

# West of England apprenticeships fund receives six-figure pledges

A total of £100,000 has been pledged during this year's National Apprenticeship Week to a scheme helping people across the West of England to develop new skills.

Last week Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) Council and the Southern Co-Op agreed to share £75,000 and £25,000 respectively to the region's Share to Support scheme, which is run by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and The Western Training Provider Network (WTPN).

The scheme allows apprentice-levy paying employers to pass on their unused levy funds to allow smaller local businesses to pay for the costs of training new starters or develop existing employees' skills set.

With the donations more than £1m has so far been pledged to the fund, with Bristol City Council, GKN Aerospace and the University of Bristol among the other organisations to contribute.

The Southern Co-op had previously pledged £50,000 to the scheme, with that money having already funded the training of business administration and healthcare apprenticeships.

Sarah Kavanagh, Southern Co-op's business transformation and HR director, said: "Knowing the impact apprenticeships can have on people's lives, we are delighted to have been able to further top up this pledge to a total of £75,000.

"It is incredibly important that we continue to recognise the difference this training can have on individuals and businesses alike. We look forward to hearing many more

inspiring stories from apprentices in the months ahead.”

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BANES Council added that it was currently supporting three organisations in the region to develop their staff towards professional qualifications.

Chantal Young, senior HR and organisational development business partner at BANES Council, said: “This opportunity that we have to transfer funding to pay for apprenticeship training fees is all about supporting and developing our local economy and fulfils our vision to improve people’s lives.”

The WTPN is a not for profit membership organisation of training providers and colleges in the West Country. WTPN director Alex Richards said that between £4m to £8m of apprenticeship levy was returned to the Treasury each year by

larger businesses in the West of England.

Mr Richards said: "It's vitally important that we use the funds to create sustainable careers for our residents. These funds are making a difference to people's lives and work prospects, we have already brokered close to £500,000 of shared funds to stimulate new apprenticeships and want to keep increasing new opportunities for local people.

"A huge thank you to BANES Council and to Southern Co-op who have supported the scheme this week."

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