



Delivering the Highways Agency equality objectives – January 2014 progress report

Achievements and aspirations



An update on how we are making a difference

In 2012 we set ourselves [four equality objectives](#) based on careful consideration of a wealth of [external](#) and [internal information](#). In the early stages we focussed on [gathering momentum](#) – bringing together working groups, engaging with stakeholders, and plotting a course of action. Activity during this second year has built on those foundations and taken focused action, by learning more about what helps and hinders our efforts to make a difference to customers and staff. We have also started to think about our aspirations for the future as we move towards becoming a publically owned corporation in spring 2015.

This report, achievements and aspirations, provides a summary of our progress to date and gives a feel for our thinking for the future.



As our Chairman Alan Cook explains to staff:

“As an organisation the Highways Agency is going to change in the months and years ahead. Whatever shape or form our organisation is in the future, equality and diversity should be at the top of our agenda. What I am looking for is an organisation that is thoughtful, caring, and considerate and thinks through the results of its actions on staff, the supply chain and road users across the country.”

Service delivery objective 1

To encourage our supply chain to take the next incremental step in improving equality outcomes.

Resources and commitment



David Poole, Director of Commercial and Procurement, leads the working group involved in this objective and says:

“ Our supply chain has a critical part to play in delivering the Highways Agency’s equality and diversity agenda. Employing more than 25,000 people on Highways Agency projects, it is often the supply chain that is the face of the Highways Agency. It is through their performance and experience on the network that our commitment to equality and diversity will be judged. We have taken focused steps this year to make our equality agenda clear to our suppliers, as employers, designers and builders of public infrastructure or supply chain managers. Our aim has been to support and encourage them to take their next incremental step on their equality journeys.”

Achievements

Collaboration to build and share good practice

- Established a supplier diversity forum, run and chaired by the supply chain, to ensure our suppliers are talking to each other, and that there is a level of engagement and expectation growing across the industry.

As part of an annual speaker programme designed to educate and stimulate our thinking, national training organisation CITB presented work they have been doing on equality and diversity. Afterwards they commented on the level of engagement of the group.

“ It is very heartening to see such a high-profile, even elite, group just getting on and doing something to make a difference.”

- Created five working groups involving a range of our suppliers that look at evidence, best practise and seek improvements against:
 - baseline data
 - employment
 - service delivery – including diversity in design and infrastructure
 - supply chain management – including site operations and considering the public and neighbours when on site
 - communication.

Development of a voluntary self assessment framework

- Developed the requirement statement and evaluation criteria for an approved list of equality framework providers for use from mid-2014.

Engagement with supplier chain leaders

- Delivered webinars with our suppliers across the whole of our industry, resulting in positive feedback and constructive follow up.
- Offered and delivered tailored input to our suppliers' senior management teams to communicate our equality and diversity expectations and to help them prepare for their next stages.

Monitoring incremental improvements to performance

- Conducted a review of minimum requirement that suppliers must undertake before they can compete for Highways Agency business. The categories on sustainability and inclusion were strengthened to make the Highways Agency's expectations clearer.
- Gathered a rich evidence base from suppliers, which has resulted in a better understanding of our collective performance and areas to focus and improve upon.
- Included a category called promoting diversity and inclusion in our supplier recognition scheme to let the industry know the importance we place on this topic, and to assess, compare, and share good practice.

Promoting diversity and inclusion – the winners for 2013

Amey plc – for their work in the Midlands region which demonstrated:

- an excellent record of embedding diversity and inclusion within scheme design and delivery, as well as providing support to their workforce
- careful consideration of community needs and the impact on those with protected characteristics, in terms of road users and non-motorised users
- a proactive approach to foster good relations within local communities through their volunteer days initiative
- commitment to expand the skills base of their employers
- evidence of sharing good practice between the workforce, their supply chain and local communities with the aim of raising performance.

