



From exams to assignments: one practitioner's path to MCIPS

Matt Stanhope-Smith started with traditional CIPS exams. He finished with MCIPS. In between he switched programmes and discovered a new way of learning.

Not everyone arrives at MCIPS the same way. For Matt Stanhope-Smith, a procurement professional at Leidos, the journey started in 2022 the way many do. By sitting exams. The Level 4 Diploma gave him structure and grounding, but when the opportunity came to transition to the Advanced Practitioner programme, an assignment-based route built around real work, he made the switch.

It was not a shortcut. If anything, it raised the bar, requiring Matt to pursue his studies around his daily work commitments.

What made the difference was being able to apply the learning directly to live situations at Leidos. No hypotheticals. No case studies from other industries. Just real procurement challenges, real commercial decisions, and real impact.

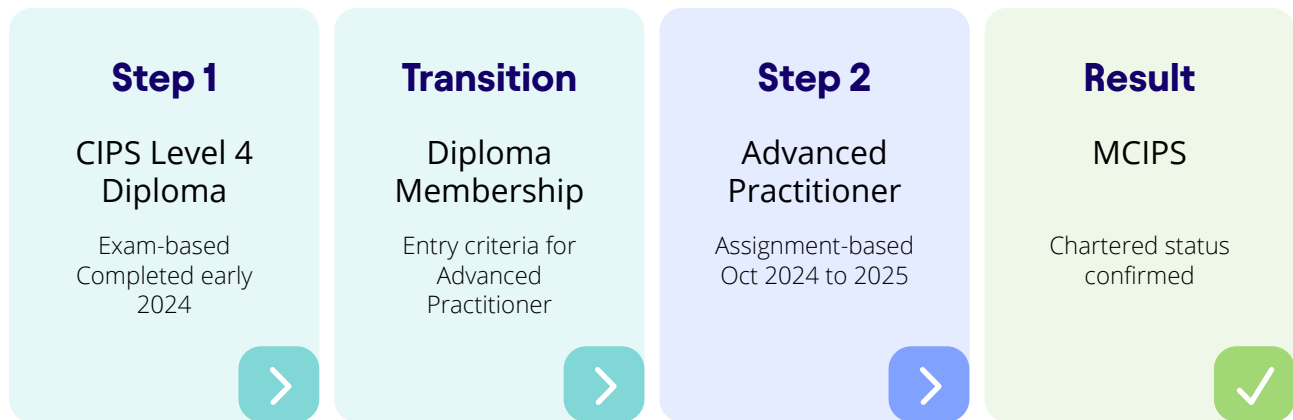
In May 2025, Matt received an email he had been working towards for three years. MCIPS status confirmed.

“ When I moved on to the Advanced Practitioner programme in October 2024, I'll admit I massively underestimated the amount of work it would take. Balancing it alongside a full-time role meant late-night reading, weekends spent refining assignments, and more than a few trips away where a laptop came along 'just in case'. It was challenging, but the stretch was exactly what it was meant to be, and there is no doubt in my mind that it has absolutely been worth it. ”

Matt Stanhope-Smith
MCIPS | LEIDOS



How Matt got there: A flexible route to MCIPS



Diploma Membership is the entry criterion for the Advanced Practitioner Corporate Award, making it the natural next step for anyone who has already completed the Level 4 exam route.

What the programme delivered

The Applied Learning model is built on the premise that the best way to learn procurement is to do procurement. Matt's assignments were not abstract exercises. They drew on genuine challenges at Leidos, making the learning immediate and the insights directly transferable to his day-to-day role.

Being part of a mixed-industry cohort added another dimension. Procurement professionals from different sectors all tackling the same frameworks creates a richness of perspective that a purely internal programme cannot replicate.

The curriculum covered territory Matt had not encountered in his earlier studies including leadership and influence, navigating commercial trade-offs, global supply chain risk and resilience, and the importance of delivering change pragmatically.

His final project included interviews with members of his own team at Leidos, and the resulting insights are now shaping the organisation's approach to category management, a direct return on the investment in Matt's development.

“ The Advanced Practitioner curriculum pushed me to think much more deeply about leadership and influence, commercial trade-offs rather than absolutes, global supply chain risk and resilience and how much is decided long before a contract is ever signed. It also reinforced a simple truth: even the best ideas fail if change isn't delivered pragmatically. ”

Matt Stanhope-Smith
MCIPS | LEIDOS

The manager's view

Laura Foley-Wright FCIPS

Matt's manager at Leidos

Laura supported Matt throughout his journey and has seen the benefits first-hand, for Matt, for the team, and for Leidos as a whole.



How has Matt benefitted from the programme?

“ This programme has enabled Matt to maximise his learning in a practical sense, enhanced by the views and inputs of cohort members bringing theory to life for other industries and roles, expanding his knowledge and application even further. ”

How has your team and organisation benefitted?

“ Matt has shared his assignments and projects for others to read. The final project included interviews with some team members, and the results will impact our strategy for category management. ”

What is your view of how the programme is structured?

“ The programme offered reasonable timelines for study, preparation and assignments, allowing participants to manage alongside their workloads and personal schedules. Hearing about the areas of discussion prompted focused conversations on the practical applications alongside the study itself. ”

Would you recommend it to others?

“ Absolutely, especially to those who are self-motivated but also like to collaborate and build a network with procurement professionals from other industries. ”

“ I started my CIPS undertaking back in 2022, driven by a desire to be more deliberate about my development rather than relying on experience alone. It moved me from not just doing the work, but understanding the rationale behind decisions and trade-offs. ”

Matt Stanhope-Smith
MCIPS | LEIDOS

Looking to upskill your team?

Get more information on the [CIPS Applied Learning Programme \(Corporate Award\)](https://www.cips.org/corporateaward), including upcoming webinars where you can put your questions to CIPS experts.

www.cips.org/corporateaward

Corporatesolutions@cips.org

