

BESA launches wide reaching skills service

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The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has created [a new skills and policy department](#) to address the industry's major training and recruitment challenges.

The Association has recruited a team of skills and policy specialists who will focus on improving the sector's approach to apprenticeships, work closely with the further education sector to beef up training provision and skills development, while also providing more direct support to member companies to address their specific skills requirements through Skills Health Checks.

The new department has been created following 18 months of in-depth research into the needs of the sector. This highlighted the sheer scale of the chronic skills shortage which BESA says is hampering business growth and the industry's ability to improve building performance.

As a result, the new skills and policy team have also been tasked with driving improvements in industry standards, policies and regulations around skills.

"Our members continually refer to skills shortages as the biggest barrier to growing their businesses, delivering vital building upgrade projects and meeting the country's ambitions to reduce carbon emissions from the built environment," said chief executive officer David Frise.

"It was, as ever, a major talking point at last week's [BESA Annual Conference](#) with the shortage of competent people also highlighted as a significant threat to the new building safety regime," he added.

Refresh

The new government has made addressing skill shortages in technical professions a key factor in its growth strategy and July's launch of Skills England – a new body with an expanded remit to address skills gaps and demand – is another opportunity to refresh the industry's approach, according to BESA.

"This is a perennial problem and we, along with many other industry bodies, have been chipping away at the edges of it for years," said Frise. "Now is the time for a total reset and a newly focused comprehensive, strategic approach which is why we have invested significant time and money in this new service."

The new department will also help the sector navigate recently announced changes to apprenticeship funding and the introduction of new foundation apprenticeships designed to encourage more young people to take up careers in construction and 'green' technologies.

A new levy system is also being introduced by Skills England to support shorter apprenticeships and improve training flexibility for learners and employers.

The new BESA team has already delivered a [School Engagement and Engineering Discovery \(SEED\) Programme](#) designed to help building engineering firms engage more successfully with schools and sow the seeds for future success

The scheme, which was developed in partnership with Built Environment Skills in Schools (BESS), offers 12 weeks free training to help engineers enthuse a future generation of skilled technical workers.

The Association has also set up an 'Outreach Team' to represent the industry at careers fairs across the country and showcase the opportunities available in building services to people from all backgrounds.

"Our work will be dedicated to supporting BESA members and the wider industry so they can create a better and safer built environment by giving them access to a pipeline of talent," said BESA's head of skills & policy Stuart Rattray.

"This involves helping them take on and attract more apprentices, including how to access funding, and more direct involvement with the further education sector to grow training provision," he added.

Promote

The new department will also "fundamentally re-think how we exhibit and promote the various professions in our sector", said Rattray.

The new skills and policy team is also creating a framework, which will be supported by a major marketing campaign, to increase the number of trainers and assessors available to back up greater training provision.

"This is another critical shortage area and a fundamental weakness that undermines the quality and availability of building engineering apprenticeships," said Rattray. "Encouraging skilled and experienced people to give something back to the industry through training and assessing the next generation could be a critical aspect of addressing our overall skills challenges.

"Together we can build a skilled and prosperous future for the building engineering services industry."

For more information about BESA's new skills and policy provision and how it can help address recruitment challenges [visit the hub](#).