

HS2 announces free construction training and paid work placements to help women develop a career in construction

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HS2 and its construction partners are hosting several local initiatives to encourage more women to step forward and consider a career in construction and engineering to mark International Women's Day.

With a workforce of more than 20,000 already in place, and more than 34,000 jobs expected to be supported during the life span of the project, HS2 says it recognises it has a vital role to play in supporting more women to feel empowered to start a career in construction.

Through its partnership with not-for-profit organisation, Women into Construction, HS2 created bespoke training and work placement 'taster opportunities', which led to sustainable employment in the construction sector for local women in the West Midlands. Now with its construction partner, Balfour Beatty VINCI, HS2 is seeking to build on that success by encouraging more women to discover if a career in construction might be for them.

Julie Venn-Morton, HS2's Skills Manager for the West Midlands region said: "For many women, a career in

construction isn't something they might ever have considered, and we know we have to think and act differently to challenge that mindset.

"By providing access to free training and paid work placements, we're able to support women of all ages to discover what it's really like to work in construction and showcase the variety of career pathways this can open up for them in the future."

Since the opening of its Birmingham-based Skills Academy in November, Balfour Beatty VINCI, in partnership with South and City College, has been encouraging more women to take advantage of the free training and support available. Training courses provide individuals with the skills and accreditation needed to begin working in a safe and supportive environment on HS2 construction sites. All programmes are bespoke and, regardless of skills or experience, participants can progress onto a paid work trial and job interview within just 4-6 weeks.

26-year-old Meriem Barra from Birmingham was working as a coffee shop manager before signing up at BBV's Skills Academy. After successfully completing her training and work trial, she's now a Trainee Engineer at Balfour Beatty VINCI's Washwood Heath construction site. Meriem encourages more women to visit the Skills Academy and find out how it could help them to discover a new career.

Meriem said: "I had always wanted a career in construction, as it had been a passion ever since I was young. But as a Muslim female who was not born in the UK, I was initially concerned that I may find it difficult to be accepted as a construction professional. The support I received, and the workplace culture really inspired me and gave me the confidence to pursue my dream."

"Working on HS2 is a once in a lifetime opportunity to be part of something truly amazing and iconic. I love what I do and I'm confident it will provide me with the career growth that I have been seeking."

Later this month, Balfour Beatty VINCI will be welcoming new starters onto its general operatives training programme, and it hopes more women will feel empowered to give it a go.

Shilpi Akbar, Balfour Beatty VINCI's Head of Stakeholders and Communities said: "Through our work to deliver Britain's new high-speed railway, we are making significant strides in changing the face of the construction and infrastructure industry; putting in place comprehensive and accessible training schemes to encourage new entrants to the industry."

"As we celebrate International Women's Day, we continue to take an active approach to the recruitment of women of all ages; providing those who join us with the opportunity to expand their skills and knowledge whilst working on one of the most exciting infrastructure schemes the UK has ever seen."

Balfour Beatty VINCI's free training programmes, which are delivered at its Academy in Bordesley Green, Birmingham are open to men and women of all ages. To register an interest in its next programme visit bbvskills@sccb.ac.uk.

Balfour Beatty Flannery, a partnership between Balfour Beatty and Flannery Plant Hire, is also hosting a dedicated 'women-only' taster session at its Plant Operator Skills Hub in Dunton Wharf, Curdworth, Sutton

Coldfield on Saturday 12 March. There are 60 places available, and applicants must register in advance with selena.tombs@balfourbeatty.com to book a place.

The purpose-built facility, which opened its doors last year, uses state-of-the-art training simulators, as well as the latest semi-autonomous vehicles, to prepare job seekers interested in a career as a plant operator for the modern-day, digital enabled world of construction. Once successfully assessed and qualified, applicants will transition into roles supporting HS2's construction.

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd