

ROGUE TRAINERS

As more people consider a career in electrical work, watch out for the scammers hoping to take advantage



Rogue training companies that promise the world but then scam people out of thousands of pounds are targeting would-be electricians.

A network of affiliated websites has sprung up in recent years, claiming to sell courses that can help anyone to become a “fully qualified electrician”. But once victims sign up for the courses, the modules are vague, there is little support and often insufficient practical training. Unhappy customers are usually unable to get their money back and are locked into iron-clad finance agreements that can hurt their credit scores.

These third-party organisations have gained momentum over the past two years, as many people look to retrain following a redundancy or in pursuit of a better career.

Jordan Adcock was taken in by one of these scams in November last year. “I was 21 and had just come out of university,” he explains. “There were no jobs because we were in the midst of the pandemic, and people were getting laid off everywhere. I started searching online for electrical courses. I filled out a form online and was called by a saleswoman who convinced me to sign up for a £2,000 course.”

That sinking feeling

When Adcock received the training manuals, he realised there was a problem. “The materials were rubbish,” he said. “I also found out that I would have to pay another £4,000 to get anywhere near fully qualified and even then, I wouldn’t have any practical experience, so it was useless.”

Adcock, who was suffering from depression, wrote the experience off as “a humiliating life lesson” and paid in full. “I got off lightly,” he says. “I’ve found lots of people online who paid £8,000 for their courses.”

Climbing the ladder

Thomas Donson was among those who paid for a £7,800 course. “I was 32 and had been a network engineer for eight years,” he explains. “I wanted to become an alarm and CCTV fitter but, technically, I couldn’t sign off on my own jobs because I wasn’t a qualified electrician. So I did some Googling and found a course online.”

The rogue training company used hard-selling techniques to convince Donson to sign up. “They even told me that the company had a celebrity endorsement,” he says. Donson, who has a mortgage, two credit cards and two children, did not meet the affordability criteria, so the saleswoman told him not to include any of his debts on his application. “We didn’t think anything of it,” he says. “We thought she knew best.”

According to Ruth Devine, employer chair of The Electrotechnical Skills Partnership (TESP), there are potentially thousands of people like Adcock and Donson who have fallen victim to training scams.

TESP is currently running a national campaign warning about the risks of rogue training companies. As well as working hard to get these courses removed when they appear on reputable job boards, TESP hopes to show potential victims that there are no shortcuts to becoming an electrician. “Ideally you would do an apprenticeship, which typically takes

four years, or the equivalent training as identified in the TESP routes,” says Devine. “Electricity can be dangerous, and handling it safely takes time to learn. You need to be supervised while you develop an electrician’s judgment.”

Donson is also running his own independent campaign and has identified a network of third-party sites which are all controlled by a few individuals. He has managed to get his money back by

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RUTH DEVINE, EMPLOYER CHAIR, THE ELECTROTECHNICAL SKILLS PARTNERSHIP

contacting his bank and freezing the payments, but he knows this may have dire consequences. “We know they may send bailiffs round,” he says.

Donson says he is currently in touch with 80 other victims of this scam. “No one out there will help us,” he says. “I went to Citizens Advice, the Financial Conduct Authority and Trading Standards, and I got nowhere. I rang a solicitor, but they wanted to charge me £500 an hour and I don’t have that kind of money. We all just want justice.”

“Even before the pandemic, we saw more people wanting to change career and become electricians,” says Devine. “And when it comes to electric vehicle charging infrastructure, the electrification of heating, the move to net zero and greater digital connectivity through the internet of things, this industry has got an even more crucial role to play. There’s a skills shortage now, and certain individuals and companies are taking advantage of that.”



Jordan Adcock



Thomas Donson