



The Electrotechnical JIB
Setting employment standards

JIB APPRENTICE EXCHANGE 2023

A Comparative Analysis of
Electrical Contractor Licensing
in Queensland & the UK



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Abstract

This report is an analysis of electrical worker and contractor licensing in Queensland, Australia and the nearest equivalent in the UK.

Queensland has a long history of licensing electrical workers spanning the existence of the electrical industry. In this report I have aimed to outline as best as I can, means of entry into the trade in both countries, licence types, and regulators applicable to the tradespeople and their role.

I hope to effectively compare the two models and look at whether or not a licensing model would work in the UK. Although we do not have a history of licensing, our regulatory framework does make it hard to perform electrical work as a non-trained person.

Please note the following acronyms which will be used throughout this report:



Introduction

In 2023 I was sponsored by my employer (and convinced by my line managers as well as my wife) to enter the JIB Apprenticeship Exchange Programme taking place in Queensland, Australia. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to work as a tradesperson in another country and to gain an insight into how the Electrical industry operates in comparison to the UK.

During my 6 weeks in Queensland, I was given access to sites and personnel who could offer me an insight into the industry. Through the ties developed by the JIB, and with the support of Unite and the ECA, I was welcomed and hosted by the RTO Electrogrouop and the ETU.

During my six weeks in Australia, working on site, speaking with electrical workers as well as union delegates and organisers, I noticed that there is a distinct difference between our industry here in the UK and in Queensland; Licenced Electrical workers and work is protected by law. Individuals not holding a licence are not seen to have the skills, knowledge and experience to perform the work safely and competently.

This keeps this potentially hazardous work within the remit of those who are trained to perform it. I wanted to use this report as an opportunity to explore the licensing framework and compare this to the UK model.

During my time in Queensland, Australia, I spent time with industry bodies, training providers and electrical contractors in various positions of seniority within the construction industry. Ensuring competency and standards throughout the various aspects of the trade is something those in the Electrical Trades Union, the Electrical Safety Office, the Training Providers and Electrical Workers view as of integral importance to the industry. In the UK there is a growing call from industry bodies and contractors to adopt a licensing scheme; the exact form this would take is a point of discussion being had between industry bodies and the legislature. At this juncture in our industry, it is worth an in-depth look at the benefits and drawbacks of a comparable system in Australia.



Part 1

Licensing in Queensland, Australia

1. A brief history of licensing in Queensland

As with many parts of the world, during the beginning stages of electrical utilisation, regulatory framework and bodies were absent. Throughout the early 20th Century, as the use of electricity became more widespread, there became a greater requirement to regulate both the supply of electricity to the public and industry, as well as electrical workers, both for the safety of workers and the general public.

Electrical workers licensing in the state of Queensland has a history almost as long as the provision of electricity to the state. On 17th October 1923, the Electrical Workers Act was passed *“to make better provision for the execution of electrical work by competent persons”*. It outlined the means with which to become one of the 4 main licence types (mechanic, fitter, linesman and joiner) and how to obtain them, penalties for misconduct and negligence whilst performing duties of the trade, as well as the implementation of the Board of Electrical Workers. The Act outlined the means with which Electrical Fitters, Mechanics, Jointers and Linesmen could apply for a *“Certificate of Competency”*. The key milestones an applicant needed to acquire this certificate generally revolved around experience within the role, either as an apprentice or someone hired in the role, as well as education from a publicly recognised body and an endorsement from the employer outlining the volume and quality of experience. Jointers and Linesmen did not need a formal education but were required to have significant experience in the form of a time-served apprenticeship and an endorsement from their employer.

To the modern day, licences have always been a requisite for Electrical Workers and Contractors. Even works that would be classed as ‘DIY’ worthy to some in the UK, are strictly prohibited and enshrined in law. I spoke to former NG Bailey employee, Kenny Bell, who now resides in Queensland, while I was there. He told me that even though he is a qualified Electrician in the UK, and would be deemed technically proficient, because he is not licenced and undergone a *“bridging course”* in Queensland, he is unable to perform even minor electrical work in his own home, such as replacing a socket.

