

Rewarding the supply chain

Maintaining good working relationships is vital to how the Highways Agency operates. Here head of supplier development, Simon Diggle, outlines the Supplier Recognition Scheme for 2014, the changes to this year's awards, and how receiving recognition from the Agency can benefit companies



Simon Diggle going through award entries

Can you explain more about why you stage the awards?

Our annual awards programme highlights the important contribution made by the Agency's suppliers in managing and improving our network. Over 90 per cent of our spend is delivered by our supply chain so we want to highlight the valuable work our suppliers do to drive down costs and deliver even more efficient and effective customer services.

We are fairly relentless in our pursuit of performance improvements and better value but it is important to recognise the great successes and innovations that our supply chain have achieved through the year. We hope that taking time to recognise our suppliers in this way helps to show how much we value them. We are striving to be recognised as a world class road operator and our suppliers are fundamental to achieving this.

The supplier recognition awards scheme also helps to highlight and share innovations and good practice across our whole supply chain.

Previous winners of the scheme

In 2013 Concrete Repairs Ltd, a member of the extended supply chain, won an award alongside Amey. This was for developing an innovative solution for some complex structural repairs on the M5 Quinton Interchange which kept disruption to a minimum.

Also in 2013 Sign Post Solutions, an SME in partnership with EM Highway Services, scooped an award for its system to replace corroded sign posts without the need for excavations. Significant time and costs were saved compared to traditional methods.

In 2012 Electrokinetic, an SME, was highly commended alongside main contractor, Interserve. This was for the first patented technique to stabilise a road embankment on the A21 in Kent, using electricity. This retained the existing vegetation protected wildlife and delivered safety benefits by reducing traffic management.

In 2013, Amey and Concrete Repairs Ltd won an award for their work on the M5 Quinton Interchange



How are the awards different to last year?

We operate in a dynamic environment and face new challenges and changes. We are preparing to transform to a government-owned company, changing the way strategic roads are funded and managed, and face a significant rise in investment. We want to develop the capability and capacity of our workforce and develop our relationships to improve collaboration. We have therefore redesigned our awards structure to reflect these new challenges and opportunities.

We have introduced two new categories: Customer Experience and Building and Sustaining Capability. These relate to great customer service and developing skills within workforces, which many suppliers already do well. We have also expanded the scope of health and safety to place an even greater emphasis on the wellbeing and occupational health of all our people.

The seven key areas for the awards are:

- **Customer Experience (New)**
- **Building & Sustaining Capability (New)**
- **Safety, Health and Wellbeing which includes:**
 - 1 Public/road user safety
 - 2 Road worker safety
 - 3 Occupational health and wellbeing
- **Managing Down Cost/Improving Value**
- **Promoting Diversity & Inclusion**
- **Delivering Sustainable Value & Solutions**
- **Supply Chain Management**

Can suppliers enter more than one category?

There are no limits on how many categories suppliers can enter. We encourage suppliers to enter all their best projects, practices and innovations that have had a positive impact in the seven categories. It may not matter how small the innovation is, when applied across the full HA programme it can have a big impact.

We have expanded our judging panel this year to prepare for a broader range of awards. They are already looking forward to seeing a range of submissions that is as extensive and as diverse as possible.

Are the awards aimed mainly at your big projects and big contractors?

No, the awards are open to the whole of our supply chain across all supply areas. We have had some notable successes from small and medium sized companies in previous years and want to build on this further still. Several of our first tier suppliers have recognised the contributions made by their suppliers and have made joint submissions with smaller companies with whom they have collaborated closely to achieve success. It's great to see these joint efforts and partnerships rewarded through our scheme.

Electrokinetic was highly commended alongside main contractor Interserve in 2012

So what do suppliers stand to gain from entering the awards?

The feedback we get from award recipients is that they are a great motivator for their workforces. People have a real sense of achievement and recognition for their efforts. They feel they have helped the success of their company and helped the Agency achieve our goals too. Suppliers also say that winning a Highways Agency award carries kudos with other clients and can expand their profile in the marketplace.

Which winner do you particularly remember from last year and why?

Every winner provides something memorable - they must do to make it through the rigours of the judging process. The best thing about the awards is meeting people at the awards ceremony where they receive their awards direct from our chief executive (currently Graham Dalton). They clearly take pride in what they do for us on a daily basis and their professionalism and dedication is very evident.

It is especially pleasing to see teams of suppliers who have collaborated to achieve success, especially those smaller suppliers who wouldn't normally get this recognition.

My main message to suppliers is that this year's scheme is now open to entries so don't be shy and please make a submission. Remember to enter by the 24 September deadline and I hope to see you at the awards ceremony.

