



**JEWSON**

# TRADE TRENDS.



**2024**



## INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to Trade Trends, the annual report from Jewson sharing the experiences and views of the UK's professional tradespeople.**

To understand how we can support you to grow your business and make your professional life easier, we've once again interviewed more than 500 people working in the construction industry to understand the things that are impacting you every day. The findings are summarised in this, our second Trade Trends report, along with information and advice on how to navigate current challenges, streamline operations and take advantage of opportunities to expand.

It's been a turbulent year for the economy, so we've explored which factors are having the biggest impact on small to medium builders and tradespeople. We've also explored the skills shortage, to understand the industry's approach to training, learning and development. Once again, we've delved into sustainable construction, exploring what improvements homeowners are asking

for to make their homes more energy efficient, as well as how the industry feels about new legislation. A new topic for this year, we've also found out how tradespeople's professional lives impact their general health and wellbeing.

Jewson is proud to partner the trades and is committed to having a positive and active role in the communities we serve. Our aim is to be the most trusted builders' merchant for UK tradespeople and thanks to our unique structure, we can offer our customers much more than just a wide range of products. From the way we're helping you build more sustainable homes, to helping you save time on quoting and estimating with Build Aviator, or getting the equipment you need through our tool hire service, we're committed to helping you succeed in your business.

We hope this latest Trade Trends report is a useful asset for you and your business.

***Helene Bradley, Communications Director at STARK Building Materials UK Ltd***



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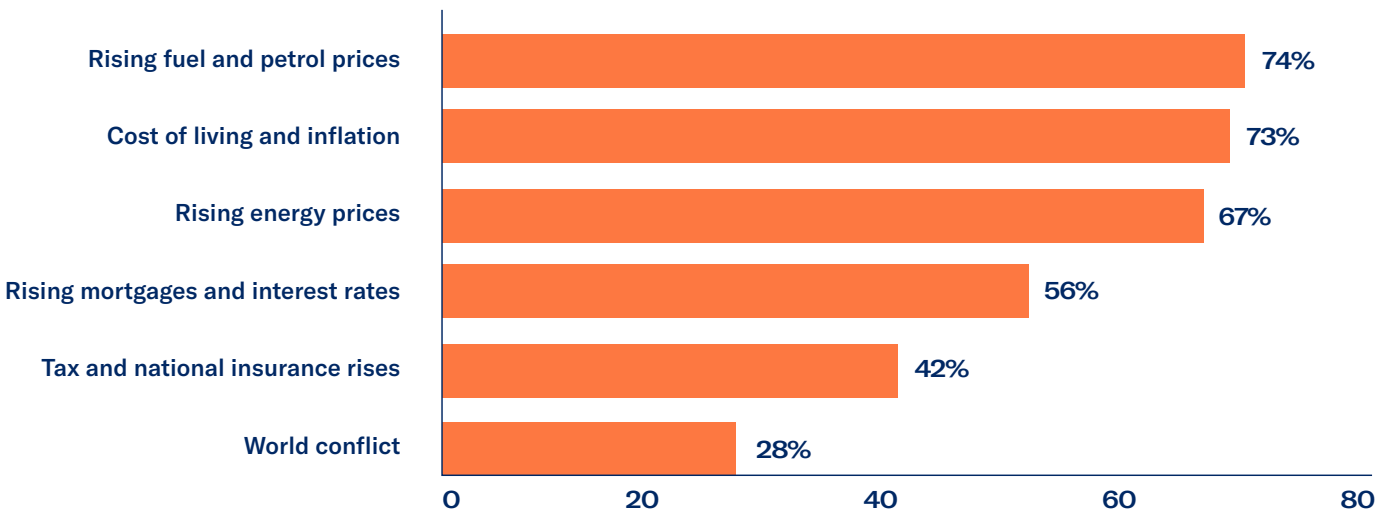
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# DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS

## ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Fluctuating interest rates, rising prices of everything from fuel to food, European and Middle Eastern conflict and the run up to a general election have had a ripple effect on the UK economy over the last 12 months, which is affecting builders and tradespeople in both their professional and personal lives.

**Our findings show the trades are concerned about pressures linked to the economy, including rising fuel and petrol prices (74%), the cost of living (73%), energy prices (67%) and mortgage and interest rates (56%).**



## OUR VIEW

Neil Grindley, Regional Managing Director for Jewson, said:

*“Like a lot of the general public, our customers are concerned about the cost of living. They’re also conscious of the wider economic landscape, what it’s doing to the construction industry, and how it’s impacting their own order book. It’s having a knock-on impact most prominently for those who employ other people, as they are seeing demand for wage growth to keep up with rising costs. This is happening at a time when their own workloads are reduced because households are cutting back on spending. We know that one of the biggest costs to our customers is having tradespeople standing around on site while they wait for products and deliveries. With that in mind, we’re speeding up delivery and collections to keep any downtime to a minimum, and ensuring we always have strong stock levels so customers can come to us when they need something quickly. The rate that builders can get through a job is the most important factor in their profit margins, so keeping to our promise of delivery within a set timeframe is vital during this challenging time.”*



