



## **JTL response to the IfATE Bill Committee's Call for Evidence**

### **About JTL**

JTL is one of the largest work-based learning providers in England and Wales, working with over 3,800 businesses and training more apprentices than any other provider in the building services engineering sector. With over 30 years of experience, JTL plays a critical role in delivering high-quality apprenticeship training, currently supporting approximately 8,000 learners in electrical and plumbing apprenticeships.

JTL has 16 training centres across England and Wales and has plans to further expand this network and deliver the highest quality apprenticeships with state-of-the-art facilities; tailoring the learning experience to local, regional and national skills needs.

The provider has a golden thread of quality and safety running throughout its apprenticeship standards, adapting to emerging technologies and cultivating a workforce that not only contributes to closing the skills gap, but also anticipates and fulfils the future demands of the dynamic wider industry.

### **Summary**

We highlight key areas to for the committee to focus on to support the training and development of the UK's skills trades workforce:

1. First, the UK's infrastructure and energy ambitions, including housing, clean energy and major construction projects, depend on a sufficient pipeline of skills electricians and plumbers. However, workforce shortages are escalating with declining apprenticeship numbers failing to meet industry demand.
2. A robust post-16 skills strategy is essential to align training provision with workforce needs, ensuring building services engineering is recognised as a priority sector.
3. Funding challenges continue to impact apprenticeship delivery, with apprenticeship levy reforms needed to ensure training remains high-quality and adequately resourced.
4. Employer confidence and training provider capacity must also be strengthened through targeted incentives and capital investment.
5. Finally, urgent action is required to reverse the decline in the electrical and plumbing workforce, with measures to increase apprenticeship starts, improve completion rates and expand career progression opportunities.

JTL urges the Committee to implement these recommendations to secure a sustainable and highly skilled workforce for the UK's future infrastructure and energy needs.

### **The Importance of Skilled Trades in Meeting the UK's Infrastructure and Energy Needs**

The UK's economic and infrastructure priorities – including the transition to clean energy, the delivery of 1.5 million new homes, 150 major infrastructure projects and data centre expansion – require a highly skilled and technically competent workforce.

Electricians, plumbers and heating engineers play a critical role in expanding the UK's renewable energy infrastructure, including solar installations, EV charging networks and battery storage. Additionally, they are essential to retrofitting homes and businesses for improved energy efficiency and supporting large-scale projects such as HS2, Hinkley Point C and data centre expansion. However, despite these demands, the UK does not have enough apprentices starting or completing training to sustain the workforce required to meet these ambitions.

### **Workforce Shortages and the Decline in Apprenticeship Numbers**

The UK's electrical and plumbing workforce is shrinking at an unsustainable rate. The electrical workforce has declined by 19.6% since 2018, falling from 277,000 to 222,800 (ONS, 2024). If current trends continue, the electrical workforce could shrink to 188,840 by 2038, severely impacting infrastructure projects. Similarly, the plumbing and heating workforce has declined by 17.98% since 2018, further exacerbating shortages.

Apprenticeship start numbers are too low to sustain industry demand. At least 10,000 new electrical apprentices are needed annually to maintain workforce levels, yet fewer than 7,500 apprentices currently start each year in England. In 2023/23, JTL started 1,870 apprentices – over 25% of all electrical starts in England – but this remains below industry needs. Without urgent intervention, the UK will fail to meet its infrastructure and energy security targets due to workforce shortages.

### **The Need for a Robust Post-16 Skills Strategy**

A coherent post-16 skills strategy is required to align training provision with workforce demands. The Government must recognise building services engineering as a priority sector in workforce planning and funding allocations. Apprenticeships need to be expanded and adequately funded, with funding bands reflecting real training costs.

Independent Training Providers (ITPs) should receive equal access to capital funding, ensuring parity with Further Education (FE) colleges. Additionally, SME employers, responsible for over 80% of electrical and plumbing apprenticeship starts, require targeted support to sustain their training commitments.

### **Apprenticeship Levy Reform and Funding Challenges**

The Level 3 Electrotechnical Apprenticeship is recognised as a gold standard programme, delivering the technical training required for modern electricians. However, since 2019, apprenticeship funding has not increased despite the addition of essential EV charging, solar PV and battery storage training. Inflation and rising training costs are putting pressure on providers and reducing capacity. Employers – especially SMEs – struggle with the cost of hiring and supporting apprentices.

To maintain the apprenticeship levy's focus on high-quality, long-duration apprenticeships, funding bands should be adjusted to reflect rising delivery costs and inflation. Additional financial support should be provided to SMEs to encourage continued investment in apprenticeship training.

### **Employer Confidence**

Although learner demands for apprenticeships remains high, several barriers prevent employers from hiring apprentices. Economic uncertainty has led to cautious hiring decisions, while limited capital investment in training centres has restricted provider capacity. Rising training costs, particularly in specialist renewable energy areas, are further discouraging employer participation.

To address these issues, the Government should introduce targeted incentives for SME employers to take on apprentices and provide capital funding for training providers to expand facilities. A long-term workforce plan, which is evidence-based and in line with modelled demand for the skills needed considering current projects and infrastructure commitments set out in the Industrial Strategy. Following this, a specific action plan should be drawn up to increase the number of apprenticeship starts in the electrical sector.

This would help ensure apprenticeship numbers align with industry needs and major infrastructure projects.

### **Addressing the Declining Workforce**

The electrical and plumbing workforce is aging, with retirement rates outpacing new entrants despite an increase in electrical apprenticeship starts in recent years. If workforce shortages are not addressed, the UK risks an acute skills gap that could slow or derail key infrastructure projects.

To reverse this decline, electrical apprenticeship starts must increase to at least 10,000 per year, and completion rates should be improved through enhanced employer support. Career progression and upskilling opportunities, particularly in renewable energy technologies, must also be encouraged to retain skilled workers in the sector.

### **Devolution of skills budgets**

The complex policy landscape of skills and apprenticeships requires careful coordination between national and local bodies. While devolution allows regions to better tailor their training initiatives to local needs, and ensure that Adult Education Budgets are spent, a lack of cohesion risks fragmented delivery. For national providers like JTL this could add further bureaucracy and complexity to the process for accessing funding.

National priorities—such as the rollout of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and sustainable heating systems—require central government oversight to ensure consistency and efficiency in the targeting of resources. At the same time, some regions serve as ‘feeders’ supplying skilled workers to other areas. This is particularly true of the electrical workforce, including apprentices, which is inherently mobile, crossing regional boundaries regularly.

Achieving the right balance between regional flexibility and national alignment is key, and the Government should aim to foster better coordination between national and regional bodies.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

JTL urges the Bill Committee to take decisive action to safeguard and expand the skilled trades workforce.

JTL’s Key Recommendations:

- Recognise building services engineering as a priority sector in the UK’s post-16 skills strategy.
- Maintain the apprenticeship levy’s focus on high-quality, long duration apprenticeships.
- Increase funding for electrical and plumbing apprenticeships, ensuring it reflects real training costs and the complexity of skills required.
- Provide capital funding for ITPs, enabling training providers to expand their facilities and increase capacity.
- Support employer confidence through targeted SME incentives, making it easier for smaller businesses to take on apprentices.
- Develop a long-term workforce plan, aligning apprenticeship numbers with projected industry needs.



By implementing these measures, the UK can build a workforce capable of delivering the Government's energy, housing and infrastructure priorities.

JTL remains committed to collaborating with policymakers, industry partners and employers to ensure the continued success of apprenticeship programmes and the sustainability of the building services engineering sector.