aptem.
apprentice

Aston University
BIRMINGHAM UK

Case study: Aston University

aptem.
apprentice

Named as The Guardian's University of the Year in 2020, Aston University has always been a pragmatic institution, founded to develop knowledge and skills for employability for the local area. In that sense, the degree apprenticeship agenda is a completely natural fit with what the university is about and the approach it has always taken.

The challenge of delivering degree apprenticeships

Alongside the opportunities forged by the offering of degree apprenticeships, come some significant challenges. There is a raft of responsibilities in terms of compliance, funding and reporting that makes apprenticeships a much more administratively burdensome way of delivering learning than standard degrees or customised training. "That's where part of the magic of Aptem happens for us in terms of the process, automation and the control of the governance and the reporting and the financial information," explains Terry Hodgetts, Director of Corporate Client Solutions at Aston University.

Aston University
BIRMINGHAM UK

The need for an apprenticeship management system – and why Aptem

The apprenticeship team at Aston was surviving by using the existing student record system, which is not designed for apprenticeships delivery. They found themselves with hundreds of Excel spreadsheets, which "was a nightmare to keep on top of." After conducting some initial research in the market, they identified a short list of what they considered to be 'true apprenticeship management applications'.

"Aptem was several miles ahead of everybody else," said Terry. "Their proposal showed a clear, demonstrable understanding of the apprenticeships environment. They asked questions and clearly understood our needs. A good apprenticeship management system isn't just about the administration. It's about the user experience, both for the apprentice and for the employer. In Aptem, we found a tool that is truly adding value to the service that we're delivering."

Benefits and impact

Speedy ILR data transfer that immediately transformed efficiency and accuracy. The Aston team selected Aptem in January 2021, aiming to get the system up and running for the September intake. Aptem's team of Implementation Consultants, led by Georgina Burton, were able to flex their usual process to fit the university's desired timeline. The ILR data transfer, which usually happens in month four or five, was brought forward, freeing up the Aston team to focus on other elements of the implementation project. Within six weeks, over 1,200 existing learners were brought into the system for their ILR management, which vastly reduced the time needed to prepare the monthly funding returns. "With Aptem, all our data is in one place. It's accurate, it's structured and we are in much better control of it."

Evolution of an efficient and lean apprenticeship delivery team. Prior to Aptem, Terry had a 4.5 headcount team, which looked after the enrolment of 250 apprentices per year. With the introduction of Aptem and all its resourcing efficiencies, he has been able to grow the team strategically,

bringing in specialist roles such as an ILR specialist. He is also looking to split the Service Delivery Manager roles into client liaison, and quality and compliance. Terry anticipates a doubling of his team, yet the apprentice numbers have trebled. And, critically, he is set up for future growth and exemplary service delivery with a focus on standardisation of processes and governance across programmes.

