

# The road to success for new talent

**Russell Wallis is the divisional director responsible for the Major Projects change programme at Highways England. He works alongside the supply chain and with other industry leaders to shape the delivery of major roads improvements which will allow the industry to attract and retain the skills required to deliver the government's £15 billion Roads Investment Strategy. In this article, he emphasises the need to invest in new talent**

**The needs of motorists are at the heart of everything we do at Highways England and with the emphasis being placed on delivering the government's £15bn roads investment strategy we will be working to deliver better journeys and provide England with the roads it deserves.**

Good transport is crucial to connecting family and friends as well as linking customers to businesses, driving economic growth. The work we are delivering increases capacity and improves the condition of our motorways and major A-roads, ultimately providing an even safer and serviceable network.

The £15bn government investment in England's roads is the most significant since the 1970s, providing Highways England

with a golden opportunity to invest in our roads, and to invest in the people who will deliver our programme. We are enhancing the existing workforce by encouraging greater diversity and ensuring that our industry is a more equal and inclusive place to work.

It's an exciting time to be in this industry, which is why it's imperative that we change the perceptions of a career in highways and urge the younger generation to continue with core subjects at school, increasing their chances of pursuing engineering related subjects, and later on gain engineering qualifications and degrees.

With the emphasis firmly on infrastructure in England, for many years to come, it will be essential for Highways England to play its part in nurturing and investing in talent, to ensure we can draw on talent and expertise to deliver an ambitious level of improvement.

*All images courtesy of Highways England*



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## Identifying skills

In a bid to identify skills, fill training gaps in the workforce and attract and retain a diverse pool of talent, we have also committed to helping the government achieve its goal of creating 30,000 apprenticeships across roads and rail by 2020.

So far, we have 48 apprentices that have achieved a qualification with us this year, all of whom will be offered permanent roles across the business, in addition to 31 graduates on programme. We have just recruited a further 27 in a number of disciplines including project management, quantity surveying, civil engineering and accountancy, with a further 12 joining the business in October.

The search continues, with 40 apprenticeship openings in project management, civil engineering, IT, HR, finance and customer service, all of which are due to start in October, and a further 30 apprentices will be recruited in January. Going forward there will also be ongoing recruitment campaigns for both apprentices and graduates.

With plenty of rewarding upcoming projects, graduates and apprentices will play an important role in achieving some of the most remarkable pieces of engineering in a generation,

from technically advanced projects like the Lower Thames Crossing, the A303 at Stonehenge and the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme, all of which will provide vital upgrades, relieve congestion, unlock growth and help to connect communities.

## The future

Looking ahead, not only will we use techniques like smart motorways to ease congestion and improve journey times, but Highways England will also play an important role in the development of technology. We are improving communication with our customers, which is making a positive impact on their journeys. Providing information in the here-and-now is really important, so we've started to use automated number plate recognition cameras to accurately determine how long vehicles take to travel between two points, before publishing these times on overhead message signs.

It is now that we need to be preparing for the future, by growing our own talent and continuing to shape Highways England into a high performing organisation. If we are going to achieve our extensive package of work, it is imperative that we lay a foundation to a more fulfilled, professionally skilled and futureproof workforce. 🚀

## Road Academies

The roads academy is a joint initiative between Highways England and the roads industry, which combined input a significant amount of expertise from both the industry and academia.

Offering a two year cross-sector leadership development programme, future leaders are challenged and supported to successfully complete and attain a postgraduate certificate in leadership and management which is validated by the University of Sussex.

The programme that takes on 18 candidates twice a year is currently looking at new ways to increase and diversify the membership of the roads academy to include more supply chain partners throughout our programme.

