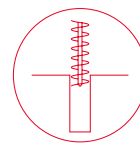


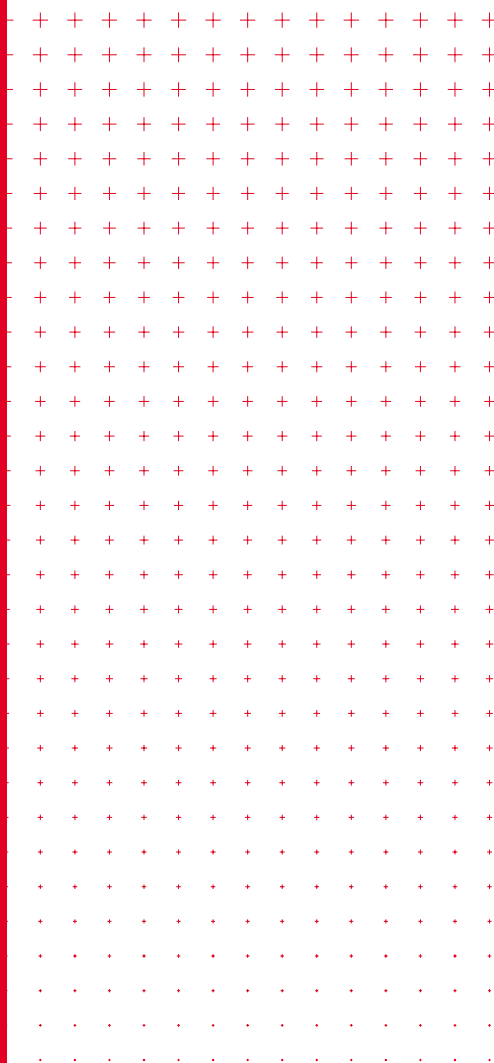
Next generation



The future of geotechnics series

What the industry needs to do to attract the next generation of experts into construction.

This is the third in Bachy Soletanche's series of thought leadership reports exploring the future of geotechnics and the challenges and opportunities facing the industry.



BACHY SOLETANCHE



Foreword

The construction industry is at a pivotal point in its illustrious history. Rapid technological advancements, an aging workforce and the global sustainability agenda are converging trends that are forcing companies across the sector to rethink their business models to keep abreast of client requirements and to remain competitive.

To survive in this changing business landscape there is a pressing need to attract a new tech/data-savvy, diverse workforce into the sector. Engaging young people from an early age and showing them the merits of working in this industry will be pivotal in ensuring it not only survives but flourishes.

The industry has done much to shake off the outdated image that construction is a male dominated, non-technical, non-professional field. When I visit sites and offices, I am increasingly inspired by the wide variety of people skills, from myriad different backgrounds I encounter.

The idea that working in construction requires working on cold, wet, muddy sites completing physically challenging work is also being challenged. The fact of the matter is that there are many different jobs within most companies that cater to people with a huge variety of skillsets, be it in management or administration, media, welding or geotechnical engineering, or even data analytics and computer science.

Promoting these interesting and rewarding roles is vital to engage young people. At Bachy Soletanche, we do this by offering scholarships, apprenticeships, inter-group internships and upskilling programmes, attending university open days and offering 'World of Work' days to young people who are interested in developing a career in construction. But we are always looking at new and innovative ways to drive home the value of a career in this field. Cross company collaboration is also vital to alleviating the strain on the industry.

Our aim for this report is to ignite conversation around the importance of inclusivity and diversity within the sector, and to illustrate the benefits of having a versatile, mixed work force. We also hope it proves informative and educational to both individuals and companies, ultimately presenting the geotechnics industry as a tolerant and desirable place for intelligent, curious and eager-to-learn young people to build a career.

Chris Merridew is Managing Director at Bachy Soletanche



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A sector in transition

Louise Pugh from Bachy Soletanche confirms that the organisation has spent years attracting and retaining the best talent, as well as working to create a diverse and effective workforce. We have witnessed first-hand sweeping changes that have shaped the industry and while we have seen real progress in recent years, we still have a long way to go and strive for improvements.

The business case for diversity and inclusivity is undeniable. Companies in all sectors are waking up to the notion that diversity in the workplace is about more than simply a compliance issue – it's a critical business asset. A report by management consultancy McKinsey, *Delivering Through Diversity*, published last year found that companies with varied teams are 33% more likely to outperform their competitors. This is in no small part due to the variety of perspectives people of different backgrounds can bring. These perspectives lead to better outcomes on the site, in project management and throughout the design process.

