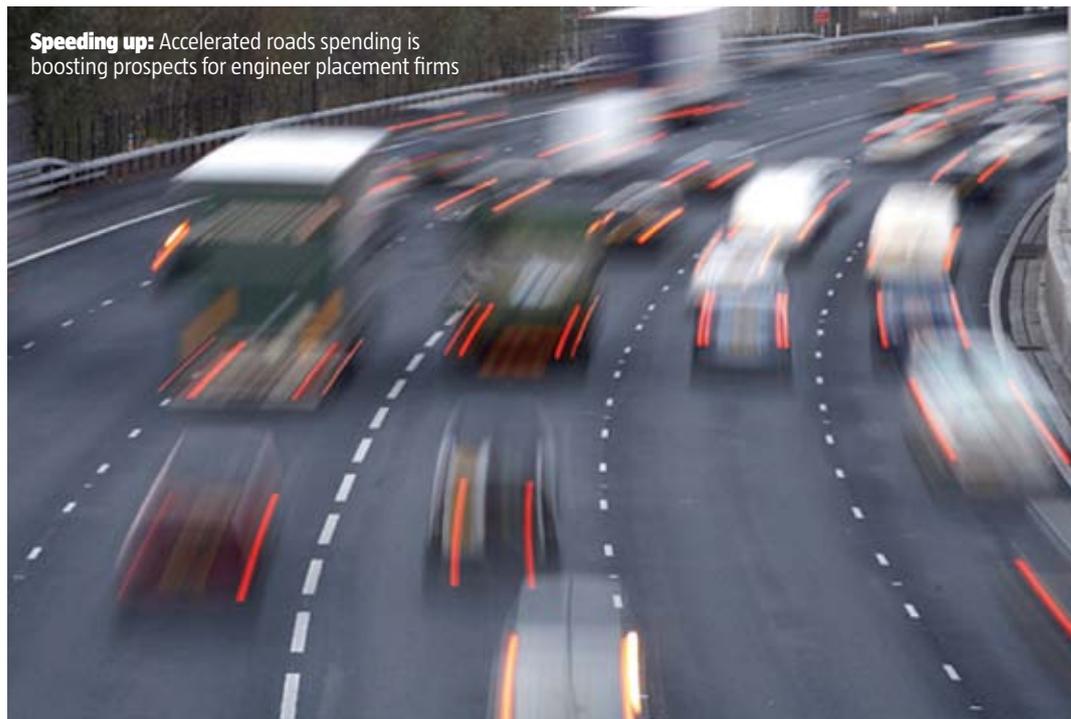


With a tsunami of work promised after the government pledged £15bn of road building, secondment firm Waterman Aspen says the recruitment market is about to get even more competitive. **Ben Cronin** reports



**Speeding up:** Accelerated roads spending is boosting prospects for engineer placement firms

# TURNING A CORNER

If recruitment levels are the bellwether for the state of the economy, then Waterman Aspen's figures suggest engineering has turned a corner. The company, which has been seconding employees into a variety of engineering positions for 26 years, says the size of its workforce has now exceeded the level it was at in the days before the financial crisis. "We are now almost 400 strong and have experienced unprecedented growth over the past two years with demand for our services at record levels throughout the UK" says managing director Chris Chaplin.

Chaplin says he wants the company to be the temporary staffing provider of choice for the highways and transportation sector, but he is keen to stress that the firm is not a recruitment agency. "First of all, the majority of the engineers and technicians we place on secondment with other consultancy firms or local authorities are salaried members of our workforce," he says. "And, unlike most recruitment firms, almost all of our managers are engineers themselves." This includes Chaplin who started his career at Kent County Council

in what used to be the South Eastern Road Construction Unit.

"We're more akin to a consultant than an agency," he says. "We know our clients' businesses and we help either by putting individuals or teams of people into their offices, or taking packages of work away and doing them in a Waterman office."

Chaplin believes that public sector spending cuts and the way infrastructure projects are now funded is partly responsible for the company's recent growth.

"The public sector has had to reduce their permanent staff establishments and we provide them with the ability to undertake their projects in-house – otherwise they'd have just lost control of them completely" he explains.

