

New BESA President calls for national retrofit plan

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Adrian Hurley C. Eng has been elected as President of the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) for 2024-25.

He is managing director of the design, installation and maintenance contractor [FP Hurley & Sons](#) which was founded by his grandfather Frank 75 years ago.

Hurley has been involved with BESA since 2019 when he joined Council as the elected representative for Wales. He joined the Membership Committee in 2021 and was appointed BESA Vice President in 2022.

He has been a powerful advocate for improving skills and training across the sector and empowering young engineers to help the country achieve its net zero and building safety goals.

He told the Association's AGM that he was honoured to be elected as President during BESA's 120th anniversary year.

"We are rightly proud of our history and the impact BESA has made over the years," he said. "As we face up to another period of major transition, the Association will once again provide leadership, guidance, and expertise to ensure members seize the opportunities for growth and diversification that are essential to the future of our businesses and the people we employ."

Urgent

He later told the annual BESA President's Lunch that the Association would continue to press the new government to commit to a national programme of commercial building retrofits adding that BESA members would be essential "to this now urgent work".

Hurley pointed out that the UK has around 30 million existing buildings many of which are “in dire need of an upgrade – and it is widely acknowledged that this will be a fundamental building block of net zero”.

“The deployment of new technologies, like heat pumps, is exciting and progressive, but there is so much we could still do to improve the performance of what is already built and installed,” he told his audience at the Oxo Tower in London.

However, he said he was concerned that the “enormous task” of retrofitting and refurbishing millions of buildings would be hampered by a serious skills shortage. “It will take a combination of innovation, more strategic use of digital technology, and better recruitment to address this.”

The new President also expressed concern that the number of women coming into the industry remained low and that many others were leaving early and before realising their full potential.

“So, BESA is relentlessly pursuing ways to improve training and attract new talent as well as accentuating the opportunity for people already working in our industry to learn new skills,” said Hurley.

He explained that the Association was restructuring its training and skills service and revamping how it helps members provide evidence of their technical and professional competence and compliance with legislation, industry standards and best practice.

Speaking just a week after the publication of the final report from the Grenfell Tower disaster public inquiry, Hurley urged BESA members and the wider industry to prove their commitment to the Building Safety Act which he described as “groundbreaking legislation that goes far beyond safety into every aspect of our work”.

“In case we needed any reminding of why this is important, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry report* was highly critical of the construction industry...it highlights many systemic failings and is a timely reminder of why the industry needs to put the wellbeing of people ahead of financial gain.”

He added that the Grenfell tragedy was “a defining moment in our industry’s history” and criticised those who had fostered a “lowest cost first” culture.

“Buildings are not just investment opportunities; they are social assets critical to keeping people safe, healthy and productive. Cutting cost should not be sought at the expense of good performance.

“The good news is that the new ways of working required to make building occupants safer also have positive implications for quality. Better buildings are also safer buildings.”

Regime

However, he warned the government that it would have to properly resource and fund the building safety regime if it was to succeed and be capable of supporting its stated growth plans.

“Without a well-funded planning and enforcement system, vital projects including housing developments, mixed-use projects and hospitals, face delay, additional costs – and possible cancellation,” said Hurley.

“The government made construction growth one of its first priorities when taking office in July, but this must not lead to another generation of rapidly built, poorly designed homes and commercial buildings.”

Making people feel safe and protected in their homes and public spaces was crucial, Hurley added, but must not be done “at the expense of other aspects of building performance”.

“Buildings need to be comfortable and have good indoor air quality. They need temperature control, and healthy levels of natural lighting and space. In other words, they should be designed to be ‘safe havens’ from all threats to health, safety and wellbeing including the growing impact of overheating as our climate warms up.”

*BESA has produced a summary of the key recommendations from the Grenfell inquiry report for the building engineering sector which is available [here](#).

For more information about the Building Safety Act [visit the BESA Hub](#).