



IHE PRESIDENT 2008-2010

TONY SHARP IEng FIHE

Traffic Signals Engineer, South Gloucestershire CC

Tony Sharp represents and is representative of IHE's members. Now an engineer in the Traffic Signals team in South Gloucestershire Council, he came into highways originally from a non-engineering post in trading standards. He followed the then "traditional" route of day release for O/HNC, gaining career experience over a number of years first for Eng Tech moving onto IEng in 1995.

Because few people know about careers in highways (to the public "a road is a road", not the rather "clever structure" that it actually is) Tony thinks it's vital that IHE, along with sister organisations, policy advisers, and Government, raise the profile of engineering and of highways and transportation within it. Ideally it should feature as one of the careers of choice for school and University leavers. Tony believes that such co-operation is the way to make an impact on the intractable problem of young people's perceptions of "engineering", a profession many still associate with heavy outdoor labour, and repairing boilers and motorcars.

Tony hopes that we can create opportunities out of the economic downturn. It might make some of the "glitzy" occupations, finance especially, less attractive to those soon to leave university. More importantly, we need to persuade employers that this is the time to maintain or increase their recruitment and training of new entrants and existing staff.

"This requires staff planning over greater lengths of time than we have traditionally done", he says. "Many who entered the profession via the O/HNC route will retire in the couple of decades and the skills gap that has recently been 'plugged' "externally" will only get wider. Colleagues are starting to return to their home countries in Eastern Europe or the southern hemisphere as these economies grow and create their own skills gap (and in turn attract UK engineers more than happy to transferring their skills to these other countries). Consequently, without strategic decisions to invest being taken now, when the upturn comes there will not be enough people competent to do the work."

Tony's priority is therefore to extend the IHE's groundbreaking competence based Professional Certificates to cover all the specialisms in highways and transportation. Government regulations (CDM etc) frequently demand that employers must use "competent" staff on construction work. Yet "competent" is difficult to define across such a varied industry. To give employers and staff security that

they are competent, IHE is establishing a series of Certificates where "Knowledge" and more importantly "application" of such knowledge is assessed. The first, in Development Control, is already successful; that in Traffic Signals was well received at the 2008 JCT Symposium and has already been awarded to 17 TfL candidates. Others will need to follow with Road safety the next in line. Tony sees this initiative as IHE again "punching above its weight".

Tony looks forward to building on IHE's strengths: membership participation at all levels, and a focus on the needs and wants of the "doers" in highways: the "practical" men and women who make up that membership. He is "is proud of what IHE has achieved", and knows it "can achieve even more working with other professional organisations".

- *Tony chaired the steering group for the IHE Motorcycling Guidelines. Subsequently the Transport Minister asked him to join the National Motorcycle Council and chair its traffic and transport group. It is a measure of the Guidelines importance that Tony has been invited to speak in USA, Australia, Scotland and to various European forums.*
- *A keen signals engineer Tony has chaired sessions at the JCT Symposium and assisted in moving the user group hosting to IHE.*
- *This next project is developing IHE's role in road safety.*