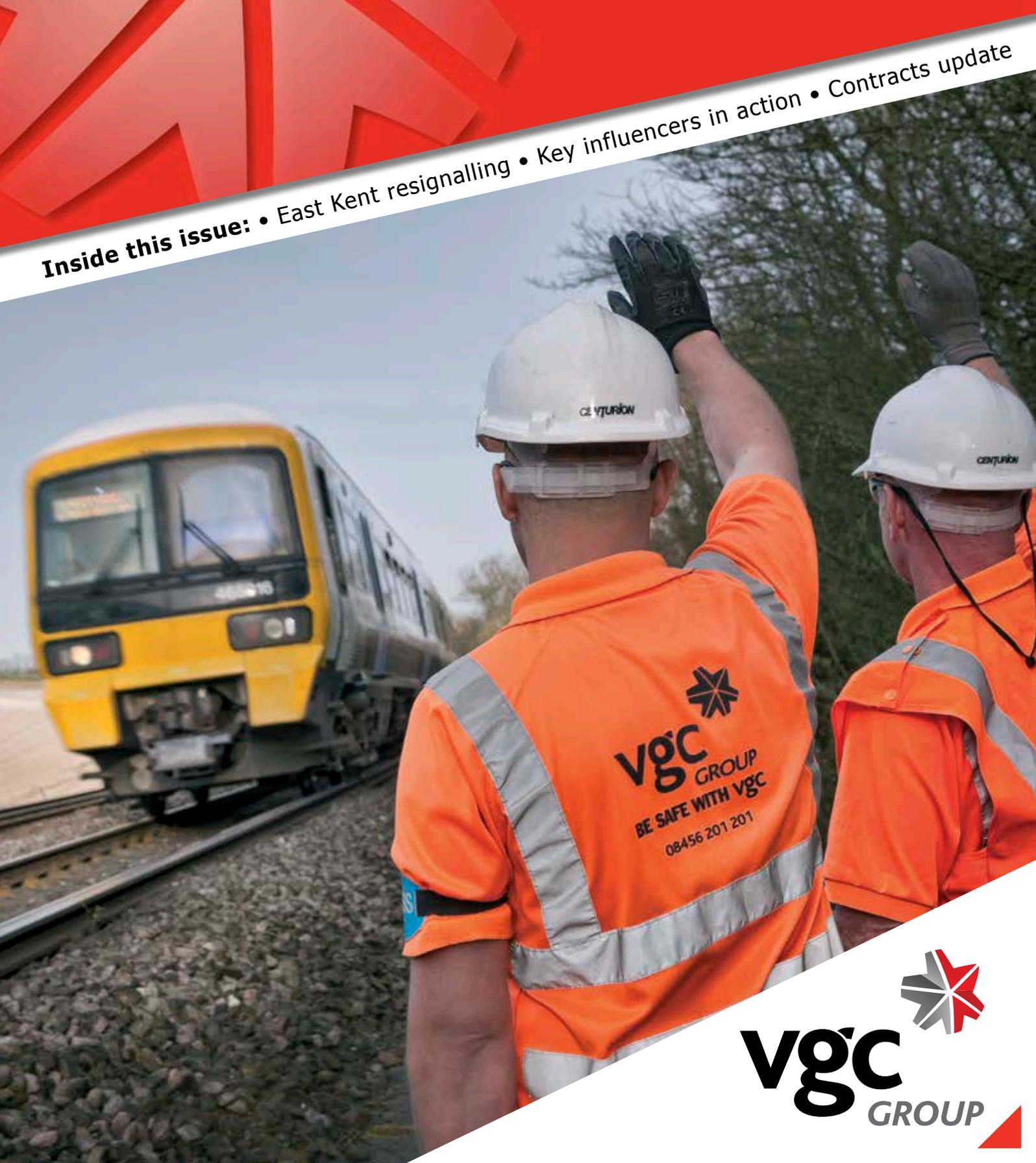


ISSUE FIVE - AUTUMN 2014

# outperformance

People, projects and services for the construction industry

Inside this issue: • East Kent resignalling • Key influencers in action • Contracts update



  
**vgc**  
GROUP



## Atkins and VGC partner to deliver essential rail upgrades in the Garden of England

Ask anyone about railways in Kent and they are sure to answer with a reference to the high speed line that links London with the Channel Tunnel. While the Eurostar track doubtless deserves the plaudits it receives, it takes the spotlight away from the hundreds of miles of essential rail that the residents of Kent depend on.

