

Why is
regulation of
electricians
so important
for Scotland?



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Did you know that anyone can claim to be an electrician?

Would you like someone unqualified carrying out electrical work on your home?

At present, anyone can claim to be an electrician and carry out electrical work in Scotland.

These unqualified individuals put the people of Scotland at risk of injury and death through faulty electrical installation and maintenance work.

That's why, along with the Scottish Joint Industry Board (SJIB), Unite the Union and other bodies, SELECT has been leading a long-running campaign for the introduction of protection of title for the profession of electrician.

We want to make it an offence for someone to call themselves an electrician when they

have no, or inadequate, qualifications. But above all, we want to see improved safety for both domestic and commercial consumers across Scotland.

SELECT and SJIB members currently find faults every day of the week with installations that they attend in consumers' homes and in business premises, which could lead to injury or death.

Some faults lie hidden for years, waiting for a combination of circumstances for a flashpoint to occur. A properly trained and qualified workforce would help towards eliminating these unnecessary risks – and bring an estimated financial benefit to Scotland of around **£58 million**.

What's the problem?

Many electricians are fully trained and operate to the highest of standards and do a good and safe job wherever they work. You wouldn't expect anything less.

However, of the some 22,000 practising 'electricians' in Scotland, approximately 9,000 have no recorded qualification. Some of these people will undoubtedly have qualifications to a greater or lesser degree, but many do not.

These partially or unqualified 'electricians' are undermining individuals and companies who invest in apprentice and staff training and innovation.

These unqualified electricians make no contribution to developing Scotland's young people by training apprentices. They don't improve their own skills and nor do they contribute significantly to Scotland's economy, as most operate in the black or grey economy.

Unqualified electricians are also less likely to keep up with the latest regulations designed to keep them, and their customers, safe.

For example, when the latest Wiring Regulations are introduced they bring in a number of changes and safety-critical issues which unqualified or part-qualified electricians will know nothing about.

What's the economic impact?

Research carried out on behalf of SELECT in 2018 showed that faulty electrical installations account for 7.1% of all fires in Scotland, and damage caused to property by these fires costs around **£9.6 million**. A number of deaths and injuries are caused by such fires or electric shocks every year.

The Health and Safety Executive estimates the financial cost to society of deaths and injuries, including to the health service, employers and the individuals themselves. From this, we can make a mid-range estimate of **£6 million** of cost from this source.

Much of the cost of faulty electrical installation lies in malfunctioning or poorly finished work that needs to be replaced. A number of surveys point to the proportion of domestic work that is substandard.

Based on these and the data on underqualified electricians, we cautiously estimate **£104 million** of cost to the consumer from faulty electrics installed by unqualified tradesmen – about 5% of work in all.

Not including the occasional major cost of catastrophic incidents, the overall cost of faulty electrical work in Scotland is around **£120 million** every year.



*“Being an electrician is a **safety-critical profession**, so it is vital that only those people with appropriate skills and qualifications carry out such work. Using a qualified electrician **gives consumers the confidence that they are employing an expert** who undertakes continued professional development and regular assessments to ensure they maintain the highest standards of safety and technical integrity at all times. That’s why I am backing SELECT’s campaign to regulate electricians by introducing protection of title for the profession of electrician.”*

Kevin Stewart MSP

What's the solution?

We want to see a level playing field, and for domestic and commercial consumers to know they are obtaining the services of someone who is properly trained and invested in the future of the industry.

To achieve this, we are pressing for the Scottish Government to introduce protection of title to make electrician a regulated profession, underpinned by a single register of electricians.

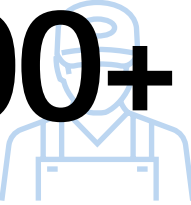
Such a register would provide the comfort and security that someone calling themselves an electrician is qualified and competent to undertake electrical work. It would also enhance the profession's status and reputation by restricting opportunities for the unskilled or semi-skilled.

The SJIB already administers the Electrotechnical Certification Scheme, which accommodates and recognises the diverse array of electricians operating within the electrotechnical industry. With some additional safeguards, a similarly robust scheme could be developed at very little additional cost for government, businesses and individuals.

