

## GENERATION 2050

# Time is running out – the energy sector's Generation 2050 speaks up

**With COP26 less than a year away, an intergenerational climate emergency requires intergenerational action. We have over 1,000 young energy experts that can help shape the climate debate, writes the Energy Institute's Sinead Obeng.\***

In the late 1990s, legendary General Electric CEO Jack Welch made 500 of his top executives pair up with junior, tech-savvy members of staff to learn how to use the internet. He secured his company a competitive edge and popularised what's now known as reverse mentoring.

There are obviously great benefits that come with experience and longevity, as shown by the incredible achievements of today's leaders across industries. But the act of listening to diverse opinions can open eyes to fresh ways of thinking about strategic issues and leadership, and can challenge our mindset in profoundly positive ways.

Reverse mentoring isn't really about age – it's about the vantage point from where we each see the world. And in the context of the intergenerational nature of the climate change, this is crucial.

As a 'millennial' I have grown up witnessing the increased certainty in observations, theory and modelling on climate change. 'Generation Z' (yes, there is actually a generation below mine starting to emerge into the workplace) have not only spent formative years against a backdrop of even greater certainty around the scientific impacts, they have also witnessed real world discussions on the technological and policy changes required to reduce current emission trends.

Subsequently, younger generations are generally more concerned about climate change and are keen to contribute to genuine reform, which should be an intergenerational effort anyway.

## Energy industry responds

Young people early in their careers in the energy sector today will be the industry's leaders in 2050. We will inherit an exciting industry that has a rich history of achievement. We will also inherit an industry that will be judged on how it has responded to the



climate emergency.

That's why we have published the *Generation 2050 Manifesto*. It articulates the voices of more than 1,000 under-35-year olds working in and studying energy, from London to Lagos, Singapore to San Francisco, from oil and gas through to nuclear, renewables, energy efficiency and storage.

All of these sectors must work together to meet net zero. I myself work predominantly in the gas industry, where a plethora of initiatives to decarbonise energy are under way from the electrification of upstream assets, hydrogen deployment in the gas transmission networks to investments in offset programmes.

Generation 2050 is an incredibly driven body of people – 60% of our contributors identify climate change as the main motivator for choosing their career in energy and 90% recognise it has given them greater agency in tackling this global challenge.

Consequently, the large majority worry for their inheritance – three-quarters fear the world is currently unlikely to keep global average temperatures within 2°C this century. They call for political leaders to introduce legislative and regulatory reforms to drive the transition further and faster, and industry leaders to align their business plans and commitments with the ambition demanded by global climate targets.

We are similarly disappointed at the pace of progress towards the UN goal of universal access to energy by 2030. Human ingenuity in our field has achieved so much, and yet around 800mn people still

don't enjoy access to electricity and 3bn still cook with dangerously toxic cooking fuels. Finding affordable, reliable pathways to provide sustainable energy for all populations without compromising security of supply is crucial.

## Post-pandemic rebuilding

The next decade will be critical for getting on track, next year in particular, in how today's political, industrial and societal leaders go about rebuilding after the pandemic. At COP26 we want our voices to be heard and our recommendations to be carefully considered.

Generation 2050 will be working over the coming year to get the *Manifesto* noticed where it counts, taking over some of the Energy Institute's channels and activities, with the help of our supporting partners – high profile names from across industry, academia and government who share the view that tomorrow's energy leaders should be heard today.

I have huge admiration for those sitting in boardrooms and around cabinet tables today – but I am also hugely optimistic about the ability of my generation to take up the reins in the future.

Meeting net zero requires creative solutions that involve all technologies and realms of the energy industry – all of which are represented within the Energy Institute's broad membership.

Generation 2050 seeks to remove any room for villainisation, bridge the generation gap and provide a space for future energy leaders to put forward fresh ideas to today's political leaders, industry leaders and the wider society. ●

\* Sinead Obeng AMEI is Chair of the Energy Institute Young Professionals Council

The *Generation 2050 Manifesto* is at [www.energy-inst.org/generation2050](http://www.energy-inst.org/generation2050)