A flexible platform that enabled the team to quickly build customised learner journeys. Aptem gives the Aston team the capability to rapidly build appropriate and customised learner journeys for different programmes. During the implementation process, they created templates on which the academics had been consulted and had subsequently approved. They were then able to build 15 programmes, many with multiple versions and iterations, including different start dates and sequences. Aptem was on hand to support with the workload, while ensuring Aston had the know-how to be self-sufficient. "Aptem isn't a 'one size fits all' solution. That is a major benefit for us."
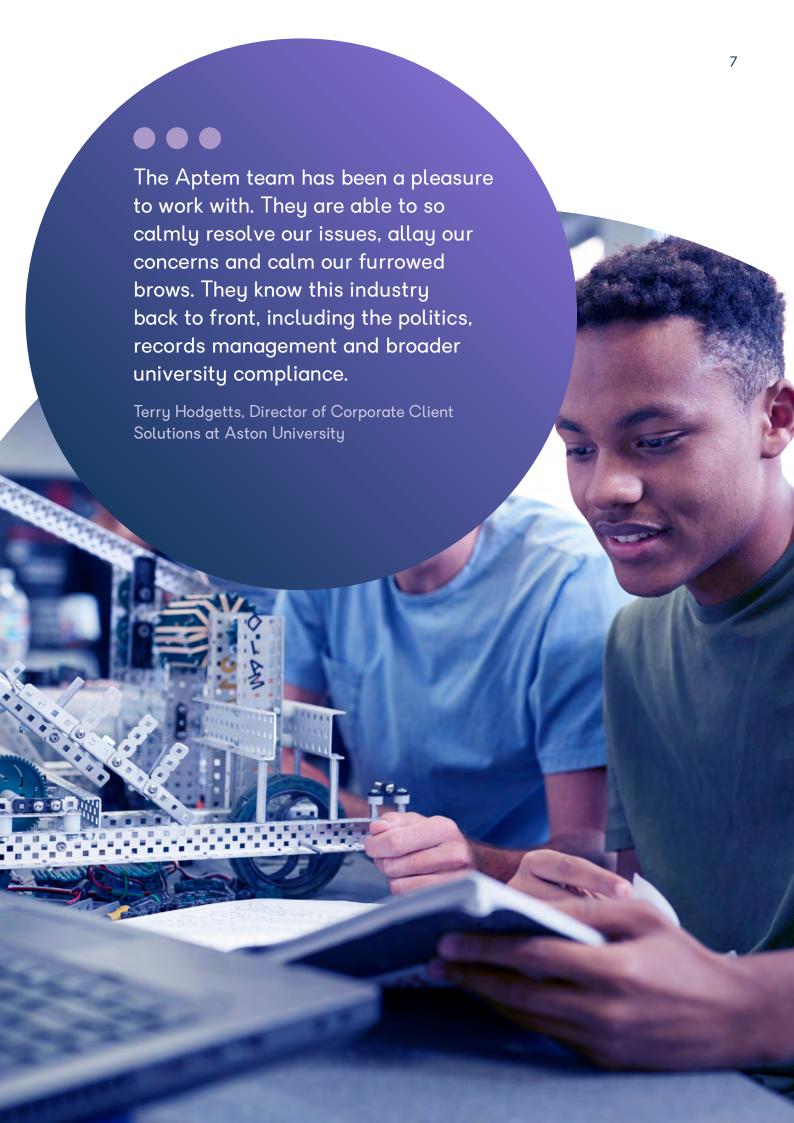
A technology that supports the growth of employer relationships. Five years after the first intake of 20 apprentices, Aston now has in excess of 1,300 apprentices on the books. With more than 300 employers engaged with apprenticeships, it has become a very significant part of the university portfolio. Through apprenticeships – and their alignment with employers' talent strategies – the university is connecting in a much more strategic way with a lot of employers. "Much of the capability to turn degree programmes into high-quality apprenticeships comes from the engagement with the coach and the focus on professional knowledge, skills and behaviour development. Tracking that using Aptem, to make sure that they're staying on top of it, is fundamental."

Fast, accurate reporting through Power BI Dashboards. Terry Hodgetts describes the reporting capability of Aptem as 'a journey, not a destination'. He feels they are just beginning to scratch the surface, explaining that the user-generated reports and the enquiry tools within the system have not only given them some quick wins, but also enabled them to set up standard reports that effortlessly give them key information. The team is excited to see the impact of the Employer Dashboards in particular, which Terry describes as "the next big thing that creates real value for our major employer partners." The time savings are plain to see. It takes the Aston team the best part of a day to pull together data for an employer review with pre-Aptem apprentices; for those who are now on Aptem, the process takes just five minutes.

● ● ●

The Aptem team has been a pleasure to work with. They are able to so calmly resolve our issues, allay our concerns and calm our furrowed brows. They know this industry back to front, including the politics, records management and broader university compliance.

Terry Hodgetts, Director of Corporate Client Solutions at Aston University

Critical success factors

A year into implementation, there are a number of success factors that the Aston team feel have led to a successful outcome.