This would far outweigh the medium to long-term costs associated with poorly installed and maintained installations, including the human cost and tragedy of deaths caused by electrical fires and electrocution.

There is also a socioeconomic side to regulation. Making the role of electrician a profession will lead to greater interest in the industry and more opportunities for women and ethnic minorities to join it, which would be a significant advantage for us all.

9,000+
Unqualified
'electricians' at large



£120m
Annual cost of faulty
electrical work in Scotland





“It is vitally important that consumers are helped to make informed choices whenever they employ an electrician. That’s why I am backing SELECT’s campaign to regulate electricians by introducing ***protection of title for the profession of electrician.***”

Monica Lennon MSP

Who's backing the campaign?

Since launching the campaign for protection of title, SELECT and the SJIB have enjoyed a wealth of support from across Scotland and beyond.

To show how this depth of backing is building, SELECT has created an online Wall of Support which shows the politicians, surveyors, housebuilders, professional bodies and trade unions in favour of change.

Bodies that have contributed a brick to this engaging graphic include:

- CECA Scotland
- ECA
- Electrical Safety First
- Energy Saving Trust
- Federation of Master Builders (Scotland)
- Joint Industry Board
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- Scottish Association of Landlords
- Scottish Building Federation
- SNIPEF
- Unite the Union.

In addition, the Wall of Support now has bricks from nearly 40 MSPs and MPs from the Scottish National Party, Labour Party, Conservative and Unionist Party, Liberal Democrats and Green Party, demonstrating the ongoing cross-party support for regulation of the electrical industry.

Among these politicians, Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP has been a keen advocate of regulation, holding a consultation on the matter which he hopes will lead to the introduction of a Member's Bill calling for protection of title for electricians.

The Wall of Support can be seen overleaf. The digital version, complete with comments from each organisation and individual, can be viewed by scanning the QR code (right).



We would welcome further bricks to the wall. To add your name, please email: yvonne.wilson@select.org.uk

£58m 

Estimated net benefit to Scotland from proper regulation



*“Poor quality electrical work carries huge risks to people’s homes, their businesses and even their lives. Protection of title is only one step, but it is an important one – and one that I believe will have a **positive impact**, not just for consumers but for **the profession**.”*

Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP

Murdo Fraser MSP

AESM

Building Safety Group Ltd.

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP

Stensons

National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC)

Gordon Eason Electrical

GP Services

Maurice Golden MSP

Scottish Joint Industry Board (SJIB)

Kevin Stewart MSP

Joint Industry Board (JIB)

Beatrice Wishart MSP

F T Davidson Electricians

Electro Installations (Scotland) Ltd.

Jeremy Balfour MSP

Scaffolding Association

LINIAN

Logic Systems

Fergus Ewing MSP

Unite The Union

OCS

Bill Kidd MSP

Colin Smyth MSP

Claire Baker MSP

Russell Findlay MSP

Rachael Hamilton MSP

E Rae & Son

Stirling Electrical Services Ltd.

Alexander Burnett MSP

Federation of Master Builders (FMB) Scotland

Jamie Greene MSP

Monica Lennon MSP

Cert

Alastair Grant Electrical

BAM Construction Ltd.

SECTT

Calder Electrical

Unitech Services Ltd.

David Torrance MSP

Michelle Thomson MSP

Existing Hon Scot

EuropeOn

Stuart McMillan MSP

Scottish Building Contracts Committee (SBCC)

