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Implementing Aptem Skills and Aptem Apprentice — Central YMCA



Aptem develops innovative SaaS technology solutions to enable skills development and employability. Our solutions drive compliance, operational efficiency and business control.

Case Study – Central YMCA

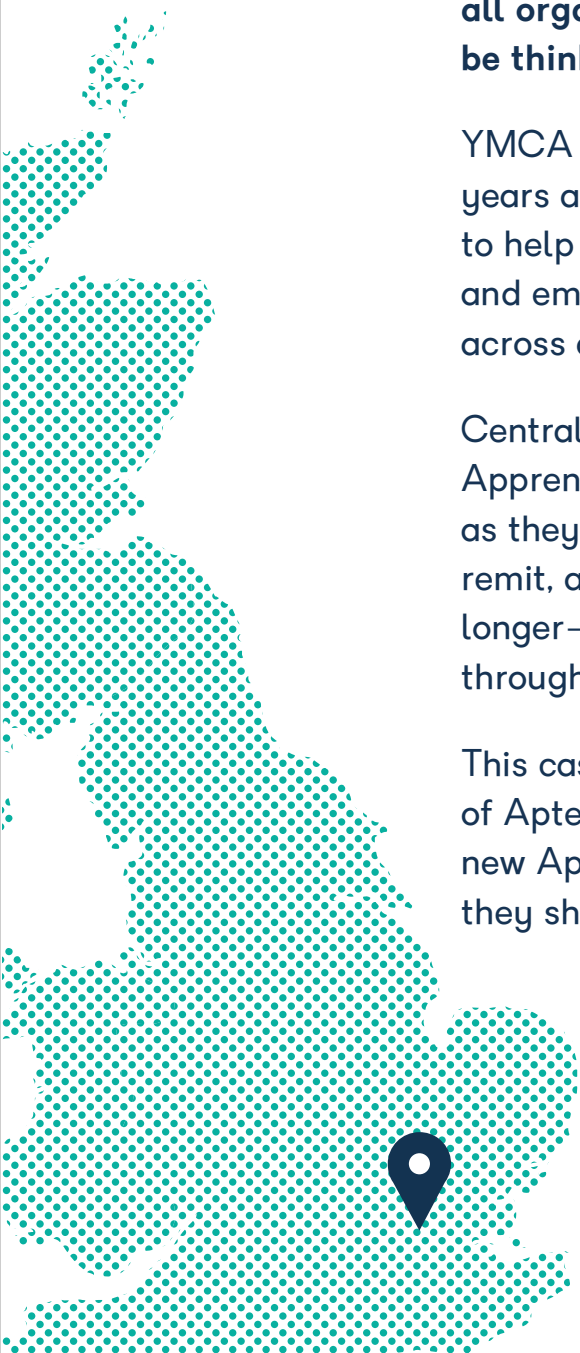
Central YMCA is a large and established training organisation with three core divisions: skills, education and commercial. It contracted Aptem in 2019 with the aim to onboard all of its programmes onto Aptem Apprenticeship and Aptem Skills.

In this case study, we look at the process of implementation in Central YMCA: what to expect, what went well, and what all organisations getting ready to implement Aptem should be thinking about.

YMCA Training, which became part of Central YMCA five years ago, was set up during the deep recession of the 1970s to help young people find new opportunities through training and employment. It now has around 6000 learners per year across all its programmes.

Central YMCA signed up to Aptem Skills and Aptem Apprenticeship in 2019. Both the skills and education branches, as they are within the Education and Skills Funding Agency remit, are delivered through Aptem. Central YMCA has a longer-term aspiration to deliver all its programmes through Aptem.

This case study discusses Central YMCA's implementation of Aptem – from preparation to going live – to help other new Aptem clients understand what is involved and how they should prepare.



Implementing Aptem

Implementation at the Central YMCA was handled through four project leads, all preparing different workstreams. The implementation consultant at Aptem, worked with the project leads. The provider was clear from the start that it was a business transformation project.

Ryan Palmer, Director of Quality and Impact at Central YMCA, and who oversaw the implementation and functioning of Aptem, said they felt fully prepared for the process of implementation:

“We knew that there was going to be a series of administrative tasks that we would have to prepare. It was quite clear what they were going to be, and nothing was a surprise. Once that process had taken place, then we discussed where the work would need to be. It was very transparent.”

Central YMCA wanted full end-to-end functionality of Aptem and to be up and running in 16 weeks – a tight timeframe for a complex organisation. Said Palmer:

“We knew it would be a heavy workload for the team at Aptem and us. But communication throughout the implementation process and the expectations about what we would have to do to get to the next step and what Aptem had to do to get to the next step, were always clear.”

The build also involved some entirely new challenges, such as qualifications that were new to Aptem Skills and Aptem Apprentice. All the outcomes had to be built before they could be resourced.

Throughout, the support given by Aptem’s implementation consultant was excellent, said Palmer:

“Throughout implementation our project leads were physically shown how it was done, rather than just giving out workbooks and telling them to crack on with it. Whenever a challenge occurred, or a question asked, rather than asking us to refer to a book, we were taken through the ins and outs of how to manage our own problems once we were fully up and running.”



