

QPR's young stars get an exclusive visit to West London HS2 station site

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HS2 Ltd has partnered with Queens Park Rangers football club to give its youth team squad a unique insight into life on a construction site.

Twenty-two youngsters, who have all been awarded a scholarship with the West London football club, were invited to see how the new HS2 station at Old Oak Common which is just two miles from Loftus Road.

A workforce of almost 30,000 are currently helping to build HS2 and the site tour gave the youngsters a chance to learn more about the careers and future development opportunities available to them.

The tour was organised by HS2's construction partner, Balfour Beatty VINCI SYSTRA (BBVS), in partnership with Emmanuel Afolabi, founder of The Fest Hub, which bridges the gap between sport and education to support young people aiming to break into professional football.

Emmanuel, who is now a civil engineer, established the community interest company after his own dream of becoming a professional footballer stalled. The former Charlton Athletic Academy player, who trained alongside Premier League stars Joe Gomez of Liverpool FC and Ezri Konsa of Aston Villa FC, witnessed first-

hand the devastating mental effects of being released by a professional club.

Emmanuel said: "It's vital we do more to inspire these young people. The harsh reality is they won't all make it as pro-footballers and we need to prepare and support them for that moment. HS2 is a once-in-a-lifetime project, and today is about opening these young players' eyes to the amazing career opportunities on their doorstep.

"HS2 invests in young people from the local area through its apprenticeship and graduate programmes, so this is a partnership we really wanted to strike."

Ambrose Quashie, HS2's skills manager for Greater London said: "We have a vast construction programme ahead of us, with careers in a whole range of subjects from ecology and IT to engineering and health and safety. We've committed to creating 2,000 apprenticeships, with over 950 of these already created, and I'm confident in joining forces with QPR and the Fest Hub that we can offer these young people a promising future."

17-year-old Jabari Christmas, who took part in the site tour, said: "If football doesn't work out for me, then I'll need to consider my options in two or five years' time. I've never had this kind of experience before, but I can see how HS2 and construction work of this kind could be an option in the future."

17-year-old Derek Luzinda said: "It's been a really great experience. A lot of the time you play football you have a tunnel vision mindset. Coming here today has broadened my mindset. It's helped me to think about life beyond football, and other careers I wouldn't have ordinarily thought about, so it's been a positive mental experience."

HS2 and its construction partner, BBVS, work closely with the three London boroughs around Old Oak Common (Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Ealing), to support local people into training and employment. A workforce of over 1,300 are currently helping to build the new superhub station, with 54 apprentices and 189 people who were formerly unemployed and live locally having secured jobs on the project.

Elliott Murphy, skills, employment and education manager at BBVS said: "We work closely with local employment, education and community stakeholders to ensure HS2 leaves a positive legacy in the Old Oak Common area.

"By working with trusted organisations like QPR and The Fest Hub, we hope to inspire younger generations about the brilliant careers the infrastructure sector has to offer, knowing that their new ideas and perspectives will help our sector to thrive."

For more information about careers and opportunities to work on HS2, visit www.hs2.org.uk/careers