



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Innovation

GL Jones Playgrounds

North Wales Partnership Continues To Thrive



(L to R) KTP associate Joseph Ankers; Gareth Hughes, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Aaron Jones, GL Jones Playgrounds.

GL Jones Playgrounds is a family-led company based in Bethesda, Gwynedd. Employing 16 staff, it specialises in the design and manufacture of high-quality playground equipment – winning awards for excellence and innovation and selling products across the globe.

In 2010, GL Jones made a successful application for a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP). This turned out to be a key period in the evolution of the business that led to a streamlined design and manufacturing process, technological innovation and sustained export growth.

The Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) scheme helps businesses to innovate and grow by linking them with a university and an individual graduate to work within the business on a specific project. KTP projects can last between 12 and 36 months and are part-funded in Wales by a grant from the Welsh Government.

The GL Jones project also resulted in significant and long-lasting benefits for the other two partners involved – engineering graduate, Joseph Ankers, and education institution, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. Three years on and the success story continues.

The Business Key Achievements:

- Increased productivity by 20%
- Increased market share in a declining market by 7%
- Profits increased by £183k
- Won Wales's Best KTP Partnership 2013
- UK Best of the Best partnership – highly commended

The Business

The decision to apply for a KTP was part of the company's strategy to enhance its design process, from concept to manufacture. Getting designs into production was a time-consuming process for GL Jones, with more than 70 manual stages and the company recognised the need to integrate its Computer Aided Design (CAD) function with its wider business processes.

Teaming up with the Menai Innovation Centre, part of Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, GL Jones engaged graduate Joseph Ankers on a two-year placement, and worked closely with the college to develop and implement a new product development process. Exploiting the latest advances in CAD software capabilities, the project enabled company-wide access to 3D rendered images of equipment and playground designs at every stage of the process.

Three Years On...

"The KTP was a huge success and probably the most important thing that we've done as a business. It took a real team effort, and the partnership gave us access to the expertise and resource to deliver a truly transformational project.

"Since completing the KTP, the domestic market for our products has become extremely challenging, with pressure on school and local authority budgets, but the additional capabilities it delivered allowed us to grow the business despite these challenges. In the last three years, we have almost doubled our export sales and now ship to customers in the US, Australia and Sweden, as well as Asia and the Middle East.

"Our relationship with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai has continued, through a second KTP linked specifically to our manufacturing process and now the college's Apprenticeship programme. The KTP structure also made us think differently about the way in which we develop our own staff and encouraged us to look creatively at the way people work within the business."

Aaron Jones, GL Jones Playgrounds Ltd

The Academic Partner

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai worked closely with GL Jones Playgrounds to secure KTP funding, select a qualified associate who could work effectively within the family-orientated business and develop a framework through which the two-year project could be managed. The faculty provided expertise on the latest advances in design technology techniques and acted as a 'sounding board' for specific challenges and solutions.

The Academic Partner Key Achievements:

- Developed infrastructure to enhance delivery of future KTPs
- Creation of new and engaging teaching materials
- Staff and student development opportunities

The project was fully integrated with the college's day-to-day teaching, enabling both staff and students to broaden their knowledge and experience of the latest CAD software and informing curriculum materials on product design, sustainability and product life cycle principles. The experience prompted the development of a knowledge transfer strategy for Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

Three Years On...

"The KTP with GL Jones Playgrounds was a real game-changer and led to a robust knowledge transfer strategy that is already bearing fruit. We now have three full-time staff within a knowledge transfer unit that works with different faculties and businesses to identify opportunities for new projects and partnerships. The team has set up two further KTPs involving the Menai Innovation Centre, as well as one with our Food Technology Centre. The first KTP, managed from our Llandrillo campus, is about to get underway and others are at different stages of development.

"Institutions spend a lot of time teaching theory to students but we are very practically-orientated, and KTPs are a fantastic vehicle for bringing the two together. They not only benefit the business and the individual associate but also engage the entire faculty, staff and students, and enable us to both develop and share best practice."

Gareth Hughes, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

The Associate

KTP Associate, Joseph Ankers gained invaluable experience and training throughout his two-year placement. His ability to transfer the knowledge from his training to the workplace not only empowered senior management to transform the business but also enhanced his own capability as a leader.

Three Years On...

After the conclusion of the project, Joseph was given a permanent role within the business and supervised the setup and implementation of a second KTP, before moving on to a senior role at another innovative Welsh business. Gwynedd-based Blizzard produces award-winning thermal protection equipment for a range of different applications, and Joseph's KTP experience has made him a welcome addition to the team.

The Associate Key Achievements:

- Training and personal development
- Management experience
- Experience of developing and taking new products to market
- Increased commercial awareness

To find out more about KTP funding in Wales | 03000 6 03000
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