



# Delivering the Highways Agency equality objectives – January 2015 progress report

## Perspectives on progress



## An update on how we are making a difference



### **A foreword from Ginny Clarke – Equality Champion and Director of Strategy and Planning.**

“ In 2012 the [Highways Agency’s four year equality objectives](#) were published and, on an annual basis, we have provided progress reports. This report continues that process.

‘However, 2015 marks an historic period for our organisation, because subject to legislation, from April 2015 we will become a publicly owned company called Highways England with responsibility for delivering the roads investment strategy. It will be particularly important to appreciate the diversity of our customers, communities and staff and to utilise the diversity of talent available to deliver this programme of work.

‘In terms of our equality objectives we could have decided to continue with our current plans until 2016. We have, however taken the opportunity to get our equality champions and practitioners together to listen to feedback from staff, review progress and plan ahead with our new responsibilities in mind. To be honest, it was a watershed moment as we debated the reasons why some aspects have been challenging, as well as suggesting more ambitious proposals for the future. As a result, each champion is working with colleagues to develop new equality objectives that will run for a period of five years.’”

# Service delivery objective 1

To encourage our supply chain to take the next 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:**

“ The significant increase in investment ahead of the industry in the next few years is both a challenge and a major opportunity for us. We, along with our supply chain, want to ensure significant progress in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We need to change the way it ‘feels’ to work in this sector so we can attract, develop and retain a broader range of talent, this will be critical to our success. Our growing workload will also be impacting on much greater numbers of people, so we have to become more responsive to communities to make sure we get things right for them as well as for road users. ”

## Our suppliers’ equality performance is important because:

The sector is facing a skills shortage - attracting people from the widest talent pool is essential – particularly if they are part of delivering an increased programme of work.

As part of our transformation to Highways England, we have committed to building our products and services around our customers and the communities in which we operate.

More than 90 per cent of our spending is through the supply chain – so our reputation is in their hands.

## Achievements

### Fostering collaborative networks

- The supplier diversity forum is a voluntary best practice network established by the Agency but run and chaired by the supply chain. Members have agreed to collect and share baseline data on diversity, which we will continue to collate and analyse at no cost. The forum has doubled in size to around 30 representatives from 20 of our key first-tier suppliers.
- Three webinars were held during 2014 with senior influential representatives from our key suppliers taking part. To date, close to 100 participants from 35 organisations have now attended a presentation sharing our diversity aspirations.

## Providing useful tools

“ The Highways Agency does not dictate what its suppliers’ equality and diversity strategies should be, but we aim to support them in taking the next steps towards improving equality outcomes; for example, by signposting a number of equality frameworks. That is why we encourage them to look at three particular equality frameworks which our evidence-based assessments indicate can make a real difference.”

### **Nicky Ensert - Sustainability, Equality and Diversity Team and Women in Transport Board Member.**

- Appreciating that a structured, evidence-based approach is critical to sustaining positive equality results, we engaged with recognised experts to establish which equality products or frameworks would be suitable for the sector to benchmark its performance.
- Three equality frameworks were identified through a robust selection process, as being closely aligned to our requirements and we [published details of the frameworks](#) on our website,
- In September 2014 we organised a supplier event which enabled members of the supplier diversity forum to meet each of the framework providers and hear what they could offer.

## Sharing our learning

- In November 2014 the influential Equal Opportunities Review published an article about our approach to promote inclusion in the supply chain. In addition, we have been invited to join the industry Fairness, Inclusion and Respect Group, and have been contributing to diversity research conducted by the [Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation \(CIHT\)](#).
- In January 2015, an article was published by New Civil Engineer about the [positive impacts of Strategic Alignment Review Tool \(StART\)](#) and the use of equality frameworks from the perspective of supply chain partners.

## Utilising our procurement processes to influence

- We’ve added EDI requirements to various stages of our procurement processes to make our ambitions clear to the supply chain. For instance, we developed our Strategic Alignment Review Tool (StART) through collaboration with the construction and road maintenance industry. This toolkit will test the alignment of our key suppliers to our strategic and procurement plans. It asks prospective suppliers to show us how they:
  - Ensure under-represented groups have equality of opportunity to join and progress
  - Establish and demonstrate a fully trained, qualified and competent workforce
  - Create an environment in which the differences individuals bring are valued, respected and used.

