, which have a severely adverse effect on human respiratory and cardiovascular health.

The next government will also have to play its part in addressing the skills gap in technical professions so there are enough young people in the engineering workforce to deliver net zero and other long-term goals, according to BESA.

It cited the Conservative Party's promise to deliver 100,000 'high skilled apprenticeships' a year by the end of the next parliament – a 30% increase on current numbers – as one potential positive policy.

Labour has also proposed a 'growth and skills levy' that would allow employers to spend up to half of the money they receive from the government to train existing staff in "high-level technical skills" including building retrofit and engineering.

The party pledges to reserve at least 50% of the money from the training levy for apprenticeships and to create 150,000 traineeships for young people.

BESA has argued for some time that degree courses should not be the "default option" for young people and that technical apprenticeships offer a valuable and rewarding alternative. However, it pointed out that employers would also need much more financial support to take on the greater number of apprentices proposed.

"So, the next government has some big decisions to make that could have a direct impact on both our working and domestic lives as citizens of the UK, but if we don't vote, we can't really complain if the wrong people get elected and go on to make the wrong choices," said Armstrong.

"The next five years will be crucial for our country's future, so let's make sure the right people are in power to influence the journey towards lower carbon, and healthier and safer buildings."

BESA has also produced a comparison of the main parties' pledges on issues linked to building engineering services: [2024 General Election Manifesto Summaries](#).

You can read the [NextGen Election Blog here](#) and find out more about [BESA NextGen network](#) here.