



**The Hub in a Pub: University of Wolverhampton
Apprenticeship Hub**

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper presents the innovative approach being taken by the University of Wolverhampton to create an Apprenticeship Hub through which the regional offer for Intermediate, Advanced, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships can be accessed. Readers can review the approach taken and consider the possibilities of a similar approach in their own context.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper presents a case study that set out and discusses the drivers behind the approach adopted to create the Apprenticeship Hub. It identifies the stakeholders who will engage with the Apprenticeship Hub and it outlines the reasons for, and benefits of, working in collaboration with other organisations to provide an integrated offer for apprenticeship provision across the region.

Findings

The Apprenticeship Hub is a physical entity within a well-known local landmark building that is easily accessible to the communities which it is intended to serve. It has been developed to meet the national and local contexts and, although only recently established, it is meeting the needs of the stakeholder groups. It provides an environment through which the integrated regional apprenticeship offer can be accessed.

Practical implications

The world of apprenticeships is changing significantly with many new requirements for employers and for education. It is a complex road to travel, particularly for Higher Education which has not, traditionally, been involved in the world of apprenticeships. This paper posits that a collaborative approach to stakeholder engagement and recognition of respective strengths can lead to organisations working in partnership to draw together their respective expertise to ensure that, through a collaborative approach they can meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

Originality/value

Apprenticeships are new to Higher Education; universities are entering a complex and unknown territory. This paper set out the approach taken by one university to working in partnership with others to provide an integrated offer that could be adopted or adapted by other providers to their own context.

Key words

Higher Apprenticeships, Degree Apprenticeships, Collaboration, Partnerships, Integration

Introduction

Higher Education (HE) is a relative new-comer to the provision of apprenticeships with the introduction of Higher Apprenticeships in 2011 and Degree Apprenticeships (where an Honours or Master's Degree is included) in 2015. Historically, Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships have been delivered by Further Education (FE) Colleges and Private Training Providers (PTP) so how can HE position itself alongside existing providers to meet the local, regional and national workforce development needs?

The University of Wolverhampton (UoW) made a strategic decision to offer Higher and Degree Apprenticeships as an alternative route to HE and to provide opportunities for apprentices to progress from intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in order to drive up skills levels in the region, to support economic growth and to create new demand. Discussions with local employers, from SMEs through to large corporates, confirmed a strong interest in Higher and Degree Apprenticeships and a growing need for identified progression routes from Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeship programmes. The University is confident that such provision will help create employment for young people as well as up-skill existing employees to address recognised skills shortages and to drive the growth in the local skills base for current and future needs.

The University plans to work with an already established network of local FE colleges and to create new partnerships with PTPs to strengthen and augment existing apprenticeships and to provide seamless and integrated progression from Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships through to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships.

This short case study sets out the innovative approach taken by the UoW to create an Apprenticeship Hub which will include a physical presence that will be a focal point for employers, prospective apprentices and their families, teachers, careers advisors, apprentices, other providers and University staff. The Apprenticeship Hub, located within a well-known Wolverhampton landmark, the Feathers Public House, will provide a "shop front" to promote and facilitate apprenticeships in the region and beyond. It will also provide a venue through which the UoW can raise the profile of Higher and Degree apprenticeships as an alternative option to traditional full-time and part-time degree level study.

The paper shows that the Hub in a Pub provides a physical presence through which the region can provide a locus for working in partnership to promote clear and integrated progression routes for technical and professional qualifications that meet the needs of learners, employers and providers.

Case study approach

This paper uses a case study to report the approach taken by the UoW to identify and work in collaboration with key stakeholder groups to fund and develop the Apprenticeship Hub. A case study approach enables the "*systematic investigation of a specific instance*" (Nisbet and Watt, 1984 in Foskett, 2004, p.4) and the exploration of "*individuals or organizations*" (Yin, 2003, in in Baxter and Jack, 2008, p.544) and, in the example of this paper, the approaches adopted by one, or more organisations. Such investigation and exploration can lead a researcher to "*generate both unique and universal understandings*"

(Simons, 1996, p.225) and whilst the focus of the research is on a single instance, or case, it can lead to the development of “fuzzy generalisations” (Bassegy, 1999) that other researchers can consider “its applicability to their own context” (Felce et al, 2016, p.265) and thus the ‘case’ can be “can be adapted to suit the local contexts and required outcomes” (Felce et al, 2016, p.265).

The paper firstly considers the drivers behind the decision to create the Hub, it identifies the stakeholders and how their needs can be met, outlines the benefits of working in collaboration and explains the relevance of the location and purpose of the Hub.

Drivers for the Hub in a Pub

There were a number of drivers behind the University’s decision to create the Apprenticeship Hub and to provide a physical presence for it within the University’s home city.

