

Over 1,400 formerly unemployed secure work on HS2

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HS2's latest performance data shows it has supported over 1,400 people who were out of work into employment, demonstrating the project's crucial role in the drive to Build Back Better and equip people with 'Skills for Life'.

HS2's success in supporting unemployed people into work is largely driven by the effectiveness of its job brokerage partnership model which launched earlier this year. By bringing together the Department for Work and Pensions, strategic regional and local stakeholders including local authorities, enterprise partnerships, charities and employment support services along the route of the new railway, the job brokerage model has enabled HS2 and its construction partners to engage local people who are looking for work.

Referrals allow individuals, including those at risk of long-term unemployment, to access training and placement opportunities which provide them with the skills they need to transition into jobs supporting HS2's construction.

Bespoke initiatives led by HS2's construction partner for the West Midlands, Balfour Beatty VINCI (BBV),

are already paying dividends and thanks to referrals from local partners, 150 people from the region who were out of work have now secured a career in construction in just six months.

HS2 Minister Andrew Stephenson MP said: "It is heartening to hear real life stories of how HS2 is supporting unemployed people into work right across the country. It demonstrates not just the huge variety of skills and opportunities that the project offers to job seekers, but is also a great example of the Government's Plan for Jobs in action."

Julie Venn-Morton, HS2's Skills Manager for the West Midlands said: "The pace of construction across Warwickshire and the West Midlands is driving the creation of hundreds of new jobs.

"Through our job brokerage model, we're able to ensure that those most in need are benefiting from training and upskilling opportunities to get them job-ready for HS2."

BBV is investing heavily in training and work placement programmes which upskill candidates ready for their pipeline of career opportunities. Through a combination of training and paid work trials it has already recruited 9 Environmental Technicians and 10 General Operatives who were all previously out of work.

A rolling programme of training sessions for the unemployed and those looking to boost their skills and experience is now underway, and those who successfully complete the programme will transition into general operative jobs within BBV's supply chain.

Among those to have secured a full-time role is 21-year-old Brady from Chelmsley Wood. Brady had never worked in construction before and recognised that his lack of skills and experience were holding him back. He successfully completed a 20-day customised training programme and gained a series of accreditations which enabled him to progress onto a site-based work trial. The passion and enthusiasm he showed during the trial led to him securing a full-time role as a general operative. He now works as part of a team supporting the construction of HS2 in North Warwickshire.

Brady said: "I really love the job. It's been great for my wellbeing, both mentally and physically. I'm out on site every day meeting new people and I've formed a great bond with the team, we're like a family.

"I've had so much personal support too. Transitioning out of social housing and off benefits hasn't been easy, but the team has helped me all the way. They even helped me to find new accommodation, which is closer to site, and that saves me at least an hour's travel time every day.

"I'd encourage anyone who is out of work to seize this opportunity, it really has changed my life for the better."

Irfa from Birmingham has also benefitted from the free training and paid work trial programme. She's now employed as an environmental technician and works as part of a team assisting with site inspections and audits to ensure that HS2's construction works comply with environmental legislation and consents.

Irfa said: "I love the variety that this job offers and the opportunity to work alongside experts in the field including arboriculturists and ecologists really does mean that every day is like a school day - I'm learning

so much.

“I had no idea just how much goes on behind the scenes to build HS2 and it’s really exciting to be part of it. The focus on sustainability of planting trees right across the project and reducing carbon impacts is fascinating. It’s something I knew nothing about before and it’s opened my eyes to what a career in this sector can offer.”

The combination of tailored training programmes coupled with paid work placements is proving to be hugely successful, supporting BBV’s drive to ensure that it recruits local people, wherever possible, to drive forward its construction programme.

Shilpi Akbar, Head of Stakeholders and Communities at Balfour Beatty VINCI said: “Our investment in on-the-job training and work with local partners is driving the creation of the highly skilled workforce we need to deliver HS2. And with a ten-year construction programme ahead of us, there will be hundreds more opportunities to come.”

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd