

From Apprentice to Operations Director: Paul McLaughlin's Journey with PTSG

2 hours ago



Last month, [PTSG](#) officially opened its new Centre of Excellence in Manchester – a purpose-built training facility designed to develop the next generation of compliance engineers. At the same time, the Group launched its biggest-ever apprenticeship recruitment campaign, creating opportunities for aspiring engineers to build careers across the business.

But what does that journey actually look like?

For every apprentice joining PTSG today, there are colleagues who have already walked that path. We caught up with Paul McLaughlin, Operations Director at ECS, a PTSG company specialising in electrical testing, compliance and installation, to hear how an apprenticeship became the foundation for a career that has taken him from the tools to the boardroom.

An accidental electrician

Paul's entry into the electrical trade was not exactly planned. Growing up in Surrey, he left school in 2005 with no clear idea of which direction to take. A week's work experience with a family friend who was a plumber nearly decided it for him until the fourth day, when a blocked urinal at Wakehurst Place, part of Kew Gardens, settled the matter definitively.

"The smell was horrendous," Paul recalls. "I had to get out of the room and thought, 'I'm not doing that.'"

As luck would have it, an electrical contractor happened to be working on site that day, and Paul spent his final day of work experience pulling cables alongside their team. It was enough to convince him.

There was also a personal thread running through the decision.

“My dad always wanted to be an electrician but never had the opportunity when he was younger,” Paul explains. “And electricians are always in work. The pay is good. I thought, do you know what? I’ll go into that.”

Building the foundations

Paul completed his apprenticeship with Peter Tree Electrical in Surrey, qualifying as a fully certified electrician in 2009. He worked through a structured programme that combined full-time college in his first year, giving him two years’ worth of technical training in one, followed by day release and then an NVQ and AM2 assessment to achieve full qualification.

After qualifying, he moved into large-scale government and NHS work with DH Croft, covering contracts across the London Borough of Wandsworth and carrying out major hospital refits. It was demanding, high-volume work that sharpened his technical skills considerably.

In October 2012, a growing family and the cost of living in London prompted a move to Kettering. A short stint with Carbonio Electrical followed, working on building and energy management systems for major retail clients including Tesco and Marks & Spencer.

By late 2013, Paul had joined PMG, the business that would become ECS.

Joining a small team with big ambitions

When Paul walked through the door at PMG, the company employed around five office staff and roughly 20 electricians. Within six months, the business had rebranded as ECS and, in 2020, became part of PTSG. Paul has been there through every stage of that growth.

His early years at the company were spent entirely on the tools, carrying out testing and inspection work across contracts including Northampton County Council, Letchworth and commercial projects in London. As the business expanded into care homes, social housing and large refurbishment projects such as West Lodge Farm, Paul’s responsibilities grew with it.

“I was told every year, ‘You’re too good to lose on the tools,’” Paul says. “I heard that probably more times than I can count. But eventually the workload made it impossible to go back out.”

A short spell as Quality Supervisor quickly evolved into a Contract Manager role as the business continued to grow.

From Contract Manager to Operations Director

Paul became Contract Manager in 2021 and quickly proved himself. The first contract he was handed, a smoke alarm and fire alarm replacement programme for social housing provider Settle, became one of the most profitable projects ECS had delivered.

“People were coming to me with technical questions and it just naturally progressed.”

In 2023 he was promoted to Operations Manager. A year later, he became Operations Director.

Paul is open about the role that support from senior leaders played in his development. Regular one-to-one sessions with PTSG CEO Greg Ward helped him understand what the next stage of his career required. Mark Mitchell, Managing Director of PTSG Electrical Services, supported him in developing his commercial and financial understanding, while John Warren became a trusted mentor throughout the transition.

“John was ringing me weekly from the day I took that role, coming into the office, checking in, and that consistent support made a real difference. Mark was also hugely important, working through the financial side with me and offering encouragement along the way. I’ve been fortunate to have that kind of backing.”

What keeps him here

More than a decade with one business is increasingly rare, but Paul’s reason for staying is simple. He believes in where the business is heading and wants to help shape its future.

“The team we’ve built has been here five years, some of them longer,” he says. “Everyone jumps in. There’s no one above anyone. It’s one team.

“And we deliver. That’s what our long-standing clients say when you ask them why they stay with us. We deliver, we build relationships and we can mobilise quickly when things change.”

Advice for the 16-year-old Paul

Asked what advice he would give his 16-year-old self, Paul smiles. He admits he could never have predicted where his career would take him. There may have been other paths he could have followed, but he has no regrets about the one he chose.

“I chose my career. I stuck with it. I gave it everything. And it’s led me to where I am today.”

He pauses before adding:

“See it through. That’s what I’d say. Just see it through.”

It’s simple advice, but it perfectly captures Paul’s career. Progress didn’t happen overnight. It came through commitment, consistency and taking opportunities as they arose.

For the apprentices joining PTSG today, his journey shows exactly what is possible.

An apprenticeship is more than a qualification. It’s the start of a career with real opportunities to learn, develop and progress.

PTSG is currently recruiting its largest-ever intake of apprentices across a range of engineering and compliance disciplines. If you know someone leaving school or college, looking for a career change, or ready to build a future in one of the UK’s fastest-growing compliance businesses, encourage them to explore the opportunities available.

Visit careers.ptsg.co.uk to find out more and apply.