To this end, the only way to legally perform electrical work under most circumstances would be to hire or be a licenced electrical worker. There are several routes to gain a licence depending on where you have started within the trade and which country your skills were honed in. The expectation has changed little since 1923; experience, education and an endorsement have been consistent themes throughout. The licence types are under 2 main branches:

Electrical Worker Licences

Anyone who performs or supervises electrical work must hold a current electrical work licence authorising them to perform the work. Depending on the licence this varies, but it is generally classed as *“a worker performing the duties their licence allows for a business or business person”*. Electrical workers cannot work as sole traders with a worker’s licence, they can only work on the behalf of other business or *“business persons”*.

Electrical Contractor Licences

A person who conducts a business or undertaking that includes the performance of electrical work must hold a contractor licence. These are in addition to workers licences and in the case of the ‘Technical Person’ licence, can only be applied for post-qualification. There are 2 types of Contractor Licences; Qualified Technical Person and Qualified Business Person. These licences can be restricted to certain aspects of the electrical trade or can be unrestricted.

Qualified Technical Person licence – they are the qualified tradesperson within the business, competent to perform electrical work, having held an electrical mechanic licence for at least 2 years. They are responsible for electrical safety and complying to applicable standards. Only the QTP can sign any documentation for electrical work performed.

Qualified Business Person licence – they are responsible for the business administration aspects of electrical contracting. An electrical business must have these two licence holders, usually these are the same individual in the instance of sole traders but can be distinct persons.

2. Gaining a licence in Queensland

There are a few options for routes into the trade to become a licenced electrician in Queensland, all outlined in the *Electrical Safety Act 2002*. Although the routes outlined to gain a licence are varied, they all require prior training either domestically within Australia, or abroad, through a time-served apprenticeship. You cannot shortcut the apprenticeship route, and every electrical worker I met whilst in Queensland had been through an electrical apprenticeship of some kind.

Here are the approved routes into the trade/gaining a licence in Queensland, Australia as outlined by the Electrical Safety Office.

Apprenticeship

Completing an apprenticeship in the relevant trade. This can be completed within Queensland, or in another territory. The criteria for qualifying are similar to gaining an ECS Gold Card:

1. Complete a relevant apprenticeship in the trade
2. Complete the approved course for the underpinning academic knowledge
3. Provide a statement verified by the Registered Training Organisation and employer that they have completed the apprenticeship and are competent
4. Satisfy the regulator that they are competent

If the above is gained outside of Queensland but the applicant is looking to gain their licence in Queensland then the applicant needs to explain why the licence was not applied for in that territory. Providing the applicant hits these benchmarks competently, they can expect to have their licence granted.

Mutual recognition

Someone who holds a licence in New Zealand or another Australian territory can receive a licence under mutual recognition. There may be restrictions applied to the new licence or class changes. These can be remedied with further training. If the licence doesn't have an equivalent in Queensland, the licence issued will most usually be a workers licence that most closely aligns.

Other routes

Electrical workers either looking to change licence type, are ex forces, qualified overseas and moving to Queensland to work (holding an Offshore Technical Skills Record), holders of other tradespersons certificates and those holding licences that expired 12 months or more ago can all apply for licences. These may be granted with further training and experience but are all highly specific as this route is less well defined. An electrical work training permit is usually issued and the applicant liaises with a training organisation to ensure competence is reached.

Unrestricted Contractor Licence – QTP

A Qualified Technical Person must have been qualified as an Electrical Mechanic for 2 years alongside completing the relevant training required by the ESO. There are also educational training requirements that RTOs offer as part of a contractor licensing course.

Unrestricted Contractor Licence – QBP

A Qualified Business Person must have experience in running or managing an electrical business for a total period of 5 years or hold a business qualification or diploma. The QBP's responsibility is to ensure the business is run correctly, with implementation of Health and Safety processes to ensure the safety of staff, legal and risk management for the business venture and compliance policies in conducting an electrical contracting business.

