

## Why a 'one size fits all' approach to tech is not an option for leading training providers





The Independent Training Provider (ITP) industry is growing. Accordingly, it's becoming more and more competitive. Winning new business is increasingly challenging and relies heavily on a company's ability to stand out from the crowd.

Leading ITPs looking to grow need to be able to differentiate their offering and, alongside readiness to increase apprenticeship provision, be prepared to diversify into other areas such as Adult Education Budget programmes, traineeships and other commercial training.



ITPs have to appeal to a variety of stakeholders in order to succeed, including apprentices, employers and investors, all of whom have different needs and priorities.

In this context, it is clear that when it comes to the technology that sits at the heart of an ambitious training business, a 'one size fits all' approach will not deliver. Leading and growing ITPs need the processes and systems in place that will support high levels of personalisation and agility.

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## User experience and engagement in the L&D space

As a society, we have become used to an incredibly slick user experience across all aspects of life. And this is no longer a characteristic confined to digital native generations; the pandemic accelerated the use of technology and remote services by people of all demographics. Customisation is now the baseline of our expectations. We expect to have personalised recommendations for music (Spotify) and films (Netflix), for Instagram to show us the products we want to buy, and Amazon to send them to us at the click of a single button. Banking apps offer services they predict we will need, and email providers predict the text we will want to use as we type. In short, we are accustomed to smooth, personalised journeys across every aspect of our interaction with technology.

Learning and personal development is no different.

What's more, a smooth and enjoyable user experience is a key component in learner engagement and has a significant impact

on the likelihood of learners completing a programme. Accordingly, user experience should be a central point of focus for providers. From the moment that an apprentice is enrolled on a programme, they need to feel like it is designed for them. First impressions really matter: [behavioural science](#) identifies universal human thinking-patterns that prove how difficult it can be to shift a negative first impression, such as negative bias and the anchoring heuristic.

It's therefore essential to provide an excellent user experience throughout an apprentice's journey, from the first moments of recruitment, enrolment and onboarding, then during a sustained period of time spent learning, while they complete their End Point Assessments, and right up until they receive their results and certificates. The apprenticeship management technology needs to be flexible to accommodate learner and employer needs, and to be relevant and tailored throughout.

## What constitutes an individualised apprenticeship learning journey?

In line with the first principle of UX design, let's start with the users themselves – the learners. Take one particular apprenticeship standard. In an ideal world, what would make one apprentice's journey different from another? Responses might include:

- ✓ The demands of their role/department.
- ✓ Their prior experience and knowledge.
- ✓ Additional learning support needs.
- ✓ Functional skills training needs.
- ✓ Capability and a need for stretch goals.
- ✓ Career aspirations.
- ✓ Areas of specialist interest.
- ✓ Optional qualifications and modules.

When you also take into account the employer's nuanced needs and preferences, the list grows further:

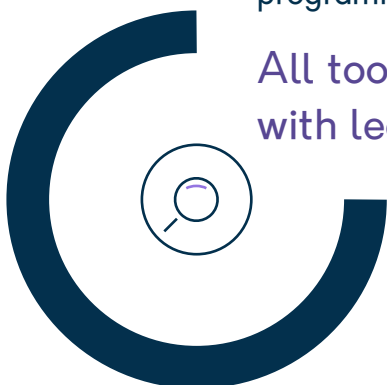
- ✓ Industry-specific qualification requirements.
- ✓ Skills and behaviours to meet strategic priorities, such as Sustainability and Diversity & Inclusion.
- ✓ Opportunities for career progression and exposure to new experiences.

And then there are the different approaches that you as a training provider wish to offer, for example:

- ✓ A blended delivery model, varying learning delivery formats to suit different groups of learners.

In short, all learners are not the same, and all employers are not the same. So, if tailored programmes get the best results, why are so many providers simply not taking this approach? For many without the supporting technology, it's deemed 'too cumbersome', and would require a huge amount of manual work to create multiple programmes which, in turn, would be incredibly hard to manage.

All too often, a suitable level of tailoring doesn't happen, with learners ultimately being the ones who lose out.





