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Aptem at work – Buckinghamshire New University



Aptem is a complete solution to enhance every aspect of apprenticeship and vocational training delivery.

Here's the proof [▶](#)

Case Study – Buckinghamshire New University

Buckinghamshire New University specialises in employment-focused and skills-based degrees. Originally founded as an art and science school in 1891, it was awarded university status in 2007. It has three campuses – High Wycombe, Uxbridge, and Aylesbury – and boasts some notable alumni, such as Google's Head of Creative Olivier Rabenschlag, the Paralympic gold medallist Naomi Riches and Olympic bronze medallist Chloe Rogers.

Bucks started working with Aptem in January 2018 and the University currently has 230 apprenticeships – predominantly in healthcare, nursing and IT. It expects substantial growth in student numbers over the coming years. The University believe the push will come from the public sector, which will seek to offset cuts in funding for training through the levy. In 2018, it was one of the first to launch the Nursing Degree Apprenticeship, and is now working with many NHS trusts including West London and Buckinghamshire Healthcare.



The challenge

Steve Dewhurst, until very recently Buckinghamshire's Director of Strategic Development and Planning, says that universities have not yet fully recognised that they need a different way of managing apprenticeship delivery.

"I think a lot of other universities are trying to manage it manually while they figure out whether they can adapt the systems that they have or whether they go with Aptem or something similar. I know they are having trouble, which is fine when you only have 20 or 30 students, but when you get into the 100s, it's challenging if you don't have a system."

Dewhurst explained that apprenticeship rules are different to those that universities usually deal with. Getting onto the Register (RoATP), the end-point assessment (EPA), compliance and *"operating under apprenticeship rules is complex and challenging, and involves lots of contracts and monitoring that we don't do for degrees,"* all present dilemmas.

230

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A system to deal with pinch points

That was one of the reasons Bucks chose Aptem. They felt they needed a platform which could *"solve the bits that weren't native to the systems we had,"* says Dewhurst. The Individualised Learner Record (ILR), contracting, recruitment and admissions, plans and monitoring, and mapping onto the standards are all pinch points that Dewhurst says can't be done with existing university systems.

They felt Aptem was different to other platforms on offer: *"The reason we chose Aptem was that it contained the most elements that we could see in the system: in other words, the life cycle, rather than just being able to plan the ILR."*

A supportive team

The other reason Bucks chose Aptem was its attitude towards development. The standards of degree apprenticeships look very different to apprenticeship frameworks, says Dewhurst. Frameworks are more compartmentalised and include long lists of small tasks that need to be covered in training and onsite. The degree apprenticeships have *"much bigger and bolder objectives that need to be mapped into an academic programme to create a plan."*

Universities are complex places and already have many systems in place for managing the learning environment. Dewhurst says that adapting Aptem to the University's systems and learning about Aptem's functionality has been, and continues to be *"a journey."* Currently, the University uses Aptem for onboarding, contracting, the learner plans – which can include around 700 elements – and the ILRs. They are learning about the reporting and monitoring systems now they have apprentices on the system. Also, there are a lot of new functions too:

"The links that MWS's CTO John Brightwell is doing, things like the learner records system, where you can look up qualifications and get the ULNs, has been really useful."

Dewhurst has been consistently impressed by the dedication and adaptability of Aptem's implementation team:

"John and the team have always been ready to say, 'well if that doesn't work, this is what would work,' and be ready to make the changes that needed to be done. Because universities would look at it and not understand it otherwise."

Mutual learning is helped by Aptem's higher education user group, where participants can offer feedback on the platform which the team use to improve the product. Universities, says Dewhurst, tend to be interested in collaboration over competition and the group offers a particularly useful way to discuss apprenticeship strategy and how Aptem can evolve.

Final words

What advice does Dewhurst have for other universities who may be considering growing their apprenticeship offering?

First, he says, don't underestimate how different the apprenticeship delivery process is to conventional degrees, even if the two systems look quite similar on paper. *"You've got to learn about it and accept that they are different,"* he argues, *"and learn what you need to do differently. I think that's probably the biggest struggle for universities."* Second, he says, you have to listen to employers and learn the programme from them.

Third, universities should understand how Aptem can help negotiate employer-university relationships:

".. it's a big selling point if you go to tender meetings or meetings with employers and they start asking you how you are going to monitor things. We've got some nice presentations and user guides that show how we use Aptem – a real physical product that you can use to demonstrate that the system is in place to monitor and manage apprenticeships."

As Bucks seeks to grow its apprenticeship programmes – taking advantage of growing interest from employers about how they can take advantage of government funding – they are confident that, with Aptem, they have a system which will successfully deliver the skills and training business and the public sector needs.

Learn more about offering degree apprenticeships in our [White Paper, University Challenge: Making Apprenticeships Work in Higher Education.](#)

"I'm delighted with the difference that Aptem is making to Bucks New University's apprenticeship business. Aptem is complementary to our existing systems, streamlining processes and eliminating data complexity. It allows us to capture and map evidence for our programmes, and has made submitting ILR returns for funding a breeze. To top it off, the MWS implementation team have really supported our transition to Aptem and have been a pleasure to deal with."

Steve Dewhurst
Bucks New University



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Aptem is the latest product developed by MWS Technology, pioneers in technology solutions for the vocational training, further education and welfare to work sectors since 2009.

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