

Ideal Heating reinvests apprenticeship funding to support local small business

2 years ago



Ideal Heating has thrown its support behind a local independent business, Bell4Business by funding an advanced level apprenticeship for one of its employees.

The UK's home and commercial heating market leader has used part of its Apprenticeship Levy funding to pay for business services provider Bell4Business employee Connor Docherty to undertake a digital marketing apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship will support the next stage of 21-year-old Connor's professional development and enable Bell4Business to expand by offering additional services, thereby also benefiting its clients.

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced by the Government in 2017 for all companies paying a wage bill of more than £3m a year. Employers that meet the criteria must pay 0.5% of their pay bill each month as a levy tax.

The levy can be reinvested into the company's workforce in the form of apprenticeship training. If it isn't spent within 24 months, any unused funding will expire and must be returned to the Government.

However, it is not widely known that companies also have the option of transferring unspent funds to SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), ensuring it is spent supporting local businesses and their development.

Ideal Heating, which is based on National Avenue, in Hull, and is owned by parent company Groupe Atlantic, has pledged to transfer up to £25,000 of its annual levy funding to support local talent.

Part of this has been invested to enable Office Administrator Connor to take on a Level 3 Digital Marketing Apprenticeship, gain new skills and achieve a higher level qualification.

The 15-month programme is being delivered by Hull Business Training Centre (HBTC). The Hull and East Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (HEY LEP) played a crucial role in linking up Ideal Heating, Bell4Business and HBTC through its Business Growth Hub.

Maria Cunningham, HR Advisor – Development at Ideal Heating, which currently has 27 apprentices across the business, including four who were recruited in September, said: “As a major employer in Hull, we wanted to give something back and support a small independent business that doesn’t have access to the same level of funding we do.”

Connor’s apprenticeship covers SEO (search engine optimisation), digital advertising and analytics. It involves both in-person and online training.

He said: “I’m so grateful to Ideal Heating for funding this training. I only began the programme recently, but I’ve already learned so much, building upon all the knowledge and experience I have gained in the business and working with our clients over the past five years.

“I’ll be able to make use of what I learn to benefit the business and it’s also absolutely brilliant for my own career development.”

Louise Bell, owner of Hessle-based Bell4Business, which offers outsourced office services including general admin, telephone answering and marketing, said: “Connor joined us when he was only 16 and he’s done fantastically well, becoming a key person in the business, with his own clients.

“This new programme is an example of the types of training that is available from HBTC for established team members, benefitting both those individuals and small businesses.

“The programme will support the next stage of Connor’s development. It will also mean we’ll be able to offer additional digital services, grow as a business and hopefully take on more staff.

“Support like this is essential for a business such as ours and I’m incredibly grateful to Ideal Heating.”

Bell4Business is changing, developing and growing all of the time, for instance they have recently launched a new service – Business Coaching Sessions, which would be delivered by Company Director, Louise. With decades of diverse business management experience across various industries, Louise is well-equipped to guide businesses towards growth. This expansion complements Bell4Business’s ongoing commitment to supporting small business owners and the self-employed.

The HEY LEP and HEY Growth Hub provides a free, impartial business support service that connects large businesses and SMEs across the region.

Carl Southcoat, Workforce Development Business Advisor for HEY LEP, said: “The reinvestment of unspent levy funding by major companies is really important to support business development in Hull, East Riding and the Humber.

“This transfer by Ideal Heating is very welcome and hopefully other large employers will follow their lead.”

Louise O'Connor, Business Development Advisor at HBTC, which has training centres in Hull, Grimsby and Scunthorpe, added: "So many large companies don't realise this is an option so they don't utilise their unspent levy funding, which is a real shame.

"If it isn't spent locally, it goes back to the Treasury and doesn't benefit the local area, so this reinvestment by Ideal Heating is really significant. Here at HBTC, we're happy to help and support SMEs or individuals like Connor secure training."

- To find out more about how the HEY LEP's Growth Hub can connect major businesses and SMEs, visit www.heylep.com/business/growth-hub/