

HS2

Mind the skills gap

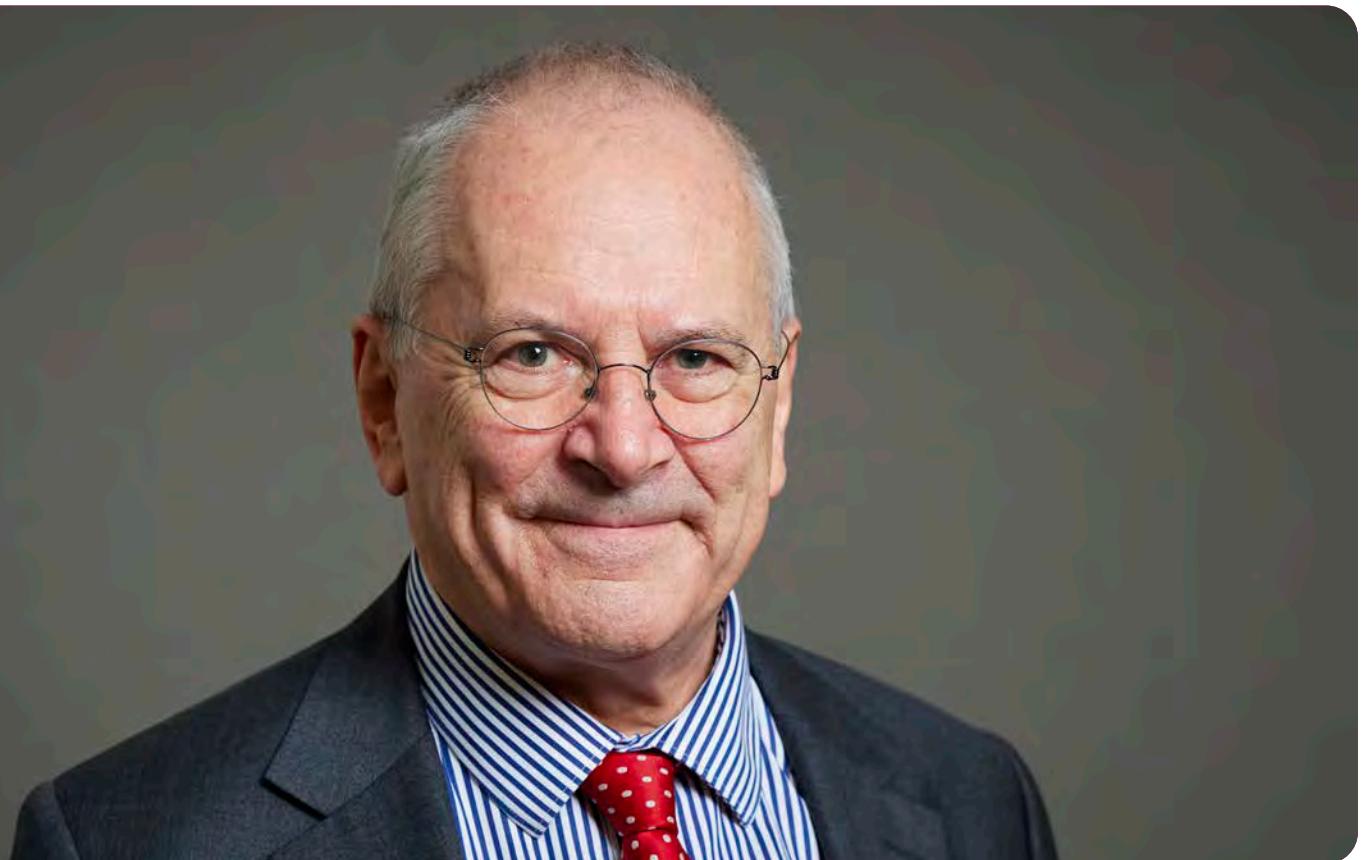
How HS2 is building a workforce
for Britain's future



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Foreword



Lord Peter Hendy

Minister of State for Rail

This government is committed to a working Britain, supporting people to grasp new opportunities and realise their full potential by breaking down barriers to opportunity.

HS2 is deeply rooted in the community – its presence at jobcentres, employment fairs and skills centres reflects that commitment. By reaching out to people who wouldn't have previously considered a job in the construction industry, as well as those who are currently not in education or employment, this successful strategy connects fulfilling jobs, education and training to the people that need it most.

A skilled workforce is essential for the UK's prosperity and economic growth. With tens of thousands of people currently working to deliver HS2, from engineers to designers and project managers, we stand in good stead to deliver the future infrastructure we need to succeed.

“This government is committed to a working Britain, supporting people to grasp new opportunities and realise their full potential”



Mark Wild
CEO, HS2 Ltd

The construction of HS2 is at a crucial stage. I'm focused on leading a fundamental reset of the programme, while ensuring we build Britain's new high-speed railway safely and as efficiently as possible. Although we are looking to the future, it's important to recognise the impact that we are already having on jobs and skills in a vital industry for the economy.

The UK has faced a historic construction skills shortage. Our solution isn't about giving people a single qualification or job, but setting them up for a fulfilling career that will last a lifetime. Over 2,000 apprentices have taken their first steps into the industry with us and around 33,000 people are currently working on HS2.

The work we have done to attract and upskill a workforce will serve the country for years to come. The people building high-speed rail today will be constructing the homes and infrastructure projects of tomorrow. A new generation is learning and innovating on the job, building skills and knowledge that only a project of this scale can provide.

Key to HS2's success has been attracting new talent, allowing us to mine a wealth of untapped resources. Not only has HS2 attracted employees at the start of their working lives, but it's enabled people to change career too.

Alongside our various partners, HS2 is helping to build a workforce for Britain's future.

Executive summary

HS2 and its delivery partners have built a pipeline of skilled workers that will support the wider construction industry for years to come.