As in other parts of the country, such as Stourbridge in the East Midlands and Farnham in Surrey, VGC Rail Projects has been working with main contractor Atkins on a railway upgrade project in east Kent, which will improve asset condition and deliver operational savings and improved network integration within the region. The project is part of Network Rail's investment programme to deliver a more reliable and efficient rail service throughout the UK.

In November 2013 VGC Rail Projects was awarded the £9.3 million contract to deliver the civil engineering scope of works, and started immediately. The company's planning team co-operated with Atkins in order to re-plan the works to align with the civil engineering design and signalling installation and commissioning.

The project will migrate the signalling control of a significant part of Network Rail's Kent route into the east Kent signalling centre at Gillingham, and include approximately 33 km of cable route installation and upgrade for power, data and telecoms cables. The route works incorporate 18 under-track and four under-road crossings.

VGC is also providing foundation bases for signals, telephones and principal supply points and associated walkways, steps, hard standings, handrails and lay down areas. Other works will include vegetation clearance, seven level crossing upgrades, and extensive piled foundations.

The VGC operation is based in Rochester and undertakes much of the work during weekends and overnight. There is a total of 200 people involved in the project with a peak labour force of 120 people on-site at key times.

Jacques Kriel, director of VGC Rail Projects, says,

“ We recognised very early on that we needed to work closely with Atkins to ensure that the job was a success. VGC values the relationship it has with Atkins, which has developed over many years of collaboration on similar contracts. ”

# Forward planning and investment – the key to tackling skills shortage

There is no need for an MBA to appreciate the impact of the economic cycle on workforces throughout the country. In good times employers recruit, invest in training and skill levels rise; in bad times employers are forced to make people redundant, training budgets are cut or stopped, and skill levels stagnate and decline.

When an upturn returns, demand for skilled workers rises very quickly and employers struggle to find sufficient qualified people. While this applies across different industries, it is especially the case in construction and engineering.

Over 30 years ago, VGC recognised the conundrum of skills shortages and addressed it in a coordinated manner. The company decided to create a bank of skilled staff that would be available to work on projects as required. By also investing in training its people, VGC ensured that staff had the expertise to tackle urgent client projects when required.

Encouraged by the success of its initial investment, the company decided to expand its efforts to anticipate and diminish the impact of the shortage of skilled workers. Among the company's initiatives were the introduction of apprenticeships, internships and work experience, and other formal training programmes.

VGC Group Chairman Sean Fitzpatrick, who has been overseeing the company's approach over the years, says: "In every recession there is an opportunity to position yourself for the inevitable upturn when it comes. The secret is to make your plans in good time. This often means investing in resources and staff development when business confidence is low."

## skills



Strong partnerships with clients have meant that VGC has been involved in the early planning stages of projects and thus able to anticipate demand for skilled staff. By being 'ahead of the game' both VGC and its clients can be more thorough in their planning and preparation and ensure that skill levels, sustainability, equality and diversity and other best practice standards are satisfied.

This approach has an important implication for VGC's ability to attract and retain the best people, as Group Services Director Ciara Pryce explains, "We've been able to attract and retain excellent people because we show them how much we value them. The way we continuously train and develop our staff demonstrates that we're committed to tackling the skills shortage in industry head on, and is fundamental to being able to deliver exceptional service to our clients."

By having a specialist training division, VGC Training - recently awarded an 'outstanding' status by the National Skills Academy for Rail Engineering - the group has been able to maintain and develop the skill levels of staff and management as well as assist external clients with their training needs. In doing so, it is playing its part in tackling the skills shortage that is impacting on the construction and engineering sector at present.



**Interns:** George Marling and Nathan Sullivan enjoyed paid internships that helped them to learn more about construction and engineering, and to apply the learning from their degree programmes.



Aasim Kahn (standing) and Bobby Hayre joined VGC as part of the company's three-year civil engineering graduate programme.



