



# IBEW British Columbia Provincial Council

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February 22, 2021

Anita Handregan, Director, Program Standards and Assessments  
Industry Training Authority  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor-8100 Granville Avenue  
Richmond, BC V5Y 3T6

RE: Standard Level Exam (SLE) Challenges for Construction and Industrial Electrician

Dear Ms. Anita Handregan:

On behalf of the British Columbia Provincial Council of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, I urge the Industry Training Authority to take the necessary steps to reinstate challenges on SLE exams for Electrician Levels 1 and 2.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers was established in B.C. in 1901. IBEW locals are based in Langley, Kamloops, Nelson, Port Coquitlam, and Victoria. The Provincial Council comprises the business managers from all five locals. Together, we represent more than 12,000 British Columbians in various electrical occupations including construction, power-line construction, power and gas utilities, as well as marine shipyards, cablevision, railway, motor-winding, electrical wholesale, security, HVAC, and electrical workers in all three levels of government since 1901. At present, we represent over 18% of electrical apprentices and our members are consistently ranked high in the ITA's top-twenty 'Sponsors by Number of Apprentices' list.

As the skilled trades shortage reaches critical levels, the IBEW is committed to ensuring that Canada's electrical industry has the capacity and high level of skills required to meet labour market demand. The Province of British Columbia, under the leadership of the New Democrat Party, understands the vital importance of Compulsory Trades for the safety and wellbeing of all citizens and business. Great strides have been made to repair the damage to industry in the last 19 years since the BC Liberals confused "Red

Seal” and “Red Tape” back in 2002 when they did away with compulsory trades. The Province once again recognizes that certifiable training protects workers’ and the public’s safety and leads to reduced liability and insurance costs, increased public and consumer confidence, satisfaction, and quality construction. The IBEW Provincial Council looks forward to working with authorities to ensure that the training and assessment required to enable certification of skilled trades professionals is equitably and efficiently accessed by all those in electrical trades training.

With this perspective, it is with regret that I note the decision communicated in OPSN 2015 010 to discontinue level challenge exams for Electrical 1 and 2. We can only conclude that this was a consensus reached at a table lacking stakeholder representation from labour and industry at the time of change. We see level challenges as vital to the success of compulsory trades certification, especially for new Canadians, who are credentialed in another country who possess the related educational background and experience to succeed in the Electrical Trade. Currently the only option for any individual wishing to challenge is to write the Red Seal exam. This represents a significant risk to industry as it can potentially place our valued certification in the hands of those who do not necessarily possess the experience or skills acquired in a full apprenticeship. Instead, underqualified individuals may study only to the requirements of the exam rather than preparing for a professional and certifiable career in the trade. The current system is not only flawed, but also unfair to those with valuable, transferrable experience from other countries.

The IBEW Provincial Council urges the ITA to reinstate the challenge pathway for Levels 1 and 2 only. To mitigate any associated risks, and to ensure success, safety, integrity, and equality, we would like to propose that this pathway only be accessible to those who are not currently registered apprentices. Those coming from outside of the system, particularly Highly Skilled Newcomers (HSNs) in urgent demand to meet labour market requirements for upcoming major infrastructure projects in British Columbia should be of top priority.

It will be necessary to not only allow new entrants to challenge the SLEs, but also to ensure their eligibility by verifying practical experience in the trade and integrating a practical assessment component to these pathways. The IBEW in British Columbia is equipped with an internationally verified electrical assessment system required to adequately determine apprentices’ practical competencies, identify, and provide required gap training, and refer to harmonized electrical apprenticeship levels through federally funded initiatives.

We hope that you will take into serious consideration the concerns, information and solutions provided above and remain available to answer any questions. We value the opportunity to work together to implement the required changes. Together we will ensure that compulsory trades certification is re-introduced with the appropriate measures in place to adequately assess and provide equitable apprenticeship access to all who wish to pursue it.

Sincerely,



Phil Venoit  
Chair, IBEW BC Provincial Council  
Email: Phil@ibew230.org

cc: Mr. Rod Bianchini, Chief Operating Officer, Industry Training Authority  
Ms. Shelley Gray, Chief Executive Officer, Industry Training Authority