

November 15, 2007.

***County firms gain from broadband as connect.glos smashes targets***

A scheme to encourage businesses in Gloucestershire to take full advantage of broadband technology has exceeded all its targets.

Funded by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), managed by Gloucestershire First and supported by local authorities and the Learning & Skills Council, connect.glos worked with over 1300 local businesses and provided IT training for 370 people.

Grants totalling £500,000 were paid out with £989,000 in additional investment from the private sector, nearly double the project target. Almost 500 businesses – 190 over target - adopted new web-based technology.

As a result, companies backed by connect.glos have forecast an increase in gross added value of £22 million, compared to a target of £4 - £7 million, with 470 jobs created or retained in the county.

With training, advice and grants administered by Business Link over a 24-month period, connect.glos is seen as one of the most successful broadband projects in the south west – prompting connect.glos to call for new ideas using broadband to further develop the Gloucestershire economy.

“The productivity of many small to medium sized businesses has significantly increased,” reports Catherine Farrell of Gloucestershire First. “Hundreds of business owners embraced the support on offer and found the expert advice received made a big impact on their profit and profile.

“We were particularly pleased that the private sector saw the advantages of broadband technology, adding just under £1 million in matched funding,” added Catherine.

These included the Natural Grocery Store in Cheltenham, whose new website revealed that its most popular mail order product was organic dog and cat food. And the Little People Company in Nailsworth, which has built a database of over 4,000 customers.

To help companies design an appropriate website, connect.glos also drew up a list of 90 accredited web design suppliers, which resulted in the region’s first not-for-profit trade association, now 25 strong.

Ends

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