Restricted Contractor Licence

As above but with restrictions on what kind of electrical work the business can perform. This could be limited to HVAC, electronics or any other subset of the industry.

Every domestically trained electrician I spoke with whilst in Queensland had gone through the traditional apprenticeship route. It is the only real route that was followed by individuals I met and everyone spoke of their time as an apprentice as a real formative life experience.



3. Training and apprenticeships

Similarly to the UK, in Queensland, apprenticeships are the primary entrance route into the trade and becoming a licenced Electrical Worker, vastly outweighing any other alternative.

There are 2 main models for the provision of apprenticeships in the state of Queensland.

The first model is the same as the UK wherein the apprentice is employed directly by the Electrical Contractor. The apprentice is given an employment contract and serves their full apprenticeship with the same contractor over a period of 4 years. The employer is responsible for providing training, PPE, minimum hours and anything else that is demanded of an employer by law. It is an excellent model for apprentices and employers as it gives consistency throughout the lifetime of the training for both parties. Provided there is work with the contractor, then the apprentice also has continuity of work to ensure their training is completed on time and to the correct standard. The employer is required to send their apprentice to a Registered Training Organisation to complete the academic portion of their training.

The second model, and one which my host Electrogroup primarily dealt with, is similar to a sub-contracting model. The training organisation, in this case Electrogroup, employs the apprentice directly, therefore they are responsible for the provision of training, equipment, PPE, sick and holiday pay. A 'host' employer engages Electrogroup to hire apprentices

for a period of between 3 months and potentially 4 years. Electrogroup invoices the host employer directly for an hourly rate and they are essentially working as a sub-contractor, similar to agency workers on site in the UK. There are a few reasons why an apprentice may be discharged from the host employer. The work may be slowing down on the job site and they no longer have a requirement for an apprentice. The apprentice may require training they cannot achieve at the current site or firm, or the apprentice and host employer may not be a good fit. When discharged, an apprentice goes back to the training organisation and goes through further educational training in the down time. Employers can request particular apprentices but generally the RTO will pick apprentices who require certain experience or who may have been out of work for longer. Whilst working on a hospital site with Stowe Electrical, the apprentices there were a mix of host-employed from Electrogroup, as well as direct employed from another contractor. They are all treated the same on site, and get regular visits from training officers to ensure their academic progress and job experience are up to par.

If you have qualified as an Electrician in another country and move to Queensland, Australia, there are competency training courses provided by RTOs (Registered Training Organisations) to ensure the trainee hits the required standard. This is also coupled with proof of education and prior training from the licensing country.



4. Licence types and restrictions

There are six worker licence types to perform electrical work in the Queensland and two main types of contractor licence. Each licence type restricts the worker to only perform the duties outlined in their licence and performing any work outside of the licence restrictions is classified as illegal electrical work. If work is deemed to expose an individual to a serious risk of injury or death there can be punishments of \$300,000 (as a worker) or \$600,000 (as a person acting as a business) and up to 5 years in prison. Corporate entities can potentially be fined \$3 million.

The Blue Licence covers electrical workers with no restrictions and not undergoing training. It will have the name of the worker, an expiry date for the licence, and a licence number which is used to confirm validity of the licence and will be added to any documentation produced by the Electrical worker (for example testing certificates would have the number noted for auditing purposes). Finally, and most importantly, it will have details of which work the licence holder is permitted to perform. The fines for performing work outside of your licence type is the same as performing work if you are unlicensed. It is illegal to perform works outside of your licence type, and there are penalties applied to individuals that do so. The four blue card licence types are outlined below.

- **Electrical mechanic;** allows you to install or change an overhead electrical line, install electrical wiring, repair any electrical equipment.
- **Electrical fitter;** allows the rewinding and repair of motors, building of switchboards and maintaining of electrical equipment.
- **Electrical linesperson;** allows the building or maintaining of overhead and underground lines as well as their testing.
- **Electrical jointer licence;** allows limited specialist installation, jointing and terminating of electrical cables as well as work relating to electrical cables and equipment.



