

# Fund passes £21m milestone

**THIS** week is National Apprenticeship Week 2021, an annual celebration highlighting the achievements of apprentices and their employers across England.

Birmingham Post publisher Reach Midlands has been involved in a long-running campaign called

Ladder for Greater Birmingham which is helping to connect employers with candidates across the city region. It has created more than a 1,000 new apprenticeships in Birmingham and Solihull since it launched in 2018.

We have also run two successful

apprenticeship awards which has seen recognition for major corporate employers, small businesses and public sector bodies such as West Midlands Ambulance Service, financial services giant PwC and IT recruitment firm Crimson.

For more information about

Ladder for Greater Birmingham visit [www.ladderforbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.ladderforbirmingham.co.uk) or call 03332 409 699.

In addition, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP Skills Hub has more information and vacancy listings for apprenticeships and traineeships at [www.gbsleprowthub.co.uk](http://www.gbsleprowthub.co.uk).

## £1m boost to aid new traineeships

A BLACK Country training group has secured £1 million worth of funding to help it create more than 400 traineeships in the region.

Oldbury-based BCTG Group has received the new finance from the National Apprenticeship Service which will support a programme for 19 to 24-year-olds running until the end of July.

A traineeship is a skills development programme that includes a work placement and can last anything from six weeks to a year, with the overall aim of getting young people into work.

Employers can claim £1,000 to cover the costs of providing the work placement and currently up to another £3,000 if that trainee then becomes an apprentice.

This new funding will be used by two of BCTG Group's subsidiary companies, with BCTG receiving £710,000 and Performance Through People, which it acquired last year, receiving £300,000.

Performance Through People is also one of the key partners in the Ladder for Greater Birmingham campaign.

BCTG Group chief executive Chris Luty said: "We're delighted to be working with the Government on this substantial programme which aims to move young people into jobs quickly – usually within six to eight weeks.

"We will be recruiting for the traineeships in a range of sectors including construction, healthcare, digital and IT services, leather manufacturing, childcare, administration and logistics."

Each young person involved will be provided with skills training, vocational qualifications, English and maths and work experience to get them ready for an apprenticeship or job if they don't have the appropriate skills or experience.

BCTG Group, which has ten sites across Birmingham, the Black Country and Staffordshire, offers more than 160 different apprenticeships and supports the training of almost 10,000 young people and adults each year.

**Tamlyn Jones**

Business Correspondent

**A** SCHEME set up to fund apprenticeship training for small and medium businesses in the West Midlands has surpassed the £21 million milestone.

The Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Fund enables large employers to pledge unspent levy to fund the training of apprentices at SMEs, with 1,840 apprentices at 613 employers benefiting since it was launched.

The Apprentice Levy is charged by HM Revenue and Customs on all businesses with a payroll of more than £3 million and is held digitally by the Government.

Employers can use the funds to pay for apprenticeship training and assessment costs by bringing in new talent or plugging skills gaps within their staff but unspent levy contributions are 'sunset' and retained by the Government after two years.

The Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Fund was set up in 2018 by the West Midlands Combined Authority and keeps this unspent levy money within the region in order to boost skills and job opportunities here.

It was enabled as part of the £69 million Skills Deal agreed by the combined authority with the Government.

West Midlands Mayor Andy Street said: "Even in these difficult times, we know there are still hundreds of apprenticeship opportunities in our region, with many of these in growth sectors such as digital and construction.

"Thanks to large organisations donating their unspent levy, we're creating new job opportunities at companies which may otherwise have been unable to hire apprentices and equipping local people with the skills employers need.

"This applies particularly to young people who we know have been hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

"With National Apprenticeship Week this week, it's an ideal time for large employers in the West Midlands that haven't spent all their



apprenticeship levy, or SMEs thinking about taking on new apprentices, to get in touch with us and find out how we can help."

Companies which have donated their unspent levy in the West Midlands include Lloyds Banking Group which pledged £3 million, one of the biggest contributions to date, builders' merchant Buildbase, the RAC and University of Warwick.

Businesses that have benefited from the fund include IT recruitment and services firm Crimson which has developed an in-house apprenticeship training academy as a result of the levy transfer fund.

It now employs 100 staff at its base in Solihull, 22 of which are apprentices, and took home the Medium Employer of the Year category at our 2020 Birmingham Apprenticeship Awards.

Business analysis apprentice Mihai Iacob graduated in law but found it difficult to gain his first job in the sector so spent two years working in recruitment.

He said: "I was put on furlough last April and used the time to learn how to code.

"After two months, I decided to look for a job in the IT sector and I found the role at Crimson, starting

with the company in September. My ambition is to become a highly skilled software developer. It's been a fantastic journey so far and I'm looking forward to what comes next."

Head of people development Cat Halstead added: "We have found that our apprentices bring innovation and creativity.

"They offer a completely fresh perspective and a new approach to solving business problems for our clients.

"They have also enabled us to solve our original challenge which was how to grow our business when facing a national digital skills gap."

## Apprenticeships plea as number of applications plummet

THE head of a West Midlands training provider group has made a plea for apprenticeships to be put front and centre amid concerns applications have dropped "by half" in the region over the past year.

Derrin Kent says there are vacancies across the Greater Birmingham area with employers ready to hire new apprentices but the quantity of applicants have dropped dramatically compared with a year ago.

He said many local employers were still offering "real jobs with

real apprenticeships", and that organisations were committed to paying, mentoring, coaching and training an apprentice at a time when unemployment numbers were rising due to the pandemic.

Mr Kent is now calling on everyone who gives careers advice to ensure job seekers, especially young people, are made fully aware of the apprenticeship opportunities across the city region.

He was speaking in his role as chairman of the Greater Birmingham

and Solihull Training Provider Network, a group of training company senior executives who collaborate on key employment and education strategies across the region.

He told the *Post*: "Applicant numbers are down by more than 50 per cent against year-on-year trends and local apprenticeship providers need applicants.

"Because this is the issue we're facing, rather than a much lower number of actual vacancies, it makes me believe this is not directly

related to the pandemic. Parents and families, careers advisers, work coaches at the Department for Work and Pensions, frankly everyone, need to recommend the apprenticeship route to more applicants.

"Despite a still relatively buoyant vacancy market, some training providers in the Greater Birmingham network are struggling to survive with lower applicant numbers for apprenticeships."

In September, the Department for Work and Pensions launched the

new £2 billion 'Kickstart' scheme, for young people in receipt of Universal Credit.

Mr Kent added: "Kickstart is a great option for an employer who wants to make the social contribution of giving a job trial to someone who they are nervous to employ.

"But it should not be seen as a replacement for apprenticeships which are a great option for those serious about engaging and training a committed new staff member for the long-term."