This has been based on a comprehensive [Skills, Employment and Education Strategy](#), published in 2018, which forecast the skills that would be needed to build Britain's new high-speed railway. An industry-leading approach followed, including the creation of local partnerships and a job brokerage service, as well as targeted training to get people into work.

As HS2 continues to evolve and resets its construction programme, the strategy will be updated, with new forecasts for jobs and skills requirements. This report reflects on the journey so far, with around 33,000 people currently working on HS2, and some key employment targets already met.

Bringing unemployed people back into work

A network of skills centres has been established to nurture new talent. These hubs, operated in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, local authorities, training providers, colleges and companies in the supply chain, provide on-the-job training and qualifications to help people into a career in construction.

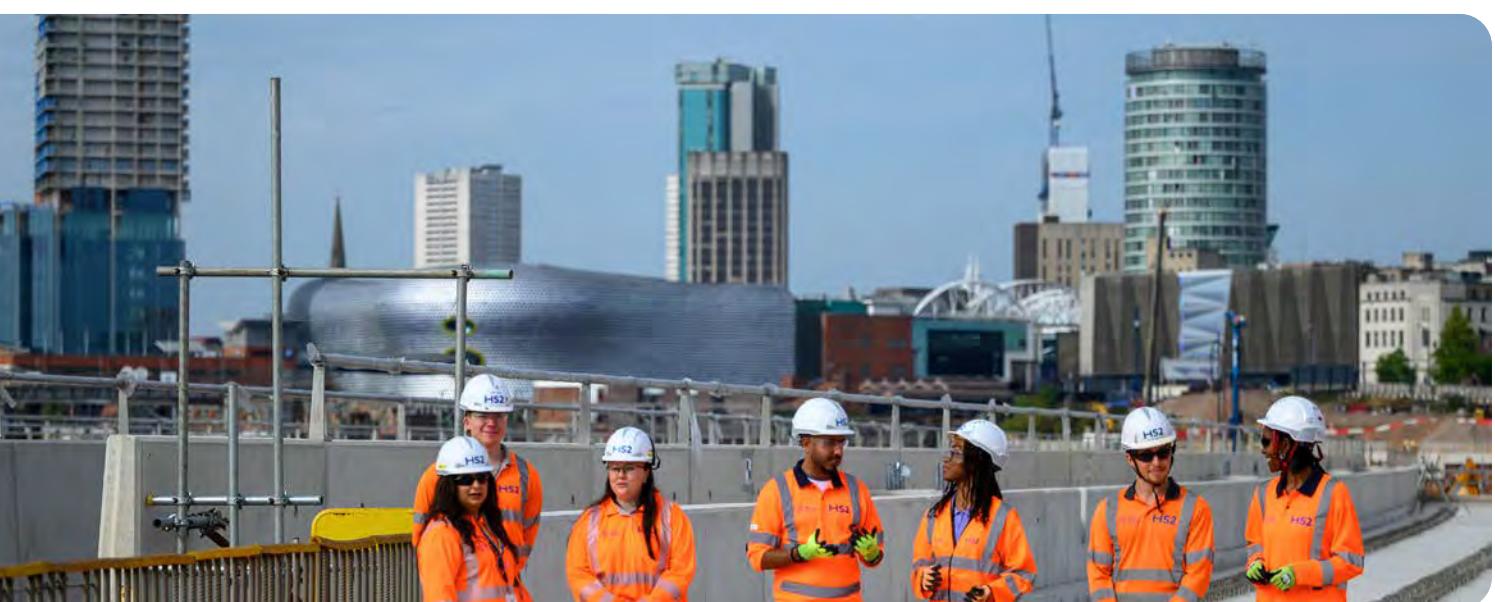
Through the HS2 job brokerage model, face-to-face conversations with jobseekers in the community, work placements, sector-based work centres and skills bootcamps, over 5,600 people who were previously unemployed have been helped into sustainable work with HS2.

Apprenticeships

HS2 has already met the target of 2,000 apprenticeships that was set at the project's inception. To date 2,032 apprentices have started work on HS2, combining classroom learning with practical experience that allows employees to earn while they learn. While the majority of apprentices are aged 16 to 24, around a third are above the age of 25, highlighting the role of apprenticeships in promoting lifelong learning.

Economic impact

The combination of apprenticeships and workless job starts delivered to date will contribute over £315 million worth of benefits to the UK. This is based on an analysis of the long-term benefits to the individuals involved and the wider economy, including improved earnings and employment outcomes, as well as lower dependency on state benefits.





8
college partnerships
operational along HS2 route



The skills challenge

HS2 is the first new intercity railway to be built north of London in over a century. Tasked with a project of this scale, HS2 saw an opportunity to create a workforce that could deliver for a generation, future-proofing the UK's infrastructure pipeline. At each step it has supported different government skills initiatives, from the 'Kickstart Scheme' to 'Skills Bootcamps'.

An ageing workforce and lack of capacity in the construction industry were known obstacles to success. This is an ongoing issue – the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) forecasts that an extra 240,000 construction workers will be needed over the next five years¹ to support the government's future growth and housebuilding targets.

At the same time, however, unemployment is rising. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people who are out of work has risen, and over a fifth of working age adults are now classed as economically inactive.² Almost one in seven young people (aged 16-24) are 'NEETs' – not in employment, education or training.³ Connecting these people to opportunities, to learn new skills, gain new qualifications and secure work, is central to the strategy.

An industry-leading approach

HS2 has worked with its partners to build a pipeline of future talent. This includes providing everything from placements for school and college students, to T-levels, apprenticeships and access to skills centres, where those who are out of work can receive free training.

At the heart of the approach is the job brokerage model – which brings job opportunities closer to diverse, disadvantaged and under-represented parts of the community. As well as the [HS2 Jobs Board](#), this involves contractors working directly with official job brokerage partners rooted in local neighbourhoods, including voluntary organisations, Jobcentre Plus, and local authority employment teams. Together, they co-design training programmes in the right areas – creating a pathway into work.

