

# Welsh Secretary meets apprentices working on ultrafast broadband

Welsh Secretary Robert Buckland has visited Openreach's National Learning Centre for Wales to see training for new recruits bringing ultrafast broadband to Wales.

Based in Newport, the multi-million pound learning centre gives both trainee and existing Openreach engineers the opportunity to learn the ropes and test new skills in a replica street, built from scratch to recreate the real network in the outside world.

Openreach has recruited heavily in recent years as it ramps up its ultrafast Full Fibre build across Wales and the rest of the UK. Its learning centre in Newport plays an integral role in enabling the business to reach its target of reaching 25 million UK homes and businesses by December 2026.

Across Wales there are around 160 Openreach apprentices – of all ages – currently going through their training, with the average age of the trainees being 31. During his tour of the centre, the Secretary of State for Wales met a number of apprentices who have opted to become engineers later in their careers, including Mariaisabel Fernandez from Cardiff.

Mariaisabel recently graduated from her apprenticeship training, having joined Openreach after a number of years working as an Emergency Ambulance Technician for the Welsh Ambulance Service. Wanting a career change that would allow her to work outdoors but also provide a good opportunity to learn and progress, Mariaisabel decided to work with Openreach.

Mariaisabel Fernandez said:

I'd been considering a career change for a while but couldn't quite put my finger on what I wanted to do. I heard through friends that Openreach was a good employer and were looking to recruit more female engineers so I did some research to see the type of work that they did.

The more I looked into it the more I thought that being an Openreach engineer was the right thing for me.

The training that's available in Newport is second-to-none.

Secretary of State for Wales, Sir Robert Buckland said

We all know how important fast reliable broadband connections are.

It's been great to see the investment Openreach is putting into its Full Fibre infrastructure and the training and development of both recruits and existing engineers.

It's also been fantastic to meet new recruits like Mariaisabel and hear about the huge contribution they are making to our economy as they build the ultrafast network that we all need.

Kim Mears, Openreach's Managing Director and Chair of the Openreach Wales Board, said

Our National Learning Centre for Wales is testimony to our commitment to not only continued learning and development but also to Wales.

The vast majority of new recruits come here to Newport to get their training before going out into the real world and helping us to build our Full Fibre infrastructure at speed across Wales.