Advancements in technology, shifting demographics and a changing workforce are all disruptive trends that are impacting the construction sector. As such, it is more important than ever to have a diverse and inclusive workforce that can tackle the myriad challenges we face day-to-day. But to tackle these issues, we must implement inclusivity and diversity protocols to create a level playing field for all.

The path to success

The extensive training plans we have in place have been a major asset in creating a diverse and inclusive workforce, they are specifically tailored to appeal to a wide variety of people. When it comes to getting professionally accredited some companies either give you time off to complete the necessary training or fund your course, for most courses Bachy are able to do both, subject to course timetables. For new joiners this is a huge draw for talented prospective employees looking to further their careers.

One of our key strategies has been to build long-term partnerships with a variety of educational establishments. We have a longstanding partnership with Surrey University, for example, which gives students on the civil engineering course one year's valuable work experience at the company, in addition to summer work placements. We also look at a range

of diverse methods to encourage people from non-traditional backgrounds into the sector. For example, we train civil engineering technicians from Level Three, which is school leaving, to Level Seven which is the equivalent of a degree. This is achieved through a block release method, where students attend a period of college for about a month at a time, before coming back into the office or onto the site. This route has proved to be invaluable to us and allows us to recruit from such a wider pool of potential talent.

The support that we give our staff through training and development has been pivotal in helping us attract and keep our talent. Many people who enter the company this way remain at the company for a long time afterwards.

Higher the talent

In our industry the biggest difficulty in recruiting and retaining the best talent is from a work-life balance perspective. Because a lot of our work is site-based and can potentially be anywhere in the world, a lot of time is spent travelling or requires people to relocate for the duration of the project. It can be difficult to find the right balance.

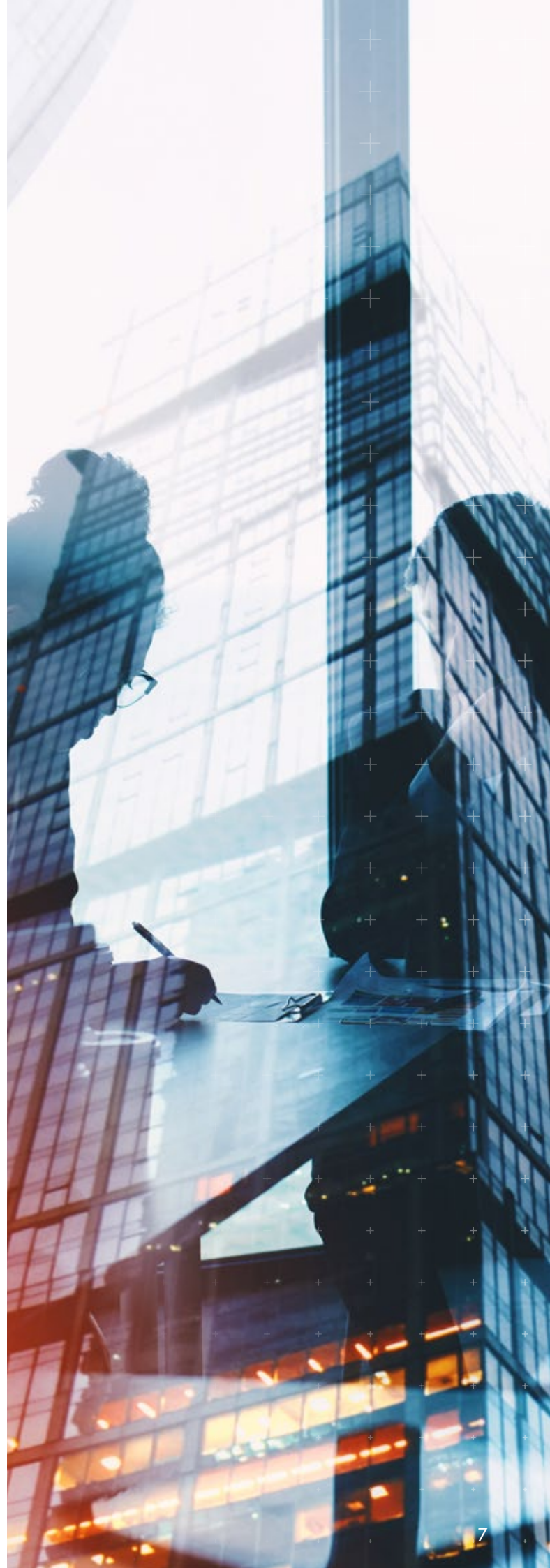
There has been a gradual change that's been happening over the past three to five years. More and more people want a job that fits within their desired lifestyle, not a life built around their work. This is becoming prevalent, even among project-based engineers who have previously been happy working on sites all over the country.

The last thing we want is for our on-site teams to feel that their work is negatively impacting their lifestyle, so we've been working through several strategies to try and find a better balance for our employees. One of these is to try and keep people more regionalised in their role, so they don't have to relocate to another part of the country for projects. We are constantly reviewing site hours and processes to find ways in which we can streamline operations to give our teams

more flexibility and balance. Everyone is different – indeed many employees have no problem moving around the country, it can really be an adventure and an exciting part of their career. The key is to try and give everyone the opportunity to work in a way that suits the life they want to lead. That's where our focus is and will continue to be.

Building bridges

At Bachy we firmly believe that a diverse workforce is a happy workforce – it's a mantra that has underpinned our mentality as a company from the beginning. It's about achieving equality across the board, and not just in the broad sense. Inclusivity is far more than just a box that needs to be ticked, it is fundamental to helping a company become more innovative. The melting pot of ideas that people from different backgrounds bring with them is what truly makes a company unique, and why I'm still here at Bachy after 18 years.



Laying the foundations for the future workforce

At Bachy Soletanche, we are committed to nurturing future talent and ensuring young people feel valued in the workplace. In doing this, we are helping tackle one of the most pressing issues in our sector – the aging workforce – whilst also attracting the best talent and opening the construction skills pool up to a broader spectrum of people. In this section, we have spoken to a couple of rising stars about their experiences in the workplace and their pathway to working at the company.

Niamh Pritchard is a Graduate Engineer and discusses her experience so far.

How did you find out about the Bachy graduate scheme?

I always excelled in science and maths at school, and I was interested in studying engineering at University. When I went to the University of Surrey open day to find out more about the civil engineering course, it was heavily advertised that students could apply for a scholarship to complete placements during the long summer break.

I applied for the course and was thrilled to be awarded a scholarship. Within the first few months there was a “speed dating” event where students got to meet all the companies involved in sponsoring the scholarship scheme. I met with some of the team from Bachy and we instantly clicked! I was really interested in the wide variety of work they offered and the size of the projects they worked on. The interview process went smoothly, and I was accepted onto a summer placement in 2014. Five years later and I’m still here!

What kind of projects have you worked on at the company?

I’ve been lucky enough to work on a diverse portfolio since I started out at Bachy. My summer placements were spent in the design office and on a piling site, and during my placement year I was working on Crossrail, the new high frequency, high capacity railway for London and the South East. To be a part of such a significant piece of engineering was a truly unique and career-defining experience.

Since I graduated in 2018, I have spent much of my time working on the Thames Tideway project – a 25km ‘super sewer’ running mostly under the tidal section of the River Thames, and a crucial foundation of a long-standing commitment to clean up the river for the good of the city. Although I am currently working in London, I am based in the head office in Burscough, and I travel around a lot for my job. That’s one of the great things about working at Bachy – you really do get the opportunity to work all around the country.

What advice would you give to someone looking to enter the Bachy graduate scheme?

Bachy is a truly international company, with a strong industry reputation and a team of people that are passionate about what they do. I chose this graduate scheme because I wanted to be surrounded by likeminded individuals who shared my desire to work in the built environment. The opportunity to gain experience in the workplace while studying proved invaluable and has enabled me to be part of some of the biggest engineering projects in the country.

My advice would be to apply for the graduate scheme and be honest about the areas you want to specialise in, because Bachy really are committed to helping their employees channel their interests in their day-to-day work and give you the opportunities you need to progress.

Here **Matty Eggesden**, an Apprentice Fabricated Welder, tells us about his passion for learning on the job and the content of his apprenticeship scheme.

I was always more interested in 'hands on' work. I grew up living on a farm and there were always lots of different jobs to do, so that's probably where that came from!

When I left school, I initially spent a year studying agricultural engineering at a local college, but when I heard about an opening on the Bachy fabricated welding apprenticeship, I jumped at the chance. I had some initial experience in the field from my farm work, but I hadn't found an opportunity to take it up as a profession.

What I really enjoy about the apprenticeship scheme at Bachy is the amount of time I get to spend mastering my trade in the workshop. My course operates on a day release basis, where I attend college once a week for classroom-based learning and spend the rest of the time working on the shop floor.

Currently I am studying for an NVQ Level 2 which is accredited by City & Guilds. Level 2 is focused more

on learning the fundamentals of fabricated welding, but as I progress to Level 3 my work will become increasingly hands on and I will be required to spend even more time in the workshop, learning how to do more technical, specialist welding. Instead of going into college, I will be required to send pictures of my work to my tutors, with an assessor coming into the workshop to accredit my work when I complete projects.