In parallel, HS2 jobs are promoted through recruitment hubs. Again, they are targeted towards the people that need them most, such as the dedicated hub in the Washwood Heath Jobcentre Plus – located in one of the UK's most deprived areas. This has all been delivered at scale, and at pace – an industry leading approach that has helped HS2 to meet its needs.



¹ Construction Workforce Outlook | CITB

² Economic inactivity - Office for National Statistics

³ NEET age 16 to 24, Calendar year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK

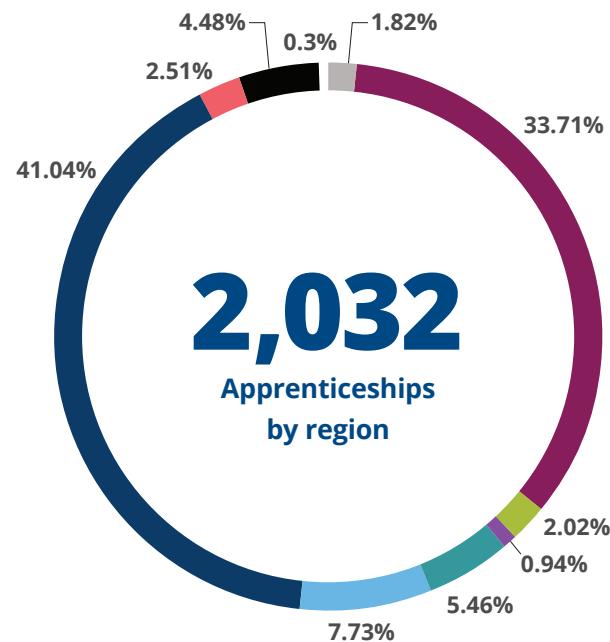
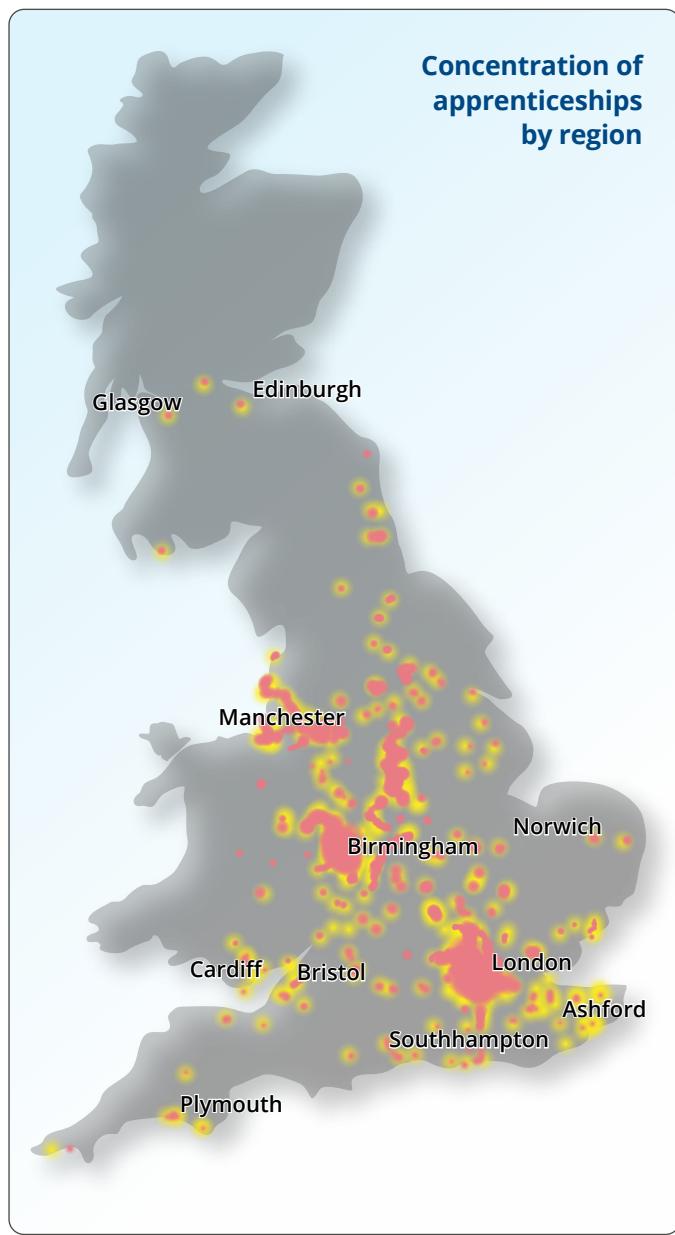
Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are the lifeblood of the industry, providing an opportunity for employees to gain practical, on-the-job experience, while earning a salary and undertaking training.

The types of apprenticeships on offer are varied, including the likes of groundworks project management and quantity surveying. Apprenticeship levels range from 2-7, with level 3 being equivalent to A-Levels, level 5 a foundation degree and level 6 a bachelor's degree.

For the young apprentices, this is a vital investment in their future – many have 30 to 40 years of their careers left to work. That said, this training is also available to people who are looking to change career, some of whom had previously ruled out the possibility of further training due to their age.

HS2 had a target of achieving 2,000 apprenticeship starts. That target has already been met, with 2,032 apprentices having started work on the programme, recruited from across the country. There will be more apprenticeships to come, as the construction of HS2 continues.