1

Implementing at speed to keep up with growth

The number of apprentices was growing so rapidly that the project leaders decided to take an agile approach to implementation. "We could have locked ourselves away to do all of the planning, programme building and testing prior to going live. But we took a bit of a chance and decided to get it up and running and make it work as we go." This approach meant that within a few months of the approval to invest in the system, they were getting results and feeling the benefits.

2

Drawing on the knowledge and experience of the Aptem team

Aston University credits much of the project success to the guidance and advice given throughout by the Aptem team. "They understood where the potholes and the trip hazards were, and helped us through that process. That was absolutely invaluable to us. We're still learning, but we're getting close to business as usual."

3

The quality of the system itself – including its configurability

For Aston, a huge win is to be able to update and modify the system without having to outsource the work. Terry explains, "Our student record system has proven to be very, very challenging over the years with any updates or modifications requiring additional consultancy. With Aptem, we can fly solo. It's very intuitive. The setup of programmes is straightforward. The setup of the ILR is straightforward. Automation trackers are very easy to use."

4

5

Putting a strong internal team behind the project

Aston's core apprenticeship team took overall responsibility for implementation, minimising confusion for their internal stakeholders. The team included executive sponsorship, project management, service delivery and project champions. The openness and willingness of that team to roll up their sleeves and dive in, proved to be critical. "My team has done a great job understanding the system and working with it. We still make the odd mistake as we go through, but we find these mistakes are generally pretty easy to fix and learn from."

Respecting that technology implementation is a culture-change project

There is a natural tension between how a programme wants to run and what needs to be done to comply in an apprenticeship environment. Throw a brand-new system into the mix and it can be overwhelming if you don't address the culture-change component. Aston came up against some challenges, including initial resistance and preferences for existing ad hoc systems. The approach of 'show, not tell' worked for them, as they identified key stakeholders, engaged, consulted and listened to feedback, all the while being prepared for some constructive debate. The result is an enthusiastic push from stakeholders for broader adoption of Aptem.

● ● ●

It used to take us weeks of chasing – often up to 40 phone calls and emails – to get one apprentice onboarded. Now pretty much the entirety of that process is automated and streamlined within Aptem. That's an enormous benefit.

Terry Hodgetts, Director of Corporate Client Solutions at Aston University

What's next for Aston's apprenticeship delivery?

The decision to implement Aptem has so far been a huge success at Aston University, and there are already plans to look at historical data, further integrations with the university's non-apprenticeship systems, and making sure new Aptem functionality is being utilised. Aptem remains on hand as a partner to ensure the academics and schools can fully adopt the system, and use it to support their ambitious growth plans.

aptem.
apprentice

● ● ●

The benefit of Aptem is it was built from the ground up as an apprenticeship management system. There are a lot of solutions out there that were built to do student records or portfolio management that have then been stretched back the other way to cover apprenticeship management. From what I see in the industry, those that have chosen Aptem are thriving in their apprenticeship delivery as a result."

Terry Hodgetts, Director of Corporate Client Solutions at Aston University

aptem.

Intelligent technology®

If you are an organisation that helps deliver apprenticeship programmes and would like to transform the way you deliver apprenticeships in a cost-effective, efficient and compliant way, get in touch:

enquiries@aptem.co.uk

020 3758 8540

www.aptem.co.uk/apprentice

Aptem is one of the fastest-growing SaaS software to manage vocational training, skills and employability programs. In Addition to Aptem Apprentice, we offer a range of other solutions to support the development of vocational skills and re-employment.

✓ **Aptem Enrol,** remote onboarding of apprenticeship students, for colleges.

✓ **Aptem Employ,** a unique, flexible, award-winning employability system that helps to get people back into the workplace quickly and for the long term.

✓ **Aptem Skills,** our award-winning end-to-end delivery platform that enables fully compliant AEB course delivery and accelerates re-employment.

in

Follow us on LinkedIn

www.aptem.co.uk