

outperformance

issue thirteen • spring 2018

inside:

Transforming the A14

Ethical Labour Sourcing Standard

Apprenticeships





Transforming the A14

Rishi Khera, key influencer, James Burke, labour manager, and Fiona Dowling, HSQE adviser

VGC is collaborating with key suppliers on a special “journey to world class”.

The A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme is the biggest road upgrade under way in the United Kingdom today. VGC has been involved since the beginning.

“We are one of four labour suppliers on the contract. But we went through a very challenging tender process,” explains Chris Ryan, operations director.

“The process started with a comprehensive pre-qualification questionnaire, then we were audited, including a behavioural assessment. It was all remarkably thorough.”

The next stage in the selection process involved attending a meeting with five other prequalified suppliers. 20 assessors monitored the interaction between the key staff from the six companies. “It was an interesting exercise and I have no doubt this is going to happen more and more often in future, so this was a good experience for VGC.”

VGC’s clients on the project, Balfour Beatty, Costain and Skanska, with designers Atkins and CH2m, make up the A14 Integrated Delivery Team or ‘A14 IDT’, working on behalf of Highways England to deliver the scheme.

The joint venture has replicated the concept at labour supply level, with an integrated labour team. “We work with three other companies in a team that delivers all the labour to the project,” explained Chris. “In other circumstances we are competitors, but on this project we work together.”

This has never been done before in the industry. We’ve had to take our VGC hat off and put our integrated labour team hat on and that’s been an interesting and positive experience.”

Work on the £1.5 billion improvement to the A14 started in November 2016. The project includes widening seven miles of this key arterial route in each direction, a major new bypass south of Huntingdon, widening a three-mile section of the A1, and the demolition of a viaduct at Huntingdon.

The earthworks associated with the project involve stripping top soil over 17 miles out of the total length of 21 miles to create several sections of new road. These include a new junction at Swavesey and a five-mile local access road, linking local communities between Huntingdon and Cambridge and allowing them to avoid using the A14.

Construction of many of the 34 new bridges is well under way, including the 750-metre long Great Ouse river viaduct, with column foundations 35 metres deep. The new Grafham road bridge was recently opened to traffic.

The UK’s biggest road upgrade



Journey to world-class

Chris is proud of his VGC colleagues working on the project. "In particular, labour manager James Burke has played a key role helping to run the integrated labour team, and co-ordinating matters with the other three suppliers and our clients."

The project ethos is 'Our journey to world class' and this is reflected in the way everything is monitored to achieve that standard. "The IDT wants to have the best people to work on the A14. They want to have the best rates, the best safety, and the best sites. We're proud to be part of the collaboration to create 'world class.'"

A14 Innovation award

In January the integrated labour team received an A14 award for innovation. The judges described them as "true innovators ... challenging the way our whole industry works. They are not only demonstrating a desire for continuous improvement, but are changing their behaviours and utilising collaborative ways of working. This is game-changing for our industry."

"It was really encouraging to be recognised for what we're doing," Chris concluded. "I'm grateful to all members of the team involved in this ground-breaking collaboration. I'm sure it is the way forward and we are pleased to be involved."

"It's a good place to be."



Another first for VGC with new Ethical Labour Standard

On Friday 9 February we became the first labour supply company in the UK to be awarded the new Ethical Labour Sourcing Standard (BES6002:2017).

VGC is also the first company in the rail sector, and one of just three companies to date, to have achieved the standard.

The Ethical Labour Standard (ELS) provides a framework for organisations to verify their labour sourcing and supply systems, including reference to the requirements of the 2015 Modern Slavery Act.

The audit report by approvals body BRE Global said: "VGC has clearly demonstrated that it operates at a level well above the minimum requirements of the ELS. The senior managers interviewed clearly showed a personal commitment to the eradication of Modern Slavery and understood how their actions influenced wider behaviours and decisions in the business. There is a strong underlying culture of organisational responsibility and a genuine concern for the welfare of others at a senior management level."

"In line with their business strategy for 2018 and beyond, VGC has put in place an ambitious action plan to address potential risks of labour exploitation."

Commenting on the award of the new standard, John Hannan, VGC's HSQE director, said: "We are absolutely delighted not only to achieve the ELS, but also to be the first labour supply company to do so. We are proud of the way this distinguishes us from our competitors in having auditable processes for preventing forced labour and human trafficking."

This independent verification shows our staff and our clients that we have embedded the issues of ethical labour supply and modern slavery throughout VGC. As Ciara Pryce, VGC group services director, confirmed: "We will continue to build on this foundation and raise the bar in the support, development and protection of our people, using the ELS to benchmark, monitor and improve."

ELS in brief

The Ethical Labour Standard requires companies to prove that they have appropriate processes in place, and can demonstrate implementation through an audit trail in areas such as organisational and management structures and policies, human resources, procurement, bribery and corruption, forums, immigration, supply chain management, learning and development, reporting, assurance and compliance.

Dr Shamir Ghumra, BRE's director of sustainable products, said:

"The commitment shown by senior VGC staff in achieving verification means that we have a major supplier of labour to the industry that will continue to look for improvements year on year."



BE SAFE WITH vgc

Be Safe by Choice: thank you to all our key influencers

Safety statistics

As of 28 February 2018.
*Accidents per 100,000 hours worked

3,005,775
hours worked over
last 12 months

91
days since last RIDDOR
reportable accident

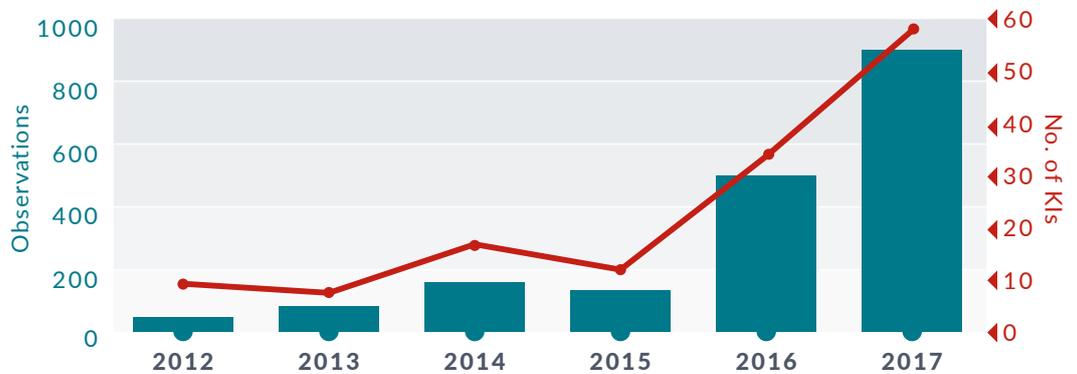
705,468
hours worked since last
reportable accident

0.07
12 month RIDDOR AFR*

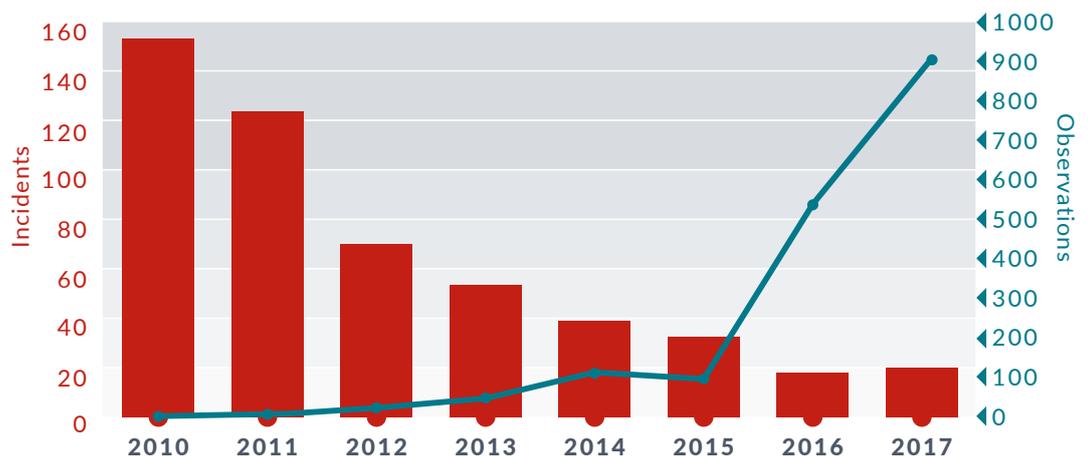
Our 55 key influencers are making a tremendous difference everywhere they work.