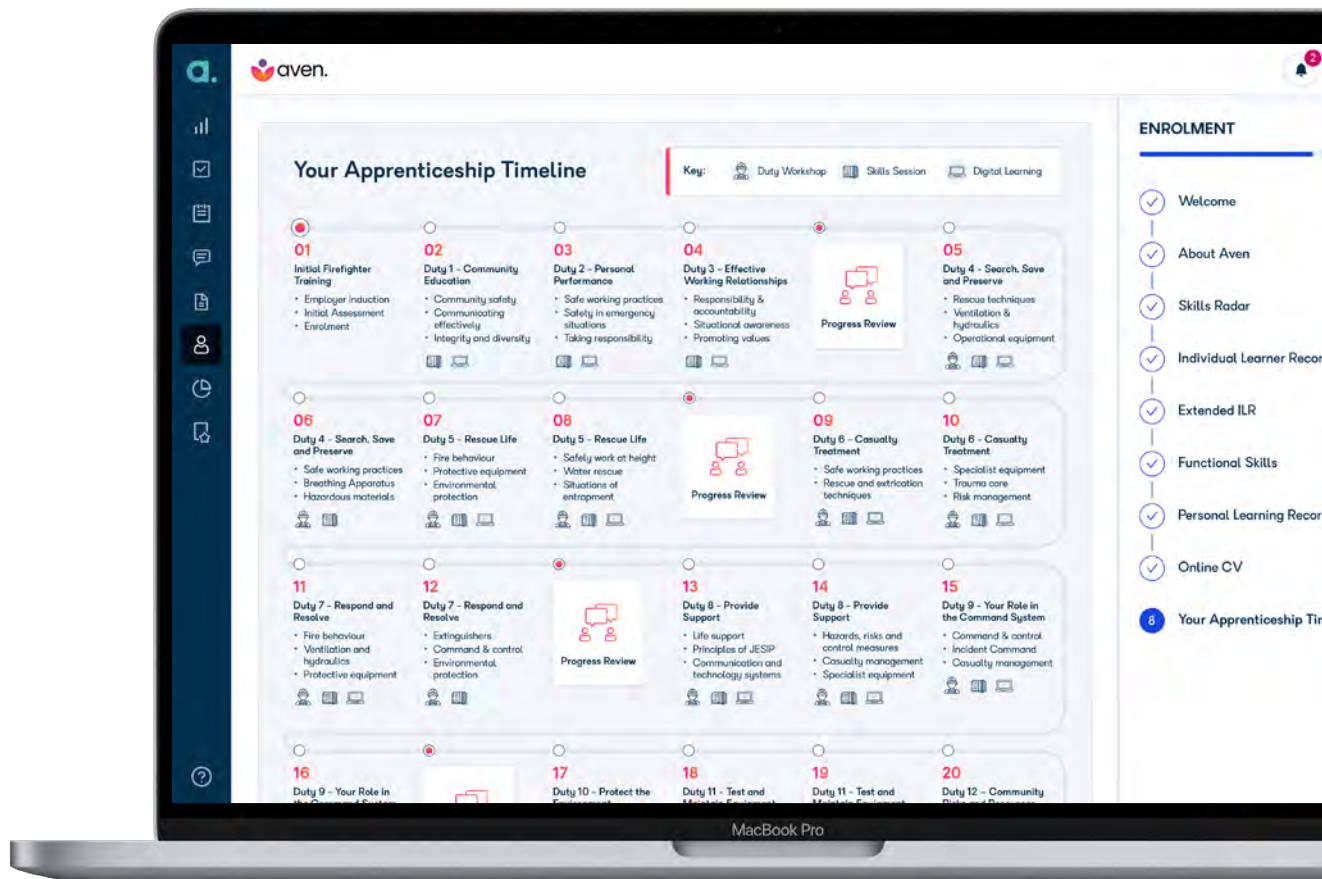
Aptem isn't a 'one size fits all' solution. That is a major benefit for us.

**Terry Hodgetts**, Director,  
Corporate Client Solutions,  
Aston University

Please note that certain features and functionality highlighted here are exclusive to specific Aptem packages. Please speak to your Business Development Manager, or Customer Success Manager if you are already an Aptem customer, for further information.

