

HS2 asks pupils with disabilities for ideas on improving stations and trains

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Pupils from three Birmingham schools and colleges dedicated to providing support for students with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), have presented their ideas for how the design of HS2's stations and trains can meet the needs of passengers with a disability.

Pupils from Braidwood school for the Deaf in Hodge Hill, Heart of Birmingham College in Washwood Heath and Queensbury School in Erdington were invited to take part in a virtual work experience programme with HS2. The partnership forms part of HS2's commitment to provide inclusive career development opportunities for SEND pupils and support them to achieve positive career outcomes.

According to NHS data*, the proportion of adults in the UK with a learning disability who are in employment is 5.6%, but in Birmingham it is just 1.4%. Working closely with SEND schools in the region, HS2's Skills, Employment and Education team hope to improve on these alarming statistics by creating pathways into learning and employment on Britain's new railway.

Richard Winter, Education Manager at HS2 Ltd said:

"It's vital that HS2 leaves a lasting skills legacy, and that local people benefit from the thousands of training and employment opportunities HS2 is creating."

“Through our work as a Cornerstone Employer for the Careers and Enterprise Company in Birmingham, we’re striving to ensure that young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are at the forefront of the opportunities we are creating and feel empowered to recognise the valuable role that they can play in the delivery this once in a lifetime project.”

The work experience programme was delivered with the support of 20 HS2 staff, which included employees with a registered disability. This provided the opportunity for staff to share their personal experiences and openly discuss students’ concerns about potential barriers into employment.

As part of the programme, students were assigned a bespoke project which encouraged them to work as a team to develop innovations which could make HS2’s stations and trains more accessible to people with a disability. On completion, the team delivered their presentation to HS2’s Innovation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion teams for review.

Andrew Pestana, HS2’s Innovation Strategy Manager said:

“Multiple voices lead to new ideas, new services, and new products, and encourage out-of-the-box thinking – and that’s exactly what this work experience programme showed.

“The students’ ideas really highlighted the barriers they can face when using public transport, and it’s vital that we listen and learn from their feedback to ensure that Britain’s new railway reflects the needs of everyone it will serve.

“Simple ideas, like changing seat configurations for signers, and ensuring that all staff carry a notebook and pen really can make a huge difference for passengers with a hearing impairment, and we’ll certainly be taking those ideas on board.”

Phil Bailey, Deputy Head and Careers Leader at Braidwood School, said:

“HS2 have put so much effort into creating a programme that really is so useful, relevant, and totally worthwhile. It really has opened the students’ eyes and got them interested to know more.

“HS2 is going to be a massive part of their lives and raising their awareness of it and the opportunities it will bring for employment is so important.”

HS2 recognises that a diverse and inclusive workforce and supply chain is necessary to drive innovation, foster creativity, and guide business strategies. It will continue its schools engagement programme in the autumn term, highlighting the pathways into employment it offers for young people, including its work experience and apprenticeship programmes.

For more information about HS2’s education programmes and to access free online education resources, visit <https://www.hs2.org.uk/in-your-area/education/>