As trained workforce champions, they raise alerts whenever they see excellent practice or areas for improvement. These are logged as observations and used to improve safety across all VGC sites.

Since 2012 the number of observations has risen in direct proportion to the number of key influencers on site. And as the observations figure has risen, incident rates have fallen dramatically (see the graphs below), proving that our focus on safety is delivering impressive results.



Observations raised vs key influencers in business



Number of incidents vs observations

'Better for Everyone' FIR commitment



VGC is among contractors calling on the construction industry to take a stand on fairness, inclusion and respect (FIR). We are one of 36 signatories to the FIR 'Better for Everyone' commitment, launched last December.

"We believe that our workforce should reflect the communities in which we work," said Ciara Pryce, group services director. "We know that people work best when they feel supported and appreciated for the strengths they bring to the job, regardless of background. It has been proven that more diverse teams achieve better results. Our differences make us who we are; individuals who come together to make a great team."

The FIR programme is delivered by the Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) and the Supply Chain Sustainability School with funding and support from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). VGC has been a gold partner of the Supply Chain Sustainability School since 2015.

VGC HSQE manager Richard Wheeler has delivered FIR presentations, focusing on the appropriate use of language, to around 250 members of the workforce on the A14 IDT.

Key messages:

1. Use language that makes people feel included.
2. The only language acceptable at work is that which doesn't offend.
3. People who feel included work better and safer; the job is easier, and everyone goes home happier.

Our skills and employment adviser Kimberley McGinty is co-ordinating the work of our FIR ambassadors to cascade consistent messages throughout our workforce.

Supporting mental health -
tips from our charity partner
Samaritans

Samaritans S.H.U.S.H listening tips

Samaritans believes we can all improve our listening skills using the SHUSH! listening tips.

If you are trying to help a friend, relative or family member who may be going through a tough time, try these tips below to help them to open up and talk:



Show you care: focus just on the other person, make eye contact, put away your phone.



Have patience: it may take time and several attempts before a person is ready to open up.



Use open questions: the type that need more than a yes/no answer, and follow up eg 'Tell me more'.



Say it back: to check you've understood, but don't interrupt or offer a solution.



Have courage: don't be put off by a negative response and don't be afraid of silence.



Supporting former Carillion suppliers and staff

Our sympathy goes out to staff and supply chains hit by Carillion's liquidation.

Fortunately, VGC has not been directly affected. "Our finance and commercial teams are reviewing our supply chain to identify any indirect exposure," said VGC chairman Sean Fitzpatrick. "We are working with our framework partners who have been in joint ventures with Carillion to support them, and offer continued work by engaging affected personnel where we can."

These include our client Morgan Sindall, which was working with Carillion in a joint venture on the A6 Manchester Airport relief road at the time of the collapse. Thanks to VGC's well-established position on the Morgan Sindall labour desk, it was easy for us to support those workers originally sourced by Carillion's SkyBlue recruitment arm.



Works on the A6 Manchester Airport Relief Road

Morgan Sindall asked us to engage with the SkyBlue workers, so they could continue as temporary agency workers on the project.

Within four days we had set up and inducted 34 staff onto our systems with the result that the people concerned kept their jobs and lost no pay. Similarly, we moved 25 staff on the north-west railway electrification seamlessly across to our contract for Siemens. The projects continued without disruption.

Outperformance recognised



The Balfour Beatty delivery supervisor praised foreman Mick McCarney for his attitude to safety.

The lead delivery night manager complimented key influencer Opeyemi Osiyemi on raising a close call regarding plant exclusion zones.

Track Partnership's head of delivery thanked Richard Wheeler, Ben Keegan and Ian Keen for their "drive to deliver", mentioning the continuous dedication of all VGC's staff, and saying: "It is clear when your staff are on our sites how much safety means to them."



Balfour Beatty's environmental adviser thanked Sean Thompson, Carlos Allca and Declan McComb for their work to minimise the environmental impact – and cost – of disposing of hazardous lead paint during demolition of a building, as part of our project at Gidea Park substation.



Tideway East SHEQ management raised an observation about an 'excellent' safety briefing by John O'Loughlin.



Morgan Sindall's senior works manager commented on our work on the A1 Leeming to Barton upgrade: "We would have struggled to meet programme demands without the help and supply of people from Tommy [Hunter] and the team."