## CUSTOMER FOCUS

*“The economy has had an effect on our business in a number of ways, in terms of consumer confidence when it comes to buying new homes and moving house, but also when looking at the building process for new homes. The increased costs and material delays we’re experiencing are caused by the changing economy, and have made consistency of delivery and regularity of trade more difficult. I don’t foresee any positive changes in the short term – but we hope that when interest rates start to reduce, consumer and trade confidence will return, and more energy will be put into driving forward the house building and home improvement markets.”*

Chris Warner, Managing Director, Castlethorpe Homes

*“It’s not just us feeling the pinch – customers feel it too. They have less disposable income available, so house upgrades aren’t a priority currently. This creates a negative circle because we have to put our prices up to survive, which prices out more customers from doing work.”*

Tom Hutchinson, Owner, Bricklaying UK

## FLUCTUATING WORKLOAD

Many working in the sector say they are expecting a slowdown in demand, which will impact their commercial performance this year.

Overall, there is an increase in the proportion of businesses reporting fewer enquiries, up from 15% last year to 23% this year. There is also a significant reduction in those saying they're receiving more enquiries, down from 31% last year to 23% this year.

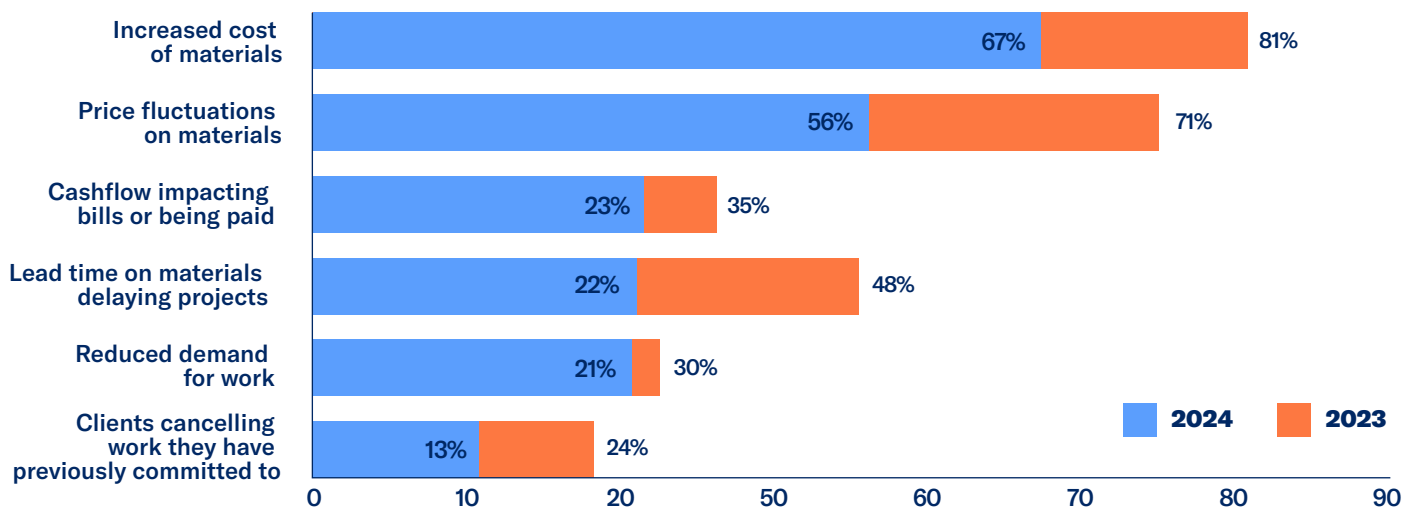
Around two thirds of builders and tradespeople expect demand to stay at the same level they're experiencing now for the next 12 months. A fifth (20%) think demand will fall, but more (22.5%) expect it to increase.

Specific concerns for those working in the construction industry are price fluctuations on materials (56%), cashflow impacting on bills being paid (23%), and clients cancelling work they have already committed to (13%). The main pressure point is the risk of material prices increasing (67%).

However, a positive note to take is that all major concerns are less of a worry for the trades this year than last, with the most notable difference being people's concern over material lead times and their potential impact on project timings.

## 2023 - 2024

### THE WORK-RELATED CONCERNS OF UK BUILDERS AND TRADESPEOPLE



## CUSTOMER FOCUS

*“The market is very sensitive right now. There used to be a pool of customers you could proactively reach out to, to find new work, but that pool has shrunk. When you look at disposable income in households across the country, those on the lower end just aren’t spending, which makes business becomes more competitive. If the phone stops ringing, I won’t have a business to run. If we could tell people that prices of materials, fuel, energy and more would stay the same for the next 12 months, it would help with planning ahead, winning jobs, cashflow and managing customer expectations.”*

John Beasley, Owner, JB Interiors

## TOOL THEFT

Tool theft is a big concern for 42% of tradespeople and builders. In a report by On The Tools in 2022, **it was reported that 78% of tradespeople have had their tools stolen**, and only 1% of those managed to fully recover them. On The Tools also found that the average UK tradesperson is likely to have between £1,000 and £5,000 worth of tools stolen from them in just one tool theft incident.

Given the wealth of pressures facing tradespeople and SME builders, and the impact that tool theft can have on their business, it's perhaps unsurprising that it's such a concern. Thankfully, the report shares a wealth of insights and advice on how to minimise tool theft, including the use of van vaults, traceable liquids and trackers. Find out more [here](#).

**78%**  
of tradespeople have  
had their tools stolen

Source: On The Tools

“Research shows that tool theft is on the rise and – due to the poor conviction rate – it often goes unreported and unpunished, meaning the scale of the problem could be even worse than we think. The cost of living crisis has been a key contributor to the rise in thefts, and we are getting more messages than ever before from people who have footage of thefts happening in broad daylight. The thieves know that there isn't much that can be done to stop them, and they are becoming increasingly brazen in their methods.

“We're working on a number of initiatives to help in the long term. For example, we're collaborating with the Metropolitan Police on a project to promote the use of a tool-marking device that makes it harder for thieves to resell stolen tools, but this needs industry-wide uptake and actual convictions in order to deter thieves. We are also lobbying car boot and market owners to ban the resale of power tools, as we know this is where a lot of the stolen goods end up. More immediate actions that tradespeople can take include fitting a deadlock system in vans to make it harder to break in, as well as keeping tools in lockboxes and ensuring the alarm system covers the whole vehicle.”

Lee Wilcox, CEO of On The Tools



## THE SKILLS SHORTAGE

The Trade Skills Index has highlighted a skills gap which it says could ‘engulf’ the construction sector over the coming 10 years. It says 937,000 new recruits are needed in trades and construction by 2032 to combat the widening skills loss posed by Brexit, an ageing workforce and rising costs in order to meet construction demand. Of the new workers required, nearly a quarter of a million – 244,000 – must be qualified apprentices to plug the gap.<sup>1</sup>

The skills shortage is a clear concern for the trades, with almost half (48%) thinking it will get worse in the next 12 months. This, they say, will impact the availability of sub-contractor labour (22%), meaning they can’t complete projects as quickly (21%) and will lead to them paying higher costs for labour (16%).

When asked how they plan to cope with this ongoing challenge, tradespeople say the only solutions available to them will impact the commercial success of their business. For example, a fifth (18%) accept they will need to pay higher wages and 15% will take on less work – both of which would impact their bottom line. To contribute towards the upskilling of the industry, 13% will invest into training their current employees. However, most people (41%) say they don’t know how they’ll cope.

Figures released by the government early in 2024 offer some promise, though. According to the data, approximately 26,060 new apprentices joined the construction sector in the 2022/23 academic year – above the required target of 25,000 a year.<sup>2</sup>

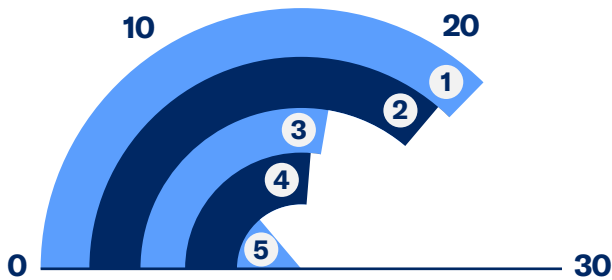
**48% of trades think the skills shortage will get worse in the next 12 months**

<sup>1</sup>source: <https://coleman-group.co.uk/the-uk-construction-skills-shortage>





## TRADESPEOPLE SAY THE ONGOING SKILLS SHORTAGE WILL AFFECT THEIR BUSINESS IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:



- 1. Lack of availability of sub-contractor labour- 22%**
- 2. Can't to complete projects as quickly - 21%**
- 3. Unable to take on as much work- 17%**
- 4. Higher costs for labour - 16%**
- 5. An increase in time spent trying to find tradespeople, rather than trying to find new work- 10%**



### CUSTOMER FOCUS

*“I want to grow my business in the future and the skills shortage in the industry is going to limit who I can take on and when, and therefore limit the potential of the business. We need to get the message out there that the future of the industry, and our society, relies on young people. We’ve got a rising population, and more houses are needed – the skills shortage puts that in jeopardy, so we’re reliant on young people joining the construction workforce more than ever.”*

**Dee Prosser, Director, Politely Plastered**

*“When I was younger, working in the trades was viewed as an option only if you had failed academically. Now, it’s certainly held in higher regard, but younger generation don’t know the potential it offers them. They’re unaware of what can be achieved when own your own business, the monetary success you can have, and the career ladder you can climb.”*

**John Beasley, Owner, JB Interiors**

### OUR VIEW

“One way that we are addressing the skills shortage is by providing a wider range of products that are easy to install and reduce the need for more bespoke skills, allowing for times when our customers cannot get as many specialist tradespeople on site. For example, in our kitchen and bathroom showrooms we offer tile backer boards which save huge amounts of time in the tiling process, and we are creating partnerships with third parties who provide pre-fabrication services, meaning our customers receive complete solutions that can be installed quickly. We also recently introduced a range of timber products that are fully finished, which will save valuable time on site. These products and services are available to all our branches across the UK, and are vital to help our customers navigate the industry’s skills shortage.”

Neil Grindley, Regional Managing Director for Jewson

**ADVICE:****GET AHEAD OF THE SKILLS GAP**

If you're worried about the impact the skills gap might have on your business, begin looking at the ways in which you can save valuable time elsewhere in your company to create additional resources. There are also ways of marketing your business to ensure you're front of mind for local talent who are looking for a job.

**Here's how:****EASY ESTIMATING**

Our previous research has found that builders spend up to 40 hours a month estimating jobs, so if you feel like your weekends and evenings are taken up by paperwork, you're not alone. If you're working with a reduced workforce, and need to free up more of your time to focus on labour, use estimating tools such as Build Aviator to claim back more of your time. Simply submit your plans, and you'll get a full breakdown of recommended materials costs for you, and a customer-facing report to help you secure the work. As well as easing the estimating process, because the material costs are kept up to date you save time navigating any price increases and get the most accurate quote.

**AUTOMATE YOUR ACCOUNTS**

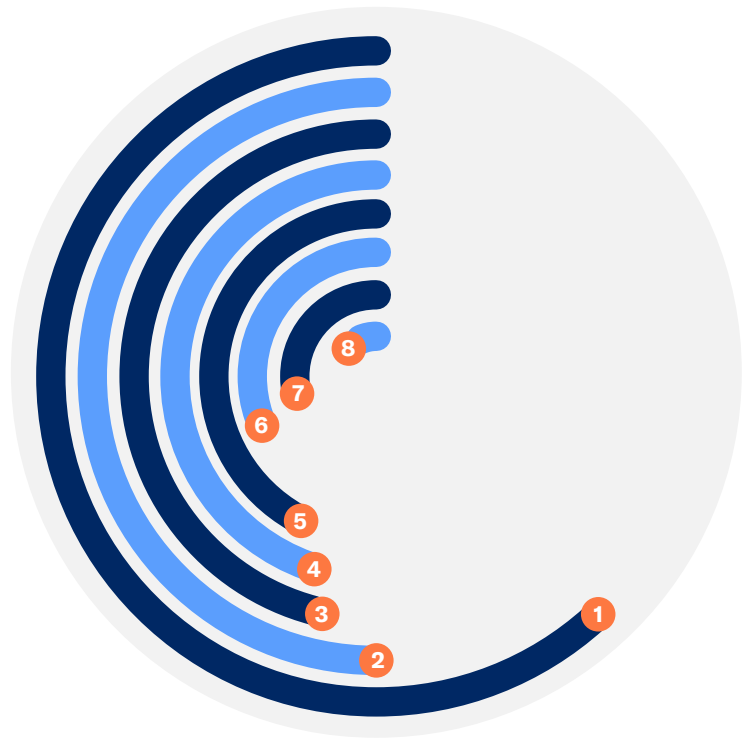
There are lots of great tools to help you automate your accounts, such as FreeAgent, Xero and Quickbooks. Through these you can manage your invoices, bookkeeping, VAT returns, end of year reports and more. If you have an accountant, they can have log ins to help keep your records up to date too. It frees you up to focus on growing your business, when you need to most.

**INVEST IN LOCAL MARKETING**

The skills shortage is affecting the whole industry meaning there's a lot of competition for talent. Stand out in your local area as the first choice for construction employment by investing into local marketing and social media. Just a few hours dedicated to creating content, could be used to promote your credentials, team culture and some of the great projects you work on. Spend a small budget on targeting people in your area who might be finishing their apprenticeship and are therefore looking for a job, and the material might inspire them to get in touch asking for work.

## SUSTAINABLE BUILDING

With an increase in legislation and regulation in relation to building responsibly, it's perhaps no surprise that the industry is reporting positive steps when it comes to sustainability. Two fifths (39%) agree that adding sustainable services to their portfolio would help them win more business, and more than a quarter (26%) are seeing an uplift in enquiries from homeowners about energy efficient building solutions. Remaining front of mind for tradespeople and builders is their ability to source sustainable materials, with more than half (51%) saying this is an important consideration when it comes to their supplier or choice for building products.



## HOMEOWNER DEMAND AND POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

According to our data, the sustainable building products homeowners are asking tradespeople about most often are insulation (65%), air source heat pumps (50%), solar thermal panels (46%), solar PV panels (45%) and ground source heat pumps (42%).