The Restricted Electrical Work Licence allows a person to perform electrical work specific to their trade, such as someone working with HVAC equipment. A restricted licence is also granted in instances where the Electrical Safety Office is investigating or has investigated an individual and has put limits on what electrical work they are allowed to do either post-investigation or until the findings of the investigation are complete. The licence will once again state a name, licence number and expiry date. It will also state what kind of works the licence holder is entitled to perform as well as which competency units they have completed.



The Electrical Work Training Permit allows an individual undergoing training to perform electrical work under specific work conditions. The training is always under the supervision of a licenced person in the trade in which the training is being undertaken, and no work can be performed alone. It is always under the umbrella of responsibility of the contractor to ensure the safety of the apprentice and the quality of the work being performed.

There are two main types of **Electrical Contractor Licence**, Qualified Technical Person (QTP) and Qualified Business Person (QBP). Both these licences can be for unrestricted business activities wherein the business can perform any electrical work, or can be restricted wherein the business can only perform the activities for that select field.



The roles of the QTP and QBP are both distinct but the Electrical Safety Office (ESO) views them as wholly necessary to ensure competently run and managed businesses that are safe for both the employers and customers. I found it interesting that the ESO views an individual wanting to attain a contractor's licence to run a business as requiring not only the technical skills to perform the role of an electrician, but also the business acumen to maintain the enterprise.

The role of the QTP is to be the person within the business responsible for compliance to the wiring regs, the electrical safety act and any other applicable rules and standards for the area that business operates in. They are also responsible for any Electrical worker within the business performing work and ensuring it is being done to the correct standard. QTP's name and licence details, alongside disciplinary action by the ESO, are all publicly displayed on an online register.

The role of the QBP is that of business management. They are responsible for the day to day running and management of the business. There are minimum competency and experience requirements but these are of a different type to that of a QTP. They do not need to be a qualified Electrician to perform the role and gain the licence, but regularly they are. A QBP needs either a business diploma or experience running and or managing a business for a total period of 5 years.

Licence maintenance

The process for maintaining a full licence also demands regular continuous professional development, known as 'Skills Maintenance' under the ESO. Skills Maintenance covers Electrical Safety Legislation, Risk Management and Electrical Installation and testing requirements.

Online training is offered by the Electrical Safety Office but this can be done through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Outside of ongoing training, a licensed Electrical Worker must also hold a valid Rescue and/or Resuscitation (depending on licence type) as well as insurance cover of \$5,000,000 public and product liability and \$50,000 consumer protection insurance.

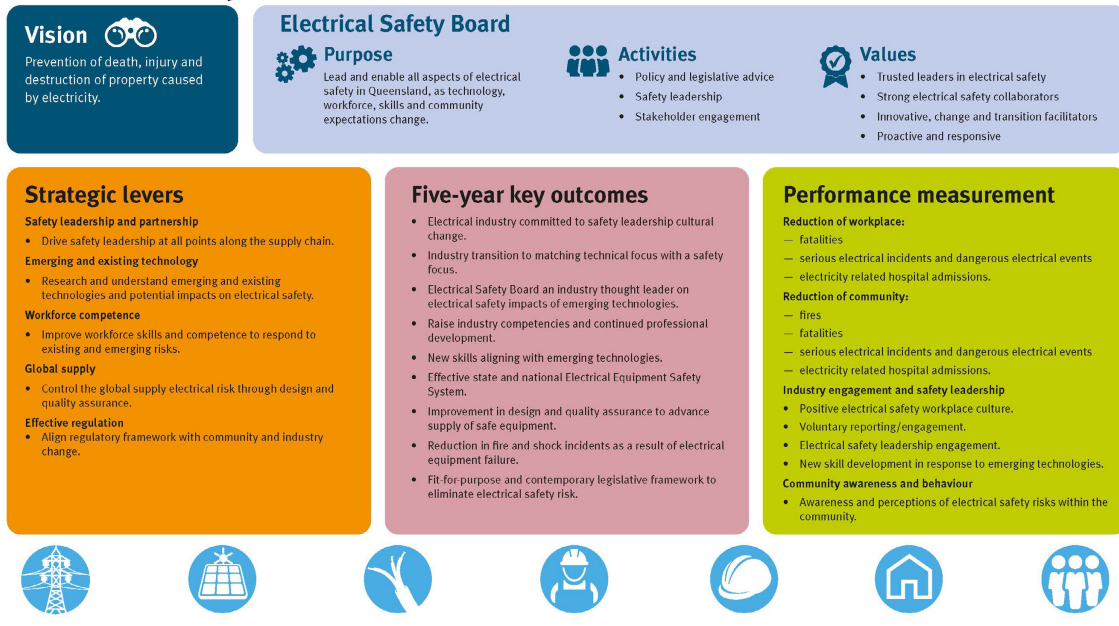
There is a requirement to ensure that licence holders keep up to date and regularly undergo training. As technologies and changes within the trade occur, it is expected of licence holders to follow those changes with CPD. Once you have your licence, to maintain it, you must actively educate yourself through CPD in order to qualify for renewal. This particular aspect of the licensing arrangement is one that intrigued me. The suggestion is that you cannot view your qualifying as a one-off effort. Holding a licence is not passive, it must be maintained as the industry changes and you must put work into it.