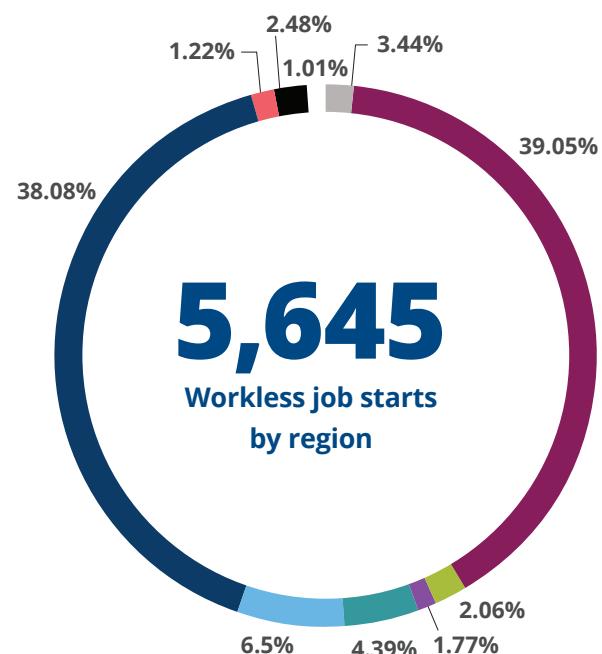
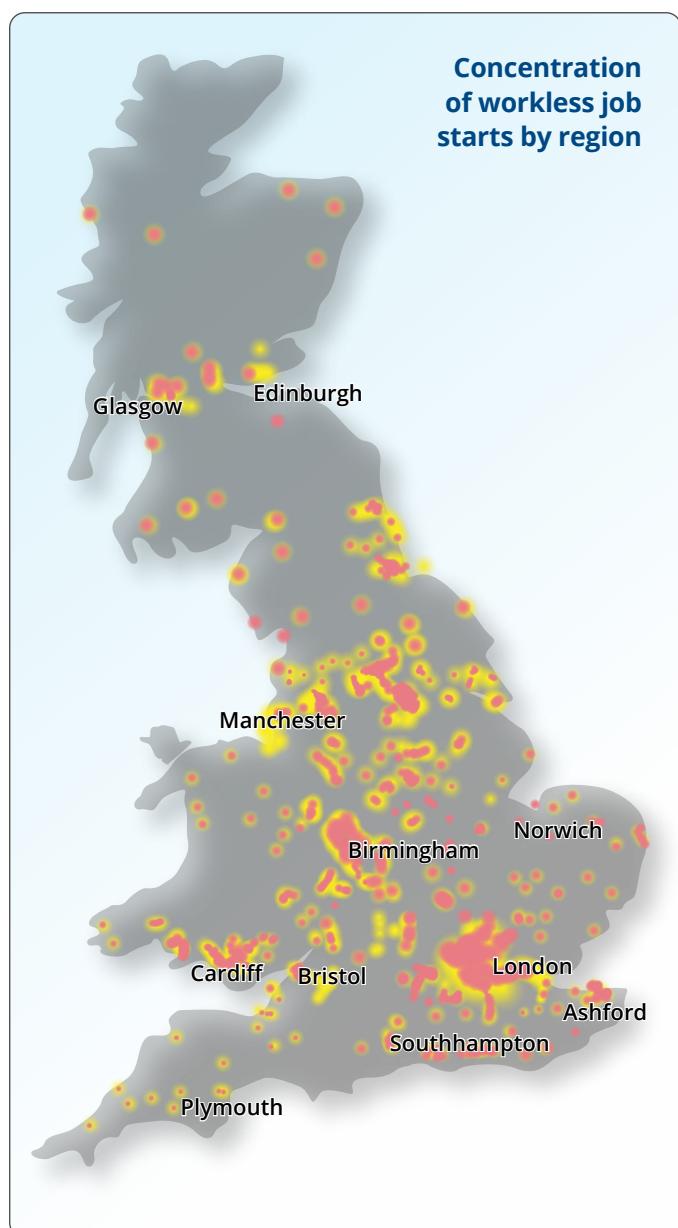
Region

- Not Specified
- North East
- West Midlands
- East of England
- South West
- East Midlands
- Wales
- North West
- London & SE
- Scotland

Supporting unemployed people

HS2 has supported over 5,600 workless job starts, successfully providing employment to people who were previously out of work. Every one of these workers has sustained a new role for at least six months, many securing promotions, additional training and qualifications once in post.

Although some people had transferrable skills from previous roles, many have changed careers or come back from extended periods of unemployment. A wide range of people have benefitted, from every corner of the UK.



Region

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Wider economic benefits



Bringing people into work and training has a wider economic value, both to the individual worker and the UK economy.

Apprenticeships contribute to an uplift in wages, improved employment outcomes and productivity gains throughout a person's career. Bringing someone into work who was previously unemployed drives

savings in welfare expenditure as well as creating a significant wellbeing benefit for the individual now in work.

Analysis estimates that the apprenticeships and workless job starts HS2 has created are worth £315million to the UK economy.⁴



⁴ Analysis completed using HM Treasury Green Book compliant methodology in November 2025, HS2 Ltd. This includes an analysis of the benefits to the individuals and the wider economy, including improved earnings and employment outcomes, as well as lower dependency on state benefits.

Wider social benefits

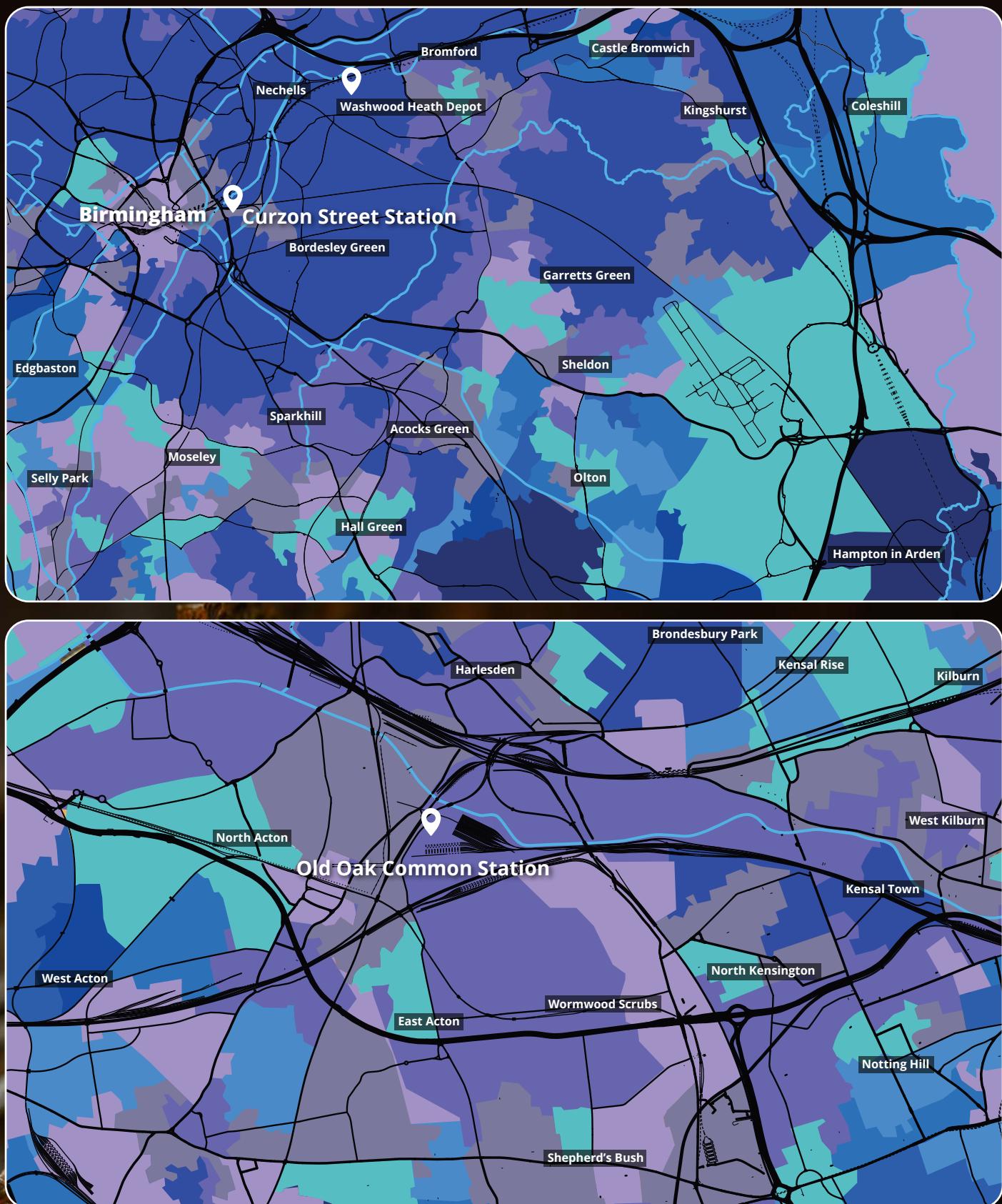
HS2's key sites are in some of the poorest areas of the UK. In the West Midlands, the planned Network Control Centre at Washwood Heath, Washwood Heath Jobcentre Plus (where HS2 has a recruitment hub) and Balfour Beatty VINCI's (BBV) flagship skills academy in Bordesley Green, are all in locations classified as amongst the UK's most deprived, according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

The IMD is the government's official measure of deprivation, based on data ranging from income to health. HS2's Birmingham Curzon Street station lies in the third most deprived decile, while Old Oak Common station in West London is in the second most deprived.

By encouraging employment and training opportunities in these areas, HS2 is bringing opportunities to some of the people and places that need it the most. Fundamentally, this means improving people's lives – helping families and communities to prosper.



Levels of deprivation



Legend

● Most deprived decile	● 4th	● 7th	● Least deprived decile	— Road and rail	● HS2 Stations/depot
● 2nd	● 5th	● 8th	● No data	— Waterways	
● 3rd	● 6th	● 9th			

HS2's first apprentice



"I'm a completely different person to the one who started my apprenticeship. I'm more confident, more resilient and even more ambitious – one day I'd like to be CEO!"

Clara was in the first cohort of apprentices ever to be welcomed into HS2. Eight years, two qualifications and three promotions later, her decision to join the UK's new high-speed railway has been the springboard for an exciting career ahead.

The only student in her sixth form year not to go to university, Clara took a year out, managing the hairdressers she had worked at since she was 15. Eventually she came across HS2's project management apprenticeship. She knew nothing about rail or engineering, but liked the idea of being organised, and of starting a project and seeing it come to fruition.

Starting a new industry, especially a male-dominated one like construction, was daunting. Working in civil engineering for SCS on the London tunnels section of HS2, Clara was regularly the youngest person in the room and would often make notes of engineering processes she heard in meetings and later watch videos of them online.

Despite the challenges, she thrived. By the time she had completed her apprenticeship, Clara was leading ground investigations at 50 locations along the HS2 route. Since then, she has earned another two promotions, becoming an assistant project manager in the team building HS2's new station at Old Oak Common, before being promoted again to project manager in 2022. Currently studying part-time for a project management degree with Northumbria University, Clara hopes the path less travelled is one that will help her climb to the very top.

Clara Lenzi, 28, is a project manager on HS2, having been in the very first group of apprentices to join the project in 2016.

HS2's 2,000th apprentice



"I used to look out of my bedroom window and see all the work taking place on HS2 – now I'm helping to build it. In the past, getting a job like this would mean travelling to London, but this project is opening up opportunities on the doorstep for young people like me in Birmingham."

Growing up in Birmingham, minutes from Curzon Street Station, Mohammed followed the progress of HS2 with interest.

After finishing his GCSEs, Mohammed began studying for a BTEC in engineering but craved a more hands-on experience. While taking a year out to consider his next move, Mohammed was excited to discover a T-Level course with placements available working on HS2 with Balfour Beatty VINCI.

The course introduced Mohammed to many different aspects of construction, but it was civil engineering which most appealed. After completing his course, he successfully applied for a Civil Engineering Degree Level Apprenticeship with BBV, which combines working on HS2 with studying at the University of Wolverhampton one day a week.

Mohammed is convinced that the blend of on-site experience, office work and university study means he is getting the best of all possible options, and he enjoys the variety that each day brings.

From watching the construction of HS2 from his bedroom window, Mohammed is thrilled to be delivering one of Europe's biggest infrastructure projects. He loves seeing the structures he is working on take shape and can't help pointing them out to friends and family.

And, although he is not looking too far ahead just yet, Mohammed can already see the opportunities that HS2 will open up for young people like him in Birmingham.

Mohammed Sharif, 19, was HS2's 2,000th apprentice, joining the project in September 2025.

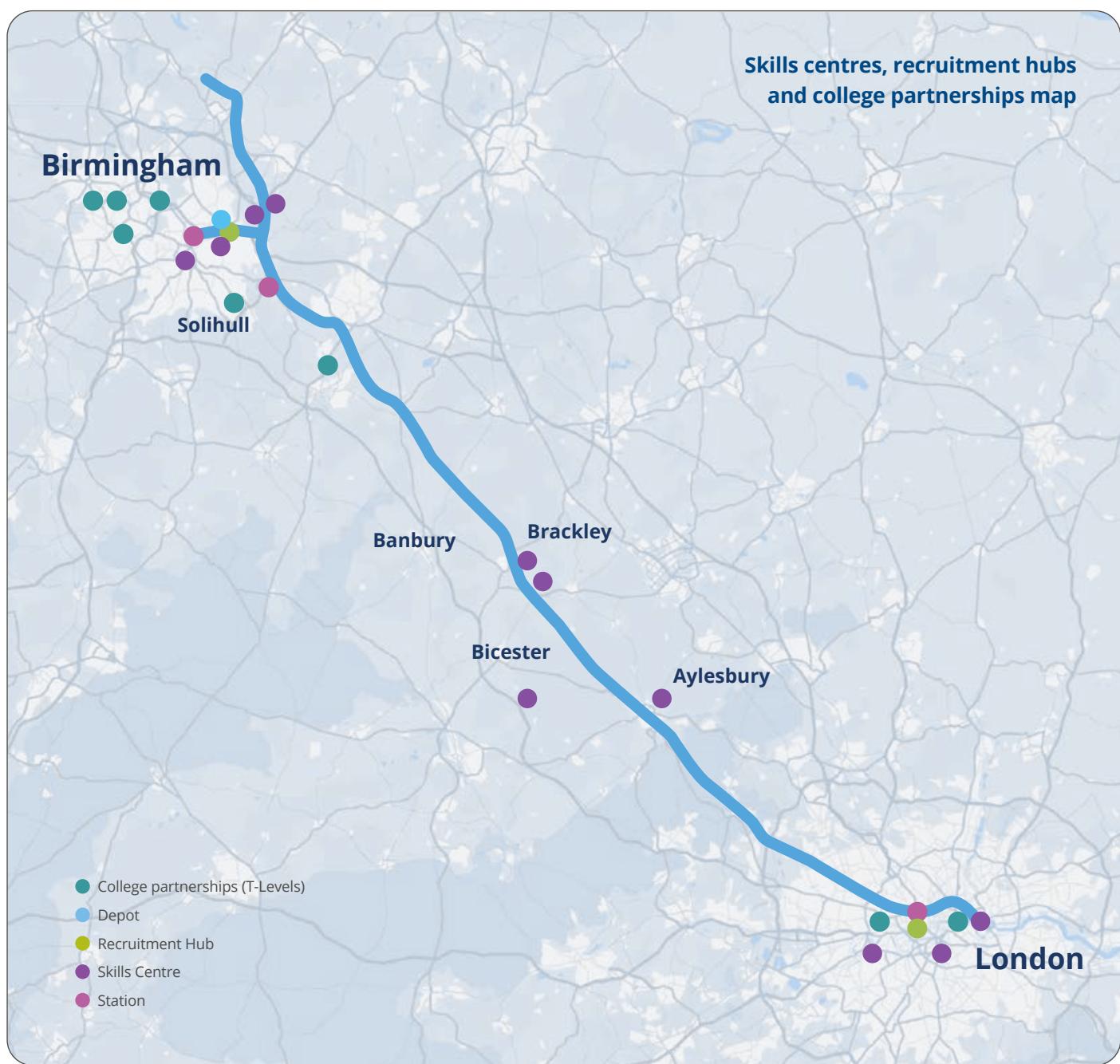
Finding new talent

For many people, construction is seen as an inaccessible career option. The day-to-day workings of a site are hidden behind hoardings, and outdated assumptions make some feel like a career in the industry isn't for them.

HS2 is focused on finding new talent from diverse communities. Partnerships with recruitment hubs, skills centres and colleges along the line of route help

to reach potential employees at every stage of their career, providing them with the training they need.

Professional development is available for existing HS2 workers too, with staff encouraged to expand and develop their skillset, whether it be through an apprenticeship, industry qualification, or on-the-job training.



Back in work after years of setbacks



"After several years out of work and many unanswered job applications, I felt like I was on the scrapheap. I just needed someone to give me a chance. Having a job again is liberating. I'm not constantly worrying about how I'm going to pay for the necessities of life. I'm learning new things, meeting new people and I feel accepted as part of the team. It's been fantastic."

Cimara has a varied career background, having spent time as a civil servant and as a teacher for students with special educational needs. However, after taking some time away from the workplace following a family bereavement, and caring for her father during COVID-19, she found it difficult to get back into work.

A visit to the Washwood Heath jobcentre opened Cimara's eyes to the possibility of a job in the construction industry, and she completed a six-week course at the BBV skills academy.

Noticing Cimara's administration experience, the team got in touch with the offer of an interview for an office-based role in Warwickshire, which she secured. Cimara now works processing important documentation for the site team, as well as overseeing other office management responsibilities. This employment opportunity is Cimara's first foray back into the workplace after years of setbacks.

Cimara Gregory secured work as an administrator for Balfour Beatty VINCI in Warwickshire.

Spotlight on the West Midlands:

BBV skills academy



HS2's construction partner in the West Midlands, Balfour Beatty VINCI, has a comprehensive programme of education, training and outreach.

