

Apprentice realises his potential at housing association

Sunderland based, housing association, Gentoo Group sees apprenticeships as an essential element of its workforce planning strategy and commitment to the local economy. Partnering with CIPS for its first-ever procurement apprenticeship resulted in a strong applicant pool from which a rising star was recruited. The combination of CIPS' globally-recognised training and immersion in Gentoo's values and ways of working enabled this first apprentice to become a highly motivated and skilled member of the team.

 **CASE STUDY**
**COMMERCIAL PROCUREMENT
AND SUPPLY APPRENTICESHIPS
PROGRAMME**





Community values

Gentoo Group is a charitable organisation dedicated to providing good quality, affordable homes for 60,000 people in Sunderland. One of the largest employers in the region, with a workforce of over 1100, Gentoo Sunderland has created meaningful jobs and rewarding careers for local people through apprenticeships since 2001. Gentoo is committed in growing a workforce rooted in the local community, boosting skills and economic growth and their apprentice scheme provides the successful applicants with the training, resources and support they need to thrive and succeed in their career.

The nine-strong procurement team manages an annual spend of £198 million, guided by a rigorous focus on what's best for customers. The rationale for introducing a procurement apprenticeship was, in part, that it would instil this approach to procurement from the outset.

Choosing CIPS Apprenticeship Programme was easy. It wasn't just that CIPS provides the whole package, from personal coaches to broad-ranging modules, specialist tutors to e-learning and revision workshops to exams. 'Our apprentice would also gain a CIPS qualification,' says Procurement Lead, Mark Jenkinson. 'And that's what everyone in procurement asks for.'



Olly is a key member of our team, always has been and always will be. We can't function without him. We have never seen him as 'just the apprentice' and that's borne out in the projects we have asked him to be part of and to lead,,

Mark Jenkinson
Procurement Lead,
Gentoo Group



Invaluable insights

Gaining an impressive professional qualification by the age of 23 was certainly a factor in Olly Watson's decision to apply for Gentoo's new apprenticeship. But there were many more. The opportunity to combine academic study with on-the-job learning was another - particularly after feeling he wasn't learning very much during the few months he had spent at university. He was introduced into the housing sector and quickly learnt the best practices in the team and industry.

Researching career options during Covid lockdowns, Olly became interested in procurement - and working for Gentoo in particular. 'I knew of its mission and realised this would make procurement even more interesting because it's not just about what's cheapest, there are quality and social value elements too,' says Olly.

Olly's enthusiasm shone through at his interview and he was selected for the two-year apprenticeship. With the active support of his line manager mentor and CIPS coach, he worked hard, passed each module and was given more and more responsibility.

As well as being chosen to lead on a project to roll out a virtual credit card system across the business, Olly was involved in the implementation of a new procurement portal. This not only gave him the deepest of insights into Gentoo's procurement processes, it also enabled the business to benefit from his fresh thinking.



Achievable ambitions

'As an apprentice, Olly brought a lot to the table - his own youthful experience, his CIPS knowledge and his learnings from the team' says Mark Jenkinson. 'He recognised that he was taken seriously and we knew we could put our trust in him.'

So great was this trust that when a job became available before the end of the apprenticeship, it was offered to Olly. 'We felt he could take on the role and develop it even further,' says Mark Jenkinson. 'It was great for us because he's a guy who's confident, wants to listen and wants to learn from us all.'

As for Olly, he says, 'I am most proud of getting my CIPS qualification but I do want to move up and the only way is to showcase my skills and take on more responsibility and I am really happy I can now do this in my job.' Olly has already been selected to represent procurement on a major business-wide project team implementing the Workday platform.

Olly is clear that the apprenticeship has been the making of him. 'I don't have just a degree. I have job experience, a CIPS Level 4 Diploma and, with higher CIPS qualifications over time, achievable career ambitions.'

“

I think what was good about me doing my apprenticeship at Gentoo, is that I learnt a lot about the organisation throughout my qualification so when I joined the team and my role in procurement, I felt like I could slot in with the knowledge I'd already gained and build on the relationships I had throughout Gentoo”

Oliver Watson

Junior Procurement Partner and ex-Apprentice, Gentoo Group

The benefits for Gentoo Group

Gentoo Group believes offering procurement apprenticeships with CIPS enables it to:

- Provide apprentices with the training, resources and support they need to thrive and succeed
- Introduce the latest professional thinking and best practices into the team
- Equip apprentices with skills and knowledge directly relevant to its work
- Grow a workforce rooted in the local community, boosting skills and economic growth.

12,000+

applications received for Gentoo apprenticeships in 2024

86%

of employers tell CIPS that apprenticeships help young people develop skills relevant to their organisation

28

Gentoo apprentices welcomed in 2024

78%

of employers say apprenticeships lead to improved productivity

With over 1,000 students sitting 5,000 exams per year, CIPS for Business Study Centre is one of the largest providers of CIPS qualifications. We have been awarded Centre of Excellence status in recognition of our quality, student care, and results. We'll provide a complete package of training, revision, course books, exams fees, eLearning, mentoring and one-to-ones with tutors, all designed to get the best results from the apprentices. We'll use our network of tutors, all experienced procurement professionals, to deliver a blend of face-to-face and online support. Training will be delivered at your site or at an alternative convenient location.

Why employ apprentices?

- If you have an employee at the beginning of their career or are looking to upskill your experienced workers, an apprenticeship is a great choice for both apprentice and employer.
- Grow talent and develop a motivated, skilled and qualified workforce that will deliver direct, positive results into your organisation.

Benefits at a glance

- Dedicated support from a Learning & Development coach to support your apprentices throughout
- All training and one-to-ones will take place at a convenient location or virtually
- All costs fully covered by the apprenticeship levy/ government funding
- Books and eLearning to accompany each module
- Complete package includes workshops, revision sessions, exam fees, tutor one-to-ones and EPA mentoring

How and where?

- We'll run programmes for up to 16 apprentices at a time, either from a single organisation or from more than one. If the whole group is from a single organisation, training and one to-ones will take place on site, otherwise it will be arranged in consultation with the various parties. Apprentices must be aged over 18, have GCSEs in Maths and English at grades A to C, or 4 to 9 in English and Maths, and not have studied procurement at Level 4 before.

Funding

- You can get help from the government to pay for apprenticeship training
- The amount you get depends on whether you pay the apprenticeship levy or not
- You pay the levy if you're an employer with a pay bill over £3 million each year
- If you do not pay the levy, you will pay just 5% of the total cost, the government will contribute 95%



Ollie was surrounded by people with different experiences which meant he was learning from those who had been on their own CIPS journey and was aware of the things that come naturally to those with extensive experience. He got the best of both worlds,”

Mark Jenkinson
Procurement Lead,
Gentoo Group



Scan the QR code for
more information

**Want to see how we
can develop your
procurement and
supply team?**

Get in touch with us:
corporate.solutions@cips.org

www.cips.org/cips-for-business