

# BREEDON: CASE STUDY

## RECRUITING APPRENTICES IN RURAL AREAS



### INSIGHTS:

Breedon is a leading vertically-integrated construction materials group in Great Britain, Ireland and the USA and delivers essential products to the construction industry with the essential materials needed to build the places where we live and work, play and in-between. Like many other construction industries Breedon faces familiar challenges with an aging workforce, vacancies in hard-to-fill rural locations and a desire to recruit more diverse talent. In 2024 Breedon engaged with Cohesion, an early talent recruitment specialist with over 30 years of experience, embarking on a mission to recruit a diverse group of apprentices across some of their most rural sites in the UK, to join their successful apprentice programme, bridging the skills gap by attracting fresh talent into the organisation.

*"In our recruitment efforts, we're not just looking for candidates to fill roles now; we're focused on bringing in new talent dedicated with a focus on supporting sustainable building practices and embracing digital transformation, ensuring that we stay at the forefront of the industry".*

### THE CHALLENGE OF RURAL RECRUITMENT

Given Breedon's business model of extracting raw materials from the ground and transporting them across the UK, many of their sites are located in remote regions. This presents unique challenges, such as a limited talent pool and sparse public transport networks.

To successfully recruit a diverse cohort of apprentices in these areas, we needed to work collaboratively, bringing hiring managers on board with targeted local attraction efforts, and delivering an engaging and supportive candidate experience.

**Local outreach:** With a data-driven approach undertaking a school-mapping exercise by location, we focused our recruitment efforts on a hyper-local level. For instance, when recruiting in the remote Scottish town of Stornoway, on the Isle of Lewis we focussed on specific outreach to local schools, utilised local websites such as "welovestornaway" and encouraged current employees to spread the word within their communities and online networks, sharing job details and starting conversations to raise awareness.

**Engaging and supporting candidates:** Attraction is just one part of the recruitment puzzle, especially as construction is a sector that may not naturally encourage fresh new diverse talent to gravitate towards it. So once candidates do apply, it's crucial for us to be adaptive to their needs, personalising their recruitment experience to keep them engaged and supported throughout.

In a highly automated world, we recognise the value of the "human touch" so instead of relying on automated video interviews, we opted for interactive career conversations over the phone, outside of school and college hours, supporting candidates to give the best account themselves and delving deeper into motivations whilst providing them with a chance to ask questions. Additionally, we discussed ways of working and transport networks to ensure their potential commute would be manageable

### PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE CANDIDATE SUPPORT

At Cohesion, we feel a responsibility to ensure our candidates are fully prepared for each stage of the process, taking the time to call, text, create videos and prepare each candidate individually for the stage ahead. Having someone for them to talk to and ask advice, as well as knowing what to expect, how to prepare, and when they could anticipate hearing back about their interview results was key.

This level of transparency and support was particularly beneficial for many candidates, especially those attending their first ever interviews.

#### Positive outcomes

Our collaborative efforts yielded impressive results: not only did we successfully fill the roles in these rural locations, but also increased the percentage of females hired by 13% year on year. Hiring managers and the wider HR team were thrilled with the quality of candidates, and candidate feedback suggested they felt well-supported throughout.

#### Early Careers Manager Ceri Travers said:

*"This was our first year in partnership with Cohesion, who helped create a fantastic recruitment experience for our 2024 early careers cohort.*

*Their collaboration with our HR team and hiring managers has cemented strong relationships across the Group. We were delighted with the insights and market knowledge provided, working together in a truly "cohesive" manner. Cohesion have become an integral partner to our Early Careers recruitment team.*

*As we move forward, we're excited to continue developing our approach to attracting and retaining the next generation of diverse talent, ensuring a sustainable workforce in the years to come".*