

OC OF THE MONTH

October 2019



Johannes Whittam (QG 2008)

A LEVELS: Maths, Further Maths, DT and Physics
UNIVERSITY: Engineering (Civil and Structural) at
Cambridge University

1. Please tell us a little about yourself – where do you currently work, and how did you get into that?

I currently work as the Rwanda Program Director for Bridges to Prosperity. Bridges to Prosperity (B2P) is an international non-profit (INGO) that builds footbridges over rivers in rural parts of developing countries to provide access to healthcare, education and markets. Before moving to Kigali, Rwanda in 2018 I spent 5 years working as a Civil Engineer designing bridges and stadia. I had a hand in the design of pretty much all aspects of the design of the main bridge of Mersey Gateway Crossing (a 2km long 3 span concrete cable stayed bridge, with 3 lanes of traffic in each direction over the River Mersey) and spent a year and a half supervising the construction. I also worked on aspects of the design of the Tottenham Hotspur Football Club stadium as well as a variety of other projects. After becoming a Chartered Civil Engineer with the Institution of Civil Engineers and the opening of Mersey Gateway I decided to move to Rwanda to work for

B2P. I'd been involved with the organisation since building a bridge in Rwanda in 2015 and am really passionate about using my skills as an engineer to help others. I'm now in charge of the program here in Rwanda as we finalise a \$30million (USD) agreement with the Rwandan Government to build 355 footbridges over the next 5 years. It's going to be a real challenge as we increase our operations here by a factor of 5 over two years but I'm very excited to be changing the rural access of a whole country, directly impacting over 1 million Rwandese.

2. What are some of your proudest achievements since graduating?

Completing construction of the first B2P bridge I worked on in Rwanda. The completion and opening of Mersey Gateway Crossing. Becoming a Chartered Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers and receiving a nomination for the James Rennie Award for the best overall candidate.

3. What advice would you give someone who is looking to follow a similar career path?

Have ambitious goals but break them down into intermediate, achievable steps.

4. How has your experience at Highgate contributed to your life and successes since leaving school?

I think the foundation of a very comprehensive education in Maths really helped me through Cambridge University and as I started my career. The DT Department's relentless enthusiasm definitely helped me gain my own motivation and excitement for engineering.

5. Did your time at Highgate help you? If so, how?

It's fair to say I left Highgate a very different man to the boy who entered it. Highgate has a unique ability to build confidence – at least that was my experience of it – whether on the sporting fields or in the classroom. My sporting memories will forever hold a large place in my heart, genuine camaraderie all round and where leadership roles were thrust on me for the first time (messrs Tappy, Evans, Sanjay, Starbrook, Humphries, Henderson and Wright, if you're reading – thank you!!!).

6. In three words, how would you describe Highgate?

Challenging, Caring, Positive

7. What's next?

Building all the suspended and suspension footbridges that Rwanda needs, changing the rural access landscape to give the population reliable access to healthcare, education and markets.