Bachy provides an incredibly supportive atmosphere for learning and the team here has always encouraged me to pursue my ambitions in everything I've done. I think more attention needs to be given to schemes such as this in schools because some people have more of a natural affinity to craft skills as opposed to traditional classroom learning, but simply don't know what's out there. For me, having been able to earn money while I've studied has been invaluable. Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to work on unique and exciting projects around the country. I am currently working on the Thames Tideway project, and the opportunity to work on more sites around the country as I progress through my career is something that truly excites me!



The pathway to success

Ruth Webster joined Bachy Soletanche as a temporary receptionist and has risen through the ranks of the company to become a Senior Contract Engineer. In this section, Ruth discusses her progression through the company and gives advice on how to follow suit.

How did you come to work at Bachy?

My route into the company has been slightly unorthodox. When I finished my A-levels I went to university to study teaching but I quickly realised it wasn't for me. I felt university was something I was expected to do, as opposed to something I really wanted to do, and I wasn't aware of any other options. As a result, I left after a couple of semesters with little idea of what I was going to do next.

Conveniently, my mum worked at Bachy as a finance director, and she mentioned that there was a role coming up as a temporary receptionist. I applied for the role, got it, and started doing on and off holiday and maternity cover. After about eighteen months there was talk of a new Contract Engineering apprenticeship scheme being introduced. When the scheme was launched, I was invited for an interview and I was offered a role on site in Barrow where I combined site work with studying for a part time Higher National Certificate (HNC) in building work. This was back in 2007 and marked the first step on my career in engineering.

What advice would you give to someone that is looking to take up an apprenticeship scheme?

There seems to be this myth that to be an engineer you need to excel at maths and science, but that isn't really the case. I think this probably comes from the fact that degrees at big universities, where you need a combination of maths and science at A-level, are heavily publicised whereas apprenticeship schemes aren't.

I have been invited to speak to university students before as part of their civil engineering course, and I always tell them that they can learn as much as they can at university, but you really start to learn the ins and outs of the job when you are working on the site. Really, what this job is about is project management – managing people and managing a site – these are the fundamental skills you need. If you don't have the ability to do that, you're really going to struggle. Everything else can be taught or learnt on the job.

The fact I didn't study for a degree has never held me back, even on contracts where the company is required to submit our CV's to show our professional qualifications. I even get phone calls from people on sites all around the country asking me to ask for my advice, so I am confident that my knowledge is held in high regard!

What do you think has been key to your success?

The company support structure has always been fantastic, and I always tell that to new and prospective employees. There is a bit of a tendency to throw people in the deep end, but from my experience that's the best way to learn. When you're put in a situation where you need to remember important things to move projects along, you get to grips with the job much faster. And, because there is always someone to consult for advice on a project or confide in if you are feeling overwhelmed, you never really feel out of your depth.

I will always be grateful for the fact I was given lots of responsibility and the opportunity to manage projects at a very young age. One such project was fitting a large diaphragm wall for Crossrail in London. I was only 24 at the time and this seemed like a really daunting task, but my Managing Director was really supportive – he knew I had the skills and that gave me a new-found confidence. Looking back on it, that was one of the best experiences of my career so far!

I have also always been eager to throw myself into new and exciting opportunities, whether that's a new project to work on, skill to develop or working group to engage with. In addition to these points, Bachy is simply a good place to work if you want to progress through the career ladder quickly – which a lot of graduates and apprentices do. If you put the time and effort in, and the company thinks you are good enough, the sky really is the limit.



Driving change in the sector through inclusivity

In this interview **Richard Totty**, Senior Design Engineer, describes his passion for volunteering with the STEM Ambassadors scheme and also discusses his motivations for promoting Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR) in construction at Bachy Soletanche. We ask Richard what can be done to help increase diversity in the sector and to promote equality in the workplace.

Tell us a bit about your role at Bachy Soletanche.

I have worked at Bachy Soletanche for sixteen years and in the industry for nearly twenty years. I currently work as a Senior Design Engineer in the Bachy South business, having previously worked in operations for about ten years. This work has predominantly taken place in London, but I have also spent time abroad working for Soletanche Bachy. Most of this time abroad was in a rural part of Kentucky, where I was assisting with a foundation remediation project at Wolf Creek Dam, but I have also worked in Vietnam and Hong Kong. During my industrial placement at university, I also worked in South Africa for a year.

What motivated you to become a STEM ambassador?