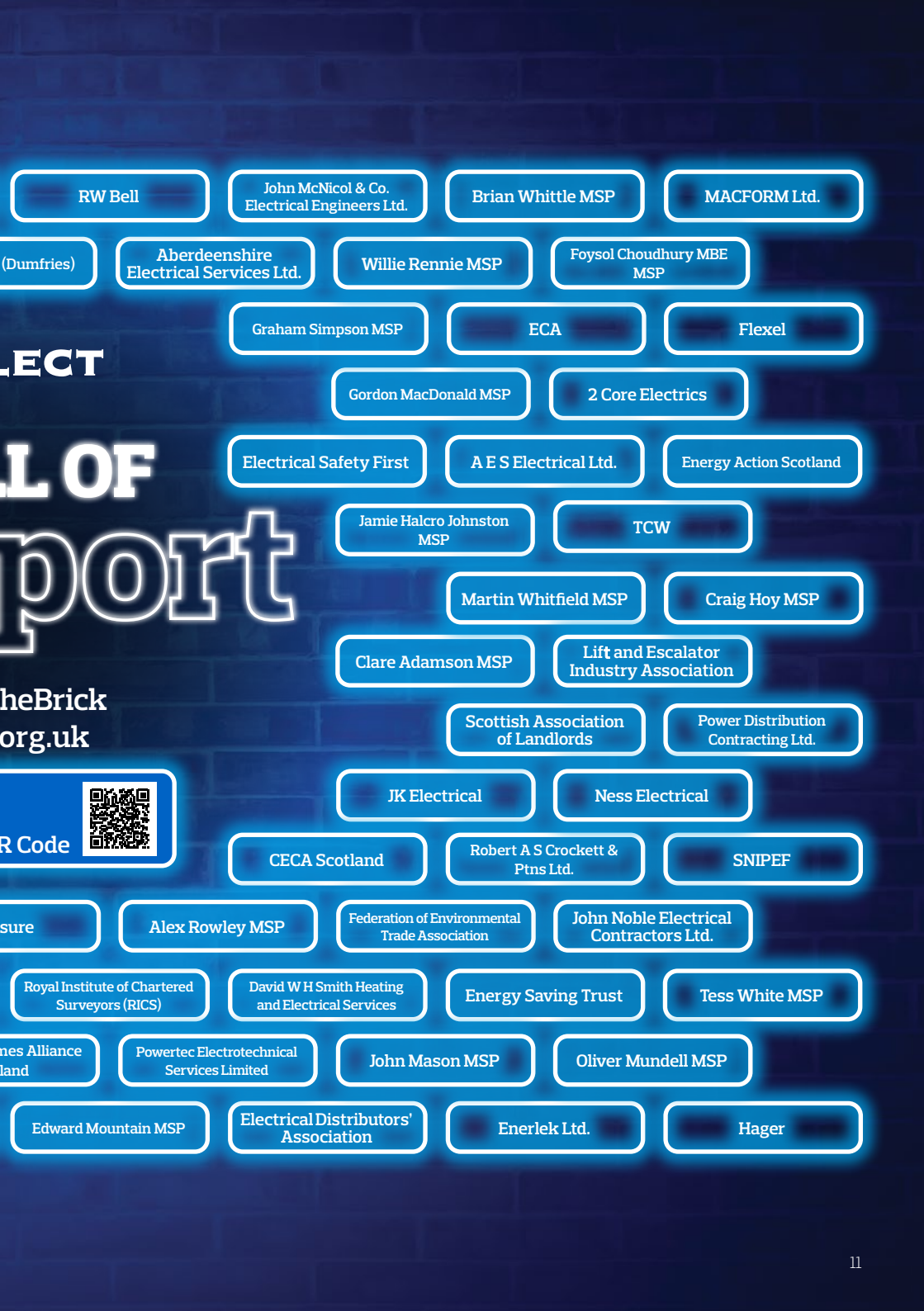
Scottish Building Federation

SEL

WALL Support

#BackTo
select.

Visit the Wall
of Support by
scanning the QR



RW Bell

John McNicol & Co.
Electrical Engineers Ltd.

Brian Whittle MSP

MACFORM Ltd.

(Dumfries)

Aberdeenshire
Electrical Services Ltd.

Willie Rennie MSP

Foysol Choudhury MBE
MSP

Graham Simpson MSP

ECA

Flexel

LECT

Gordon MacDonald MSP

2 Core Electrics

L OF

Electrical Safety First

A E S Electrical Ltd.

Energy Action Scotland

port

Jamie Halcro Johnston
MSP

TCW

Martin Whitfield MSP

Craig Hoy MSP

heBrick
org.uk

Clare Adamson MSP

Lift and Escalator
Industry Association

Scottish Association
of Landlords

Power Distribution
Contracting Ltd.

R Code 

JK Electrical

Ness Electrical

CECA Scotland

Robert A S Crockett &
Ptns Ltd.

