



lcrig

Skills in Highways

2023 REPORT



INNOVATION



COLLABORATION



NET ZERO



SKILLS

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Skills in Highways

The skills shortage in the industry is a huge challenge. With local council highways teams coming under pressure to deliver increasing services, the number of professionals required to deliver them is rising. The Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG) carried out an exclusive survey to find out more about activity levels, barriers and the actions that are needed to drive this agenda forward.

This survey was kindly facilitated by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) as a voluntary addendum to its ALARM Survey, carried out in 2023.

The findings are based on analysis by LCRIG.

Who took part in the survey?

- 91 English councils
- 22 London-based councils
- 12 Welsh councils

Key findings:

- Many councils have a limited training budget
- Lots of training providers being used to help officers retain knowledge
- Some council officers struggling to find training which is relevant to their job
- Industry requires more technical training in the short term
- High demand for training around preparing for net zero
- Lots being done to attract future talent into the sector, but more work needed

Introduction

The benefits of increasing diversity within the sector, how to change the image of the highways industry and how to provide training and growth opportunities for existing staff to keep them motivated, skilled and wanting to stay in the industry – are often cited when discussing skills in highways

A recent Highways Sector Council report identified that access to training and development is a key area for improvement.

Both the private and public sector need to work together to address the skills challenge.

But with many councils facing severe financial challenges, how can they go about attracting new talent and retaining existing staff?

The Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG) has put a major focus on skills, and it is one of four key pillars that the organisation has focused its activities around.

A key area of focus is attracting younger people into the sector and changing the image of the highways industry to demonstrate to students from an early age that it is a sector with significant opportunities for training and advancement.

A collaborative effort between Salford City College, Salford City Council, and the Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG) will see Salford City College offer new Highways Maintenance Apprenticeships.

Working in partnership with LCRIG and Salford City Council, Salford College has joined forces with local authorities and the private sector, to fill 10 apprenticeship places available on the course which will commence in October 2023.

With support from the sector, the college has also created a dedicated area within the college grounds that will allow the apprentices to fulfil the practical elements of their course.

Going forward, the hope is that this project can be replicated in other parts of the country – helping to secure a future talent pool in the highways sector and playing a part in addressing the skills gap.

LCRIG also launched LCRIG Skills – a platform that allows users to access details of sector relevant, affordable training courses, track their CPD training journey, and receive recommendations for courses that are relevant to their individual requirements

Whilst work is being done to address the skills challenge more initiatives such as these are needed. But what barriers still need to be overcome? To gauge the extent of activity across the sector, and the appetite for change, LCRIG invited councils to take part in an email survey. This was carried out as an addendum to the Asphalt Industry Alliance's (AIA) ALARM Survey in 2023.

A total of 125 councils responded.

In this report, the findings of LCRIG's analysis of responses are described.

Access to Training and Development

Accessing the right training and development is key when it comes to attracting and retaining staff in highways.

When asked to tick a statement that was most applicable to their experience in accessing training and development, 46 English councils ticked the option that stated, 'I don't have problems accessing training and development'.

Of the 12 Welsh councils that were asked the same question exactly half responded with the same answer. 14 London councils said the same.

More worryingly, 26 English councils ticked the statement that read: 'My employer doesn't have a training budget or budget is limited'. Just five London councils ticked this option, with three of the Welsh councils choosing it.

Eleven English councils ticked the 'I can't find relevant training for my job' option, with just two Welsh councils choosing this option and the same number of London councils.

When asked to give details of any other reasons for a lack of access to training and development, one respondent from an English council commented: "Additional training is available but not used to its full potential due to unknown training resources. More visibility is required."

Another commented: "Time. I am the only member of staff dedicated to asset management; I don't have a chance to take my leave most years let alone training."

Other respondents said that "Training funding is primarily spent on other departments needs" and "Courses specific to highway roles are not readily available".

"Accessing free courses to promote environmental sustainability has proved problematic. We require detailed training for our designers and engineers and cannot seem to source appropriate training free of charge," was another response received.

The responses and comments gathered highlight that there is a need for information about training courses to be made available and easy to access – something that the LCRIG Skills platform can help with.



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"A key area of focus is attracting younger people into the sector and changing the image of the highways industry"

"There is a need for information about training courses to be made available and easy to access"



Retaining Knowledge

Training is key when it comes to helping highway professionals maintain a level of knowledge that will enable them to do their jobs safely and effectively

There are several providers and key industry groups who are working hard to ensure that operatives can keep their knowledge and skills updated.

Of the English councils that responded to the survey, 53 councils indicated that they have heard of the LCRIG Skills platform, while 28 said they had not.

Survey respondents were asked to rank from 1 to 5 (where 1 is most used, and 5 is least used) what they use most to keep themselves updated.

Twenty-six respondents from English councils indicated that they use LCRIG as their first choice of provider, benefiting from a range of technical seminars, webinars, conferences, and email alerts. A further 15 respondents ranked LCRIG as their second choice with 14 flagging it as their third.

Other providers who were ranked included the Institute of Highway Engineers (IHE), Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) and the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT).

Twelve respondents from English councils chose the IHE as their first choice of training provider when looking to keep their knowledge and skills updated, whilst 5 selected the CIHT and 4 chose ADEPT.

Of those that highlighted 'other' as a choice, many specified internal training as a means to help keep them up-to-date along with external training providers and knowledge being passed on by their peers.

It was a similar story across the Welsh and London councils who responded, with continued professional development (CPD) also highlighted as important when it comes to participating in training.

Supporting Skills

Professionals working in the sector will continue to need skills support and survey participants were asked where the need is greatest.