5. Regulatory Body: Electrical Safety Office and Electrical Safety Board

The Electrical Safety Office of Queensland is the regulatory body responsible for standards around electrical safety in Queensland. They are part of the Office of Industrial Relations. Among ensuring electrical safety laws are followed and electrical equipment is compliant with Australian standards, they also manage and issue worker's and contractor's licences.

The Electrical Safety Board advise the ESO and were formed in the early 00's. They are comprised of experienced electrical workers, members of the electrical industry, the regulator and contractors. The purpose of the ESB is to develop long term plans to advise the ESO and the Office of Industrial Relations. The advisory board is comprised of individuals with a vested interest in the ongoing safety and continuity of quality electrical services within Queensland. Part of the 2018–2022 plan involved robust licensing and protection of the integrity of the electrical trade through cracking down on unlicensed electrical work.

Electrical Safety Plan for Queensland 2018-2022



The ESO is responsible for investigating and prosecuting unlicensed, sub-standard or dangerous electrical work. They prosecute, fine and impose penalties on individuals or businesses that knowingly or unknowingly break the law. Fines can be relatively minor but there are usually mandatory retraining units to take if an individual is found to have committed an offence.

On the other end of the spectrum, large fines can be applied, as well as licence suspensions or revocation. The fines can be huge, life-changing sums of money. The ESO have real powers to investigate and punish those who've broken the law and they readily do so.

The Office of Industrial Relations releases a monthly newsletter detailing prosecutions levied that month at offenders. The fines were smaller than I would have expected, but a licence suspension is a scary prospect when electrical work is an individual's main career. They've spent time building their career and reputation as an electrician and to have their licence endorsed with a penalty by the ESO would be a potentially career ending occurrence.

When I was in Brisbane, I met with Jason Young, ETU State President and part of the ESO. We spoke about infringements licence holders had made and how the sanctions are enforced. The ESO investigates all allegations seriously as offences all have potential lethality. On balance, the repercussions for a licence holder who may have made an honest mistake in carrying out their duty that caused no harm could be a restriction that would affect their ability to earn in potentially the only career they have trained in. There were a few incidents we spoke about that were under investigation at the time. In one circumstance,

a worker had followed an incorrect schematic left by a previous electrician years prior, leading to a fault occurring during testing and commissioning. The current worker had his licence restricted whilst under investigation, but due to the effective audit trail of licencing, the fault could be traced back to a previous contractor. They could be reprimanded and fined for the output of sub-par work that they had produced and the current worker would undergo mandatory training to ensure the fault with testing would not recur.

Another incident under investigation involved a worker performing live work having been pressured by their boss. The live work caused the distribution board to catch fire and the resulting damage knocked out a local phone relay station. This caused a black out of local emergency services and none could be accessed in the area as a result. The investigation was still ongoing whilst I was there, but the QTP and QTB were both placed on restricted licences as was the worker. This would have effectively halted the normal business activities, affecting wages and the normal operations of the business.