SNIPEF

sure

Alex Rowley MSP

Federation of Environmental
Trade Association

John Noble Electrical
Contractors Ltd.

Royal Institute of Chartered
Surveyors (RICS)

David WH Smith Heating
and Electrical Services

Energy Saving Trust

Tess White MSP

mes Alliance
land

Powertec Electrotechnical
Services Limited

John Mason MSP

Oliver Mundell MSP

Edward Mountain MSP

Electrical Distributors'
Association

Enerlek Ltd.

Hager

Can the Scottish Parliament help?

Yes. Regulation of electricians is not reserved to Westminster. Some professions, including that of architect, are specifically reserved but not electricians, and this has now been accepted as fact by Scottish civil servants.

SELECT has Counsel opinion which states that the Scottish Parliament is competent to legislate in this area. A broad summary was that there is no bar to regulating electricians under the Scotland Act 1998.

As a result of our lobbying, the Scottish Government has set up an Electricians Working Group to explore the challenge of ensuring the safety of electrical installations.

This group is committed to protecting consumers, protecting scrupulous traders and creating an inhospitable environment for miscreants, and maintaining an environment that allows competition within the provision of electrical services to thrive.

Are other trades regulated?

Yes. There is a notable contrast between regulation in the gas industry and its absence in the electrotechnical industry.

Across the UK, there are 102 regulated professions including some of a surprising nature, namely bouncers (door supervisors), road/street works operatives, arts therapists and public space surveillance operatives – yet electrician is not among them.

This fact is a constant surprise to the many people we speak to about regulation.

We have interviewed many members of the public which has reinforced the view that, just like other professions, the majority of people would welcome some form of regulation to safeguard them from unsafe or potentially dangerous electrical work.



*“The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) Scotland supports the **importance of using professionals in all aspects of construction work**, be they multi-million pound contracts or small domestic works of a few thousand pounds. It is vital to ensure that only properly trained and qualified people design and carry out those works. The FMB Scotland supports the campaign being run by SELECT, the trade body for electrical contractors, to introduce protection of title, which would ensure that anyone calling themselves an electrician in Scotland would have to hold **appropriate qualifications.**”*

**Gordon Nelson, Director, Federation
of Master Builders (FMB) Scotland**

What's been achieved so far?

The campaign for regulation has made significant progress in the past few years, gathering momentum politically and across the construction industry itself. Here are just a few of the recent milestones:

● October 2024

Establishment of cross-party group

Led by Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP, a group of cross-party MSPs is set up to work towards the regulation of electricians.

● February 2021

Consultation No2 held

A second consultation on regulation of the electrical industry closes on 12 February. Launched by Jamie Hepburn MSP, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, electricians and the wider industry are again urged to take part and make their voices heard.

● January 2021

SELECT shows support

The association submits a letter to the Scottish Government's consultation on regulation, outlining its case for protection of title and claiming only legislation can bring about "comfort and security" to consumers.

● November 2020

Consultation No1 closes

A consultation by MSP Jamie Halcro Johnston closes with over 140 submissions – 90% of them positive. The MSP says he hopes the consultation will lead to the introduction of a Member's Bill calling for regulation of electricians.

● November 2019

Holyrood exhibition

SELECT spends three days at the Scottish Parliament, engaging with MSPs and other groups about the urgent need for protection of title. As a result, 30 more politicians sign up for the Wall of Support.

● February 2019

Call for evidence

To consider the case for regulation, the Scottish Government commissions Pye Tait to gather evidence on the extent of substandard electrical installations in Scotland and the risks to the public. SELECT Members and the wider industry contribute to the survey, which sends a clear message that action is required.

● October 2018

Parliamentary debate

A Scottish Parliament debate on regulation is held, led by Jamie Halcro Johnston. The MSP points out that, while more than 100 regulated professions exist in the UK – including door supervisors at clubs – there is no protection afforded to electricians. His motion asks parliament to recognise that improperly installed electrical work creates a significant risk of fire as well as other harm to householders and that the installation of electrical work by unqualified or part-qualified individuals carries a major safety risk.



*“Regulation will **enhance** the profession itself as it will ensure that only those who can prove that they have appropriate qualifications, knowledge and experience are accorded the respect that is due to such an **important and safety critical profession.**”*

Willie Rennie MSP

What are the challenges?

Against the benefits of regulation, we must set the costs of establishing and operating a comprehensive system of qualification.

We estimate that the cost of training an electrician to meet the required standards would be approximately £1,000 in total. Assuming 10,000 unqualified or underqualified electricians undertook this training programme over a five-year period, this implies an annual cost of £2 million.

In addition, whichever organisation ran the accreditation scheme would need to extend the administration costs of this to the whole sector. For example, an over-arching body could act as the gatekeeper for a scheme. As an indicator of cost, SJIB currently charges £16 per year for registration, and extending this cost to unqualified electricians adds a further £160,000 of cost.

As we have mentioned, the literature review and data on qualifications in the industry suggest an association between higher qualifications and higher pay, and therefore costs. This can be read in two ways. One is that it represents a cost to society in the sense that regulated tradesmen charge more to cover the cost of their training and those unable or unwilling to gain qualifications are excluded from the market – in other words the new system acts as a ‘barrier to entry’ that drives up costs.

Alternatively, higher wages imply higher productivity, quality of work and the fact that practitioners take a share of the benefits of the savings to be had from better safety in the form of higher wages.

What are the benefits?

As well as greater safety and improved consumer confidence, a cautious estimate of net financial benefits to Scotland from proper regulation of the electrical industry is around **£58 million**.

Netting off costs against benefits, this monetary figure includes all of the benefits from higher electrical standards, such as fewer injuries and

deaths, better functioning installations and improved customer satisfaction.

In addition, Scotland is investing £1.6 billion over the next five years in decarbonising the heat in buildings and it makes sense that those undertaking that programme are trained, qualified and competent.



*“There are thousands of people in Scotland claiming to be electricians without adequate training or certification. This is a **serious risk to public safety** and we need **support in law** for qualified electricians.”*

Craig Hoy MSP

Who are SELECT?

SELECT is the trade association for the electrical contracting industry in Scotland. Founded in 1900 as The Electrical Contractors' Association of Scotland, it is the oldest electrical trade association in the world.

Throughout the past 125 years, it has had two main objectives:

- To protect public safety by driving up industry standards
- To provide for the future by training apprentices for a career in the industry.

SELECT has more than 1,200 member companies ranging in size from the very largest down to one-person businesses.

Taken together, SELECT Members contribute a combined annual turnover to the Scottish economy in excess of £1 billion and employ more than 15,000 electricians.

Who are the SJIB?

The Scottish Joint Industry Board (SJIB) was founded in 1969 by SELECT and Unite the Union. The principal objects of the Board are to:

- Regulate relations between employers and employees engaged in the industry in Scotland
- Provide benefits for persons engaged in the industry in Scotland
- Stimulate and further the progress of the industry
- Regulate and control employment, the level of skill and proficiency, health and safety competence, wages and welfare benefits.

How can I find out more?

To help raise the profile of our campaign, we have a dedicated regulation page on our website at www.select.org.uk

We also have dedicated Facebook, LinkedIn and X accounts and issue regular updates in the national and trade press.

You can also view a number of videos on our YouTube channel by clicking the link below:

- **MD Alan Wilson on protection of title**
- **Jamie Halcro Johnston on regulation**
- **Accidental home fire statistics**
- **Help us make Scotland safer**
- **Hidden dangers put lives at risk.**



*“Recognition of the vital role that qualified electricians play in safeguarding all aspects of Scottish society is **long overdue**. Unsafe electrical wiring can cause many problems but, worst of all, poor and unsafe work is often hidden which means it can be a **silent but deadly killer**.”*

Catherine Gillon, SJIB



Founded in 1900, SELECT is Scotland's largest construction trade association.

It has more than 1,200 member businesses who collectively have an annual turnover of around £1 billion and employ over 15,000 people and 3,500 apprentices.

SELECT also delivers training courses to more than 3,500 electricians each year and is committed to regulation of the industry for a safer Scotland.

The Walled Garden
Bush Estate
Midlothian EH26 0SB
Tel: 0131 445 5577

www.select.org.uk

February 2025