Atkins – for promoting diversity and their work on gender balance, which included:

- sponsorship of more than 200 female employees in an externally-run women's development programme over the last two years
- recognition by *The Times* newspaper as one of the top 50 employers for women in 2013

- development of a gender balance improvement plan for the UK that incorporates:
 - a new careers website which represents Atkins as an employer of choice, to make them more appealing to females and working mothers
 - job descriptions (where appropriate) that advertise flexible working opportunities
 - briefing all recruitment partners on the commitment to improve gender balance and the expectation for gender-balanced shortlists where possible.

Our aspirations

David Poole adds:

“By 2016 we aim to have made a real difference in our industry. We want the industry to feel refreshed, and we want to be able to evidence that change in terms of the outcomes that people see.”



Graham Dalton Highways Agency CEO presenting a winners award for promoting diversity and inclusion to Kelly Kilby and Tony Meehan from Atkins.

Service delivery objective 2

To improve our understanding of, and responsiveness to, the needs of protected groups within local communities that are affected by our work on the strategic road network.

Resources and commitment



Vanessa Gilbert, a director in the Highways Agency's Network Delivery and Development directorate, leads the working group involved in this objective and says:

“ We need to design and deliver schemes and conduct maintenance work that takes account of the needs of road users and local residents, and does not create any unnecessary physical barriers to employment and services.”

Achievements

Review processes, procedures and guidance to identify local needs

- Produced a work plan to use to review a sample number of non-motorised user audits by region to assess usage and effectiveness of interventions. As a result, we have started to identify best practice and improve our targeting of interventions that will provide the most benefit, particularly to disabled people.
- Identified key procedures to be updated in line with the public sector equality duty.

Review work programme to direct spend on improvements

- Commissioned a stock take review of our work on improving accessibility to ensure the budget is spent on those facilities that will make the most significant difference to disabled people.
- Presented the Highways Agency's approach to an expert in interpreting the public sector equality duty, to check we are in line with not just the letter but also the spirit of the law. This confirmed our approach and gave us a clear focus for monitoring.
- Conducted a review of our value management guidance to support the inclusion of disability, accessibility and legal requirements in scheme design.

Identify good practise for responding to community needs

- Offered tailored support to suppliers delivering our new asset support contracts – which the Highways Agency uses for its maintenance and improvement work – and then delivered workshops to support the development of their work to improve both employment outcomes and community outcomes.

Review our maintenance and small improvement schemes in relation to disability accessibility

- Reviewed a few completed schemes to ascertain how they have taken account of the needs of disabled people, which will influence how we target future interventions.

Our aspirations

Vanessa Gilbert adds:

“ By 2016 we want to publish evidence of good practice, including the outcomes from the improvements we will have made. We will have a more comprehensive knowledge of the needs of disabled people and people with protected characteristics in relation to the strategic road network, using this to inform the delivery of all relevant projects.”



Road schemes and maintenance work needs to take into account the needs of all road users and the local communities.

Employment objective 3

To promote an inclusive culture where the needs of a diverse workforce are valued and promoted.

Resources and commitment



Pete Martin, from the Highways Agency’s Traffic Management directorate, leads the working group involved with this objective and says:

“ Like most good organisations, the Highways Agency strives to create a working culture in which all people are treated with respect, are encouraged to meet their potential and are able to contribute to the performance of our business. It’s important that these aren’t just words and so every year the Highways Agency monitors the impacts of our employment policies, and staff survey returns by different groups, to understand the experiences of our colleagues. As a result of this feedback, our focus has been on disability equality and, while there is more to do, we have made progress.”

Achievements

Analysis of evidence to understand the needs of disabled staff:

- Initiated and analysed the 2013 staff survey, which revealed a slight improvement in response rates and the discrimination and harassment category.
- Conducted a dedicated disability survey to focus our actions on the issues that are important for disabled staff and their line managers. We communicated the results to staff.

Address issues identified via our disability survey, networks and evidence:

- Completed an internal audit of our reasonable adjustment procedure, which will result in an exercise to streamline the process.
- Conducted a facilities and accessibility audit in all our offices and regional control centres to identify where we can make improvements.
- Appointed a board member as the mental health champion and leader of the Highways Agency’s mental health working group.