### The sustainable products homeowners are asking UK builders and tradespeople about most:

1. Insulation - 65%
2. ASHP - 50%
3. Solar thermal - 46%
4. Solar PV - 45%
5. GSHP - 42%
6. Draft proofing - 28%
7. Ventilation - 21%
8. Biodiversity - 9%

## CUSTOMER FOCUS

**“Customer awareness of sustainability has never been higher, and their desire to make a more conscious choice when it comes to their materials purchases has never been greater. We now see sustainability as an integral part of what we offer and what our customers expect from us. However, cost is the biggest barrier to progression in this area, and while we will embrace the additional costs required to build better homes, it does limit how much we are able to advance and explore the latest innovations. Clear guidance on what are the most sustainable solutions for homes is also an obstacle – there is conflicting information on the ways to achieve the most sustainable outcomes, so more transparency and education is needed.”**

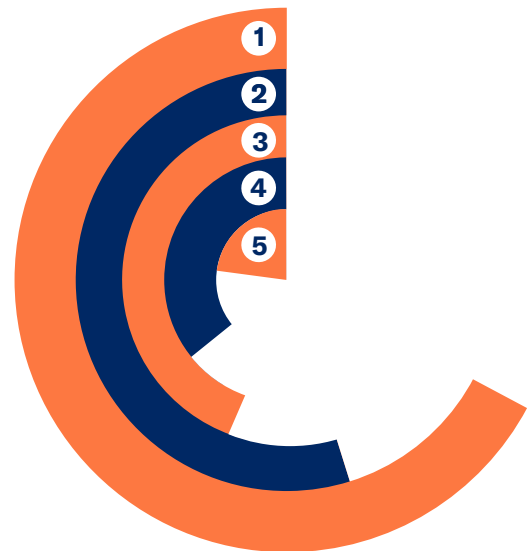
*Chris Warner, Managing Director, Castlethorpe Homes*



## GREEN TRADES TRAINING

Just as with the skills shortage, construction workers know they need to take action to ensure the industry remains at the forefront of sustainable building. As such, more than two fifths (41%) will start or continue upskilling in green construction practices this year, with motivations including needing to comply with regulations, protecting the planet, and earning more money.

## REASONS WHY TRADESPEOPLE AND BUILDERS WILL UPSKILL IN GREEN CONSTRUCTION THIS YEAR



### OUR VIEW

**Sabrina Passley, Head of Sustainability for STARK Building Materials UK, said:** “Upskilling in green trades is crucial because it empowers our workforce to drive sustainable innovation, ensuring our buildings are not only compliant with evolving regulations but also provide better, more comfortable, and eco-friendly spaces for everyone. Our customers have opportunities to lead in sustainable building by adopting eco-friendly materials like those available in our Building for the Future range. We’re supporting them further by providing Building for the Future branches where customers can consult with our to sustainability ambassadors who are currently undergoing ongoing training to provide specialist advice and insights on the best working practices, and insight on the best working practices.”

“By scanning this QR code, customers can quickly locate the Sustainability Flagship branch closest to them.”



1. To keep up with the times - 65%
2. To comply with regulations - 57%
3. To have a positive impact on the environment - 36%
4. To win more work - 22%
5. To raise the profile of their business - 15%

## BUILDING REGULATIONS PART L

In June 2023, the grace period for changes to Building Regulations that came into force a year earlier ended. This means the updated rules to Part L of the building regulations now apply to any projects that were given planning permission pre June 2023, and to all new work moving forward. There are some specific changes in relation to heating that must now be followed to make new build properties and renovations on existing properties compliant, meaning they might affect your projects.

With sustainability at the heart of the matter, the changes to Building Regulations are designed to help improve the UK's housing stock by creating higher standards and making more energy efficient homes. The new regulations are also a stepping stone to bigger changes coming in 2025, when the Future Homes Standard will be introduced – more on this later.

**When we asked tradespeople and builders about how the changes to Part L have affected them so far, more than a third (33%) said they're confident in understanding it, 41% are confident in how to adapt their ways of working to comply, and 32% have changed the materials they're purchasing to ensure they're in line with the new regulations.**

**However, almost half (46%) say they would appreciate more support or training from the industry on energy efficient building solutions, with one in ten saying they've explored upskilling opportunities already. An additional concern is homeowner acceptance, with more than a third (37%) of tradespeople saying homeowners are reluctant to pay more for the enhanced materials required to meet regulations.**



### CUSTOMER FOCUS

***“Green skills training is a priority for us – we need to keep up with the times, not just for our customers’ needs but to work in line with Building Regulations. The more consumers demand sustainable products in their projects, there more work there’ll be available for the industry. Some sustainable products require a skillset of their own in terms of labour and installation, and if you train in those areas, you’ll start to offer a niche service. Becoming trained up in these areas offers other opportunity to be recognised, too. Jewson’s Making Better Homes Awards, for examples, shines a light on people who are going out of their way to work sustainably. Plus, as you become more specialised through training, you’re helping fill the skills shortage. So, there are multiple benefits for the industry and your business.”***

**Chris Hutchinson, Owner, Bricklaying UK**

***“Training should be provided by the government, as an incentive to the industry. Right now, training is expensive and inaccessible, and that is worrying, knowing how important the construction industry is to creating a more sustainable future.”***

**Tom Windle, Owner and Lead Landscaper, Gardenscape**

**ADVICE:****HOW PART L AFFECTS  
DIFFERENT PROPERTIES****NEW BUILD HOMES**

New wet central heating systems must be sized to operate at a maximum flow temperature of 55°C. Once installed, a heat loss calculation must be carried out to ensure the new boiler meets this standard and isn't oversized.



A mandatory air tightness test is required.



Gas boilers in new builds must now have a minimum efficiency score of 92%, while oil boilers must meet 91% - or 86% if it's a combi boiler.



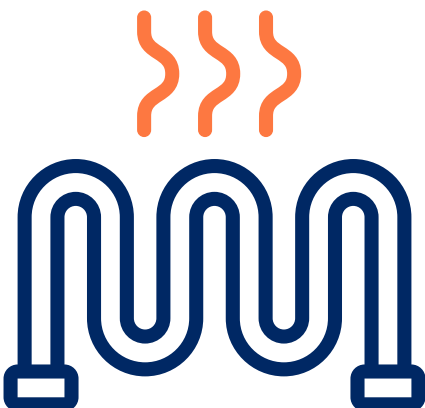
Property developers will need to provide the owners of the new home with detailed information on their heating controls, including where they are, what they do, and how to maintain comfort and minimise energy use.



Any exposed pipework must be insulated, and thermostatic radiator valves must be in place on radiators in all rooms other than where the thermostat is installed. The system must be balanced, as well as flushed, cleaned, and inhibitor added in accordance with BS 7593.

**EXISTING PROPERTIES**

New or full replacement wet central heating systems – including all radiators and pipework – should be sized for a maximum flow temperature of 55°C. If the property doesn't allow for the system to be sized in this way, it should be designed for the lowest achievable flow temperature possible. This is to make it easier to retrofit heat pumps in the future.

**TOP TIP**

Part L favours renewable and low-carbon energy sources over traditional alternatives, so products like solar panels and heat pumps are now key to help pass SAP10 requirements. In fact, Part L states that any new-build properties with gas central heating or an electric boiler must have solar PV by law. If not, you must instead install a ground or air source heating system to meet the SAP10 requirements.

Part L also recommends that wastewater heat recovery systems – which are also available in Jewson's range – are used in new build properties. The systems can convert heat that is lost down the drain into heat for new water and can be retrofitted into existing bathrooms or installed into new ones.

All products are available in Jewson's Building for the Future range.

## FUTURE HOMES STANDARD

The Future Homes Standard is a new piece of legislation that all new build homes must comply to. Its aim is to ensure that new homes built from 2025 onwards will produce 75-80% less carbon emissions than homes built under the current Building Regulations, aiming to decarbonise the housebuilding industry by focusing on improving heating, hot water systems, and reducing heat waste.

With the changes set to come into place soon, we asked tradespeople and builders about their awareness of the legislation and how it might impact them.

We found that only 23% of the industry are aware of the upcoming changes and how it will impact their job. Of them, 30% say it will increase the costs to their business, while 31% say it won't impact their business at all. Additionally, 17% say it gives them an opportunity to enhance their reputation, while 18% say they will require additional training and upskilling to ensure they're working compliantly.

### ADVICE:

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOMES STANDARD ENTAIL?

As part of the legislation, very high quality building fabric (e.g. structural materials, insulation), triple glazing standards and low-carbon heating through heat pumps will replace their older, less efficient counterparts. This, combined with additional regulation targeting existing homes, will contribute to reducing the UK's carbon emissions and achieving its net zero target by 2050.

– Source: CBRE

### OUR VIEW

“Being part of the STARK Group allows Jewson to leverage European expertise in sustainability. This gives us a unique opportunity to pass on best practices and lessons from our European colleagues to our UK customers, ensuring they're prepared for how the regulations will affect them every day.

”Part L of the Building Regulations is crucial to the industry because it sets the foundation for energy efficiency, fostering sustainable building practices that directly enhance comfort and wellbeing, while reducing our environmental impact. As such, the Future Homes Standard will push tradespeople to meet higher energy efficiency and sustainability benchmarks.

“The data shows there is progress being made, but there is more that can be done and at Jewson, we want to make this process both educational and rewarding by ensuring easy access to innovative products, expert advice, and everything else they might need to build sustainably and with confidence.”

Sabrina Passley, Head of Sustainability for STARK Building Materials UK



## LIFESTYLE AND WELLBEING OF THE TRADES

Working in construction can often be a physically demanding job, and while many might think hard labour keeps them fit, it's often hard to commit to healthy eating habits and additional exercise due to long working hours and time spent on the road. As well as this, it can be difficult to make time for the necessary health appointments that ensure you're functioning as you should be.