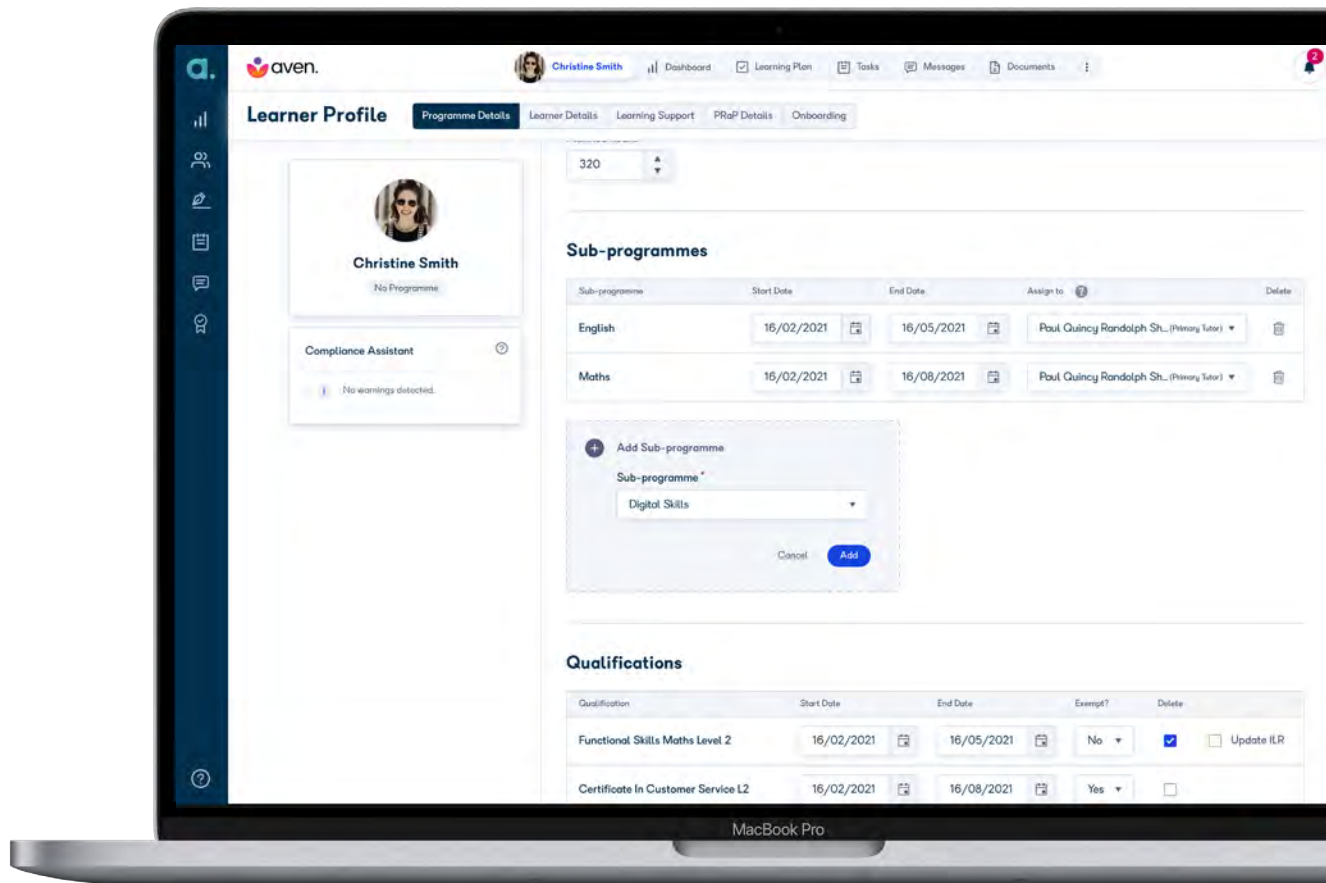


## Use cases of customised learner experiences within apprenticeship delivery



Aptem's flexible platform enabled a university apprenticeship team to quickly build customised learner journeys.

During their Aptem implementation process, a university created learner journey 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 they had the know-how to be self-sufficient.