## Real benefits flow from VGC's Be Safe by Choice programme

Two years after VGC introduced its behaviour based safety programme "Be Safe by Choice", the group can point to real benefits.

"Be Safe by Choice" has been well received by people throughout the group with a steady rise in the number of close call reports. At the heart of the success of the programme is the fact that staff recognise that Be Safe by Choice is a force for good, and staff engagement ensures that potentially dangerous situations are avoided.

A key element in the success of the programme has been the role of 'key influencers'. Having been trained to observe, engage and coach their colleagues on good safety practices, key influencers have been able to identify and anticipate potentially dangerous situations and liaise with their colleagues, line managers or clients to find a solution.

Terry Dutton Wells, VGC's HSQE director, says, "I'm delighted with the way our key influencers have stepped up to the mark and are helping to improve safety performance throughout all our work areas.

"We will keep encouraging everyone to think about the good reasons we have safety controls, rather than just issuing instructions. A 'no risk' attitude will help to ensure accident rates continue to fall."

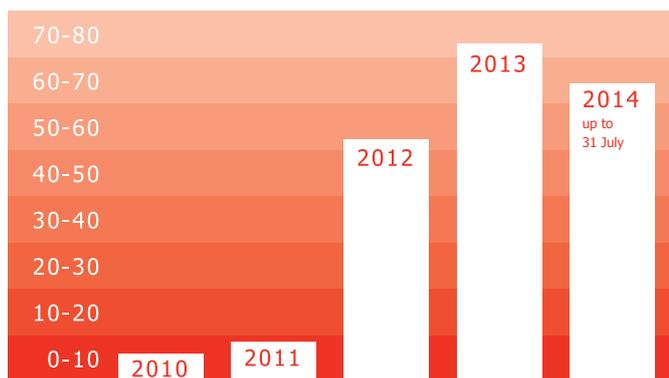


Figure 1: Increase in close-call reports (2014 figure to 31 Jul)

The British Safety Council audit in spring 2014 noted:

“ VGC's behaviour-based safety programme 'Be Safe by Choice' has improved staff participation in health and safety management. ”

Ensuring that key influencers benefit from the three-day course they undertake means that their work commitments have to be managed.

The course and the follow-up engagement and coaching ensure that they are equipped with the skills to identify unsafe behaviour before accidents happen. Key influencers represent an investment, with benefits far outweighing the cost.

"We're here for the long haul and absolutely committed to Be Safe by Choice", says Terry Dutton Wells. "We'll keep training and supporting our key influencers because our aim is to reduce safety risks to the lowest possible level."

## BE SAFE WITH vgc

### Safety statistics

Hours worked over last 12 months	1,860,843
Days since last RIDDOR reportable accident	152
Hours worked since last reportable accident	831,455
12 month RIDDOR AFR*	0.05

As of 30 June 2014. \*Accidents per 100,000 hours worked

## Key influencers in action

Dennis Pollard, drainage foreman on the LUL contract, became a key influencer in June 2013.



"I thought the programme would be about teaching us what to do and not to do - 'sergeant major giving orders' type of stuff. But it isn't: it is about people: why they do what they do, and about how you can talk to people.

If you just tell someone off as if you're a parent and they're a child, they'll ignore you, or get annoyed. If you speak like an adult to an adult, you'll get a much better reaction. So if someone is doing something unsafe - say, using a disc cutter without goggles - you might tap them on the shoulder, and put a question: "Excuse me, mate, what would happen if something went in your eye?"

They're likely to answer, "Oops, I'd go blind" and then they'd take action. That is what you want: a win-win situation. It's about asking questions instead of telling; and nine times out of ten it will work. If someone's really awkward you have to keep going. You might have to speak to the supervisor if it still doesn't work, but I've never found I've needed to.

There is a key influencer meeting each month, as well as regular informal meetings with the other three key influencers here at the LUL depot, and it's been good to get to know them. We are the eyes and ears of safety for VGC; we make sure we get the little things right to stop them turning into big problems.

I want to keep myself and everyone else safe. You have to look out for each other - at the end of the day, we all want to go home safely."

Graham Walker, foreman on the north-west electrification project, attended training at the end of June 2014.



"It's about talking to people, and it looks at ways of dealing with people who are difficult. It was really interesting to watch how people reacted differently when we tried out different ways of doing and saying the same thing."