For the first time, we wanted to use our Trade Trends report to delve into tradespeople and builders' relationships with their physical wellbeing, to see if more could be done to create a healthy construction workforce nationwide.

We found that trades agree that being healthy impacts them professionally, with the majority (87%) saying they're able to do their job better if they feel fitter. What's good to hear is that 58% have found a good balance between their working hours and physical exercise. On average, tradespeople and builders spend 2.6 hours a week exercising – which relates to any physical activities they do outside of their job. However, more than a quarter (26%) don't do any physical activity outside of working hours.

Despite so many saying they commit to exercise, the figures reveal that many aren't focusing on their overall wellbeing. A quarter (25%) say they've missed healthcare appointments because they find it hard to take time off work, and almost three in ten (29%) say their job makes it hard to eat a healthy diet. A further 40% say they find it hard to relax and unwind, despite 87% saying it's important to look after your mental health.

**26%**

of tradespeople don't do any physical activity outside of their working hours.

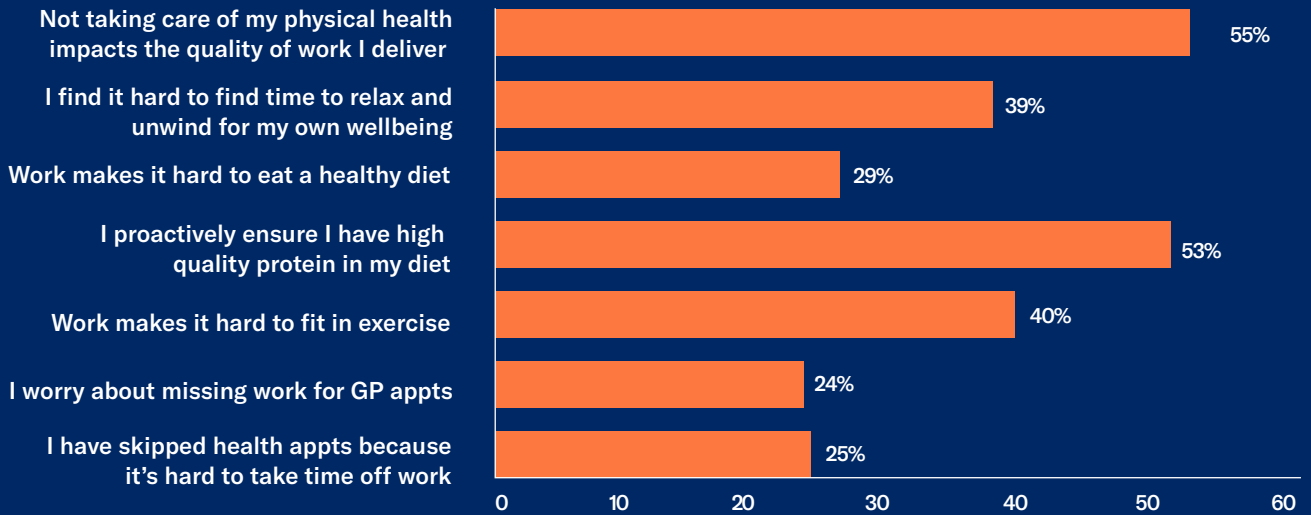
**87%**

of tradespeople say they can do their job better if they feel fitter.





## TRADESPeOPLE AND BUILDERS REVEAL MORE ABOUT THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING



Gavin Crane, CEO for charity Band of Builders, said:

**“The findings in this report highlight a crucial aspect of our industry that often goes overlooked – which is that there are several barriers tradespeople face in maintaining good physical health.**

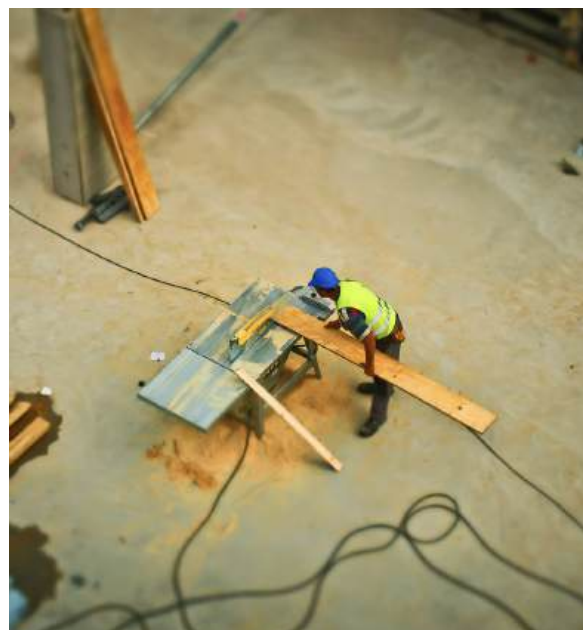
**“The demanding work schedules, lack of access to healthy food options on-site, and limited time for rest and recovery are significant challenges. Additionally, there is a culture of ‘pushing through’ pain and fatigue to complete projects to agreed schedules, which can lead to neglect of proper health practices and exacerbate injuries.**

