

R&B Switchgear Group

HIGHLY COMMENDED - SME OF THE YEAR



R&B Switchgear Group has established itself as a champion of skills development and a driving force in the future of engineering talent. As a partner of Hopwood Hall College, the company has taken a proactive role in shaping curriculum, supporting T-Level placements, and delivering high-quality apprenticeships.



With a dedicated training team, R&B Switchgear provides a supportive environment where 12 current apprentices thrive across key engineering pathways. Their innovative approach includes peer mentoring, hands-on learning, and clear progression routes, ensuring every learner has the opportunity to grow.

By actively contributing to curriculum design and offering sustainable employment opportunities, **R&B Switchgear has become a model SME for workforce development and community impact.**

Can you tell us about your company's approach to tackling the skills gap in the engineering sector?

R&B Switchgear Group addresses the skills gap by investing in a structured learning pipeline that begins with its R&B Switchgear Academy. The Academy's electrical and mechanical programme is designed by experienced engineers and is open to school-leavers, T Level students, graduates and people already in work. It gives trainees a strong foundation for a career in power engineering and the support needed to reach their full potential. Apprentices spend most of their time in the workplace and rotate through different departments to build a broad skill set while working towards a Level 3 Manufacturing Engineering qualification. They receive hands-on experience, learn modern mechanical and electrical theory, and are assigned mentors who monitor progress and provide personalised training. For T Level students, the Academy offers a 45-day (nine week) placement that gives them theoretical/practical experience with such skills as the use of mechanical and electrical hand tools, measuring & marking out and fitting skills along with reading drawings, wiring, power systems and the important health and safety requirements linked to each. R&B also invests in staff development through a Learning Management System that supports on-the-go learning and further training. This multi-pathway approach, alongside recognition such as the Next Gen Makers 'Excellent Employer' kitemark, Hopwood Hall College's 2025 'Large Business of the Year' award, DfE 'North West Apprenticeship employer of the year' & National 'Highly Commended Apprenticeship employer of the year' 2024, The Manchester College 'Platinum Employer', demonstrates the company's commitment to closing the engineering skills gap.

As an active member of the Hopwood Hall College Engineering Board, how do you influence the curriculum to better meet industry needs?

R&B Switchgear uses its seat on Hopwood Hall College's Engineering Board to ensure that the curriculum reflects the realities of modern power engineering. Gavin Chadwick and his team provide feedback on course content, highlighting the competencies that apprentices need to master. They share insights from industrial requirements and discuss college curriculum and the units being delivered to enhance the learners understanding and development within the company. Board members also arrange site visits and guest lectures to expose students to real equipment and working practices, and they advocate for the inclusion of work-placement and peer-mentoring elements that mirror the Academy's approach. This collaboration ensures that graduates and T Level students leave college with the practical skills and behaviours that employers require.

Your partnership with Hopwood Hall College supports both Apprenticeships and T-Levels. How important are these programmes in building a sustainable talent pipeline for your business and the wider industry?

At R&B Switchgear Group, Apprenticeships and T Levels form a core part of our long-term talent strategy. Our close collaboration with Hopwood Hall College is central to this approach, ensuring that curriculum discussions, and dedicated events are aligned with the evolving needs of industry. This partnership enables streamlined logistics for onboarding both apprentices and T Level students, creating a seamless bridge between education and the workplace. Our apprenticeship programme currently supports 11 apprentices across three years, combining classroom-based learning and practical activities, working in line with Hopwood Hall College, leading to a Level 3 Manufacturing Engineering qualification. Apprentices undertake a 12-week training period when they start and then rotate across multiple departments, receive guidance from dedicated mentors, and develop skills in modern mechanical and electrical theory. Through the T Level programme, second-year students complete a 45-day industry placement where they gain practical experience in tooling, measurement, fitting, and switchboard layout and wiring. In the last two years, we have hosted twelve T Level students, with five progressing into permanent apprenticeship roles. By working in close partnership with Hopwood Hall College, we are able to engage with young talent early, influence the skills being developed, and provide real-world experiences that prepare learners for meaningful careers. This approach allows us to nurture talent at different stages, assess potential in live environments, and build a sustainable pipeline of future engineers, helping to address the critical skills shortage across Greater Manchester.

What impact have you seen from investing in young engineers through these education and training initiatives?

Investing in young engineers has had a transformative impact on both R&B Switchgear Group and its people. By engaging with apprentices and T Level students from the earliest stages of their training, the company is able to nurture and develop talent over time- shaping skills, knowledge, and professional behaviours in line with industry needs. This early investment not only builds technical capability but also fosters loyalty and long-term commitment. Our young engineers bring a fresh perspective, energy, and enthusiasm that enhance the workplace, sparking innovation and creating a positive, collaborative environment. Apprentices describe working alongside experienced colleagues and dedicated mentors as “enlightening,” and value the access to knowledge, resources, and equipment that enables them to grow into professional engineers. T Level students highlight the welcoming nature of the business and the breadth of engineering opportunities and career paths available. By combining structured training with real-world experience, R&B Switchgear is developing the next generation of engineers while enriching its own workplace culture and capability.

**Looking ahead,
how does R&B
Switchgear plan
to continue
evolving its
approach to skills
development and
supporting the
next generation
of engineers?**

R&B Switchgear plans to expand and evolve its skills strategy and Academy to meet future industry demands and higher levels of technical ability. The Academy will continue to offer multi-pathway programmes, with plans to increase the number of apprenticeships, T Level placements and graduate rotations. The company is exploring new specialisms in renewable energy, digital power systems and advanced manufacturing, and intends to integrate these topics into training and curriculum development. It will also use its Learning Management System to broaden access to remote and self-paced learning, allowing both apprentices and existing employees to upskill in areas like digital design and AI. R&B aims to strengthen its collaborations with Hopwood Hall College and other education providers, influencing curriculum developments and promoting diversity. Outreach to schools and under-represented groups will be expanded to encourage more women and young people from diverse backgrounds to consider engineering careers. The company will continue to champion T Level placements and apprenticeships as a route into long-term employment, ensuring that the next generation of engineers has the practical experience, qualifications and professional support needed to thrive.

“We’re incredibly proud to receive this award. Apprenticeships are a core part of our long-term strategy – not only for developing talent, but for ensuring the sustainability of our industry.

Working alongside local colleges has allowed us to offer real-world experience and meaningful career opportunities to the engineers of tomorrow.”

GAVIN CHADWICK

**Technical & Training Manager
at R&B Switchgear Group**