- Scores from the latest round of supplier selection using StART show that the lowest performing suppliers from the previous exercise have now made significant improvements in this area – up to 36 per cent.
- StART feedback reports have been used to promote the benefits of equality frameworks to companies that achieved low scores in relation to inclusion.
- In November 2014, 26 companies were appointed to our collaborative delivery framework – our largest ever. As part of the selection process, suppliers were assessed on their inclusion work for their people and the customers and communities we serve. Performance matrices for inclusion are currently being developed building on experience of the three aligned equality framework providers.

### Recognising and celebrating achievements

To reward those who have demonstrated good practice and strong progress, we've included a 'promoting diversity and inclusion' category within our supplier recognition scheme.

- It is encouraging that this year both the winner and the highly commended companies have used either an equality framework or another structured way to drive change. This reinforces the benefits of using these tools, particularly as submissions in this category have increased by 60 per cent from last year.

### The winner - East Midlands Highways and Recycling Lives

East Midlands Highways and Recycling Lives demonstrated that diversity and inclusion is an integral part of their work to improve their commercial performance. They have ventured beyond traditional recruitment routes to embrace diversity of talent - with successful outcomes.



### The highly commended - BAM Nuttal Morgan Sindall JV

What set this submission apart was not the plethora of apprenticeship, NVQ, graduates or on-site learning opportunities, but the fact that these are woven into an integrated, structured, systematic approach to inclusively develop capability. Their aim is to create the conditions that lets everyone develop.



## 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



### Simon Sheldon-Wilson, Director Customer Operations and Equality Champion says:

“ Our roads provide a vital service for our customers. They have the potential to positively impact the lives of those who rely on our roads for work and for leisure and through the goods and services our network delivers. To be really successful, those working within Highways England and on our behalf in delivering our services need to represent the diversity of our customers and neighbouring communities.”

### Achievements

- To better understand and respond to the needs of the customers and communities our work affects, we developed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sifting tool (EDIT) with Mott MacDonald and other project managers from across supply chain. This tool:
  - Brings together population data with research and intelligence on the needs of different groups in relation to roads
  - Provides ‘hotspot’ identification to assist preliminary decisions
  - Applies information about the scheme and the design criteria
  - Provides an assessment outcome score
  - Enables the decision maker to progress with relevant EDI action
- Our plan is to engage with a wider group of project managers to further evolve the EDIT tool.
- We’ve also updated the *Design for Roads and Bridges Manual Authors Guidance* to further emphasise the need to consider community and diversity needs when overseeing or undertaking design work.

## Engaging with our customers

- A customer panel has been set up which consists of a cross-section of 1,000 independent people with whom we can discuss concepts, test ideas and find out how we are performing.
- Members of our executive have been active in our 'customer connections' initiative: meeting our customers, stakeholders and partners, hearing perceptions on our performance and explaining our priorities.

## Recognising and celebrating achievements

- The Highways Agency has been presented with a Milestone Award for having 1,000 sites registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme – a first for construction clients in the UK.

### **Graham Dalton, Chief Executive of the Highways Agency said:**

“ I’m delighted to accept this award on behalf of the Agency and our partners in the supply chain. We work hard to minimise disruption for drivers and limit disruption to our neighbours who live near our road network whenever we carry out maintenance or improvement work.

Customer service will continue to be a priority as we prepare to become Highways England. Through better planning, improved safety and engagement with our customers, we will deliver £11 billion of investment in our network with minimal disruption.”

## Employment objective 3

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

### Resources and commitment



**San Johal**  
**Human Resources Director:**

“ Our people are at the heart of our business and listening to their needs is important. Using staff forums, research, results of surveys and reports we are focused on improving the working environment to make it inclusive and fair for all. We are undertaking work in priority areas identified such as disability, mental health, and issues such as improving the balance of men and women working in leadership positions.

However, on its own that will not be enough. So we will spend some time thinking wider and understanding what we need to do to build diversity and inclusion considerations into the fabric of the new organisation, so that awareness is present throughout everything we do with our people.”

### Achievements

#### **Mental Health and the power of a positive working group:**

The Highways Agency continues to use its mental health working group to understand the experience of working in the organisation from a mental health and wellbeing perspective.

“ This group comprises of people from across the business, with personal experience of mental health issues that can be both life-changing and challenging. It includes people who have a mental health illness, those who care for others with mental health issues and managers who have team members with mental health illness. Since its inception in 2013, this group has doubled in size and includes members across all regions. Most importantly, as a group this is one of the most unified, productive and empowering; a force that makes a positive difference. This report provides a brief insight into the initiatives we have helped develop so far.”

