

The Skills for Business Awards are now in their fourth year and continue to go from strength to strength. The Awards recognise and celebrate the direct impact learning has on businesses, individuals and communities in Greater Manchester.

MICRO BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Winner: Construction Q

Construction Q(CQ) is a full-service quantity surveying practice built around the professionalism, leadership, expertise and passion of its founder Fiona Hull, MRICS. After twelve years as a top-flight QS with premier construction companies, she needed an answer to the demands of parenthood in an industry still dominated by gender inequality, inflexibility over hours and training. CQ was her mould breaking answer

In five years Construction Q has moved from Fiona's kitchen table into offices, built a strong team, reached a turnover of £217,000 and amassed a stellar portfolio of exceptional projects. Looking forwards there is a strong pipeline of work, no borrowings and a forecast turnover of £312,000 next year.

In building her team Fiona selects based on personality, passion and purpose. Her current full- time team are all pursuing some form of training/personal development

In addition, Fiona maintains her commitment to lecturing and educating on a pro bono basis. She lectures regularly at both Salford and Manchester Metropolitan Universities on the construction courses and gives career talks in high schools.

An excellent business model that clearly and effectively addresses a major sectoral issue. The investment in skills undertaken by the business clearly delivers outstanding results backed up with a keen focus – driven by the owner – on people's personality, passion and purpose.

The judges also Commended, Tonetech Ltd for their entry.

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Winner: Space Zero

Established in 2009, Space Zero is a specialist interior design and FFE consultancy, with a team of 34 working from offices in Manchester and London. Working with clients from MediaCityUK to Malaysia, Space Zero has a particular strength in delivering cutting-edge experiential learning environments for the education sector, as well as inspirational spaces for healthcare providers, residential schemes and commercial offices. They have grown steadily over the past eight years and are forecast to achieve a £5.5m turnover.

The Space Zero training policy, which forms a part of the 'People Charter', has led to improvements across the whole of the business, but specifically in terms of the efficiency of its processes and effectiveness of its people. Project 'Marvel', a continuous improvement programme which every team member contributes to, has seen the introduction of a new company-wide business management system, automated key client engagement sheets, developed new techniques to deliver client meetings and improved the quality of output to its clients. As a result, in 2017 the company will report a 200% increase in bottom line profitability, which the team will share in via its preferred partner bonus scheme.

Space Zero is a forerunner in its industry – it was one of the first interiors firms to fully embrace BIM (Building Information Modelling) when it launched six years ago and it has continued to invest in the training and development of its specialist BIM team through code camps, hacking days and through leadership seminars to ensure it remains ahead of the curve, and its competition.

The Space Zero team is critical to its success and the business invests heavily in strategies to help develop skills, promote health and wellbeing, and better support individuals in their careers.

A clear winner in this category demonstrating an exemplary approach to looking after their staff through their careers through the use and development of a skills training matrix, a range of benefits focused on health and wellbeing and the company's own Peoples Charter. A new apprenticeship will be launched this summer helping further develop an outstanding offer.

MEDIUM BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Winner: Aptus Utilities Ltd

Aptus Utilities Ltd is an Independent Connections Provider (ICP) offering fully-managed multi utility installation for gas, water, electricity and street lighting on industrial, commercial and residential developments. It was formed in Bolton, in March 2010, to fill a vital gap in the market for a multi utility solution that would speed up processes for construction clients and enable them to meet industry targets. Aptus has shown consistent growth in turnover, profit, workforce and scope of geographical operations.

Investing in skills across the entire workforce has enabled Aptus to nurture a young workforce, attracting a new generation into the industry. Trainees and Apprentices make up 14+% and is set to rise with continued expansion.

They are proud of the contribution they are making to change the perception of the utilities industry to appeal to a younger demographic. They have stood by their vision to choose not always the most qualified person, but the right people for each role and for the long term development of the company. That investment has resulted in sustained and rapid growth with 1 employee in 2010 increasing to over 150 today.

Their Award recognition (ATTM 3), compared with others in their sector, are testament to the success of our model, which is producing skilled individuals across our business and contributing to the resilience and vibrancy of the industry.

A top quality entry whose level of detail brought out and told a compelling story about the approach and impact that comprehensive investment in staff development can bring.

The judges also Commended, Barlows (UK) Ltd for their entry.

LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Winner: Stockport Council

Stockport Council is the largest employer in the Borough, employing over 6000 people.

An excellent submission that clearly demonstrated local solutions to national problems and which highlighted with clarity the positive impacts that their actions have had. Their workforce development strategy provides opportunities for all staff in all occupations across the council.

In the last year they have employed over 100 Apprentices and operated a Supported' Apprenticeship programme specifically targeted at young people who are in care, care leavers, young carers and learners with special educational needs. They operate an internal Business-focused apprenticeship pool and, new for 2017, leadership and management higher and degree apprenticeships for existing Council leaders.

Offering Apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 7 they have a whole workforce approach which is being adopted and replicated by other local authorities. Their work with disadvantaged individuals is truly exemplary.

The judges also Commended, The Co-Op for their entry.

BEST OF THE BEST - Best Investor in Skills Award

Aptus Utilities Ltd.

This award recognises the company that has not only been judged as the best in their own category but the best across all businesses for taking an active and effective approach to their investment in and delivery of their skills and training strategy.

Aptus were a unanimous winner of this award and clearly demonstrated in an excellent entry that their approach to investment in their workforce has paid off resulting in outstanding growth making them a real "stand out winner" . The company has demonstrated solid execution of its many initiatives and has equally ambitious plans for the future.

Their entry told a compelling story of success through investing in their workforce and this is a thoroughly deserved award recognizing Aptus to be the best of the best.

EDUCATION BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP OF THE YEAR

Thirty Pound Gentleman and Contact Theatre

Thirty Pound Gentleman and Contact Theatre have formed a meaningful and productive partnership using music as a tool for learning.

To date this has achieved over 300 opportunities for young people with a number of acts releasing professional recording projects and performing at prestigious festivals and events across the world.

The greatest thing about this partnership is that it is not just about providing people with the skills to produce music, it is also about providing individuals with the skills and experience to start their careers in the creative economy – it is about inspiring people, showing them a route into the industry and giving essential skills such as budgeting, business planning, marketing and the steps that it takes to produce commercial record releases.

LEARNING PROVIDER OF THE YEAR

Total People Limited

Total People has been building a reputation for excellence in the North West since 2001. Providing apprenticeship training to almost 4500 young people in 1800 settings they lead the way in work-based learning. Consistently graded as ‘Good’ through Ofsted inspection, our ethos is to improve businesses by enabling staff to fulfil their potential.

In a category that was full of some highly successful providers, with some outstanding outcomes delivered, there was one provider who stood out. Total People Ltd provided narrative and evidence of their focus on their own staff as key assets in their business. This gave the judges a great feeling of the human aspect of their organisation.

At a time of unprecedented change, they have provided detailed support to Levy paying employers. Their reputation with employers was exemplified by testimonials which included from Michelin starred chefs and Bentley motors.

INTERMEDIATE APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR

Anthony Szylak – The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust with Bury College

The judges were hugely impressed by Anthony’s impact during his apprenticeship in the highly demanding world of the NHS. His approach to continually developing his skills was excellent. Not only doing his apprenticeship, Anthony also contributes in a significant way by supporting the homeless community, a carers café and giving pastoral support.

Since joining the Trust two years ago, Anthony Szylak has successfully completed his Level 2 Business Administration Apprenticeship with Bury College and is now employed as a Divisional Administrator within Rochdale Infirmary and across the local community.

Since joining the Trust, Anthony has constantly impressed his bosses through his willingness to go beyond his job role.

This has included carrying out independent research to build his knowledge on how the NHS operates and delivers services, learning how things work /communication channels /consequences of decisions / delays etc. Through this, Anthony has learned about the significant impact on patient care that can result from errors within the temporary workforce planning. As a result, Anthony developed a more efficient system which has:

- Improved forward planning for temporary workforce
- Enabled staffing rotas to be completed and released in a more-timely manner
- Reduced the need for last minute gap filling to be carried out
- Improved the smooth running of the service
- Reduced the numbers of delayed /cancelled procedures
- Delivered a greater level of service to customers

Commended - Sharon Edwards:

The judges wanted to commend the impressive and dedicated Sharon Edwards. Her journey to her apprenticeship contained some huge challenges which Sharon has managed beautifully. Becoming an apprentice at 29 years of age with 4 young children is a massive inspiration to us all.

ADVANCED APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR

Stephanie Moyle, Eatock Primary School with Bury College

Stephanie Moyle has been employed at Eatock Primary School based in Daisy Hill, Westhoughton, Bolton for three years. She is now the Office Manager. The school's mission is 'Giving Children Wings to Fly' and supports 250 children from Nursery, through Reception to Year 6.

Stephanie has progressed rapidly in both her Apprenticeships and within the schools and in a very short period has moved from clerical assistant to become the school office manager with a wide range of responsibilities. Adding real value by changing business processes and the success she has demonstrated has encouraged the school to recruit additional Apprentices. She has also made a significant contribution to a school now rated as outstanding by OfSTED

Stephanie has a huge amount of responsibility within the school and has clearly come a long way to get to where she is. Embodies what it takes to be an apprentice. Stephanie is a great role model for young people who step out of traditional education

Since leaving school with few qualifications, and becoming a young mum at aged 18, Stephanie has dedicated herself to self-improvement. She has successfully completed two Apprenticeships (at Intermediate and Advanced Levels) and used the skills learned to progress to a senior role within the school; all by the time she has reached 23. She has now moved onto a Team Leading qualification which shows that she has a continuing desire to learn and advance further in her career.

She is an outstanding role model to other young people on what you can achieve through hard work and dedication.

HIGHER AND DEGREE LEVEL APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR

Matthew Leavis, Morson Vital Training with Manchester Metropolitan University

Mathew is an immensely capable young man enabling his employer to deliver training programmes to the highest standard and as a result Morson achieved platinum status with the National Skills Academy for Rail – the only organisation to achieve this. He has been instrumental in supporting his employer to significantly reduce costs operating in a strategic manner. Matthew has been encouraged by his employer to develop his career using management and business training but in a specialist field, and has been very receptive to the opportunity.

Matthew has now completed a number of qualifications while working towards his business degree - his Level 3 diploma in Leadership and Management through the ILM, a Level 5 diploma through the CMI and most recently he has been proposed by the CMI to become a chartered manager through their experiential route. This has been all on the back of the works undertaken over the last three years taking an embryonic business to the head of an industry sector.

This was a truly excellent quality application. Mathew has managed a degree apprenticeship alongside a demanding job role achieving real business results.

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Roy Miller, Amphorea Packaging

Roy Miller created Amphorea Packaging 18 years ago as a business to business supplier of packaging materials after working for one of the world's largest packaging companies in a corporate pan European sales role. Amphorea's focus is on delivering UN certified containers to businesses in the food production, oil, chemical and pharmaceutical sectors amongst others. The company has a turnover of nearly £10m and employees 52 people, 20% of which are apprentices.

In order to develop his business Roy created 3 Internet sales companies Ampulla, Ideon and The Bottle People and almost single-handedly opened the online market for the delivery of glass and plastic packaging direct to the SME and consumer markets. Amphorea also branched into new markets with the company Aloumino Ltd, focusing on glass and aluminium products. The Amphorea Group now sells a wide variety of products totalling over 2,000 lines.

Roy is also an Officer in the Royal Navy Reserve and has been mobilized 5 times since 2008 to some of the world's most dangerous places including Somalia on counter piracy missions and Libya during the 2011. Roy is a truly inspirational entrepreneur and has demonstrated a drive to succeed and innovate.

LEARNING AND SKILLS CHAMPION OF THE YEAR

Pam Earley – The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust serves the communities of North Manchester, Bury, Rochdale and Oldham, along with the surrounding towns and villages.