Those responding were asked to rank where the industry needs most help in the short term and to rank different areas in priority order (1 being highest priority and 8 being the lowest priority).

Of the English councils that responded, 34 flagged the area of technical training as an area where there is a need for the greatest level of support. Four of the Welsh councils selected this as their highest priority, along with 10 of the London councils.

This was closely followed by 'Preparing for net zero/decarbonised services', which 21 English councils ranked as their top choice.

The area of asset management scored highly with 43 English councils giving a ranking of either 1, 2 or 3.

There was less of a concern around 'Communicating what the Highways Service does for members of the public', with 37 councils giving this a ranking of 7, indicating that there is less need for training in this area.

Overall, there are clearly concerns that more needs to be done to support officers in councils with one commenting: 'We don't have enough engineers and technically competent people. More on the job training would be beneficial.'

Another stated: 'In the short term there is a real issue with recruitment and retention of permanent staff.'

The Local Council Roads Innovation Group and other leading trade groups including the Institute of Highway Engineers (IHE), Road Surface Treatments Association (RSTA) and the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) are working to address recruitment concerns and all have their training courses available via the LCRIG Skills platform with new courses being added on an ongoing basis.



"There are several providers and key industry groups who are working hard to ensure that operatives can keep their knowledge and skills updated"

"34 respondents from English councils flagged the area of technical training as an area where there is a need for the greatest level of support"



Attracting Future Talent

Attracting new talent into the highways sector has always been a challenge, but work is being done to address this.

At the LCRIG Innovation Festival in 2023, young professionals from the highways sector took part in a debate about skills and spoke about what attracted them to come into the highways sector and what more needs to be done to attract a younger and more diverse workforce into the industry.

As part of the survey, respondents were invited to respond to the following statement via free text: 'What are you or your organisation doing to encourage the next generation into the sector?'

There were a variety of responses received ranging from 'We have an apprentice scheme to train up staff.

We also accommodate work experience students from schools, colleges, and university' to 'Performance related pay but not a lot else!'

Apprenticeship schemes and graduate programmes were frequently highlighted as a means to attract new talent.

Concerningly, one respondent said: 'To be honest, not much. Local authority pay is not competitive enough to fill vacancies.' Another said they were 'Finding it difficult to recruit overall'.

Other authorities said they were putting on career days whilst some had identified STEM ambassadors within their councils.

Apprenticeship schemes and graduate programmes were frequently highlighted as a means to attract new talent.



Kerry Winstanley,

Finance and Operations Director
at the Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG)

There's no doubt that the skills shortage facing the sector is huge and our report into Skills in Highways highlights some of the challenges faced in this area.

But with challenges come opportunities and tackling the skills shortage is something that we are passionate about.

Since we launched LCRIG Skills (our online training platform) almost 12 months ago, I've become more involved in this area. What started as a project to build a simple database to provide a shop window to sector relevant, affordable training, has turned into an opportunity to do so much more to support the skills agenda across the sector.

And it is clear from our analysis in this report that this support is needed.

With the new academic year now underway, Salford City College are busy with the final preparations to their newly created Highways Maintenance Academy, as they get ready to welcome the first cohort of apprentices on to the Highways Operative course. LCRIG have been working in partnership with the college and Salford City Council to get this new apprenticeship off the ground, and for me it's been a very rewarding project.

Recently, I've had the opportunity to speak to a number of individuals and organisations about skills. One thing that has really resonated with me, is that there are so many inspiring initiatives taking place that tackle the challenges the sector faces, not only in bringing in new employees, but also in the retention and development of employees.

These initiatives have inspired LCRIG's future plans, which include the next round of development of LCRIG Skills, with plans for a central area that will showcase the initiatives that are being developed. The LCRIG community is a great place to share information and learning experiences and we plan to extend this out more widely as we continue to do more to support skills and employment initiatives.

Next year's Innovation Festival will continue to grow and develop and will feature a learning element across the two days with access to CPD accredited technical training sessions.

Please get in touch with us so that we can further develop the work we are doing around skills to help benefit the wider sector.

"There are so many inspiring initiatives taking place that tackle the challenges the sector faces"



Kerry Winstanley

LCRIG Membership

The Local Council Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG) is a community interest not-for-profit, membership organisation, providing members with a unique platform to engage with councils, the DfT and the wider highways community.

Our mission is to facilitate fresh thinking in innovation and collaboration, whilst also helping the highways community achieve Net Zero.

Join us and connect with a community of like-minded councils, organisations and individuals, all of whom are driving change through innovation and technological advances across the local roads network.

Membership types



associate member

Organisations providing products or services to the highways sector.



council member

Local highway authorities and 'Teckal' organisations – council membership is fully funded.



partner member

Government & professional bodies, associations, working/research groups.



academia member

Universities and academic research organisations.



Scan the QR code to view our membership benefits

LCRIG delivers a wide range of services and has implemented key initiatives to support the highways community



lcrig skills

launched to tackle the skills shortage and provide access to sector specific training.



lcrig IPS

designed to remove barriers to innovation and to keep pace with changes in the market.



lcrig INNOVATION festival

showcasing the latest innovative technologies and maintenance solutions to help local authorities meet their current and future challenges.



lcrig STRICTLY HIGHWAYS

bringing together the highways community, sharing solutions and celebrating the amazing work taking place in our sector.



Scan the QR code to find out more about our work



“ LCRIG is influencing change where it matters, at the point of service delivery.

Brian Fitzpatrick,
Managing Director Fitzpatrick Advisory

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To enquire about membership, please get in touch via email at info@lcrig.org.uk



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