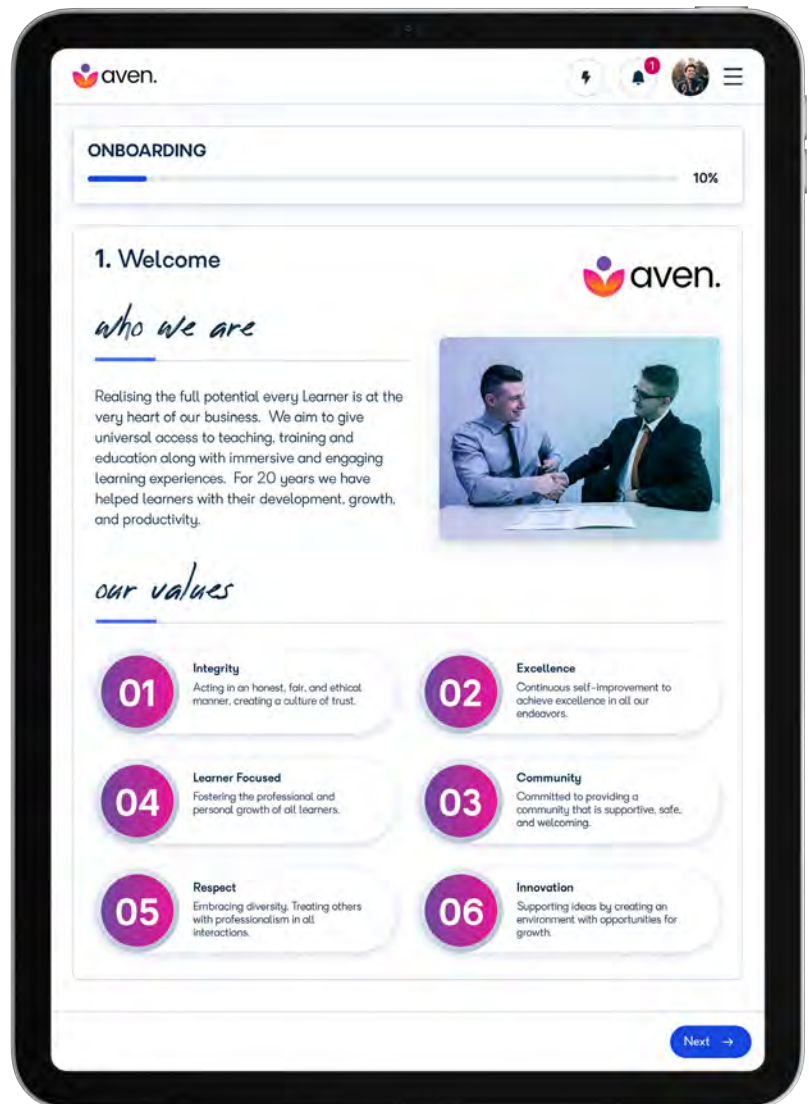
Aptem's sub-programme functionality enabled a leading ITP to deliver employer-specific programmes.

As a provider that prides themselves on tailored programmes, it was important that our client could meet employer demands to weave their own modules and supporting content into the learning plans for specific cohorts of learners. The ITP had become well-versed in the strategic workforce development goals of the employer and was delighted to be able to create truly tailored apprenticeship programmes that prepared learners for a career within that organisation and sector by incorporating additional modules and learning interventions.





Another ITP made full use of Aptem's customised onboarding functionality.



The provider recognised that a positive apprenticeship onboarding experience can set the tone for a collaborative journey with a successful outcome. It greatly valued the way in which Aptem simplifies the process of delivering tailored onboarding experiences to its learners, and took the following steps. It started with a warm introduction to counterbalance the unavoidable raft of required form-filling. The initial onboarding pages were branded to the employer, with a warm and friendly tone to create a sense of belonging and an introduction to the company's values. It carefully considered the skills assessment, ensuring its importance as a tool for progress, and avoiding the disconnect associated with processes that are deemed generic and unnecessary. Throughout the onboarding process, the ITP paid special attention to the data collected, making use of case logic and form customisation.

