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# Teamwork sets product approval on right track



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Collaboration is the French word for it and in the UK the popular name is partnering. But whatever you call it, the days of 'keep out of my patch' are long gone.

The manner in which the Highway Authorities Product Approval Scheme (HAPAS) has been developed, and the result this work has achieved, exemplifies the benefits of adopting close working relationships.

Plans for a national approval scheme for innovative highway products and materials were first announced back in 1997. There was one main thought uppermost in most peoples' minds: that for such a scheme to be successful all parties with a technical interest in building and maintaining roads must be fully involved.

The Highways Agency and other highway authorities shared the asphalt industry's concern that some good new ideas were taking far too long to be accepted for use in UK road construction. Caution is a prudent attribute of engineers. But there was concern that this was beginning to stultify innovative developments in techniques, products and materials. In simple terms, the UK's highway industry was being left behind.

The Highways Agency (HA) and CSS got together with the British Board of Agrément (BBA) to see whether something could be gained by looking at how other countries operated. The French approach to product and material development proved to be particularly relevant and it was noticed that in France there appeared to be greater readiness to use innovative products at an earlier stage.

French authorities use an Avis Techniques (Technical Notices) system already well known and understood by the BBA which has been a member of the European Union of Agrément (UEAte) for over 30 years.

The 'agrément' process for approving innovative building products is well established in most European

countries and a system of confirmations of certificates between members in different countries is a useful aid to cross border trade.

This model fitted the UK requirements exactly so HAPAS was set up with BBA as the assessor and technical secretariat. HAPAS certificates are published as BBA/HAPAS Roads & Bridges Agrément Certificates.

From the outset it was foreseen that HAPAS must be technically thorough so the certificates could be absolutely relied upon by engineers using the products. Applicants for HAPAS approval must supply comprehensive data able to stand close scrutiny by the BBA. The process is very time consuming and therefore is not cheap. However, as the BBA is a non profit distributing company linked to the Government, the fees involved in gaining HAPAS approval reflect the actual costs involved.

The value of a truly national approval scheme is enormous and there are benefits to be reaped by everyone involved. Repeat evaluation of the same product by different highway authorities is eliminated. Engineers keen to produce better solutions by using good new products are given the assurance that the innovation will not let them down. Producers can start to recoup development costs at an earlier stage and specification writing is simplified by calling for HAPAS approved products only.

Development of HAPAS has proven a great success. This has been due to the enthusiastic participation of the highway authorities, producers, research bodies and other experts on the various Specialist Groups which have drawn up guidelines for testing, assessment and certification of each HAPAS product category.

In total 44 HAPAS certificates have been issued and many more are coming through the system including those for thin surfacings. This is a remarkable testimony of how results can be achieved when the industry pulls together as a whole.