16 weeks

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The wins and the hitches

While the building of Aptem within Central YMCA was a complicated process, Palmer endorsed the Aptem team for its communication and relationship building. The project workstreams functioned well, he said, allowing the organisation to focus. The training went well, the data conversions worked, and the “occasional hiccups in file formats and compatibility” resolved. Programmes unused to online delivery and ePortfolios, such as horticulture, converted smoothly.

Aptem went live at Central YMCA on the target date:

“The fact that we went live on the day we committed to going live was, for us, a great achievement, particularly given the complexities of the build.”

What proved more complicated was the education provision – the 16 to 19 study programme – which operated differently from apprenticeships. In particular, the programmes needed a different funding report. It is currently being built, and Palmer has praised the Aptem team for communicating well on the build and being flexible about Central YMCA’s needs:

“Aptem has been very open with their communication and very clear on timeframes. You are working on it, and we understand when it will be ready. So that’s been good. We’ve resolved it nicely.”

“The fact that we went live on the day we committed to going live was, for us, a great achievement, particularly given the complexities of the build.”

Ryan Palmer

Director of Quality and Impact at Central YMCA

Partnership working

Palmer was very keen to stress that working with Aptem during implementation was very much an “innovation partnership”. For example, the next phase for Aptem is bringing Central’s commercial learners into the platform:

“We’re looking at bringing our commercial learners across and seeing if that will work. That’s a new market for you guys, and we’re still discussing, as an innovation partnership, how we can do it. It is an exciting period.”

The nature of the partnership means that the implementation process will only work with two-way communication, says Palmer.

“Aptem, like any software provider, will only build what you have asked for. I can’t guess the way that they work, and they can’t know your needs unless you tell them. You need to fully understand what the changes are going to be and what additional requirements you might have for, just as an example, staff training or hitches in the data flow.

“Because Aptem involves a culture change – it is a very efficient system, and if you’re not as efficient, it can seem confusing at first. I’ve got admin that have been doing the same thing for ten years. They are used to doing things a certain way, even if we don’t need to do that anymore.

“What’s important, though, is that the team at Aptem are there to help. They are very responsive.”



The Aptem team

While the whole team at Aptem helps with implementation and the smooth running of Aptem products, the implementation work is carried out by the core consultant. As they move to the final stages of implementation towards long-term development they will be supported by Customer Success.

“You’ll get an excellent level of service with implementation, and you will get support until such time you feel comfortable working on the new system.”

Central YMCA has been pleased with the broader input of Aptem, for example, sponsoring the organisation at an event at the House of Commons. Working with the team at Aptem is, for Central YMCA, not just a service but a relationship:

“As a fledgeling relationship, it seems to be heading in a good direction. We signed the contract six months ago now – it doesn’t seem like it’s been six months – and we’ve made a lot of progress. We’re now feeling comfortable enough to turn off all our old systems because we kept them out just as a backup, because, you never know. But now we’re confident that we’ve got to the point where we’re functioning beyond where we were before we got started.”

“You’ll get an excellent level of service with implementation, and you will get support until such time you feel comfortable working on the new system.

Ryan Palmer

Director of Quality and Impact at Central YMCA



A message to other training providers

Palmer says that, for Central YMCA, the tender process aligned with their post-contract experience, meaning that Aptem did not promise more than they could deliver:

“Trust what they say during the tender – or however you go about your procurement – because they will be honest. Aptem will tell you what is sensible and what can or can’t be done. Some firms who we spoke to said ‘yes’ to everything and that immediately put a big red cross in my box.”

And because Central YMCA is a complex organisation, they had to make sure Aptem could deliver:

“The questions we asked at our meetings with you when we were coming on board, were: As your name is quite new to the market, are you big enough? Can you do it? Is Aptem really as transformational as the presentation says? Yes, was the answer. We were comforted by that.”

Aptem products have made a huge difference to Central YMCA, even though it is early days. It now has a genuinely end-to-end system for learners and employers, says Palmer, with new assessment formats such as ePortfolios. Aptem has allowed them to pivot towards full remote delivery during the pandemic.

Finally, Aptem’s data functionality – around learner progression and business performance – have proved invaluable:

“From a management perspective, it has given us access to a huge swathe of live reports, something we didn’t have before. And that allows us to have real-time reporting and real-time performance management of our staff.”

“Introducing Aptem has been hard work,” says Palmer, “but now we are out the other side, we are all beginning to see the benefits!”

- Find out how Aptem can help you with your compliance.

The team at Aptem can offer a demonstration of their products to show the benefits of the technology to training providers.

You can book a demonstration via:

www.aptem.co.uk/book-a-demo

email us at info@aptem.co.uk

or phone us on 020 7870 1000



Aptem Skills and Aptem Apprentice are the latest products developed by Aptem, pioneers in technology solutions for the vocational training, further education and employability sectors since 2009.

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