## Commendations

**Congratulations and thanks to the following people, who have demonstrated our culture of 'outperformance' - we are very grateful to you.**



Tadhg Bolger won a quality award from Morgan Sindall for his attention to detail in installing and finishing work at Heathrow T2.



Pat Regan, Harry Sims, Lewis Horne, Adrian Seager and Gareth Morris were commended by Atkins for their safe work attitude.



Alan Axon and Paul Gregory were thanked for their help by Tata Steel



Derrick Ashley and William Benjamin were given awards by Skanska for keeping a safe working area.



Jitesh Kumar Chandegara and Iqbal Cheema were commended by Skanska Balfour Beatty for their work on the M25 Connect Plus project.



Kelvin Austin was commended by MACE for his commitment and dedication to the Heathrow project.



Ben Russell, Oliver Russell, George Malone, Liam Smith and Steve Turner were thanked by Balfour Beatty Rail for their dedicated work.

### 'Be Safe by Choice' awards:



Trevor Scoble, Nigel Pearce, Garry Smith, Tony Trevaskis and Alan Axon were commended for highlighting risks on the railways and ensuring that work was carried out safely. Tom Shofield, John Grant, John McKenzie, Richie Cooke and Nigel Hughes were commended for professional conduct and awareness of safety.

### Outperformance awards:



Will Williams, Tadhg Bolger, Richard Cooke, Kevin Henry, Costel Alexndry, Lee Van-Cliff, Shabul Hussain, Kelvin Austin, John McKenzie, Tom Schofield, Mihai Gilgor, Shane Jupp, Adam Hards, Patrick Alexander, Alex Delaney, Simon Clamp, Julie Norris, Heena Chatrath, Ciaran Murray and Nigel Hughes.



“ No two days are ever the same, which I really enjoy. ”

## Laura Edwards – putting people first

When your job title is Human Resources Manager, it helps if you are a ‘people person’ and VGC is fortunate to have just such a person in Laura Edwards.

Laura is celebrating eleven years with VGC this year, and has proved herself an integral and well-respected member of the VGC family, and a key person in the growth and professionalism of the services delivered by her department.

In keeping with the nature of her work, one might say she personifies the HR programme at VGC, such has been her impact on the department over the course of her years with the company.

Having started her professional life as a legal secretary, Laura joined the HR team in 2003 and rose swiftly through the ranks to HR manager. Her performance on major projects has been excellent - she was responsible for gaining authorised signatory status for airside security clearance of VGC staff working on projects at Heathrow and Gatwick airports.

She oversaw the same protocol for the Hinkley Point nuclear facility project too - but that’s only the tip of the iceberg. Laura is responsible for recruitment, staff management and industrial relations processes for over 1,000 staff at various sites across the mainland UK. It might be why she insists on strong builders’ tea during office hours.

Laura is not content to merely rest on her laurels - her career with VGC has seen exemplary personal growth too. She has amassed an impressive array of qualifications from a Level 4 NVQ in management through to CIPD qualifications including a postgraduate diploma in personnel management.

Her innovations at VGC are equally impressive. Laura has implemented the occupational health scheme, the VGC business and construction apprenticeship programmes, has overseen the applications for training grants from the CITB, and ensures that VGC complies with industry training requirements. This ensures staff grow and develop, as she herself has done during her career.

Laura loves the fact that no two days are ever the same at VGC - and is enjoying contributing to the growth of the business.

She is an active member of the VGC Charity Committee and has contributed hugely to fundraising efforts for Mesothelioma UK and Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research.

Laura extends her dedication to personal development well beyond VGC. She is part of a local youth mentoring team named The Space Project, which helps young women between the ages of 11-24 with issues such as low self-esteem and mental health problems.

Outside work Laura leads an active social life, attending music festivals and travelling as far afield as Thailand and the USA. Recently married to husband Dave, she unwinds in typical family fashion with some home cooking and the odd glass of wine in front of the television on a school night, much like the rest of us!

Laura is well respected by colleagues, directors and clients alike, and is an integral part of the VGC family.

## Contracts update

Business activity across the VGC Group continues to be buoyant. The following is an overview of contract successes and developments since the last issue of *Outperformance*.

