

ITQ Professional Apprenticeship **CASE STUDY**

BRIDGE PARTNERS

From raw recruit to Help Desk Manager Oran Sim's pathway to success

Matching up Oran Sim's raw talent and enthusiasm with a rapidly expanding IT company and CRC's new ITQ Professional Apprenticeship has proved a marriage made in heaven. Oran, one of the first students in the country to complete the innovative course, has progressed from a junior assistant at Cambridge-based Bridge Partners to the highly responsible position of Help Desk Manager, while his employers are so pleased with the scheme that they plan to take on Apprentices each year to help develop talent from within.

The success of the Apprenticeship, an innovative collaboration between Cambridge Regional College, e-skills (the sector skills council for the IT and Telecoms Industry), City & Guilds and QA-IQ (the UK's leading IT delivery company), has been due to listening to the needs of employers and creating a programme to suit their needs.

The Apprenticeship Programme

Cambridge Regional College was answering the needs of local employers when it developed the framework for its innovative ITQ Professional Apprenticeship, the first in the UK.

Many companies faced difficulties attracting the right young people into IT support, and had been disappointed by graduate job applicants' lack of business understanding and company culture.

They wanted an Apprenticeship course with an industry-recognised accreditation, an emphasis on developing excellent communication skills and a real understanding of business practices.

CRC responded with its pioneering scheme that not only developed generic IT skills but also gained industry-recognised qualifications such as Microsoft-Certified

Professional and CISCO Networking Practitioner qualifications.

The College also made sure the requested high importance was placed on teaching communication skills, recognising that the ability of Apprentices to communicate clearly was as important as being technically capable.

Its programme enables learners to work as IT technicians while spending time in the College's purpose-built Microsoft Suite, enhancing both their technical knowledge as well as their business and customer-service skills.

As with all Apprenticeships, the ITQ Professional Apprenticeship is a structured Work-Based Learning programme that is delivered both in the workplace and at the College to develop current and future employees between the ages of 16 and 24.

Impact

Solution to recruitment problems – Financial benefit – Innovative training to suit employer's needs

The problem

A shortage of skilled, business-aware applicants for Cambridge's expanding IT sector.

The solution

A professional Apprenticeship programme designed to teach industry-standard qualifications and produce high-level, well-qualified staff.

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The Company – Bridge Partners

Bridge Partners is a rapidly-growing information and communications technology support services company with clients in Cambridge and London. Staff are highly experienced ICT professionals who have worked both in-house and with client companies at board level throughout their careers. The business specialises in helping small to medium-sized organisations to get the best from their information and communications technology. It also offers strategic ICT advice to larger firms, helping them manage their technology resources and prepare their organisations and culture for change. In the past, recruitment has been a problem – the company puts a particular emphasis on customer relationships – and taking on an Apprentice was seen as an ideal way of combining the benefits of in-house training with a professional skills programme

The Apprentice – Oran Sim

“I love IT and I love my job. When I applied to do the course, CRC matched me carefully with Bridge Partners and it’s worked very well. Doing an Apprenticeship has had big benefits. You can come into College with any question you have from work, and when you’re at work you can put into practice things you’ve learned at College.

“You’re learning all the time and picking up knowledge at a very fast rate. It gives you a complete study and learning environment, along with the real work to use it in. The experience of being here working at Bridge Partners and being treated like an adult was also an advantage.” Oran, 21, started his Apprenticeship as

a junior assistant at Bridge Partners, spending his time going out to sites with colleagues, building machines with a checklist to hand and close supervision, and working with a mentor – and admits that initially 99 per cent of it was over his head. He studied IT at A level and thought he had a good understanding of the subject. “But I came to this job and realised just how much I didn’t know. I worked from the bottom up to get to my present role as Help Desk Manager.

“I’m very proud that the company believed I could do the job - I didn’t think I would ever get to this level. It has been a really enjoyable two and a half years and I have learned an enormous amount.

“I came in here as a junior and the fact that I have progressed this far is fantastic. It makes me feel how lucky I am to be where I am, particularly when I see people with degrees coming here looking for jobs and not being picked to do the sort of work I’m now doing.”

Oran, who is just about to complete his Advanced Apprenticeship, is also a keen pilot in his spare time, and has his own plane. He flew solo before he could drive and qualified as a pilot when he was just 17. Music is his other big interest: he is the drummer with Cambridge band Violet Bones, which has a big fan base and has just released its debut single.

“The band has been together for two years and is going very well. We have a lot of fans locally and now we’re trying to branch out with our new single. We’re all very keen on music. I love IT and I love music, and I’m in the fantastic position where I can work in a job I really enjoy and spend my spare time doing what I love.”

“Taking on an Apprentice seemed a good way of training someone up and getting an employee who could grow within the business. I was impressed by the fact that the course had a Microsoft accreditation for the workplace, the industry-acknowledged specification.

This has worked very well for us and there have been definite financial benefits for the business. Oran has grown up knowing and understanding the way we do things and there is real value in catching people young and moulding and shaping them. It is a very good way of progressing.

Cambridge Regional College worked hard to see what Oran was doing at work and how they could relate it to his course. We are already planning to take on another Apprentice. In fact, I’d like to take on one or two a year and see them grow as the business progresses.”

Andrew Glover
Founder

Bridge Partners