When the economic climate brought new challenges to organisations in the roads sector, the Highways Agency and its primary partners established the Roads Academy to drive leadership, collaboration and change within the sector.

The challenge

The Roads Academy is a joint initiative from Highways England (formerly known as the Highways Agency, a government-owned company responsible for the strategic roads network in England and Wales) and the roads industry. Established in 2011, the Roads Academy drives leadership and collaboration amongst member organisations across the sector.

Julie Macavoy, Roads Academy Team Leader, explains, “Following a series of strategic reviews, the Director of Major Projects at the Highways Agency was keen to encourage collaboration and innovation in the roads sector and felt that a leadership development partnership for senior managers within the Highways Agency and its tier one partners would achieve this.”

“As senior technical, HR and L&D representatives from primary partner organisations involved in the construction, maintenance and management of the roads network, were invited to be part of a steering group,” says Julie. “Collectively, they agreed that driving cultural change, collaboration and sharing knowledge was essential to help the sector meet current and future challenges. A ‘learning together, working together’ approach would benefit the supply chain as a whole.”

As a result, the Roads Academy was established, a membership organisation offering a cross-sector leadership programme with the primary purpose of ‘developing catalysts for change’; skilled and influential leaders equipped to tackle complex challenges and drive significant change in how the industry thinks, behaves and performs.
We chose Roffey Park due to their proven expertise, track record and quality approach.

The solution

With the support of primary partners confirmed, members of the Roads Academy steering group needed to carefully consider who to aim the programme at, who to develop as ‘catalysts of change’?

Julie says, “A competency framework was developed, to define the attributes that participants would ideally acquire through the programme, such as collaboration, influencing skills and the ability to share knowledge with their own organisation and across the sector. The competency framework is also used during selection interviews and development centres, to ensure participants with the right skills.”

The next step was to commission leadership experts to design and deliver the programme. Following a rigorous Government tender process, Roffey Park was appointed as the preferred leadership development provider for the Roads Academy. “We chose Roffey Park due to their proven expertise, track record and quality approach,” says Julie. “Another key differentiator for Roffey Park is the quality of its relationships and people. We value the warm, open and honest relationship we have with Roffey Park. We work together in active partnership.”

The approach

Roffey Park worked closely with the Roads Academy to design the Developing Catalysts For Change programme, a self-managed learning programme delivered in cohorts of up to 18 people and comprising four key elements:

- Four three-day residential workshops held at Roffey Park over a 15 month period, covering strategic thinking, systems and consultancy, personal influence and impact, change and complexity.

- Eight one-day action learning sets to ensure application of learning, generate solutions and establish a valuable support network.

- Nine Challenge & Innovation coaching sessions, combining individual and peer coaching.

- Two masterclasses per year, offering access to leading industry experts.

“Learning is set in the participants’ real world,” explains Julie. “The main programme is followed by 9 months of working in an Internal Consultancy Project Group. Delegates apply learning to develop solutions to real projects and issues in the sector and implement these within their organisation throughout the programme and beyond, driving change and ensuring a clear return on investment for member organisations.”

The programme is taught at masters level, requires a two-year commitment and culminates in a Postgraduate
Certificate in Leadership and Management.

The programme adds further value to participants and member organisations. Julie says, “Establishing a cross-sector leadership development programme is innovative. Any concerns around sharing sensitive information with competitors were quickly dispelled. Participants develop valuable relationships based on trust and mutual benefit.”

Member organisations are also entitled to two places at each masterclass, in addition to current and past Roads Academy participants. “Key sponsors and executive directors open and lead the masterclasses, creating valuable opportunities for attendees to consult with influential executives from Highways England and throughout the supply chain,” says Julie.

She continues, “We also aim to engage with other leading organisations outside of the roads sector, such as the Department for Transport and John Lewis.

The results

Evidence from participant interviews, work portfolios and project outputs suggests a programme that is succeeding in producing future leaders and making a significant impact at an individual, leadership, organisational and sector level.

- At an individual level, the top four areas where the programme has ‘very high impact’ are around ability to collaborate across the roads sector, network effectively, be a leader of the future and improve the supply chain.
- At a leadership level, participants think differently, more strategically and communicate with more impact. They are able to challenge, address blockages to change, empower their teams and lead effectively through change.
- At an organisational and industry level, the Roads Academy is building a critical mass of talented individuals who have a greater understanding of the sector, work in partnership and build a shared perspective. One participant called this ‘privileged insight’.
- Research interviews identified a number of examples of new approaches that have saved millions of pounds.

The programme has executive stakeholder support and high visibility across the sector. “The main sponsor is the chief executive of Highways England and graduations are attended by Highways England executives and senior directors from primary partner organisations,” says Julie.

She adds, “The Roads Academy programme was launched at the beginning of the Government’s period of austerity. It’s testament to the programme’s impact that, to date, 116 people have attended the programme.” With the Government announcing reforms in the Infrastructure Bill, a fixed five-year funding settlement and a challenging £15 billion programme of infrastructure projects over the next five years, demand and funding for the Roads Academy programme seem certain.

In summary

The Roads Academy leadership development programme delivered by Roffey Park is seen as a template for success,” concludes Julie. “Development programmes in the future will be based on the Roads Academy model as it’s a tried and tested approach, with proven results and significant impact on participants, member organisations and the sector in general.”

“I’m very proud to have been involved in such a pioneering programme that is transforming leadership and driving change across the sector,” says Julie.
About us

Roffey Park is an internationally renowned leadership institute based in the UK and Singapore. We develop people who develop organisations. With 65 years’ experience of leadership and management development, organisational development, human resources and personal effectiveness, we provide executive education and research to many of the world’s leading companies and organisations.

Powerful transformational learning to develop people who develop organisations

Without question the greatest asset in any organisation is its people and their ability to collaborate in achieving strategic goals and objectives. We believe that creating the opportunity for each individual to perform to their full potential, every day, will improve business performance – and make work more fulfilling.

This requires individuals to have self-awareness and knowledge of their different behaviours so they can lead, inspire and motivate.

Designing learning which enables a lasting difference

The Self Managed Learning philosophy, pioneered in the UK by Roffey Park, underpins our approach. Self Managed Learning is about individuals managing their own learning by taking responsibility for decisions about what they learn, how they learn, when they learn, where they learn and why they learn. This is all grounded in the context of organisational needs.

We treat individuals as adults, expecting and enabling them to take responsibility for their learning. Our approach is holistic, learner centred and empowering. Our focus is on substance not style using applied learning to bring to life each individual’s own workplace.

Contact Us

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