## Popular customisable features available to Aptem customers

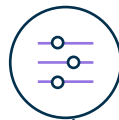
### Onboarding

With in-built customisation functionality, Aptem simplifies the process of delivering tailored onboarding experiences to learners. With plenty of form-filling to be done as part of any apprenticeship delivery, Aptem users can make sure initial onboarding pages are welcoming; clearly explaining who they are as an organisation. They can be creative in how they collect essential data, by using customised forms and case logic. If it's not carefully thought through, endless up-front form filling can seem arduous, irrelevant and off-putting.



### Learner journey

This can be personalised by programme or funding stream, and can also be specific to an employer. The curriculum content can be customised right down to individual learner level, and Aptem users can adapt what the journey physically looks like.

The Aptem logo, featuring the word "aptem." in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. A large, thin, dark blue arc curves from the bottom left towards the right, passing behind the logo.

## Reviews

Reviews in Aptem are a flexible and powerful feature that can be used to drive progress and manage business processes. With Aptem, employers and providers can create and customise reviews that relate to stages throughout the learner journey. They can customise a set of reviews that relate to onboarding processes, initial reviews, progress reviews, ongoing reviews and gateways reviews. They can also create reviews for internal processes such as compliance and eligibility checks. As such an important part of apprenticeship delivery and regulatory monitoring, this flexibility is proving a huge help to providers.

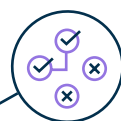


## Sub-programmes

To enable the delivery of a best-in-class, personalised learner experience, Aptem has simplified the process of managing curriculum delivery through the creation of [sub-programmes](#). This gives Aptem users a huge amount of flexibility as they can create learning plans for all learners, subsets of learners, and even individual learners. This is personalisation, at scale.

From functional skills and additional learning support to stretch activities and optional qualifications – all learning plan components are within one single, fluid programme, catering for every learner's need. This eliminates the need to have multiple versions of an individual programme for the same apprenticeship.

Employers are often a route to differentiation, with leading providers vying for long-term relationships that position them as trusted advisors and immerse them in the organisation's workforce planning strategies. Being able to weave employer-specific training into learning journeys can make a huge impact on employer perception and engagement.



## Diversity in apprenticeships

Another important consideration for ITPs with the ambition to grow, is the increasingly broad profile of learners. Apprentices are now almost any working age and come to their programmes from a variety of professional backgrounds and with varying levels of experience. The range of apprenticeship programmes has also grown and will continue to diversify as companies identify skills gaps where apprenticeships could meaningfully solve hiring challenges.


Employers are increasingly looking for demonstrable diversity among their workforces. The specific ingredients that constitute each course, alongside the different support needs and additional learning requirements of individual apprentices, make delivering these programmes at scale particularly complex. Being able to treat each programme and each learner as an individual is only possible with technology that can easily be flexed.

What else should providers be doing to ensure that they are set up for maximum apprenticeship participation?

Here are some checks that providers should expect from their delivery platform.

- ✔ **Accessible technology.** There is a lot to consider when ensuring learning management systems are as accessible as possible, from compatibility with popular assistive technologies (NVDA, VoiceOver & JAWS) and keyboard-accessible navigation to colour/contrast ratios and text alternatives for non-text content.
- ✔ **An interface that is intuitive for users.** Consider how the unrivalled usability of Apple has changed how we expect our technology to be easy to navigate, guiding us through the process, regardless of technical capability. Successfully taking individual learners of all abilities and situations on their professional development journey relies heavily on the learning platform they are expected to use.
- ✔ **High-quality cognitive assessment.** It's important to identify additional learning needs from the outset. This process is ideally integrated into the delivery platform, so that the learner's onboarding experience is seamless, and they get the extra support they need throughout their programme. With an estimated one in five learners having additional learning support needs, how coaches identify and then provide this support is a critical part of learner engagement and success.





In short, the level of diversity within apprenticeships delivery, from the apprentices themselves to the courses they will enrol on, requires agile and flexible technology that can be customised to suit a huge variety of learner user experiences.