BBV has been involved in over 600 events in partnership with local authorities, Jobcentre Plus, community groups, schools and colleges. Meanwhile, recruitment hubs in local jobcentres have allowed the team to actively target jobseekers.

The BBV skills academy in Bordesley Green operates in partnership with South and City College Birmingham, and was established to upskill members of the community who are currently out of work. It allows trainees to gain the accreditations they need to work with BBV, as well as providing paid, on-the-job placements. Following the success of this training, BBV has joined forces with other institutions including Birmingham Metropolitan College, Solihull College, Wolverhampton College, Warwickshire College Group and private training provider QTT.

Since 2021, over 32,000 hours of training have been delivered to more than 400 local unemployed residents, and 142 people have found work as a direct result. These partnerships with local colleges have also allowed BBV to support 94 T-Level students, providing them with 45-day placements working on HS2.

For existing HS2 workers, training is delivered at the Kingsbury Skills Academy. Over 100,000 hours of training and 13,000 courses have been delivered there, such as health and safety courses and plant operator training.

"To truly invest in our future we need to invest in our young people, giving them the skills and opportunities they need to land good jobs and get on in life. This is at the heart of my 'Jobs for Everyone' programme and my Growth Plan for the region. HS2 offers a unique opportunity for people to not only pursue a rewarding career in the railway industry but also help build the transport infrastructure that will transform our regional economy and change thousands of local lives for the better."

Richard Parker
Mayor of the West Midlands

From T-Level student to apprentice of the year

"I originally found out about T-Levels from a student who came into my class at school and spoke about careers in construction. If that hadn't happened, I never would have thought it was an option for me. Now, I attend early careers events with BBV to show other students what a career in construction could look like."

Charlotte was inspired to start a career in construction after watching her family home being built.

She signed up for a construction-led T-Level at Walsall College, securing a placement with Balfour Beatty VINCI (BBV) – working on HS2. The course was the perfect introduction to the wide-ranging world of construction and, when the time came to apply for degree apprenticeships, Charlotte knew there was only one she really wanted.



She now spends one day a week studying civil engineering and transport at the University of Wolverhampton, and the rest of the week building bridges on HS2 for BBV. The blend of learning and work means Charlotte can be studying beam calculations at university one day and putting the theory into practice the day after.

For an ambitious apprentice, HS2 is the perfect place to encounter a wide variety of people and experiences. As a site engineer, Charlotte has been given a significant level of responsibility from the outset, from looking at bridge designs, to ordering the right materials, to overseeing their installation.

She continues to thrive on the challenge. Having passed her T-Level with a distinction, Charlotte was recently named the University of Wolverhampton's Outstanding Apprentice of the Year.

Charlotte, 20, is studying for a Degree Apprenticeship in Civil Engineering and Transport at the University of Wolverhampton, alongside her role as a site engineer with HS2 contractor, Balfour Beatty VINCI.

Spotlight on London Euston:

Euston Skills Centre and Euston Skills Yard



The Euston Skills Centre was officially launched in February 2024, part funded by £4.1 million from HS2. Run by Camden Council, in partnership with the United Colleges Group, the centre provides training facilities to upskill local residents in disciplines such as electrics, carpentry and joinery, as well as providing CSCS testing and health and safety courses.

HS2's construction partner Mace Dragados, the company that built the facility, installed some utility services and systems nearby to act as a learning aid for students. Workshops, machinery rooms and outside training areas ensure that practical skills are taught alongside classroom learning.

The centre is building a future workforce able to help deliver London's infrastructure and construction schemes. Each year, it is facilitating more than 150 apprenticeships and 150 job opportunities in construction and green technologies.

Next door, HS2 has worked with Camden Council, training group Skills People and supply chain partners to open the Euston Skills Yard. Located on HS2's Euston site, this purpose-built outdoor facility will provide skills bootcamp training in groundworks, civil engineering and construction operations.

Co-designed with construction companies, the Skills Yard teaches skills that are most in demand – providing a route to work.

"The Euston Skills Centre is already providing more than 150 apprenticeships each year, while the Euston Skills Yard is creating opportunities for our residents to gain the skills that construction employers need right now – and with it, a direct route into good work."

"We've worked with HS2 to open up part of the Euston site for this facility and with major employers operating in Camden to offer guaranteed job interviews. This is about making sure our residents see real benefits from the redevelopment in Euston here and now, as well as in the years to come."

Councillor Richard Olszewski
Leader of Camden Council

New industry, soaring career prospects



“Being made redundant after 11 years was a huge shock. Before starting this role I had no idea that jobs in quantity surveying even existed – now I’ve got a completely new career ahead of me.”

Nazia worked for her previous company, a small business consultancy, for 11 years. However, when the business ran into trouble, Nazia was let go and lost her job as an administrator and HR advisor.

As a single mum with a son about to go to school, Nazia, who lives in Ealing, applied for a number of part-time and flexible roles. However, she struggled to find a job that would fit her family commitments and allow her to build a career.

She was referred to the government’s Restart Scheme, which helps people back into work.

There she learned about a vacancy for the SCS joint venture, delivering HS2’s London tunnels. After eight months of unemployment, Nazia took the leap, joining a completely new industry.

Nazia started out working as an administrator for the labour team, helping to manage resources and ensure staff were deployed in the right areas to deliver. A year in, she was given the chance to work with a quantity surveyor. As a lover of numbers and something of a perfectionist, Nazia felt the work suited her. She began to take on more quantity surveying work, while SCS offered to pay for a foundation course in engineering contracts to supplement her growing experience.

Now, three years after she joined the company, Nazia is an assistant quantity surveyor and is studying part-time for a foundation degree in quantity surveying, also paid for by her employer.

With a busy and demanding home life, Nazia is grateful for the support and flexibility this role provides, and has an exciting career ahead of her.

Nazia Hashim, 36, is an assistant quantity surveyor for HS2 construction partner, SCS.

