



Neilcott helps apprentice build his future

**“Accountancy is a well-respected profession. In the past it’s generally only been offered via college through a firm of accountants. What we wanted, and I am sure many companies like us require, is the opportunity to offer training to someone willing to learn in the workplace, because they will then understand the issues that particularly relate to the construction industry.” Robert Cox Group Accountant, Neilcott**

**Neilcott Construction is a medium-sized construction company which has been trading since 1967 ([www.neilcott.co.uk](http://www.neilcott.co.uk)). It specialises in general contracting working in the Health, Education, Leisure, Retail, Industrial and Public Sectors. The company, which has a turnover in excess of £35 million employs 90 members of direct staff at its Orpington headquarters.**

### **New to apprenticeships**

Group Accountant Robert Cox, explained how the company operates. “The majority of our work is carried out by offering work to a large pool of trusted specialist sub-contractors rather than employing large numbers of direct trades personnel. This is why we are able to run on such a relatively small pool of staff for the size of the business, all of whom are fully qualified.”

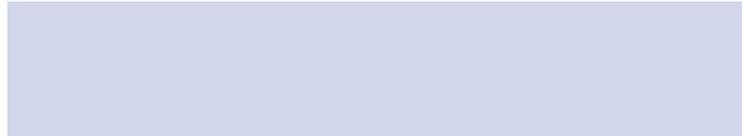
As Neilcott doesn’t employ a great number of trades people directly, it has generally never been able to offer apprenticeships. However it has more recently taken on trainees in both management, surveying and now accounting.

“The company is growing and there is now more opportunity for us to offer apprenticeships in some areas,” said Robert.

### **Training with support**

Last year Neilcott offered its first finance apprenticeship to 22-year old Paul Sharpe, who is now doing an apprenticeship as an AAT accounting technician with the company.

“I approached an employment agency asking for those interested in accounting work and Orpington College, who is keen to engage with local



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employers, had also contacted the employment agency and told them of the accounting apprenticeships available. It seemed like an excellent opportunity to offer training with the support of a well-respected local training provider.”

### Better training on the job

Robert said that he wanted to offer a young person training because he felt that real work experience coupled with good quality training would produce a better, more commercially-aware person than one who knew the theory, but had little practical exposure in their chosen field.

“I hope that Paul will complete his apprenticeship with Neilcott and begin to take over some of my responsibilities so I can concentrate on the company’s strategic growth,” he said. “There is a great opportunity here within a growing company for someone like Paul and he will only be constrained by his own ambitions.”

### Basic training

Paul began his work at Neilcott getting to understand the basics, working alongside the purchase ledger clerk until he felt confident and had built up his knowledge. When Robert was satisfied of his competence, Paul moved to working with the sub contractors, updating databases and inputting information.

Some months on and Paul is now doing much more figures analysis, contributing to Robert’s reports to the Board.

### Motivated apprentice

He attends college one day a week and Robert said that he is already a valuable member of staff.

“If we hadn’t taken on an apprentice, we would have had to take on a qualified accounting technician,” said Robert. “Taking on a motivated young person who is willing to learn has fitted into the company’s growth plans much better. Paul is developing alongside the company and contributing to our growth.

“When he has completed his accounting apprenticeship in 18 months to two years, he can go onto to gain more accounting qualifications and really progress within the business.”

### Clear career path

“At college we were each asked to draw up a plan of how we saw our future,” said Paul. “Since I started at Neilcott Construction I’ve become quite ambitious – more so perhaps because I can see that there could be a clear career path ahead of me which benefits both myself and the company.”

Robert adds: “The AAT accountancy apprenticeship represents an excellent opportunity to continuously apply theory learned at college in a practical environment and is a good grounding to later becoming a fully qualified accountant.”



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