Training success

Gold award for VGC rail training

The National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR) has awarded VGC's rail training a 'Gold' rating. In the course of three visits at the end of 2017, VGC's training team was assessed on four key areas: quality of provision, leadership and management, learner outcomes, and capacity to improve. The result was four 'gold' ratings.

Ryan Frost, VGC Training manager, commented: "This is a result of teamwork – thanks to all my colleagues. We all find it very rewarding to see learners flourish as they gain confidence. It is great to see them progress in their careers and to know we've played a part in that."



The Costain Skanska general foreman at Crossrail Bond Street commended Caplea Pastoral Razvanthe and key influencer Bereket Kidane for their awareness of site safety.



Our client Costain passed on a compliment on our temporary works from fellow sub-contractor Hochtief, working alongside us on Crossrail at Seven Kings.



Thank you to key influencer Mihai Gligor for his dedication, good work and positive attitude on our Crossrail Anglia project for client Costain.



Andrew Donnelly was congratulated for his safety awareness regarding public access on Network Rail's north-west electrification project.



The CVU construction manager thanked us for the preparatory work we'd carried out for the London Lord Mayor's Show. "It's been a pleasure working with you."

CVU's senior construction manager commended "remarkable progress" on our project at Lambeth.



The senior works manager thanked us for "a job being well done" where we were digging trial holes beside Windsor bridge for Balfour Beatty Vinci JV: "A well-presented site, well managed."



2017: another year of growth

Last year, the VGC Group's annual turnover reached £76 million for the first time.

Our five business areas performed well through the year in a competitive environment, with construction and rail recording significant growth. Major infrastructure projects across the UK include Crossrail, HS2, Sellafield, Hinkley Point and EGIP.

Sean Fitzpatrick, executive chairman, thanked everyone for their contribution to our shared success over the past twelve months.

"There are numerous uncertainties in the political landscape with the unknown implications of Brexit," he said. "We continue to experience downward pressure on our margins, and the procurement processes for securing new sales are becoming tougher. However, we are delighted that our people continue to rise to the challenge and work together to achieve our shared objectives."



Drug and alcohol awareness training

Morgan Sindall regional supply chain director Mike Tonner thanked Sean Dempsey, Lindsay Doogan and David McCracken, for their "first class" briefing at the supply chain 'speed dating' event in Glasgow in November 2017. They talked to 62 sub-contractors about drug and alcohol awareness.



Congratulations

Apprentices Daniel Smith, David Williams Sarpong, Daniel Pang, Arsalan Aleem and Josiah Narkwa recently completed their NVQ level 2 Diploma in Railway Engineering. They signed up from the College of North East London, and have been working on Crossrail C610 as part of our contract with client ATC.

VGC supports 'Inspire Me' campaign



As part of our drive to increase women's participation in our workforce, we are supporting 'Inspire Me'. This Construction News campaign aims to celebrate the careers of women in construction, and empower others to advance to senior positions.

With Willmott Dixon as headline partner, VGC Group has joined Bowmer & Kirkland, Mabey, NASC, Randstad and Trad Group as official supporters.

Morgan Sindall Labour Desk celebrates third birthday



The Labour Desk at Morgan Sindall celebrated its third birthday in January. Providing an efficient labour supply to Morgan Sindall Group customers, it is a collaboration between five specialist agencies including VGC.

Ben Wallis, VGC's labour resource co-ordinator, says, "I have been working on the Labour Desk since its launch in 2015 and feel privileged to continue to be part of this bespoke labour service. With Morgan Sindall's vision and values at its core, the Labour Desk strives for 'perfect delivery' to all customers."

Acoustic barrier - part of Crossrail Anglia



Client Costain praised the quality of the barrier that our rail projects team built beside the sidings at Shenfield, overcoming challenging conditions to complete it on time and on budget. The barrier will reduce the impact on neighbouring properties of sound and light from the trains .

Successful housing infrastructure project



Completed infrastructure project for client Eurovia's HRN1 development at Houghton Regis in January (see autumn 2017 issue of Outperformance).

Mersey Gateway now open



We're very proud of the part our teams played in the Mersey Gateway project. The new six-lane bridge, which connects north Cheshire with Merseyside, opened in October 2017.

The VGC Group:

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