Stephen Dauncey, Director of Finance and Business Services, says:

“ I volunteered to be the mental health champion. I’ve set up a dedicated working group which comprises a cross-section of people from across the organisation, and includes a lot of people with personal experience of mental health issues. That’s extremely important because we learn from people’s past experiences and it helps us to see the challenge ahead, and what we need to do in the workplace. This is not only about having the right policies in place; it’s about having the right behaviours in place, and the right management and leadership in these areas.”

- To coincide with world mental health day, the time to change pledge was signed by our mental health champion in October 2013.
- Developed a reasonable adjustment agreement specifically for mental health, in conjunction with the mental health working group, Access for All disability network, and trade unions. Launched in October 2013.

- Initiated the development of a package to improve line manager awareness of mental wellbeing and mental health-related illness, and reviewed existing stress-related products to further support individuals.
- Finalised the line manager mental wellbeing awareness package, with planned delivery of initial sessions during March 2014. (This material was developed by Remploy in conjunction with members of the mental health working group.)
- Organised ‘wellness’ events across a number of locations involving a host of external professional support organisations.
- Arranged for Remploy to visit six locations, participate in a mental health workshop, and contribute to an internal video to promote their mental health support services to our staff.
- Expanded the Access for All disability network across all regions.
- Extended unconscious bias training to all managers.
- Completed a visual image audit to identify where a further stock of diversity images are required for use in our communications.
- Reasonable adjustment agreement for general disabilities was developed in conjunction with Access for All and launched in November 2013.
- Initiated our diversity week programme and recommended the theme of disability confidence – based on feedback from the disability survey.

Increase disability declaration on the Highways Agency's HR and payroll system:

- Achieved a slight improvement in declaration rates and collaborated with the Department for Transport and cross-government colleagues to share best practice.
- Instigated the design of a new communications product to encourage voluntary declaration.

Our aspirations

Pete Martin adds:

“ By 2016 we would like to see an increase in declaration rates, better awareness of equality and diversity (including disability and mental health issues), robust management capability, and the operation of a streamlined and effective reasonable adjustment process.”



Graham Dalton spending some time with our current graduates focused on earning their professional qualifications.

Employment objective 4

To successfully encourage talented people from a broad range of backgrounds to join and progress through the Highways Agency.

Resources and commitment



Martin Fellows, a director from the Highways Agency's Strategy and Planning directorate, leads the working group for this objective and says:

“ We know talent doesn't come in one guise. It is essential we hold on to our talented people, we are attractive to a diversity of applicants, and once within rank and file people know it is merit and competence that count for progression. Although it has taken us a while to select the right people to drive this objective, the group is now in place and beginning to make a real difference.”

Achievements

- Retained the positive about disability (two ticks) accreditation for the sixth year running.
- Participated in the Civil Service-wide positive action pathway programme, which is targeted at under-represented groups reaching senior levels, and will promote the next cohort during 2014.

- Gathered evidence and produced a strategic delivery plan to focus activities on career development and temporary recruitment allowance, job design, and the way we work.
- Instigated a review (which is nearing completion) to determine the extent of business travel and assess the impacts on work-life balance.
- Delivered a presentation to the Highways Agency's senior leadership team to launch and seek support for the strategy and future intentions, including a fresh approach to job design and career development opportunities.
- Supported the partnership of a group of Highways Agency and private sector women in forming an independent, midlands based women in transport group The inaugural event focused on managing national projects and the skills women contribute to challenging projects.

Our aspirations

Martin Fellows adds:

“ By 2016 our aim is to have a much better understanding of what enables a diversity of talent to flourish and to have developed approaches that work in influencing both the make up and culture of our organisation.”

Raising awareness – diversity week



The message across all directorates from Simon Sheldon-Wilson, Traffic Management Director, executive board member, and chair of the small internal group responsible for organising diversity week, was:

“ I encourage everyone across our organisation to build their equality and diversity understanding. The learning in this environment never stops.”

With this statement in mind the Highways Agency used national diversity week and international disability day to launch an awareness programme, initially starting with the theme of striving to be a disability confident organisation. Highways Agency events included:

A road show exhibition – organised in all offices and control centres during 2-6 December 2013 and included:

- promotion of e-learning material and opportunities to tailor online training material

- interactive material, case studies and a full range of professional information on a wide range of disabilities and organisations
- an internal video that included a leading member of the Access for All network, the Highways Agency’s chairman and other leaders discussing current initiatives, progress and aspirations (forming part of a fuller awareness programme commencing with Highways Agency-wide briefing discussions in January 2014)
- meetings for disability network Access for All were organised in six offices during diversity week
- discussions with more than 200 staff and subsequent sessions at group events to offer advice on disability issues and available support.

A staff photography competition – Highways Agency staff were invited to submit images to demonstrate the components of a disability confident organisation. The winning photograph was selected by staff using an online voting survey. It is now available on the [Highways Agency's Flickr page](#).



Our visual media editor's said:

“The photograph has good composition and makes successful use of the point of view perspective which has created a strong and positive image of accessibility”

The competition was supported by the sports and social group within the Highways Agency.

Collaborative and supporting events

A webinar and workshop on accessibility and inclusive design

In partnership with Atkins and CH2M Hill, the Highways Agency held a workshop on 2 December 2013. In total 25 staff (with more than 500 years of experience in influencing the design of the built environment) from 13 different consultancies attended.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Mark Dyer, CH2M Hill's accessibility and inclusive design specialist, whose projects include the Olympic and Paralympics Games in London and Rio, as well as the FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

The webinar enabled staff and our supply chain to:

- share information and hear world-class thinking on the subject
- gain insights into what accessibility and inclusion means in practical terms and the barriers that society often unwittingly creates for disabled people
- reflect on what could be learned and applied to our own practise in relation to roads.

Supply chain activity for diversity week – a number of our supply chain partners used the opportunity to promote their own equality agendas, some of which are showcased below.

EM Highway Services Ltd used diversity week to promote their equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) and respect agenda. Nearly 1,000 participants received a toolbox talk, the ED&I framework and other linked material. More than 70 per cent of EM staff completed the voluntary tasks and provided feedback.

Vicky Worthington, Corporate HR Manager with EM Highway Services Ltd, said:

“ We have been really encouraged as a business by the responses from our employees during diversity week. The activity has provided us with some excellent ideas and suggestions to ensure EM keeps this essential topic alive and relevant to our employees.”

Morgan Sindall and BAM Nuttall – which as bmJV are joint venture partners – work on the M1 junctions 39 to 42 smart motorways scheme in West Yorkshire. They devised and ran a carefully tailored event to help their workforce understand the barriers faced by disabled colleagues, including hidden disabilities, colour blindness, hearing impairment and learning difficulties, and how they can proactively work together to address and overcome these.

Samantha French, Morgan Sindall’s strategic inclusion and community manager, explains:

“ The event was specifically designed to be relevant to the entire workforce. Given the successful outcome of the event, another is planned on site around March 2014.”

Parsons Brinckerhoff ran an event in their Godalming office, as well as a webinar on the theme of epilepsy in the workplace that involved a speaker from the Meath Epilepsy Trust. The initiative covered the stigma associated with epilepsy, increasing understanding and practical support, including reasonable adjustments.

Rachel Skinner, Parsons Brinckerhoff’s director of marketing and communications for Europe, says:

“ Personally, I was very impressed with the personal touch that was achieved by the speakers, and the empathy shown by the attendees.”



Alan Rowley, a member of our Access for All disability network, commented on diversity week:

“ I am really passionate about Access of All (the Highways Agency disability network) and was pleased that diversity week focused on the barriers that disabled people sometime face, and highlighted the variety of actions that are being taken to help break down these barriers.”

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