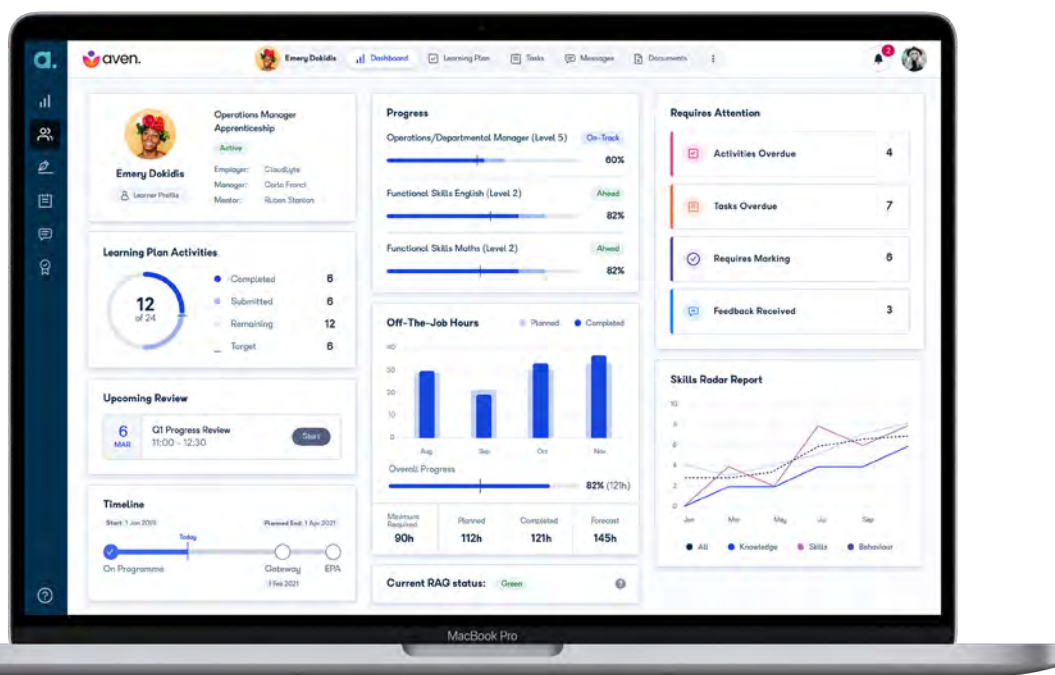
## Tailored learning requires effective tracking

Providers need to have the technology in place that will allow them to be flexible and offer extra support to learners who need help, or to sufficiently challenge those who are achieving beyond course expectations. Learning needs to be relevant, and the technology needs to be able to allow for this flexibility, while also making sure that training providers have access to the data they need to know whether a learner is on top of their workload, or if a coach needs to intervene and provide additional support. Successful ITPs have thousands of learners enrolled across a suite of courses, all of whom are at different stages, working within their own set of personal circumstances, goals and ambitions.

### Performance and progress overview and drilldown capability within Aptem

When providers, including the largest apprenticeship provider in the UK – Lifetime Training – use Aptem, their data is held centrally, allowing them to easily report and analyse. There are a number of built-in reporting tools along with more detailed Power BI Dashboards (for tutors, employers, learners, regulators and management) within Aptem and we're adding to these all the time.

For those who, either regularly or ad hoc, are looking to better use the wealth of data available to them, Aptem's Data Analytics team helps to develop [tailored data strategies and reporting](#).



Using descriptive statistics and predictive forecasting, the team provides customers with insights that inform good decision-making:

Onboarding data to ascertain time between stages to complete onboarding and common patterns.



Red flags from learning plan progress to predict dropouts as early as possible.



Risk areas are measured by overdue activities and the time between these activities, and RAG status.

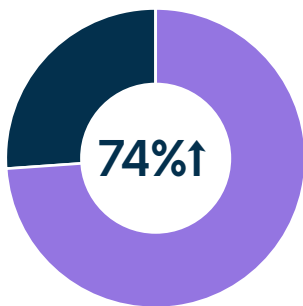


Tutor responsiveness via marking turnaround time and reviews.



