DAY IN THE LIFE: GRADUATE TRAINEE

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Describe the main responsibilities of your role

As a Graduate Trainee for Optimum Procurement Group my primary focus is to help our senior procurement teams secure incremental value for our clients through cost management, reducing supply side risk and improving sustainability.

My role involves supporting our Procurement Executives, providing day-to-day operational assistance and helping to deliver key strategic projects. Knowing I have the full backing of experienced Procurement Executives on my team, as well as my Procurement Principal, gives me confidence in my role and means I always have somewhere to turn for expert advice.

How does your average day start?

As an outsourced procurement services provider, Optimum works on behalf of multiple clients, managing more than 200 categories of expenditure across a wide range of industry sectors. This ensures every day brings its own challenges and two days are rarely the same.

I begin my working day by assessing the day's tasks. Forward planning and thorough organisation are essential elements of the role. The ability to prioritise tasks and focus on the most important and pressing issues is vital.

Every morning the analyst within my team sends around a detailed report of all purchase orders raised by our client the previous day. This allows us to precisely review ongoing expenditure to measure how it aligns to planned strategies and best practices. We can then easily identify any areas of rogue or inefficient expenditure, drive correct behaviors and channel spend through preferred suppliers. This results in greater supply chain control.

What is your favorite part of your job?

My favorite part of my role is the continuous learning and development that, as a junior member of the team, I am exposed to during Optimum’s graduate scheme. The support provided internally from all levels of the business helps me to develop my procurement knowledge and professional skillset.

I also enjoy the varied nature of my position. As part of the graduate scheme, I will undergo six, four-month placements over two years. Four of the placements focus on procurement outsourcing, working directly with Optimum’s clients, while the other two take place within our fleet management business and sales team. Such variety ensures the role never ceases to be exciting, challenging and rewarding in equal measures.

What is the most fulfilling part of your role?

One of the great things about working at Optimum is that as a team and individually we continually come up with innovative ideas, ways of saving money and initiatives to ensure correct procurement behaviours are implemented.
Working with experienced procurement individuals to enhance and develop my skills within the profession is fantastic. Optimum has high-calibre, experienced individuals with a wealth of industry knowledge. This is invaluable to the development of junior team members.

Another particularly satisfying aspect of my role is the level of responsibility I am given on projects to provide the client with solutions through the use of strategic procurement and category management tools. I’m given a high degree of responsibility on cradle-to-grave projects, including purchasing negotiations and presenting strategies to clients. Ultimately, I deliver carefully considered and well developed procurement projects, all closely supported by management in Optimum. This support is key, both to the success of our clients and to my personal development as a graduate.

**What is the most difficult part of your job?**

Procurement can be an extremely challenging career choice from time to time which, for me, is what makes the job interesting.

Resistance to procurement’s role from suppliers or internal stakeholders can present difficulties. This resistance is often fuelled by a lack of insight into the benefits that good procurement practices can bring to a business. Good communication, negotiation and persuasion skills can overcome such resistance. When it becomes clear that procurement’s input can improve business performance and enhance supplier relationships, most stakeholders come to embrace the procurement function.

**What do you feel are the key skills needed to be successful in your role?**

The key to success is to apply the skills, knowledge and experience gained from previous assignments to fresh challenges and new sets of circumstances.

A wide range of skills are essential including teamwork and organisation and communication skills. The ability to show innovation, think outside the box and adapt to changing circumstances is also important. Finally, as with any role, enthusiasm, dedication and confidence are also extremely helpful.

**How and why did you get started in the profession?**

I identified procurement as a profession I was keen to get into during my second year of university after completing a purchasing module. It was an area I felt I definitely wanted to progress as a career choice ensuring that the final year of studying was focused on procurement. I will always remember my university tutor advised that procurement can be both tremendously challenging and rewarding. It can be the difference between success and failure due to the impact expenditure can have on a company’s bottom line.

**Are you a CIPS member and if so and how has CIPS helped you in your career?**

I am a CIPS member. My degree with Liverpool John Moore’s University is accredited by CIPS, which allowed me the opportunity to develop my professional skills as I studied. CIPS has helped me as it is highly regarded in the industry and recognised by employers. One of the benefits is that it helps you be recognised as a procurement professional and allows you to progress your career to more senior levels within the business. The fact that my degree course is accredited by CIPS was an essential factor which led to me being selected by Optimum to be part of their graduate scheme.

**What advice would you give someone who wants to progress to your position?**

My advice would be to work hard to achieve CIPS with your degree if your course is accredited. During university, if your course allows for an industrial year, then take the opportunity with both hands. What you will learn will be invaluable and crucial when you start your procurement career.

Be willing to work hard and test yourself. In the procurement profession this is easy as it is a challenging environment.
What do you think the next step in your career will be?

The next steps in my career are to build on the key skills I have developed through Optimum’s graduate scheme and to progress to a Procurement Executive. Working for an outsourced procurement services provider has given me a wide range of skills and experience of working across a number of industry sectors. This experience will put me in good stead for the rest of my career.