Pam Earley has worked at the Trust since 1995 where she has successfully achieved a number of significant promotions. Initially starting as a Receptionist, Pam quickly gained more responsibilities in her role of Secretary. With a keen interest in IT, Pam began to take a lead role informally helping colleagues improve their IT skills, which led to her becoming IT Trainer for the Trust, following which Pam secured a further promotion to the role of IT Training Manager. Pam's appetite for self-improvement has led to her current position as Curriculum Development Co-ordinator.

Following the introduction of significant numbers of new, young staff across multiple departments, Pam recognised a new level of energy and enthusiasm for learning across the Trust. Quick to capitalize on this, Pam has also helped to introduce apprenticeship training to existing staff across the Trust. This vision has led to hundreds of additional staff starting an apprenticeship in the past few years.

Throughout her 20+ years at Pennine Acute Trust she has been champion of learning and development. Apprenticeships have now become part of the Trust's culture, in no small part to Pam's work, where Managers now routinely contact her to discuss how apprenticeships can help them fill vacancies and support staff professional development. In support of this, Pam has met with hundreds of staff across the entire Pennine Acute Trust resulting in over 200 signing up for apprenticeships.

"Pam has worked tirelessly to promote apprenticeships enabling the hospital Trust to employ staff which represent the demographics of the local population, meet the public sector target and maximise our Levy spend".

Lorraine Davies, Learning and Organisational Development Manager – Workbased Learning

Pam is an excellent example of how a key staff member has risen through the ranks and implemented a learning and skills improvement scheme that has made a real difference not only within the organisation, but also directly to people's lives. Pam has affected cultural change within the health trust and transformed the way Apprenticeships are viewed, both as a recruitment tool and as a means of professional development – managers within the trust now ask Pam how Apprenticeships can be used to drive productivity and effective ways of achieving the goals of the organisation.

OUTSTANDING INNOVATION

Winner - Cogent Skills working with Bury College & Manchester Metropolitan University

In 2013/14, despite Greater Manchester being recognised as at the forefront of scientific research, development and innovation, there were only 22 laboratory-based apprenticeships delivered across the city-region at all levels. The number of Apprentices has now grown three fold.

Bury College was tasked to deliver the newly approved Level 3 Apprenticeship Standard in Laboratory Technician through a distance learning model. Previously there was no distance learning provision at Level 3 and this was a real barrier for SMEs in the sector.

Key innovations have included:

- A strategic partnership between Cogent the industry lead body and the college in developing the Apprenticeship standard
- Creative approaches to delivering the Apprenticeship through use of the college's Virtual Learning Environment to support distance learning, weekend residential and one to one reviews and tutorials utilising the web.

Development of the blended learning model has enabled Cogent Skills and Bury College to promote the Standard to science-based companies throughout the Greater Manchester area. This has helped gain insights from a much broader area, both geographically and in the scope of companies and individuals involved, helping provide apprentices with access to additional information, knowledge and understanding of skills, knowledge and best practice taking place in the sector.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE INTO EMPLOYMENT

Willmott Dixon Construction

Based in Manchester Willmott Dixon founded in 1852 and employing 260 people is a long established major construction company.

They have a long track record of investing in both people and the communities in which they operate. They have established the Willmott Dixon Foundation through which they focus on community cohesion and the life chances of disadvantaged young people. Rather than simply donating money they use the resources of their 3500 employees to deliver programmes and initiatives that make a real difference.

The entry demonstrated an excellent example of a strong partnership between Willmott Dixon & The University of Manchester affiliated Construction Academy supporting those furthest away from the labour market, including the long-term unemployed, individuals in custody and ex-offenders.

To date this specific scheme in Greater Manchester has supported over 30 economically inactive people into careers in the construction sector – to become active members of society and begin their careers and support their families.

Willmott Dixon also has an Apprenticeship Pathway in place with a cluster of prisons – a fantastic way of progressing people from custody to employment and Willmott Dixon are the only construction company in the country doing this. As a Manchester-based national contractor, it is clear that delivering a real and tangible social value to the local community is an integral part of Willmott Dixon’s mission and ethos.