## Preparing for an unknown future

As we've already touched on, there is huge diversity in the number of programmes available for apprentices. For ambitious ITPs, having the technology in place that allows them to continue to add new courses to their provision, tweaking them as they develop, is essential to business growth.



rise in degree-level learner starts from 2019 to 2021

There are thousands of apprenticeship standards, and more will arise as the way we work continues to transform to fit the future. For example, few would have predicted the extraordinary growth in popularity of degree apprenticeships (a 74% rise in degree-level learner starts from 2019 to 2021). The traditional route into some industries such as medicine, pretty much unchanged over recent decades, is now being challenged – as shown by the imminent arrival of a medicine apprenticeship pathway.

Meanwhile, the step change in consumer demand and government-led targets for sustainable products and services is leading to an unprecedented demand for reskilling people for green jobs, not just in the energy sector, but across the board, from fashion to finance. As referenced multiple times at the Annual Apprenticeship Conference in 2022, sustainability is set to become a core component of all apprenticeship standards in the near future as we build towards net zero by 2050.

Being able to adjust content, efficiently, across your portfolio of programmes is a reality for which ITPs need to be prepared.





We're seeing a marked increase in Aptem customers who, having started their journeys as apprenticeship training providers, are keen to be agile enough to adapt quickly to opportunities created by new government education funding schemes as and when they arise. On top of that, employment markets ebb and flow, and schemes to address the ever-changing skills deficit continue to be launched. How leading providers maximise these opportunities depends heavily on their ability to flex and move quickly into new markets.

**Christine Weddell**, Chief Operating Officer, Aptem



Beyond apprenticeships there are other learning offers that ITPs with an eye on market domination will want to be able to accommodate as they expand. It's not easy to predict how and where growth will be best made, especially when the volatility of external forces is taken into account. We don't yet know exactly what the future looks like – how we will work and what jobs we will be doing – so it stands to reason that we can't know for sure the nature of growth that leading ITPs will need to be able to accommodate in order to remain competitive.


Similarly, we cannot predict with any accuracy the types of events – such as the pandemic – which will require extreme business agility in the future. Business planning needs to take into account a range

of external factors including changes to an individual's circumstances, change at an organisational level, and changes at an industry level, as well as accounting for unknown quantities such as Covid-19.

There are examples of this being done successfully. Some ITPs were able to support furloughed workers when coronavirus was causing extreme disruption, highlighting the benefits of having the technology and internal processes in place that allow for agility. Being able to recognise an opportunity and act on it is a level of flexibility that ITPs should embrace. To facilitate this behaviour, training providers need to take into consideration the technology they use, as much as they do their management structures and other supporting processes.








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## One size should not fit all

There are plenty of situations in which an out-of-the-box technology solution is appropriate and indeed the best option. But these tend to be software solutions to address particular challenges that affect just one area of a business. Technology to reduce the resources needed to facilitate a particular process and streamline workflows for example, or to support good communication between team members, like using Microsoft 365 capabilities to support file sharing and provide a chat function for teams to use. However, when it comes to business-critical technology, a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. When tech is fundamental to current performance and future potential, and has touchpoints with many of your teams, customers and partners, a more bespoke approach is needed.

Being a carbon copy of competitors will not help ITPs to stand out and gain new business in this competitive climate. Ambitious training providers need to recognise the importance of finding a technology solution that will work for the nuances of their business, enabling them to show off their unique proposition to partners, learners and investors alike. Obviously, taking on new technology requires considerable work and can be daunting, but this level of customisation does not need to be implemented all at once. What's critical is choosing the right partner that will enable continued growth. A partner that offers the support and expertise needed to ensure you get the most out of the system you choose for all of your stakeholders.



Although saving on costs up-front is tempting, investing in technology that ultimately constrains growth will be a false economy.



The Aptem Team continues to work with us collaboratively on new innovations and shares our relentless desire to support our learners in delivering high-quality training programmes.

**Carl Cornish**, Chief Operating Officer,  
Lifetime Training





What large and leading ITPs need is technology that will deliver for the long term, and providers with whom they can work in partnership, who will support the business as it responds to market opportunities.





We were impressed by the functionality that Aptem offered, as well as the robust plans for future development and its potential as a system that could grow with our organisation. In terms of the support you get from Aptem, you couldn't fault it.

Natalie Hare, Head of Operations, Haddon Training







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](https://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.
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