### VGC Rail Projects

In June 2014 the £9.3 million contract with Atkins to deliver the East Kent resignalling project was signed.

### VGC Labour Solutions

We have secured work on projects across the UK, including:

- M1 junction 19 - *Skanska*
- A1/M1 widening – *Morgan Sindall/Carillion JV*
- M3 Smart Motorways – *Balfour Beatty*
- Manchester hub - *Siemens*
- North Lincolnshire re-signalling - *Siemens*
- East Kent re-signalling - *Balfour Beatty*
- Paddington Station roof refurbishment - *Morgan Sindall*
- Anglia Crossrail – *Costain*

### VGC Construction

- Electrical equipment foundations at London Bridge – *Birse Rail*
- Miscellaneous street works in East End of London – *Cubic Construction*
- Holloway prison groundworks - *Costain*

### VGC Personnel

- Surveying resources - *Lanes for Drains*
- Engineers for rail and airports - *Dyer & Butler*
- Site engineers – *Galldris*
- BESC site engineers – *Morgan Sindall*
- Project staff – *Siemens UK wide*
- Planners, engineers and administrative staff – *Balfour Beatty*

### Cole Hire

- Freezer van for ice sculptures of poodles for 'Smirnoff Ice' advert
- Refrigerated vans for Raymond Blanc's Oxfordshire restaurant for a BBC2 programme
- Refrigerated vans for the Royal Navy air show at Yeovilton, and an event at Hamilton Park Race Course in Scotland



## Appointments

Contract successes and increased workload have encouraged VGC to expand its team of top class people. Resources have been increased across the board, from site management, engineering, estimating, tendering, logistics and planning to payroll, finance and commercial management. To see the list of new personnel, please visit [www.vgcgroup.co.uk/new-colleagues](http://www.vgcgroup.co.uk/new-colleagues)



## Charity update

VGC is delighted to report that the company's fundraising efforts have raised over **£4,334** for Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research to date. Staff, clients and partners have taken part in a golf day, a football match, a baking competition, fun games and a muddy obstacle course.

For more details, see our website 'News' pages – or, to donate, go to [www.justgiving.com/theVGCGroup](http://www.justgiving.com/theVGCGroup)

# News in brief



## Contractor of the month at Bond Street

Costain Skanska, the joint venture managing the Crossrail Bond Street contract, assesses seven areas of health and safety each month. VGC has won the 'contractor of the month' award five times in the first six months of 2014.

## Four stars in Link-up audit

After two full days of audit VGC was awarded the highest possible score by Link-up. The rail industry registration and pre-qualification scheme confirms that the company meet the health, safety, operational and competence standards required to work on the rail and underground systems.

## Network Rail Principal Contractor

VGC Rail Projects has been granted a principal contractor's licence by Network Rail. Following a rigorous audit they approved the company to manage construction work on track, stations and buildings on the rail network.

## Preferred supplier lists

VGC Personnel is now a preferred supplier for some of the largest UK contractors, including Balfour Beatty, Siemens, Vinci and Morgan Sindall. This is the result of a lot of hard work by the team as well as the high quality of its candidates.

## Protection Master licence retained for LUL

VGC passed this safety critical audit for London Underground, allowing the company to continue supplying protection masters.

## 24 new environmentally-friendly vehicles

Cole Hire recently took delivery of 24 new vehicles, chosen for their low emissions and excellent fuel economy. They will join the rest of the VGC-branded fleet at construction sites around the country.



## NSARE rates our training 'outstanding'

The National Skills Academy for Rail Engineering (NSARE) assessed VGC's rail training and graded it 'outstanding' in all four key performance areas: learning outcomes, quality of provision, leadership and management, capacity for improvement. The report noted that "there is a strong commitment shown to safe practice being used at all times".

## British Safety Council audit: three stars

The detailed audit of health and safety management systems compared VGC to leading organisations in other industries, and in many areas noted that VGC is leading the way. The group's overall audited score was 82.33%, with comments such as "directors are genuinely and actively interested in health and safety".

## Get involved – we'd love to hear from you



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Follow us on LinkedIn (VGC Group)

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recruitment

### VGC Personnel:

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managerial recruitment

### VGC Rail Projects:

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