Waterman Aspen are part of the multi-disciplinary Waterman Group but their staff work in integrated teams under the supervision of client managers with a variety of private and public sector clients. The firm has also partnered with consultants including URS and Atkins to bid successfully for frameworks including the Midlands Highway Alliance, West Midlands Highways

**"We are now almost 400 strong and have experienced unprecedented growth with demand for our services at record levels"**

Chris Chaplin,  
Waterman Aspen

Alliance and the Hampshire County Council Strategic Partner Contract.

With the government having recently announced £15 billion worth of spending on roads there will be plenty more work in the pipeline but Chaplin isn't alone in thinking that the industry will struggle to find the human resources for the work: "It's quite scary to think they've announced what's been described as a 'tsunami of work' that is going to be released in March. That is additional work in a market where there is already a limit on the resources available," he says.

This of course is good news for employees. Chaplin accepts

that Waterman Aspen has to offer a competitive benefits package to attract talent that is thin on the ground.

"Good professionals with relevant experience will realise that they're the ones holding all the cards at the moment," he says. "Our packages have to be the best we can offer because there's so much demand."

Salaried staff at the firm can therefore expect to be offered a company car, a flexible benefits package and on-going training, but Chaplin thinks that the variety of work offered by Waterman Aspen is the greatest perk – and this also informs the type of recruit he looks for.

"Although much of our business is about reacting to client needs, we're not just recruiting staff to fill a specific role because that post might finish in a few months – we're looking for someone who enjoys the challenge of something new".

We call it "variety with security": we offer stable and time planned secondments fulfilling client project needs, however in order to develop and grow when the time is right, we evolve our staff to new secondments allowing a broadening of skills base and personal development."

## Staff Profiles

To offer an insight into what it is like to work for Waterman Aspen we have asked some of our employees to share their experiences with you:



In his time since starting with Waterman Aspen in 2007, Chris has seen his own career develop, joining as a Senior Engineer and progressing up to Associate Director. Through his secondments to various clients, Chris project managed the Traffic Management for the Chamberlain Award winning visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Birmingham in 2010 and is currently leading the programme delivery of the £30M Coventry City Centre Public Realm Project, which has won numerous industry accolades. Chris won the CIHT West Midlands Branch Young Professional of the Year Award in 2013 and is now part of the senior management team at Waterman Aspen. He says “My success in my career to date is down to the support of both Waterman Aspen and the clients I’ve been seconded to”

Lucy is a Senior Technician who has been with the firm since 2009. Lucy is currently on the ICE’s Graduates and Students Committee, organising events and liaising with various Universities. She is also a STEM Ambassador mentoring young people in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Lucy considers the best thing about working for Waterman Aspen is that “the nature of the company means that I will never have the risk of being pigeon holed into one area of Civil Engineering. I have been able to gain experience in several different areas. If you are considering a change in career trajectory, looking for a supportive employer, wanting more experience and great opportunities then I would definitely recommend Waterman Aspen”



Waterman Aspen has a successful track record in developing staff to Incorporated and Chartered status through their ICE approved training scheme. Tim joined Waterman Aspen 18 months ago due to “the variety of clients and projects I could potentially be involved with”. Tim also believes that “Joining Waterman Aspen has opened up opportunities where I could push for professional development for myself and my staff. I have a good mentor who has the time and the experience to help and guide me towards my goals”

Lucy joined Waterman Aspen’s North East team as a junior Technician in 2006 and has since worked on secondment with 5 different clients. Lucy has gained experience in a wide range of projects, including high profile projects such as Crossrail and the New Tyne Crossing. She has developed new skills through training and through hands on experience of software including AutoCAD and 3D Microstation. Lucy is currently seconded to a large, multi-disciplinary Consultancy and says “I have really enjoyed working within different client teams and have gained a unique perspective of the industry both in the office and on site”



If you would like to find out more about the variety we offer please visit our website [www.watermanaspen.co.uk](http://www.watermanaspen.co.uk) or contact [mark.emberton@watermanaspen.co.uk](mailto:mark.emberton@watermanaspen.co.uk)