

QA APPRENTICESHIPS

A 'High-tech, High-touch' Model for Technical Education



LEVEL
Further Education and
Higher Education



INITIATIVE
Supporting Vocational
Training and Degree
Apprenticeships



USERS
2,000

THE CHALLENGE

Formed in 2008, QA is the first IT apprenticeships provider rated Outstanding by Ofsted. They offer apprenticeships throughout England and Scotland in business, digital marketing, IT, project management and software/web development. In partnership with multinational organisations like Accenture, Cisco, HPE and Microsoft, QA helps apprentices achieve their potential while fuelling technical industries with skilled employees.

“Our heritage is in providing high-tech training, the vast majority of which was face-to-face,” said QA Business Development Director Ben Sweetman. “Our educators are the key to our success. Their expertise and guidance creates well-rounded and well-informed apprentices who are inspired and enthused.”

When the company began offering degree apprenticeships in 2015, their delivery model had to change. “We needed the best of both worlds,” Sweetman said. “We wanted to continue the face-to-face training that served us so well and combine it with a digital learning experience. We designed the model to enable self-directed study and actively encourage the application of practical skills in the workplace.”

The need for a blended learning experience led QA to tender for a robust and flexible VLE, which would provide a seamless learning experience, both online and face-to-face.

THE DECISION

QA needed a learning platform that would facilitate a flipped classroom experience, meaning that underpinning concepts and independently-driven tasks would be delivered online. This would free up class time for activities that allow deeper exploration of content. “We knew that the key to ensuring success in our degree apprenticeships would be to facilitate active learning, which puts greater focus on students' application of conceptual knowledge rather than factual recall,” said Sweetman.

In a competitive tender process, QA evaluated leading systems, selecting Canvas in 2015 because it offered unrivalled usability. Its intuitive design would enable staff to easily create and deliver courses, monitor student progress and, according to Sweetman, “act more as coaches and facilitators of learning.” As a cloud-native solution, Canvas would also enable students to engage with content on any web-enabled device, any time.

“Our tech-savvy student base demands a great user experience across platforms and the complete flexibility to access materials whenever and however suits,” said Sweetman. “Only Canvas could provide this.”

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BEN SWEETMAN

QA Business Development Director

THE RESULTS

A smooth implementation process meant that Canvas was immediately useful for QA. “Implementation was quick and painless, and was supported with regular contact from the Canvas customer team,” said QA Learning Technologies Manager Craig Daraz.

A year on from implementation and QA now uses Canvas to deliver all of their degree apprenticeship courses. In addition to students and teachers, moderators from external bodies are actively engaged with Canvas, continually gaining insights into learners’ progress. “Engaging with students in their learning environment is important,” said Sweetman. “Gone are the days of irregular moderation and slow intervention. Consistent feedback through SpeedGrader enables better progress—and instills confidence in students that they are being supported throughout their learning journey.”

Sweetman said that Canvas is “working hard” for QA, enabling seamless delivery of content and providing opportunities for students to interact with courses in new ways. Additionally, Canvas provides tools for peer feedback and collaboration, which Sweetman calls “vital for ensuring engagement and allowing the application of knowledge crucial for workplace success.”

For QA teachers, Canvas provides analytics tools that help them assess students’ engagement and abilities on an ongoing basis. This, according to Sweetman, “empowers teachers and students to engage in a clear and transparent education programme, and helps teachers be flexible and adaptable in the instruction they offer.”

“We now deliver our programmes in a ‘high-tech, high-touch’ model and the personal element of our instruction is vital,” said Sweetman. “Canvas is unlike most technology products out there because it enhances the personal learning experience. It facilitates greater engagement between students and teachers, and lets our educators spend more time doing what they do best.”