When I first graduated I was offered a position with Bachy Soletanche in the design team in the North West of England. It was there that I was first encouraged by my line manager to get involved with STEM. This involved participating in events at schools and the wider community and was mainly focussed on encouraging young people to consider engineering as a future career path. Admittedly, my work in promoting STEM tailed off as I progressed to an operations role, but it is something I have picked up again more recently with my design work in the South. In fact, a key motivator for me to re-engage with STEM activities was my nieces, several of whom have expressed desires to work in STEM fields, so I wanted to be a positive role model for them and others in their position.

What motivated you to want to promote equality and diversity in the workplace?

A major reason for wanting to get involved in promoting Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR) in the workplace was an article I read in New Civil Engineer that discussed the lack of diversity and

representation of LGBT+ people in the engineering sector. As a gay man this article really struck a chord with me. Furthermore, my nieces will soon be entering the workplace and I am aware that they could still encounter conscious or unconscious bias due to their gender and/or ethnicity – something I want to try and change. With this in mind, I spoke to our HR team who were extremely supportive and encouraged me to get involved with promoting FIR and helping Bachy Soletanche to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Having been actively involved in the LGBT+ society at university, I was eager to continue building awareness around these issues in the office and on sites. Subsequently I got involved in our parent organisation, VINCI Plc's working group. The knowledge I have gained from the FIR working group has also allowed me to participate in the Supply Chain Sustainability School's FIR in Construction Ambassadors programme.

Do you think the sector is inclusive to a broad spectrum of people?

Historically, the reputation of the construction industry wasn't great when it came to diversity and inclusion. There were very few women in my civil engineering classes at university, even fewer in engineering positions on sites, and few if any women in operative roles. I was openly gay when I was at university, but I went back into the closet when I got my first job because I didn't want my sexuality to define me. I wanted people to see me as a competent engineer, but I felt there was a lot of stigma attached to being identified as an out gay man in the workplace. I would sometimes wonder how I even got into construction given some of the banter that I used to overhear on site!

The good news is that this sector is a different place to what it was when I started and big steps have been taken on a long journey towards equality. There has been a lot of progress in encouraging women into the industry, through promotion of STEM in schools and

within workplaces, such as Taylor Woodrow's 'Women in Taylor Woodrow' (WiTW) working group. It's great to see VINCI Plc taking the subject seriously, having repeatedly been accredited by the National Centre for Diversity as Leaders in Diversity, for programmes such as their mental health first aid training and awareness. Bachy has also made the same commitments, through the 'Time to Change' campaign.

But there's still a long way to go and more work needs to be done to create a welcoming environment for all. The gender pay gap has been well publicised recently, and there is still a lot of work to be done to equalise pay across the industry. Another issue is research, by Stonewall, that suggests only half of LGBT+ people working in the sector are comfortable being openly LGBT+ at work. This figure needs to be lower – there is a legal obligation that nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable in their workplace. There is also empirical evidence from Stonewall that proves openly LGBT+ staff are more effective when supported by their employer.

Bachy has always been a great place to work, and I have never been made to feel anything other than welcome. But I have friends in other parts of the industry who unfortunately can't say the same. At operative / technician level within the construction industry there is still a way to go to improve diversity and inclusion, in particular there is a clear underrepresentation of women in these roles. The industry needs to do more to address the issues that surround flexible working for site operatives, which I believe would help to break down this barrier, encouraging entry onto sites for a diverse array of people. This industry is never going to grow and improve and be able to address the skills shortages that we face, unless we tackle this.

What would you say to young people who are looking at getting into the sector?

I have worked in the industry for nearly 20 years, and it is the everyday challenges as well as my personal interests that keep me here. What I really enjoy about my job is the family feel that we have in the office. There is always a feeling of mutual respect for different opinions and friendship amongst colleagues. Bachy Soletanche also continues to allow me to pursue my own interests, which often have the potential to bring mutual benefits to the business as a whole.

My invaluable experience with the VINCI Plc FIR working group has also led to me joining Stonewall, the LGBT+ equality charity, as an ambassador. I also joined InterEngineering, an organisation that believes diversity and inclusion within engineering is pivotal to business success. They also work closely with industry bodies to promote FIR and the business case for FIR in the workplace. I have also taken on the role of our office employee forum representative, so that I can engage with our directors on these topics and those which are of importance to all employees within the business. Through these activities, I have been able to engage Bachy Soletanche with major inclusivity and diversity programmes around the country. I am truly privileged to be able to campaign and promote something I believe in every day at work.

