**STEM STUDENTS STEP BEHIND THE HOARDINGS**

Industry specialist Dan Grimshaw says construction firms should be doing more to woo young people who are taking STEM subjects at school to help meet the huge skills shortage facing the sector over the next five years.

Dan, founder of design and construction firm Beam Development and who is a mentor for the British Library’s Innovating for Growth programme, says the industry urgently needs to attract fresh blood if it is to continue to flourish.

“We currently have an ageing workforce,” said Dan. “As workers reach retirement age, fewer people are entering the industry to replace them; at the same time the sector is experiencing a shortage of ‘young talent’.

“Although the order books may be full now, for the industry to prosper post-Brexit, it must do more to sell itself to young people while they are still in secondary education to attract the school leavers and graduates of the future.”

With this in mind, Dan is holding what he hopes will be a series of educational visits to Beam construction sites, inviting a group of sixth form co-ed physics students from Harris Sixth Form at East Dulwich to visit a new build, eco-friendly home, in Forest Hill, London.

“When I walk past a building site, I'm always trying to get a look through the cracks in the hoardings to see what is going on,” said Dan. “Mostly construction sites are suspicious of onlookers, and essential Health and Safety protocols mean they are generally inaccessible.

“In reality, behind those closed doors hides a plethora of exciting, interesting, and innovative activity. The range of materials and processes on a construction site is enormous, and so many specialists are key to the overall project.

“We hope the visit will spark the imagination of the students and give them an insight into some real-world activity. They asked some excellent questions and started some really interesting debate. We are looking forward to the next visit.”

Harris Sixth Form physics teacher Ben Hodgson, who accompanied the group, said learning more about the specialists with STEM skills who contribute towards that final innovation of a building was a real eye-opener for his students.

“Seeing the different innovations that go into designing, materials, manufacturing and testing modern construction techniques and products made them aware of the multi-disciplinary and diverse careers that sit behind modern construction and design.

“In terms of their STEM studies, the students saw first-hand how innovation in design, technology – and the science behind those technologies – is making a tangible difference outside of a traditional laboratory setting.

“It was fascinating to learn just how much technology and science goes into constructing new buildings and meeting challenges around energy usage, airflow, planning regulations and the thermal profile of the building at the same time as creating a well-designed space.”

The construction industry is currently struggling with the worst staff shortages since the late 1990s amid the rush to reopen from lockdown and a sharp drop in overseas workers due to Covid and Brexit.

A report published by the Construction Skills Network in June predicted construction will need 216,800 new workers by 2025 to meet demand.

Harris Sixth Form at East Dulwich works as a joint site across Harris Boys’ Academy East Dulwich and Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich and is one of the largest sixth forms in London.

Dan Grimshaw is a design and construction specialist based in Bath and London. He is currently on the jury for the BLT Built Design Awards 2021. For further information visit: [www.beamdevelopment.co.uk](http://www.beamdevelopment.co.uk)

**ENDS**

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