Spotlight on:

EKFB Skills Centre



Opened in 2023, the EKFB Brackley Skills Centre was set up by HS2's construction partner to provide a range of training, education and employment initiatives to local people in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

Jobseekers take part in intensive pre-employment courses, where they can obtain the CSCS qualification they need to work on site, gain experience in the industry and access potential employers. So far, 130 pre-employment courses have been completed, with 55 people going on to secure work on HS2.

Apprenticeship training is also provided at the Brackley Skills Centre, allowing workers to earn while they learn and gain real, on-the-job experience. To date, 77 apprentices have undertaken courses at the skills hub, going on to work in disciplines such as groundworks and steel fixing.

In November 2025, EKFB opened its Bicester Skills Centre, a brand-new training and pre-employment facility. Courses here are delivered in partnership with Sunbelt Rentals, providing apprenticeship programmes, pre-employment sessions and advanced learning, such as industry upskilling.

"These training opportunities don't just teach skills, they create social value – connecting local people with local jobs. By combining on-the-job training with classroom learning, we set people up for a career that will benefit them in the long term. Working on HS2 will set up the next generation of construction workers, project managers, engineers and more, to meet the UK's future infrastructure needs."

Jon Howlin

CEO of The Skills Centre, which operates the EKFB facility in Bicester

A fresh start on site



“This is the best thing I’ve ever done. Since joining HS2, my life has completely changed. I’m on the right path and I’ve got a bright future ahead of me.”

Muhammad spent his early life on the streets of Coventry, hanging out with the wrong crowd and getting in trouble on more than one occasion.

But during his second prison sentence, a chance meeting changed everything.

Due for early release, Muhammad was put in touch with Carmichael UK, a recruitment company for civil engineering and construction.

Growing up, Muhammad had always been attracted to a career in construction, but opportunities to enter the workforce had been limited. He therefore jumped at the chance to join Carmichael UK’s ex-offender programme, completing his construction readiness training while still at HMP Hatfield.

On his release, Muhammad joined HS2’s construction delivery partner, EKFB, and began working on the project in March 2025. Since starting as a general operative, Muhammad has wasted no time in undertaking additional training, achieving an NVQ in groundworks, learning to drive machinery on site, and recently completing his CSCS Blue Skilled Worker training.

Muhammad would recommend his path to anyone in a similar situation, and says the secret to his success is commitment, teamwork and a willingness to learn. Now, with a second child on the way, Muhammad is looking forward to progressing even further up the career ladder and has his sights set on a role as project foreman in the future.

Muhammad, 30, is a groundworker for HS2 delivery partner EKFB.

Lessons learned

HS2's work is far from over, but there are already some powerful lessons for the wider industry, from one of the biggest initiatives of its kind.



Contractual requirements

HS2 has built a workforce through the efforts of its delivery partners, including joint ventures and other firms in its supply chain. There are stretching skills and employment targets to be met as part of suppliers' contracts and they are required to support the key initiatives described in this report, such as the job brokerage model. It's still a flexible approach – contractors select from a 'menu' of skills and employment interventions to meet their contractual targets and skills needs, ranging from delivering work placements to full apprenticeships.



Finding new talent

To successfully navigate out of a skills shortage, attracting people who wouldn't usually consider a career in the industry is crucial. By addressing misconceptions about the nature of work (e.g. in the case of construction, that it's not a female friendly industry or that all jobs are PPE-wearing or manual roles), HS2 has been able to access a bigger pool of potential employees, boosting the workforce.



Working in partnership

The job brokerage model is a partnership success story. It was deliberately developed that way – bringing contractors, local authorities and skills providers together as early as possible to avoid duplication and wasted efforts. Like all successful partnership projects, it requires clear structure and agreed ways of working. It has been managed through set governance arrangements, including a project board and four regional steering groups.



Leaving a legacy

HS2 has been responsible for a number of firsts for the country, from unprecedented 'bridge slides' to low carbon construction techniques. Its workforce has learned and innovated on the job, developing leading-edge skills that will benefit the industry for years to come. This knowledge will be transferred through the generation of professionals that will move on to other major projects in future. This philosophy of leaving a legacy is important for all major schemes.



Clear objectives

One of the reasons for HS2's success has been the clear and consistent objectives, set at each layer of the mega-project. This stems from the Department for Transport's benefits baseline to HS2's strategic goals, right through to the Skills, Employment and Education Strategy and job brokerage model. These objectives have helped to focus minds on continuous improvement. HS2's approach was created in a gradual, step-by-step fashion, with refinements made along the way. For example, the job brokerage model was piloted at first, meaning that lessons could be learned before it was fully rolled out.



Sharing expertise

As new lessons are learned, it's important for organisations to share expertise with other projects looking to achieve similar outcomes. In the past few years, HS2 has worked with the likes of Sizewell C and Tideway to share insights on how to implement a successful Skills, Education and Employment Strategy, while the HS2 Learning Legacy programme shares technical insights on all aspects of delivering a major project, from consents to concrete.

Looking ahead



HS2's industry-leading approach to jobs and skills has made strong progress. A well-established workforce, rooted in local communities, is building the viaducts, bridges, cuttings and embankments that the high-speed railway will run on, as well as digging its tunnels and readying the ground for its new stations.

Over the coming years, the focus will shift from civil engineering to rail systems. HS2 and its delivery partners will develop the technology that will allow trains to run – everything from signalling systems to communications and sensors. They will lay tracks,

install overhead wires and build the trains that will carry passengers and improve journeys for thousands of people every day.

This transition will require a new cohort of talent and with it, provide the opportunity for a new wave of job and training opportunities, all of which contributes to tackling Britain's long-term industry skills gap.

Following the reset of the HS2 programme, an updated Skills, Employment and Education Strategy will be developed which will build on the momentum established so far.

2018	2020	2025	2026
HS2 publishes Skills, Employment and Education Strategy	Major civils work commences	5,000 unemployed people secure work on HS2	HS2 confirms that 2,000 apprenticeship starts target has been met



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