**Dorothy Adams – Sustainability, Equality and Inclusion team, member of the Mental Health Working Group, and Eastern Region Access for All Network Co-chair.**

#### **Increasing understanding and capability**

- Working with Remploy, the mental health working group developed a training course to assist line managers in understanding the signs and symptoms of mental ill-health, what they can do to help their teams and where to go for further support.

“Hearing a line manager’s experience made me want to join the group and make a difference.”

**Member of staff on why they joined the mental health working group.**

- The course has now been attended by over a quarter of line managers and it’s anticipated at least half of all managers will have received this training by the spring of 2015.

“The content was valuable and helped build my confidence in knowing how to speak to members of my team about mental wellbeing issues and concerns.”

**Line manager course delegate**

**Increasing understanding and capability**

“As Trades Union leads for the Highways Agency, we were more than happy to join and support this working group. The work that the organisation has done in this group shows a valuable commitment to the good mental health of their staff. They have put several management tools in place to assist and encourage both managers and staff to deal with the stigma attached to mental health, and to allow staff the confidence to approach them with their illness and receive the much needed help they seek.”

**Dave Artis of Prospect Union and Lindsay Alder of Public and Commercial Services Union**

**Time to Talk**

- Across the Highways Agency members of the group supported the national “Time to Talk” day in February 2014 by encouraging others to talk about mental wellbeing and utilising a wide range of supporting material. Approximately 1,500 conversations took place on the day.
- Our health, safety and wellbeing week in October used the Europe-wide theme of ‘healthy workplaces manage stress’ to improve awareness of pressure and stress management amongst staff. Events across the organisation highlighted the support and information available and a number of supply chain partners gave presentations about their work in this area. In 2015 the organisation aims to work together with supply chain partners to share best practice and overcome issues.

“I became involved because it’s important to raise awareness and to stop unfair behaviour towards others because they are suffering with a mental health illness.”

**Member of staff on the importance of challenging attitudes to mental illness.**

- The key message of the week was “Stop, think, talk and listen.” There were daily articles on our intranet to share information and stimulate discussion about a number of topics that included:
  - Managing stress
  - Workplace safety
  - Mental wellbeing
  - Beyond the workplace
  - The employee assistance programme

“ I think many people are still uncomfortable talking about the subject, which is a shame really as not all injuries are physical”

**Member of staff on the need to raise awareness.**

- A reasonable adjustment agreement for mental health was developed by the working group with HR and the trade union side, to help staff and managers talk about issues and develop agreed action plans to help both the individual and the line manager.
- While sickness absence is only one measure to assess the overall mental health and wellbeing of people, we saw a reduction of 18.5% in sickness absence days attributed to mental health illness in September 2014 compared to December 2012.
- Work is underway to develop a support network for staff experiencing mental health issues, consisting of trained volunteers to offer fast and accessible advice.

“ Our people are our most important and valuable asset and just like the strategic road network, our people need to be looked after and feel safe.”

**Member of staff on why the work of the mental health working group is important.**

We recognise that mental health is a complex issue and there are limits to the help which networks and guidance can provide. The support provided seeks to complement medical and professional counselling, and to provide access to specialist advice and support.

**Sharing Learning**

- Our approach to mental health and wellbeing was publicised in the August/September 2014 issue of the Equal Opportunities Review, as an example of continued good practice.
- Our Mental Health Working group co-ordinators delivered a presentation at the National Centre for Diversity, which was also cited in the publication ‘HR Review’. Representatives will shortly be participating in a trade union conference with Prospect to talk about the work done collaboratively with both Prospect and Public and Commercial Services unions on mental health.

## Employment objective 4

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



**Graham Dalton**  
Highways Agency Chief Executive says:

“ Employing and retaining capable people to deliver our expanding programme of work is one of the challenges that we need to rise to as an industry – attracting, retaining and developing more women – is part of the solution.”

### Achievements

Research gathered by the Agency suggests that more needs to be done to increase the appeal of engineering to a wider audience.

### National Women in Engineering Day

- On 23 June 2014 the Highways Agency hosted a 'Women in Engineering' day at the Think Tank Science Museum in Birmingham. This brought together supply chain contractors from the civil engineering industry to consider ways to improve recruitment, retention and female talent progression in the sector. It also marked the Women's Engineering Society's 95th anniversary.

- The event included workshops to identify and eradicate significant and lasting gender-balance problems across the sector. Ideas ranged from outreach projects to building modern flexible working arrangements and apprenticeships.
- During the event, Chief Executive, Graham Dalton committed the Highways Agency to the Women in Science and Engineering's 'Ten Steps' initiative, which will feed into our new employment objective.

**50.8%**  
of the UK population  
are female

**31%**  
of Highways  
Agency staff  
are female

**18%**  
of Senior Civil  
Servants in the  
Highways Agency  
are female



**69%**  
of Highways  
Agency staff  
are male

**82%**  
of Senior Civil  
Servants in the  
Highways Agency  
are male

### Volunteers involved in promoting careers and networks

“ I currently work for the Highways Agency as a Service Delivery Manager overseeing a number of projects in the Midlands. Studying engineering has helped me gain an understanding of the projects I manage and gives me the opportunity to influence, check and challenge certain decisions made on the projects by the contractors designing and constructing the roads. My next goal is to become a chartered engineer by 2016. I find this challenging as I am not on a graduate scheme and so have to be fully motivated My advice for women considering a career in engineering is – you can do anything you put your mind to – just ask yourself – do you want it? If it’s yes, find a mentor and plan your route to get it.”

**Deborah Makinde - Service Delivery Manager**

“ More women are now working in this field and that’s partly due to partnership working with key stakeholders who recognise that there are women who want to join this industry and who can do well.”

**Naziya Sheikh, Pavement Engineering Advisor**

### Women in Transport Network

“ The Leading Women in the Highways Agency networking group held its first event in September and further events are planned quarterly through 2015. The Highways Agency executive team have endorsed this initiative and several members are now committed to providing insights at future events and are supporting leaders in the Agency in developing talented women across the organisation.”

**Melanie Clarke, Head of Regional Control Centres**

### Outreach work

Many women in the Agency are Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Ambassadors who undertake voluntary work to encourage girls to consider engineering careers.

“ I am a STEM Ambassador. Volunteering provides me with the opportunity to encourage girls at schools and colleges in the north west to consider engineering as a career. By using practical examples from my life and achievements as an engineer in manufacturing, consultancy and construction industries, I can explain the opportunities, challenges, success and satisfaction of engineering as a career.

The Highways Agency also encourages its staff to maintain links with their specialism, even if within the Agency their work has taken them to other fields. I believe this shows genuine commitment to encourage inclusion across the sector as well as the value of different life experiences and continuous learning. By remaining linked to their subject matters via affiliation and participation in their speciality institutes, staff can network and keep abreast of developments.”

**Lucia Fullalove: Highways Agency Lean Practitioner, STEM Ambassador and Fellow of the [Institute of Corrosion](#).**

## Attracting new talent

We started recruiting apprentices into our business in June 2013. Prior to that date, less than 2 per cent of our workforce was under the age of 25.

- Between June 2013 and April 2014 we recruited 30 business administration apprentices. Of this group 87 per cent were under the age of 25.
- Since April 2014 we recruited a further 17 apprentices, of which only 12 per cent are 25 or older.
- In early 2015 a further 24 business administrative apprentices are scheduled to join. Approximately 85 per cent of this group are under 25.

## We operate a graduate scheme.

- In November eight graduates joined the Agency, four of whom were female. As part of the recruitment campaign, advertisements were placed with the Women in Science and Engineering and Women in Engineering and Science campaigns. We also used social media to help promote the graduate opportunities.

## Positive about disability

- The Agency has been independently assessed against the five themes within the ‘positive about disability’ initiative, also known as the ‘two ticks’ scheme. This accreditation will run until 2016.

**“ I am proud to be able to take this forward each year for the Highways Agency as an employer which promotes inclusion for all. This accreditation demonstrates that we are continuing to embrace the ethos of the ‘two ticks’ initiative and have committed to the five requirements based around attracting and supporting disabled people and staff in terms of employment ”**

### **Dee Garbelotto, the Agency’s Reasonable Adjustment Manager**

- Work commenced to further improve the reasonable adjustment process to support staff with a disability. Of 90 requests received in the last quarter, 67 per cent were resolved within one week and 94 per cent within five weeks.

## Evolving equality, diversity and inclusion



**Steve Dauncey, Finance and Business Services Director, Equality and Mental Health Champion and a leader of the Transformation Programme.**

“ Our focus on diversity and equality in the workplace is essential for us to deliver the challenges presented by the Road Investment Strategy. Improving our performance in these areas is essential to achieving the high performing benchmarks that are expected of a government-owned company. Our improvement forms part of our current transformation and will help us become a fully capable corporate business with a strong equality, diversity and inclusion culture.

We will build on what we have already achieved, incorporate what staff, our customers and the supply chain have told us and will develop actions to be delivered over the next five years.”

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