

Business support hub celebrates major milestone after securing more than 25,000 jobs

One of the most important business organisations in Greater Manchester is marking a major milestone after having helped create more than 13,600 jobs and safeguard another 12,000 over the last decade.

The GC Business Growth Hub is celebrating its ten-year anniversary this month after achieving phenomenal success since it was first launched.

Since being established the hub has also generated more than £228m of finance offers to small and medium-sized businesses across Greater Manchester as well as helping them to save two million tonnes of carbon.

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The SMEs have also saved £550m in energy, material and ware costs, thanks to the efforts of the hub.

In an exclusive interview with BusinessLive, director Janine Smith lifts the lid on how the hub was set up, the work that it does and its plans for the future.

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Mrs Smith said: “When we first set up it was off the back of the closure of the North West Development Agency at the National Business Link Network.

“It ended up that there was no real coherence around the whole business support landscape.

“Greater Manchester decided that it wanted to create its own hub and the first couple of years after that were very much focused around trying to work with the various stakeholders and the private sector to persuade everyone that this could be mutually beneficial.

“After a couple of years we secured seed funding from the Growth Company to set us up initially and then we started to attract funding from central Government and from Manchester itself. That enabled us to start to put on support for businesses.

“I joined in 2013 to manage the delivery side of things. There were five of us at that point and we are at over 200.



Former Oldham Council Leader Sean Fielding; Janine Smith, Director of Business Growth – GC Business Growth Hub; Hilary Centeleghe, Head of Start-Up and Growth – GC Business Growth Hub; Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham; and Matthew Dooley – Former Enterprise Director at People Plus

“We went through massive growing pains but over that time we have been able to attract funds that have enabled us to put support on to meet the varying needs of businesses in Manchester at different times.

“The key priorities at the moment are everything to do with green and innovation and support around that including supply chains.

“Coming out of Covid, we have been able to shift what we deliver to meet the particular needs of the region at this time.





“We constantly look at who delivers the support such as our staff or external organisations who have more expertise in

certain areas.

“We also make sure that we stay up to date with exactly what we are able to offer businesses to help them to move forward.

“We have been able to stay agile enough to just constantly meet what Greater Manchester businesses need.”

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When asked to sum up the work of the hub, she added: “If anybody wants any kind of advice whether it is setting up a business, scaling one up or help to understand a particular area whether it be people, bringing a new product to market or sales then we have expertise that can support a company on that journey.

“If we can't provide the support we will always signpost to an organisation that can.

“We always try to stay really agile and we work really closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and LEP.

“We constantly work with them to try and understand what policies that exist, what Greater Manchester is trying to achieve and then how we can turn those policies into practice.



Janine Smith, director of GC Business Growth Hub

“We have a further two years of European funding so over the next 24 months we will be concentrating on what we do in terms of supporting the 2038 carbon neutrality pledge.

“We will be supporting the clean air zone so for businesses who are not able to access the grants and loans that will be available through TFGM, we would be a dedicated service to support those organisations.”

Mrs Smith started out working for a housing developer in the aftermath of the Manchester IRA bomb in the 1990s.

After a couple of years she took a “big jump” and switched to teaching but it was not long until she was back supporting

North West businesses.

“I first set off as a sales and marketing executive at property developer Bellway”, Mrs Smith said.

“It was just as Manchester city centre was redeveloping itself in the aftermath of the IRA bomb.

“I then moved into teaching which was a big jump.

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“I started off in a high school before moving into a college

but with that it was supporting a lot of businesses

“I was delivering leadership and management training or people-type skills into businesses as well as teaching 16 to 18 year olds.

“I worked really closely with Business Link at that time. It was like a natural evolution really.

“Initially I started advising businesses around what they needed to do in terms of leadership or investing in people.”

On the hub’s plans for the future, she said: “We are just about to launch a new initiative with the combined authority and each of the four Greater Manchester universities, called Bee Leaders.

“The idea is that there will be something there that anyone can access to meet their particular needs and learning styles.

“That’s going to be launching in January.”

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