

HS2 Minister visits Birmingham to open new INFRA Skills training centre

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Andrew Stephenson, Minister of State at the Department of Transport and the HS2 Minister, officially opened the new purpose-built INFRA Skills Training Centre in Aston, Birmingham.

The new INFRA Skills Training Centre focuses primarily on rail and construction training. This vital training facility will assist infrastructure companies in developing and training their workforce to meet the demand for £55 billion in rail contracts by 2022. The West Midlands area is currently responsible for 49,000 railway-related jobs – the joint second-highest concentration of all UK regions outside of London.

The new centre, located in the heart of the West Midlands, provides modern on-site training. Adjacent to the centre is a purpose-built Rail Training area with more than 80 metres of railway track, including working points, signals, RRAPs and a level crossing. An Overhead Line Span will be added in the coming weeks, making it one of the best training facilities in the country. INFRA Skills trainers work with students to ensure they gain hands-on, practical experience in learning the skills required to build and maintain rail lines.

INFRA Skills is actively supporting rail and construction companies to build a workforce capable of building,

maintaining, and repairing the UK's infrastructure, while also ensuring our industry has the skills it needs to grow the economy, especially when HS2 opens in 2026.

During his visit, he also stopped by the HS2 Induction Centre, run by parent company Auctus Management Group, which provides inductions for all Balfour Beatty Vinci employees and subcontractors working on the Midlands section from Long Itchington to Stafford.

The Minister also saw on-track demonstrations from INFRA Skills sister company, RSS Infrastructure. They showcased their Welding, Track Warning Services, Safety-Critical Resourcing, and Construction and Civils capability at the newly developed Training Induction Area.

We spoke with the Minister about the government's training initiatives and the importance of companies like INFRA Skills in delivering their plans.

Andrew Stephenson MP, Minister of State, Department of Transport, said: "I'd like to pay tribute to the work of INFRA Skills in delivering the new skilled workforce that we need for the Rail sector. There is going to be a huge opportunity in the Rail industry in the years to come.

"There are many people in the workforce currently who are ageing and have a huge amount of skills that they want to pass onto the next generation but we need to get that new pipeline of talent. We need to bring more people into the sector and therefore INFRA Skills has a real role to play in that in skilling up the next generation to take over those roles and to help support an expanding workforce need."

INFRA Skills focuses on four main areas to support the infrastructure sector: safety-critical training and assessments, apprenticeships, funded learning, and occupational health services.

Steven Morley, General Manager of INFRA Skills, said: "We have invested in our new training centre in Birmingham, where we offer a variety of courses and practical training. We aim to prepare candidates for a rewarding career in rail or construction or continue upskilling by developing new knowledge.

"We play a vital role in developing a continuous supply chain of highly skilled and diverse talent with specific sector expertise by delivering commercial training, funded learning, and apprenticeships."

INFRA Skills provides rail training programmes from beginner to advanced levels to the highest standards, having recently retained their prestigious National Skills Academy for Rail's (NSAR) Gold award.

INFRA Skills is one of only a few organisations in the UK to have received the NSAR GOLD Standard for rail course delivery. This award honours high-quality professional training programmes that have enabled learners to demonstrate staff competency, qualification, and safety in accordance with national standards.

INFRA Skills is committed to collaborating with all employer clients to design and deliver Apprenticeship training programmes that are tailored to their specific goals and requirements.

Andrew Stephenson added: "Apprenticeships are a great way into any sector but particularly into Rail. Unfortunately, because of COVID-19 we have seen a dip in the number of people starting an

Apprenticeship but we're really keen to see those number grow in the next few years.

"The HS2 programme alone is already supporting 650 apprenticeships and that will grow to over 2000 apprenticeships at peak construction. Apprenticeships are an absolutely fantastic way to start your career and I would encourage people to look at the apprenticeship route."

INFRA Skills has a long history of reducing the skills shortage and increasing social mobility through its Local Enterprise Partnerships, which include collaboration with colleges, prisons, charities, ex-military and government departments to assist those with disabilities or individuals struggling to find work by removing the barriers they face.

Richard Toy, CEO of Auctus Management Group, INFRA Skills' parent company, said: "We recognise the economic and social value that infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the Midland Metro bring to the local economy, whether through the use of local supply chains or the recruitment, training, and development of local labour.

"We work with local communities, Jobcentre Plus offices, regional and national charities, and local colleges and training providers to provide our clients with access to highly trained professionals, ensuring they have the broadest talent pool possible to successfully deliver projects."

Anyone interested in learning more about INFRA Skills, their training programmes, safety-critical training courses and assessments should call 0330 113 0006 or email info@infraskills.co.uk.

Photo credit: INFRA Skills