It's also important to emphasise that you can be the master of your own destiny in this sector, and at this company in particular. I think there is a common misconception that you can only get into this industry if you have a degree. But Bachy Soletanche actively encourages full and part time paid apprenticeship schemes, as well as partnerships with local universities, and offer scholarships to those which they see potential to do well in this industry. We also maintain links to local schools, participating in careers fairs for 11-16-year olds. This is because we want to employ as diverse a group of people as we can.

A line manager of mine started off on the tools of a ground investigation rig and worked his way up to become a principal geotechnical engineer. Another colleague entered the company in a similar role, and has gone on to become a senior supervisor, overseeing the safe and effective operation of our nationwide projects. This is a fundamental tenet of diversity and inclusivity – that anyone should be able to find opportunities to progress and succeed, regardless of their background, gender, sexuality or any other protected characteristic.

I have found this culture of inclusivity at Bachy – I truly hope others find the same elsewhere in the industry too.



New frontiers:

Opportunities for young people in the construction sector

Ken Gailey, Operations Director at Bachy Soletanche, has over thirty years' experience in the Geotechnics industry. During this period he has worked on sites and projects of all shapes and sizes, including spending three years living and working in Hong Kong. Ken tells us about the importance of attracting young people to the construction workforce and the wealth of opportunities that are available.

When the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in 2017 it promised to reverse a 20-year decline in investment in workplace skills. Not only was it supposed to be the Government's flagship policy for increasing the number of apprenticeships on offer, it was a fundamental pillar of the UK's strategy to alleviate a growing and increasingly concerning skill shortage. Yet over two years in, we're still not seeing the benefits. A recent survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that the number of people starting apprenticeships has fallen by more than a quarter since the Levy was introduced.

For the construction industry, especially the geotechnics sector, the shortcomings of the scheme have been a contributing factor in the inability of many businesses to bring in the fresh new talent that they need. Young people and graduates in particular can bring with them an enormous amount of instinctive digital knowledge that somebody who has been in the industry 15 or 20 years simply does not have. And these digital skills are increasingly important in geotechnics, because methods of construction at all stages of a project are undergoing a rapid digital transformation.

If we don't attract more young people into the sector, this fast evolution will continue to outpace the skillset of the workforce. This will place additional strain on the construction workforce, hindering the speed at which businesses can innovate and implement new technologies and undermining the quality, value and effectiveness of the sector's work. It's one of the biggest challenges facing our industry right now, and one we need to tackle as a matter of urgency.

A holistic approach

One issue is that our sector has always been very inconsistent in the way it approaches talent development. Some companies invest the time and effort it needs and do it very well; others unfortunately see it as non-core to delivery of their projects and woefully underinvest.

Bachy Soletanche has always taken great pride in the way we encourage people from all walks of life to fulfil their potential. We have longstanding partnerships with universities and further education colleges around the UK – the students of which are able to access work placements and on-the-job training with us to complement their learning and forge a strong start to their career. Aside from attracting some very intelligent and eager-to-learn talent, we also find we have a much higher retention rate amongst employees that come to us via this route.

I think this has probably got a lot to do with the atmosphere we have developed, both on site and in the office. When new apprentices or placement students join us we always ensure that they have a mentor. The mentor system is in place to make the transition into the workplace as seamless as possible, ensuring new employees don't feel out of their depth or alone. We also actively encourage young people finding their way in the industry by giving them the opportunity to gain experience in various parts of the business. This not only gives them a holistic view of the company, it provides a generalist foundation from which they can begin to build a picture of the specialism they might want to focus on as they begin their career in earnest.

The construction sector needs to wake up and understand how important this will be to our collective success in the future. It's not just about attracting people to your company and filling your own skills gap – it's about making our industry as a whole seem more appealing to those who are still determining what direction they want their career to go in. Construction, and geotechnics within that, is competing with every other industry sector – many of which are more appealing to the majority of candidates, at least on the surface. We need to up our game in this battle, otherwise it's one we're going to continue to lose.

Moving with the times

I am often asked what I think needs to be done to encourage more people into the construction sector, and to be honest there is no simple answer. The challenge is multi-faceted because people have a lot of different opinions around what the job entails, many of which are incorrect or misinformed. In my experience it's the architects that get a lot of the praise and enjoy the highest profile role in our sector, but the fact of the matter is the buildings they design could never be constructed without the work of specialist companies further down the supply chain, particularly those in the geotechnical sector.

From my experience, there is a perception among young people that working as an engineer means they will be stood in a cold and wet muddy field braving it against the elements surrounded by loud machinery and vehicles. This is a misconception – many of our engineers will rarely set foot in a muddy field throughout their entire career and working conditions on site have vastly improved in recent years. Realistically, this misconception comes from a lack of understanding about what the job entails. In all honesty, the sites our engineers work on differ greatly which means every day is different. One day our engineers may be analysing rock and soil samples, another day they may be supervising the drilling to create the foundations for a new skyscraper.

While the Apprenticeship Levy and other government initiatives clearly haven't reached their full potential, the industry needs to admit that we don't always get it right when it comes to promoting what we do and how important it is. Most importantly, we need to be getting in at the very earliest stage and talking to young people when they are still in school – waiting until they are at university is too late.

Several geotechnical specialists offer apprenticeship schemes in partnership with the Federation of Piling Specialists (FPS), higher level apprenticeships in civil engineering or quantity surveying and plant apprenticeship schemes in mechanics and fabrication/welding. Many of these opportunities are available direct from school or College, and there is a wealth of different pathways you can take – but if you're not in the schools talking to pupils at or ideally before GCSE age, helping them to make informed decisions, you're going to have missed the boat.

We're doing more and more in this regard by partnering with schools and getting in to speak to pupils from as early as possible, but there's always more that can be done. And crucially companies need to realise that there isn't going to be an immediate return on that investment of time. This is something we need to do now to tackle the skills crisis five, ten, fifteen years in the future – but in an industry that runs on tight margins and is always looking at the short-term, I fear that kind of long-term thinking is all too hard to come by.

Reaping the rewards

This industry has a lot to offer to anyone who is looking to forge a long and rewarding career in the field of engineering. Indeed, one of the greatest things about this job isn't the engineering side of things, it's the other skills you develop like teamwork, leadership, communication, respect – all of which are just as useful in life as they are in the workplace.

Engaging young people at an early age and letting them know about the qualifications and skills they can gain throughout their career, regardless of their academic background, will be integral to the ongoing success of this sector against a backdrop of serious economic and political challenges. It will also ensure that technological advancements can be seamlessly implemented into our daily work, which will in turn help us to begin to tackle some of the pressing issues we face in our society, from the housing crisis to the need for new major infrastructure. In my opinion, the government need to play their part, but that is only half of the equation. There needs to be a concerted effort from all the major players within the industry to diversify their workforce and promote the benefits of a career in this sector to people of all backgrounds. Getting this right will not only ensure the success of our industry, it will inspire successive generations to become leaders in a sector that is undergoing a rapid change.



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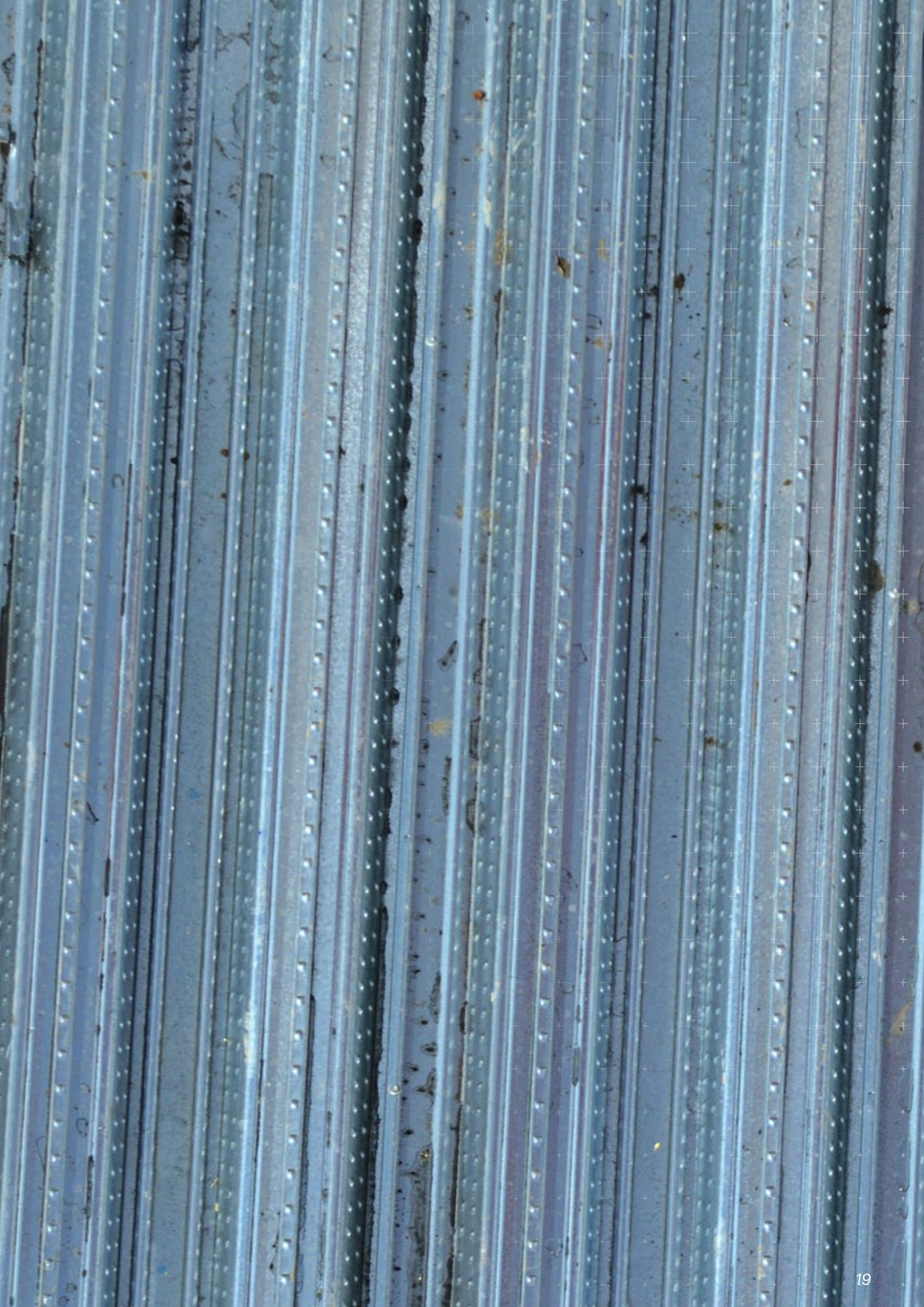
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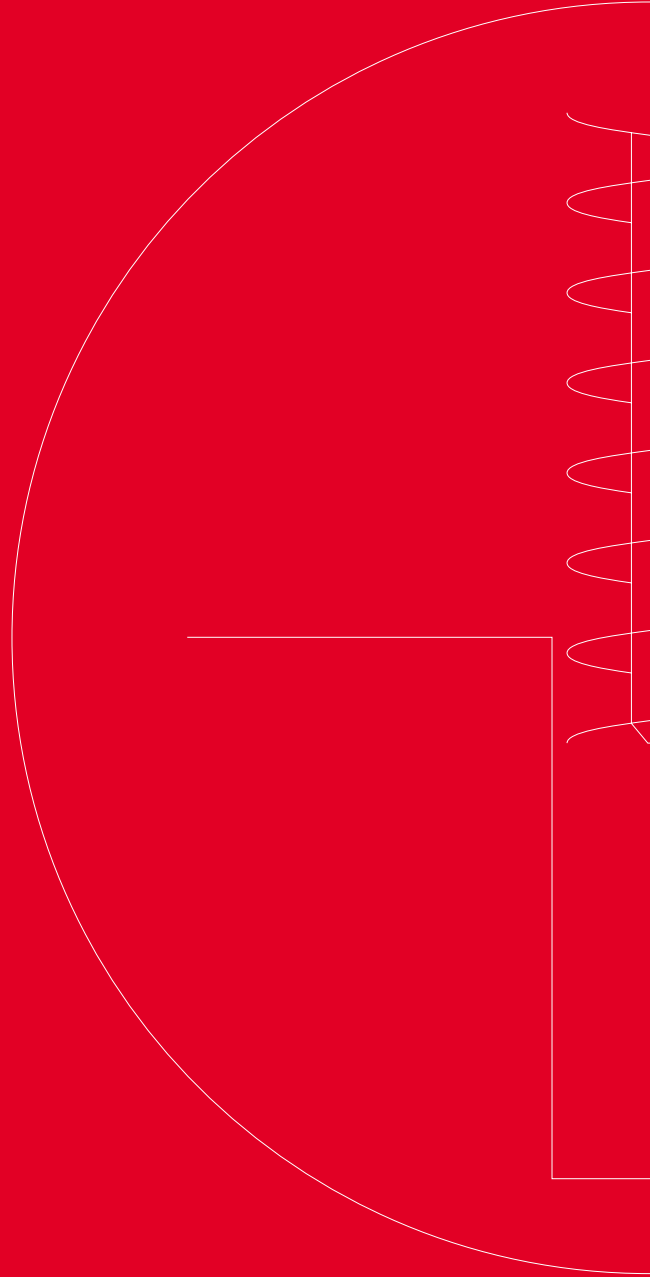
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