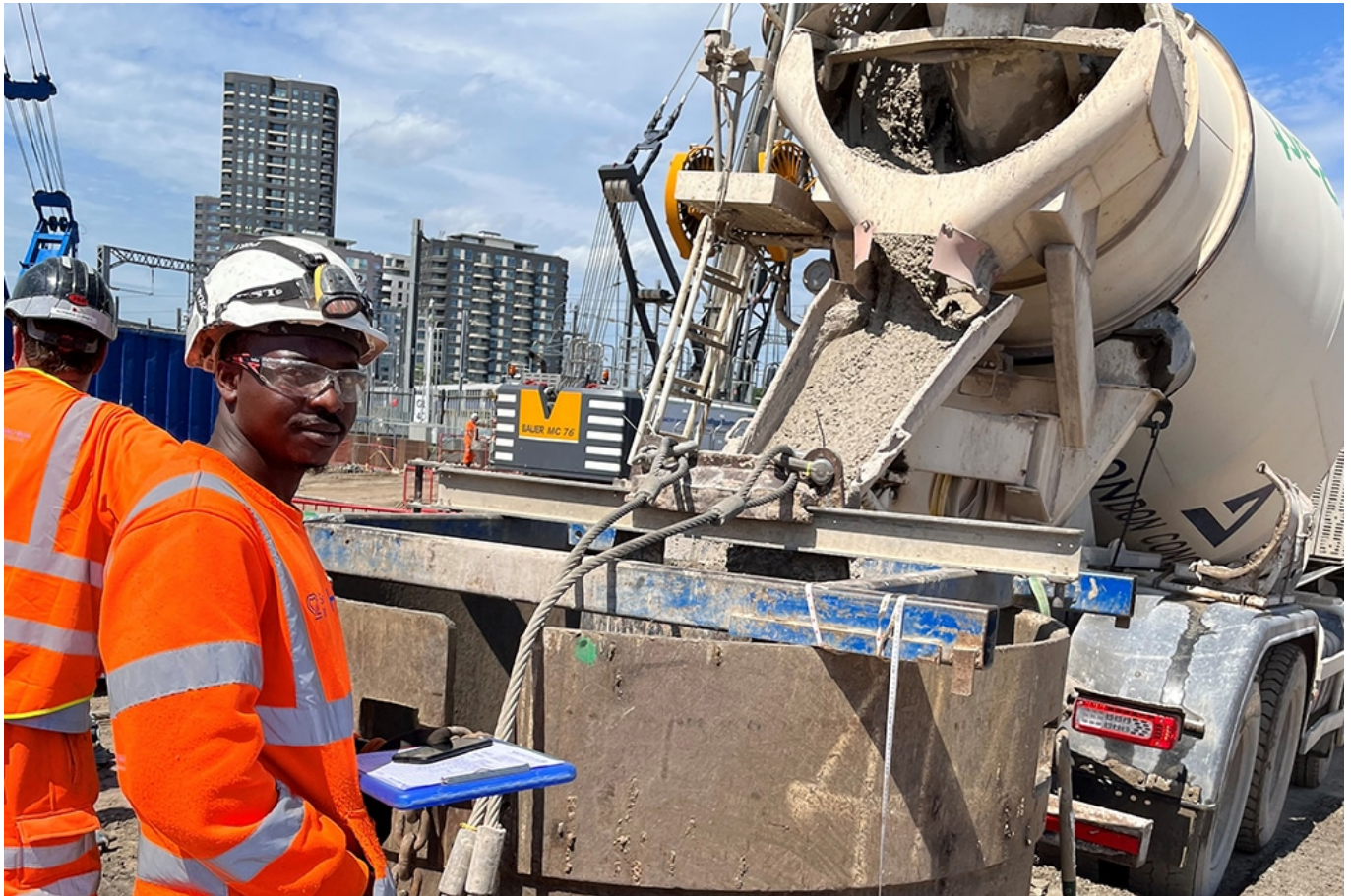


From office cleaner to HS2 site engineer

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An aspiring engineer from Nigeria is climbing the career ladder and helping to build Britain's new railway after being handed a one-off opportunity by Bachy Soletanche, a specialist geotechnics contractor working on HS2, with Balfour Beatty Ground Engineering.

In just one year, 29-year-old Osaro Okuonghae, who lives in Birmingham during the week, and Peckham at weekends, fast-tracked from cleaning the welfare accommodation units at HS2's Old Oak Common Station to working as a site engineer helping to build the new transport superhub.

Two years ago, Osaro made the bold decision to leave Nigeria and progress his studies in the UK. The cost of living in the capital, combined with studying for a master's in Civil Engineering at the University of East London, soon took its toll and Osaro took a part-time job as a cleaner. By chance, he was placed at Old Oak Common, where he soon made friends with the on site engineers.

His passion for civil engineering shone through as he quizzed the engineering team about the construction works underway. Noting that he was keen to progress, qualified, and in need of a lucky break, the site's project manager asked for his CV. Weeks later, Osaro was invited to interview for a vacancy in the engineering team.

One year on, and Osaro is now a valued member of the orange army helping to build HS2. Having successfully completed his master's degree, he spent nine months working with the team at Old Oak Common and has since transferred to join the team building HS2 in the West Midlands.

Speaking about his lucky break, and the chance to work on Europe's biggest infrastructure project, Osaro said: "The support I have received from the entire team is just amazing, and I'm incredibly grateful that they saw potential in me and gave me this opportunity.

"I've been able to put my studies into practice, and the training I've received means I've been able to get hand-on in so many different aspects of HS2's construction, from quality assurance, piling and constructing diaphragm walls.

"Everyone at Bachy Soletanche and Balfour Beatty VINCI SYSTRA has helped me on this journey, and I'm so proud to be playing a part in building HS2 in London and the West Midlands."

Vincent Leblois, Project Director for Balfour Beatty Ground Engineering SB3 said: "We're very fortunate to have had Osaro on our team and it's been great to see how much he has progressed throughout his time working at Old Oak Common. With his positive attitude, and willingness to learn and take on new challenges, Osaro has been an asset to our team and he has shown great potential.

"It's fantastic that with the support of HS2, we are able to offer such important opportunities to aspiring engineers like Osaro and help them lay the foundations for a successful career."

HS2's workforce has now reached almost 30,000 and with two decades of construction works ahead, as the HS2 network extends North, there will be thousands more opportunities for people to play their part.

There are currently over 170 live vacancies with HS2's construction partners and contractors working on their behalf. For more information about careers with HS2, visit hs2.org.uk/careers