Government policy and targets

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships are high on the Government agenda with a pre-election “commitment of 3 million new apprenticeships starts in England between 2015 and 2020” (Delebarre, 2016, p.3). The Government’s plans to “increase the quality and quantity of apprenticeships..(to).. help address our nation’s skills shortages and stimulate economic growth” (H M Government, 2015, p.4). Key to the achievement of these goals is the focus of apprenticeship provision on high quality apprenticeships at higher technical and professional levels that are designed and developed to meet local economic needs (H M Government, 2015). Higher Apprenticeships, first introduced in 2011 were augmented by Degree Level Apprenticeships, introduced in 2015. The Government notes that “The development of higher (level 4 and 5) and degree (level 6 and 7) apprenticeships aims to widen access to the professions and develop the higher level technical skills needed to improve productivity and support businesses to compete internationally.” (H M Government, 2015, p.18).

Whereas Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships (at qualification levels 2 and 3, respectively) are primarily the domain of FE Colleges and PTPs, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships cover qualification levels 4 - 7 and fall within the portfolio of HE institutions, particularly at levels 6 and 7 i.e. Bachelor’s and Master’s degree, respectively. “Degree apprenticeships involve employers, universities and relevant professional bodies co-designing apprenticeships to meet full occupational competency where the apprentices must complete a degree (bachelor’s or master’s) as part of their apprenticeship.” (H M Government, 2015, p.18).

The government’s commitment to the development of Degree Apprenticeships is further articulated in the White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, BIS, 2016a), which notes that the government has: “introduced Degree Apprenticeships to help employers get the skills they need at the highest level to increase productivity in their businesses” (BIS, 2016a, p.52); that “Degree Apprenticeships combine high quality degrees with a job with training” (BIS, 2016a, p.52); and that: “the success of Degree Apprenticeships will depend on employers and universities working together” (BIS, 2016a, p.52).

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3 The reasoning behind the government's focus and imperative to grow apprenticeships and
4 to give employers a primary role in the design of apprenticeships is beyond the scope of
5 this paper. It is included within this paper to set the external context in which education
6 providers must make decisions on their future direction. What is clear, and relevant, is
7 that the growth of apprenticeships and their expansion to include all levels of study,
8 including Bachelors' and Masters' degrees, brings Higher Education providers into the
9 apprenticeship arena. Consequently, the government has provided a significant driver for
10 the UoW to consider extending its undergraduate and postgraduate provision to include
11 Higher and Degree Apprenticeships in pursuance of the government's stated aims to
12 address skills shortages and to provide higher level, higher quality apprenticeships and
13 Degree Apprenticeships.
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16 ***The Apprenticeship Levy***

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18 A key tenet of the Government's 2020 Vision is the introduction of an Apprenticeship Levy
19 to "*increase investment in apprenticeships*" (H M Government, 2015, p.6). Whilst details
20 of the Levy and its implementation are beyond the scope of this case study, its
21 introduction is pertinent to the drivers behind the Hub in a Pub initiative. The University,
22 in common with other education / training providers, recognises that employers who will
23 pay the Apprenticeship Levy are likely to want to recover the monies paid and the only
24 way to do so is "*to pay for training and assessment for apprentices in England*" (BIS,
25 2016b). Larger employers within the region, with whom the University has long-standing
26 relationships and partnerships, have begun to ask if the University plans to offer Higher
27 and Degree Apprenticeships. These companies are seeking a range of apprenticeship
28 training and qualifications that will meet the organisations' workforce recruitment and
29 development needs and that will allow drawdown of the levy monies paid.
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32 Hence, the Apprenticeship Levy is another driver that has contributed to the University's
33 approach to the introduction of apprenticeships and the Apprenticeship Hub. The Levy
34 provides a driver for the broader remit of the Hub, that of a multi-level approach to
35 apprenticeship provision; whilst the focus of the University will be on Higher and Degree
36 Apprenticeships, employer organisations are seeking high quality apprenticeships
37 throughout their workforce and are looking for suitable training from levels 2 - 7. Whilst
38 the University is not looking to directly provide apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3, the
39 University can see the value, to itself, the employer organisations, potential apprentices,
40 schools, careers advisors and other stakeholders, in providing a 'one-stop shop' for
41 information, advice and guidance on the apprenticeship provision within the region. Such
42 an approach builds on the success of the University's *Gateway* which provides generic
43 guidance on accessing university and becoming a student (UoW, 2016); although the remit
44 for the Apprenticeship Hub will need to be broader to meet the needs of multifarious
45 stakeholder groups.
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50 ***Local Strategic Economic Plan***

51 The Black Country Strategic Economic Plan (BCSEP, Black Country Local Enterprise
52 Partnership, BCLEP, 2014) noted that "*Local employers have stated that the lack of skills*
53 *is a major barrier to their future growth*" (BCLEP, 2014, p.17). Under its priority
54 programme "*P1 Skills for the supply chain*" the BCSEP (BCLEP, 2014, p.16) identifies the
55 following as one of their key priority programmes, to provide "*additional capacity to*
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3 *deliver higher level apprenticeships and skills training for our target sectors, meeting*
4 *skills gaps identified by businesses” (BCLEP, 2014, p.54).*