The messaging of the ESO and the industry as a whole is one of ensuring competence through education, effective industry messaging and regulatory powers. The Electrical Safety Regulator has powers to prevent shoddy work and the fear of licence suspension is something workers who intentionally perform work to a lower standard should be mindful of. The ESO's role is not to punish and penalise all workers, but to educate those who have made a mistake and hold to account those who have negligently produced poor work.

Part 2

Requirements of a qualified electrician in the United Kingdom

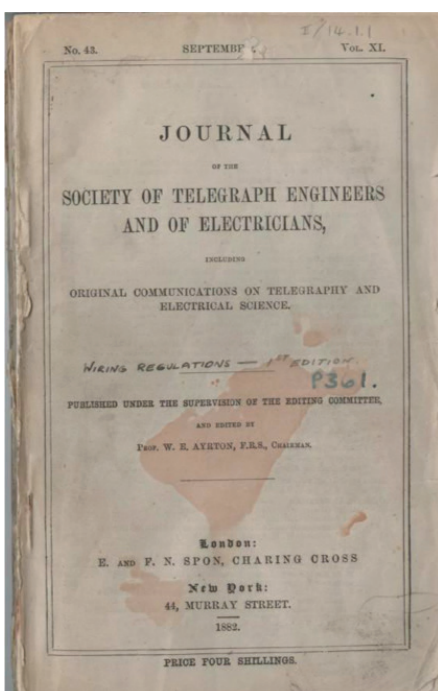
1. A brief history of electrical contractors in the UK

The UK, unlike Queensland, doesn't have a specific licencing body or scheme that governs and regulates Electricians. Electricity was a craze of the 18th century, with electricians utilising it as a means of polite entertainment in 'Electrical Parties' for the upper classes. It was initially viewed as a means of entertainment and for experiments.

As technology evolved, electricity generation and distribution infrastructure started to appear towards the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Electricians and Electrical Contractors came about as a solution to the need for competent, trained persons to install and maintain electrical installations in domestic, commercial and industrial environments.

The Council of the Society of Telegraph Engineers, a predecessor of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE), now the IET, published the first edition of the wiring regulations in 1882. This publication was a result of an investigation into fires arising from poor electrical lighting installations. The first edition was composed of nineteen rules, five of which were relating to dynamo machines, nine with wiring, two with lamps and three with 'Danger to Person'.

Although there is no official licence in the UK, standardisation of the Wiring Regulations in the mid-20th century helped to professionalise the trade, alongside the work of the Electrical Contractors Association as well as the Electrical Trades Union and its successors. The introduction of the JIB grading scheme in 1968, and then the merger with the UK Register of Electricians in 1999 to form the Electrotechnical Certification Scheme (or ECS Card), has been widely recognised as a proof of competence for an individual to perform electrical work and is in my opinion, the closest thing we have to a licensing scheme that is widely adopted across the UK. The ECS Card, including the online portal and CPD reports, details the type of apprenticeship, qualifications, training, continuing professional development, employer endorsements, and experience an individual has undertaken to perform electrical work, which competency units they have achieved and when this occurred. The ECS record may also detail professional memberships, codes of professional practice, competent person scheme status, as well as identification checking and security vetting. Although not obligatory for an electrical worker, it is very difficult for an untrained individual to perform electrical work without encountering substantial hurdles.



2. Routes into the trade

To become a fully qualified Installation Electrician, there are a few routes into the trade, with a full, time-served apprenticeship being the most commonly recognised route.

Apprenticeship route

The apprenticeship consists of a Level 3 academic qualification and job-based experience, with the expectation that an apprentice will spend 20% of their entire apprenticeship in education or 'learning' job skills. The remaining parts of the job are gathering overall experience and competence within the environment. Academically, apprentices must gain technical knowledge and the acquire a certificate in the latest edition of the wiring regs.

