

HS2 work experience goes virtual so young people don't miss out

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HS2 Ltd, the company delivering Britain's new low carbon high speed railway, has launched a brand-new virtual work experience programme for school pupils.

As part of its dedicated programme of school engagement and education activity, HS2 offers work experience placements to students every year to help them to get first-hand experience of life in the workplace on Europe's biggest engineering project.

Students would usually spend one full week at HS2's offices, where they are assigned a dedicated mentor and given the opportunity to work within the departments aligned to their personal areas of interest and career aspirations. Since 2017, HS2 has supported over 100 students and provided placements in its engineering, environment and business support teams – the most popular choices amongst young people.

In a bid to ensure that pupils didn't miss out as a result of COVID-19, HS2 acted quickly to adapt its programme and worked in partnership with Speakers for Schools and the Social Mobility Foundation, to provide students with week-long virtual work experience placements.

Richard Winter, HS2 Ltd's Education Manager explains: "40 students aged 16-18 were due to join us over the summer for their annual work experience placement. This is a such a valuable and important part of their education and personal development that we were determined to pull out the stops and make it happen.

"Being part of a team in a professional environment, learning about different roles and responsibilities and developing essential skills, is highly valuable and not something you can easily replicate in a classroom environment."

Twenty young people joined the programme in the first week, with 10 male and 10 female students joining colleagues in HS2's virtual teams. Pupils from Camden and Hillingdon were amongst the ten London boroughs to take part in the first session, with further programmes extending out to young people from the West Midlands to Tyne and Wear in the North East.

The programme opened with a 'Meet the Boss' session, where young people heard from HS2 Chairman, Allan Cook, who took questions from the pupils and shared his personal career journey from life as an apprentice engineer to leading the delivery of Britain's revolutionary new railway.

Allan Cook, HS2 Ltd Chairman said: "Young people have potentially missed out on a huge amount as a result of the pandemic, so our priority was to deliver on the commitment we had made to provide annual work experience opportunities.

"HS2 is a railway for future generations, so it's absolutely right that we put young people at the heart of it. Creating opportunities which inspire young people to be the engineers, ecologists and leaders of the future is exactly what we set out to achieve in our Skills, Employment and Education Strategy, and I'm delighted to have played a part in it."

The week-long placements provide students with a taste of working life as they partner up to deliver a business project, with guidance from experts in HS2's engineering, environment and economics teams. Pupils carry out their own research and complete a variety of activities and challenges throughout the week, before giving a presentation to HS2's executive team on their final day.

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd