

Ways to attract the young to join built-environment sector

To industry leaders, getting students thrilled about the job is a good start

Joanna Seow
Manpower Correspondent

The built-environment sector aims to attract more skilled workers by engaging students in better ways, mapping out clearer career paths and improving jobs through digitalisation.

The initiatives were raised by industry leaders at a panel discussion yesterday during the final day of the International Built Environment Week (IBEW) conference.

Mr Liew Mun Leong, chairman of Changi Airport Group and Surbana Jurong, suggested getting experienced engineers to talk to younger people about what they do.

"If you show them how Jewel was built, they will be more excited than just telling them, 'You can build Jewel'," he said.

Mindsets still need to change, Mr Liew added, calling the lack of trained engineers "a national problem". He noted that engineers in France are more highly regarded than doctors and lawyers.

Far East Organization chief executive Philip Ng said Singaporeans are capable of executing building projects of world-class quality, but few want to be involved in maintenance.

Minister of State for National Development and Manpower Zaqy Mohamad earlier outlined details of a leadership development scheme launched in May for the industry.

The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) started the first run of the iBuildSG Leadership Engagement and Development (Lead) Horizon Programme last



Minister of State for National Development and Manpower Zaqy Mohamad taking a selfie with (from left) City Developments group general manager Chia Ngiang Hong, CBRE chairman of South-east Asia Pauline Goh, Far East Organization CEO Philip Ng and A.I.M. & Associates principal partner John Ting. PHOTO: BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

month for 25 young emerging leaders to hone their skills.

Next month, 20 senior-level leaders will start the first run of the Lead Milestone Programme, which includes a stint at Imperial College London and an overseas immersion programme in Asia.

"We hope to nurture the next generation of leaders and decision makers like yourselves who are forward-thinking, keen to innovate and have an internationally minded outlook," Mr Zaqy told around 300 senior executives at the event in the Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

Panellist Wong Chee Herng, group managing director and chief executive of Straits Construction, suggested that schools organise field trips to building exhibitions

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE CAN EXPECT

It... allows us to express the different things that young people can expect, how they will progress through their careers and what are the big, challenging, complex projects that they will have an opportunity to embark on.



BCA CHIEF EXECUTIVE HUGH LIM, on the skills framework for the industry, which is expected to be launched next year.

and educate students that the construction industry is not just about spending long hours under the sun.

In that vein, some 700 students visited the IBEW this week, said BCA chief executive Hugh Lim, adding that the upcoming skills framework for the industry, which should be launched next year, will also help to set out career progression pathways.

"It... allows us to express the different things that young people can expect, how they will progress through their careers and what are the big, challenging, complex projects that they will have an opportunity to embark on," he added.

He also said that digitalisation can help redefine roles of site supervisors like resident engineers and technical officers, and make

them more attractive.

For example, the BCA is in discussions with the Singapore Contractors Association to explore putting project records in the cloud, which will reduce the need to refer to paperwork kept in onsite offices and improve productivity, said Mr Lim.

Ms Pauline Goh, chairman of South-east Asia at real estate agency CBRE, said her firm is also investing heavily in digital tools to engage staff.

Other topics discussed were the importance of selecting consultants and contractors based on quality – such as safety records and productivity efforts – rather than price, and the need for organisation leaders to drive transformation.

joseow@sph.com.sg