After completing the academic components of the qualification and gaining sufficient experience, in order to attend the End Point Assessment (EPA), a gateway meeting between employer, apprentice and educator will ensure the apprenticeship has hit key milestones including duration, qualifications, job experience, logged "Off The Job" hours and assessment plan work (such as a portfolio or project plan). If all are completed satisfactorily, an EPA can be booked/sat as a proof of competency.

A time-served apprenticeship will usually take around 4 years to complete but some can take more or less time. Not all develop and acquire the requisite knowledge in the same timeframe and the apprenticeship route gives time for an individual to work at a pace that is suitable to them.

Experienced worker assessment route

This route is for individuals who have the requisite experience as an electrician but for whatever reason, did not complete a full apprenticeship. The experienced worker's route is not a shortcut or bypassing the route to become an electrician, but offers a different means of acquiring a qualification on par with that of an industry apprenticeship.

The individual applying for the Experienced Worker's route must have spent at least 5 years working in the industry as an electrician (not including time spent in full or part-time training). If sufficiently experienced and holding at least a Level 2 (or equivalent) Diploma, they can apply for the experienced worker's route. An NVQ of a different type is completed by the candidate alongside any other training needed to fill gaps in competence. Once the pre-requisite educational components are met, an End Point Assessment is completed to achieve the Qualification. The individual can then apply for an ECS card which is viewed as the same standard as the industry apprenticeship.

Short course route – domestic installer

A means of bypassing the traditional apprenticeship route, generally preferred by those looking to switch careers but unwilling or unable to accept the drop in pay due to personal commitments or even those who have the requisite experience but not the time to complete the Experienced Worker's Route. Short courses take significantly less time than a full scope apprenticeship and are regularly self-funded.

The uptake of short courses was partly fuelled by the introduction of Part P in 2005 and the creation of the Competent Persons Schemes. This enabled individuals with training and experience to self-certify work as a Domestic Installer under a Competent Person Scheme such as the NICEIC or NAPIT. Competent Persons Schemes would historically only require a 2391 or EAL 2625 and BS7671 qualification, alongside 2 years of industry experience to join, however from September 2021, the CPS standard for Domestic Installers matches that of the Gold Card Requirements.

Frameworks and traineeships

Can also provide a route into industry. Traineeships provide preparatory work for individuals to prepare for an apprenticeship or work. They can be from 6 weeks to a year, but on average will be for 6 months. They provide paid work to build workplace experience for employment or a specific job role.

Outside of traineeships and the routes described above, qualifications such as City and Guilds 2357 will also allow those working in industry to attain qualifications that sit within the apprenticeship framework. Through this route, and if the other benchmarks are met outlined in the apprenticeship framework, then a qualification can be gained outside of the standard routes.



3. Competency standards – Part P and the Building Safety Regulator

The introduction of Part P in 2005 was intended to ensure that all electrical work carried out in dwellings was performed to a sufficiently high standard, reducing the risks of electrical accidents and fires. It brought a lot of electrical work that would have been performed in the domestic environment under the remit of Building Control's 'notifiable work'.

After the completion of installation work, Part P also requires that the installation is inspected, tested and certified. This could either be done through notification to Building Control, or through the newly developed Competent Person Schemes. This enabled work to be signed off by a Qualified Supervisor within the company. Part P also restricted the amount of electrical work the average homeowner could perform within their own property, by introducing special locations and demands for certification.

The Building Safety Regulator

A new regulatory body under the umbrella of the Health and Safety Executive, the Building Safety Regulator came into being through the Building Safety Act 2022. It came about as a response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, where a fire in a high-rise residential building in London caused the deaths of 72 people. One of the key recommendations in the aftermath of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt was the set up of a Building Safety Regulator. The report 'Building a Safer Future' highlighted many issues; an ignorance of regulations and guidance, an indifference to quality, a lack of clarity about responsibility and inadequate oversight from regulators.

The aim of the Building Safety Regulator is an oversight of building safety in high risk buildings, setting of clear building safety standards and enforcing them, supporting residents in high-risk buildings, an advisory and reporting role to local authorities and stakeholders as well as improving competence throughout the construction industry. This last part and role of the regulator as improving competence is the most interesting development in the move towards licensing.