**“However, physical health is critical for tradespeople and should be made a priority. Good physical health not only enhances performance and productivity on-site but also reduces the risk of injuries and long-term health issues, ensuring that those working in the industry can continue to do what they love safely and effectively.**

**“There is definitely more that could be done by the industry to promote better physical health. We need to foster a culture that prioritises well-being, by providing an education on the importance of physical health, offering access to fitness resources and health services, and ensuring that**

**work environments support healthy practices. Simple measures like regular health check-ups, proper nutrition, ergonomic tools, and sufficient breaks can make a big difference.**

**“At Band of Builders, we are committed to supporting our members’ wellbeing and will continue to advocate for initiatives that promote physical and mental health in the trades.”**



**“Looking after my health and wellbeing is important to me, because I’m so busy and have multiple roles – as well as running a business, I’m also a busy mum, so it takes careful planning and organisation for me to have a good work life balance. I make sure I get to the gym regularly, eat healthily, and get sleep when I need it.”**

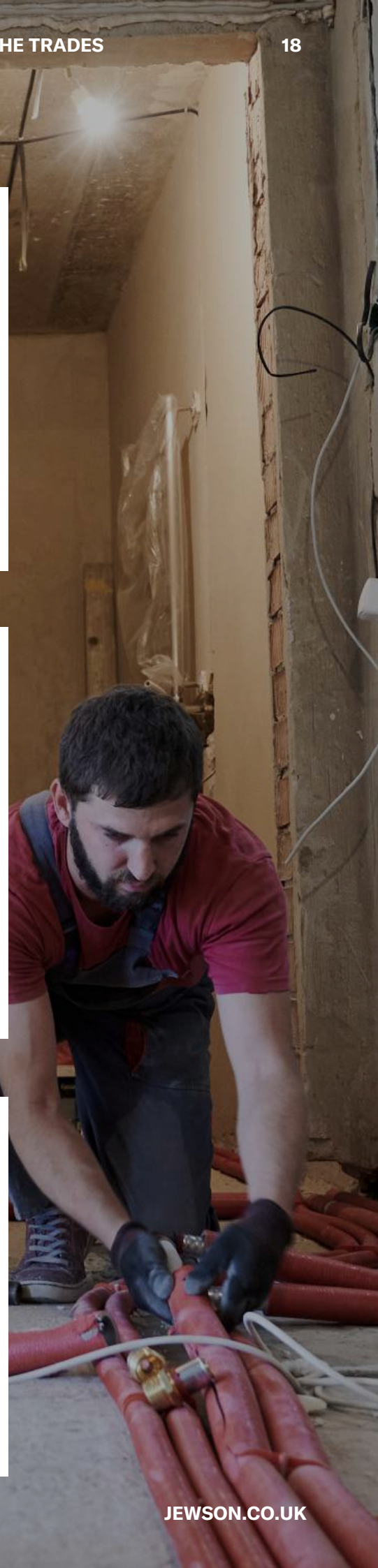
*Dee Prosser, Director, Politely Plastered*

**“The stresses of work can impact my wellbeing. I often turn to a couple of beers when feeling stressed, despite knowing they’d affect my health. The main thing I try and do to look after myself is take time away from work; I turn my phone off, shut the laptop, and don’t take calls. Looking after yourself properly will impact everything, including your business, home life, work life, and lifestyle.”**

*John Beasley, Owner, JB Interiors*

**“Feeling fit, refreshed and mentally alert definitely makes doing your job easier and more manageable. I like to get outside, take in the fresh air and then do some moderate exercise a few times a week. Being present in nature and soaking up the great outdoors is a great way to be reminded that the world is a big place, and the office or site are small in comparison.”**

*Chris Warner, Managing Director, Castlethorpe Homes*





## CONCLUSION

Although a lot has changed in the year since our first Trade Trends report, and there is still economic uncertainty ahead, one thing remains true: there are a wealth of opportunities for tradespeople and builders to grow their businesses. Whether it's upskilling in sustainable building to provide customers with the energy efficient solutions they require; getting to grips with the Future Homes Standard ahead of 2025; outsourcing some of your business to free up resource or finding time to prioritise yourself so you feel healthier, success comes in lots of different forms.

At Jewson, we're proud to partner the trades, and we are committed to providing you with all the products, services and advice you need to get ahead.

Reach out to your local branch manager today to find out how we can support you, or use any of our help resources below.

### Helpful resources:

-  [Jewson.co.uk](https://www.jewson.co.uk)
-  [Building for the Future](#)
-  [On The Tools](#)
-  [Band of Builders](#)
-  [Federation of Master Builders](#)