One of the key recommendations in the report was to ensure an adequate number of competent people across all key design and construction roles to ensure the work was designed and installed to a sufficient standard. Systems like the CSCS Smart Check and ECS Check are a great asset to the industry in this regard, as they allow immediate verification of all 2.1 million CSCS and partner cards. This tool allows

Clients and Contractors to assess the range of competencies across their workforce to maintain minimum competency standards.

A statutory body aiming to better regulate the construction industry could be seen by some as moving in the direction of licensing. By having minimum standards of competence to practice and perform jobs in construction, it would effectively be preventing those who've not achieved these minimum standards from performing the roles of the trade. It would be enshrined in law and would be a de facto licence to practice.

4. A call for licensing in the UK

There has been a growing voice amongst those in the industry to see a form of licensing adopted by the industry as a whole. With electricity becoming a larger part of our daily lives and tragedies like Grenfell at the back of our minds, the need for a register of electrical professionals is becoming more important.

The Scottish Government Commissioned research in 2019 in to whether there would be a business case for the introduction of an Electrician's Register in Scotland. The research reported that 7.1% of all fires in Scotland were caused by faulty electrical installations. A register to ensure all individuals performing electrical work would provide a net benefit of £58 million to the Scottish economy as well as improving standards and ensuring culpability for those who perform poor electrical work. I couldn't find any research into the British Government's attempts to pose this question, and all significant regulatory changes (Part P and the Building Safety Regulator) seem to be as a result of tragedies rather than a more progressive forward planning approach to industry development.

If the UK government were so inclined to set up a licence or register, we effectively have a means of registering qualified electricians in the UK with the JIB ECS card. It is a gateway to entry on to most commercial and industrial job sites, detailing qualifications and competencies. In Northern Ireland, ECS Check is listed as an accepted Licence to Practice under government procurement guidance following extensive successful trials. This system could be expanded throughout the UK and across industries to ensure minimum competency.

Conclusion

In my opinion and based on my experiences in Queensland, licensing or a register of Qualified Electricians throughout the electrical contracting industry in the UK and Ireland should be implemented. The trade is potentially dangerous, complex and highly skilled, with ongoing training required throughout the lifetime of the tradesperson's career to maintain a working understanding of the changing regulatory framework we operate within as well as keeping abreast of changing technologies. Tragedies caused by faulty electrical work are all too common with few and far effective punishments for those who've shown themselves as wilfully negligent.

The strength of the licensing system in Queensland is it protects everyone in equal measure. Workers are protected by the trade they have trained in and maintain their licence, and in return, are protected from unlicensed workers undercutting them and

performing illegal electrical work. Contractors and clients are protected by the licencing framework. Workers have to perform ongoing CPD to maintain their licence and any endorsements by the ESO are shown on a publicly available register. They can be sure the workers they hire show a minimum level of competence and ongoing training. The public is protected by the licencing framework as rogue traders are taken out of the marketplace. The system in Queensland has been in place for a century now, and clearly the model works. There was not one mention throughout my entire time in Queensland of any worker being against the principle of licencing or how it is implemented. It is an accepted part of the trade, and on balance protects all.

Electricians work hard to gain their qualifications, and it would be a service to the industry to recognise that work.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to finish with some acknowledgements for my hosts and friends I met whilst in Queensland.

Firstly, thank you to my employer and line managers Karon and Oana for endorsing and supporting me in the application process. I'd like to thank my hosts at Electrogrouop; Donna, Kenny and Kris for having me and showing me round your wonderful state. I'd also like to extend a thank you to the ETU for their hospitality, Luke Ellis, Steve Bravo, Kristin Perissinotto, Jason Young, Brenton Muller and Chris Lynch, you and your union members made me feel very welcome whilst I spent time in Queensland. Thank you for inviting me to your events and bringing me into your union family.

I'd also like to say a big thank you to Andy Reakes at the JIB, Unite and the ECA for making the trip possible.

Finally, a special thanks to Kenny Bell, a former NG Bailey employee and a friendly northern face on the other side of the world!

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