5 The Black Country Strategic Economic Plan is, therefore, another key driver for the UoW
6 as the University is able to provide some of the additional capacity identified in the plan
7 as an area of need. Whilst the plan refers solely to higher level apprenticeships, which
8 cover levels 4 - 7 (Skills Funding Agency, 2015, p.2), it predates the introduction of Degree
9 Apprenticeships. The UoW is well-placed to offer Higher and Degree Apprenticeships to
10 meet skills gaps identified by businesses whilst recognising that the skills gaps needs exist
11 at all education levels (i.e. levels 2 - 7); the UoW does not normally provide education at
12 levels 2 and 3. The BCSEP targets will require education and training providers across
13 levels 2 - 7 to meet the different organisation and business sector needs. The
14 Apprenticeship Hub can thus provide this focus for regional apprenticeship provision.
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18 ***The University History and Vision***

19 Whilst there are external drivers there are also internal drivers that have influenced the
20 UoW decision to offer Higher and Degree Apprenticeships and consequently to create the
21 Apprenticeship Hub.
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23 The UoW (was established in 1827 as the Wolverhampton Mechanics’ Institute which led to
24 the development of education “*not to turn working men into scholars, but to improve*
25 *their competence as craftsmen and their value to the community as citizens”* (Haynes and
26 Meakin, 2013, p.9). Over its 180 year history, through its 25 different names the UoW has
27 focused on “*providing opportunity ... to engage in learning as a means of improving and*
28 *enhancing both individual and collective life chances”* (Layer, in Haynes and Meakin,
29 2013, Foreword). Higher and Degree Apprenticeships provide further opportunities for
30 learners to grow their competences, improve their life chances and meet their employer’s
31 needs by the provision of technical and professional learning.
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35 In addition, the UoW is committed to be the: “*Opportunity University ... to be an*
36 *employer-focused university ... delivering opportunity and academic excellence”*. (UoW,
37 2012). As part of this commitment, the University is “*implementing a range of initiatives*
38 *to extend its existing curricular models to reach a wider audience and to increase*
39 *opportunities for access to Higher Education”* (Felce *et al*, 2016, p.266). The addition of
40 Higher and Degree Apprenticeships to its curriculum portfolio allows the UoW to broaden
41 its engagement with employers and to provide further opportunities for learners to access
42 higher education whilst providing support and enabling economic growth and the driving
43 up of skills within the region.
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46 ***Impact on the University’s approach***

47 This section has shown how the government policy and targets for apprenticeships, the
48 introduction of the apprenticeship levy and the needs of the BCSEP align fully with the
49 vision, history and strategic aims of the University and provide the primary reasoning
50 behind the UoW decision to offer Higher and Degree Apprenticeships. A secondary
51 consideration, that should not be overlooked, is that of competition and the potential loss
52 of students who choose to achieve a Degree through an apprenticeship route rather than
53 through full or part-time study; if a University does not have a Degree Apprenticeship
54 available, learners will, by necessity, choose to study with an alternative provider.
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3 In consideration of the drivers to offer Higher and Degree Apprenticeships it is clear that
4 the needs of learners, employers, the region, the economy and the government extend
5 beyond these types of Apprenticeship. In order to fully meet the needs identified a full
6 range of apprenticeships are needed; these will include Intermediate and Advanced
7 Apprenticeships as well as, potentially, Traineeships. [A traineeship is “a course with work
8 experience that gets (an individual) ready for work or an apprenticeship” (H M
9 Government, 2016)].
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12 The recognition that this range of needs was greater than what can be achieved by the
13 UoW working alone led to consideration of the different stakeholder groups and how the
14 UoW approach could aim to meet those diverse needs.
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16 Stakeholders

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18 The UoW identified a range of stakeholder groups that might want to access
19 apprenticeships both from the point of being an apprentice, being an employer, providing
20 information about choices and providing the education and training towards an
21 apprenticeship qualification. These were separated into external and internal groups,
22 based on their relationship to the University.
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25 *External Stakeholders*

26 The primary external stakeholders are:

- 27 • the potential apprentices (who could be school pupils, unemployed people, existing
- 28 employees),
- 29 • those who are an apprentice,
- 30 • employers.
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34 To become an apprentice an individual must be employed and a contract of employment,
35 normally for at least 30 hours-a-week, must exist. The apprentice must be paid at least a
36 prescribed minimum wage and cannot contribute to any tuition fees. The employer is
37 responsible for payment in full, or part, of any tuition fees and must provide paid time
38 ‘off-the-job’ for the apprentice to attend lectures and training.
39

40 Secondary external stakeholders include:

- 41 • parents /partners of apprentices or potential apprentices,
- 42 • school teachers who give advice and guidance to their pupils,
- 43 • careers advisors both within schools and within the wider market e.g. through Job
- 44 Centres; FE Colleges and PTPs,
- 45 • Professional Bodies and other organisations who inform the University curriculum
- 46 developments and who may accredit existing courses delivered by the UoW.
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50 *Internal Stakeholders*

51 The key internal stakeholders were identified as those who need to:

- 52 • design curricula for Higher and Degree Apprenticeships - primarily academic staff,
- 53 • develop the student records processes, academic regulations and quality processes for
- 54 course validation, quality assurance and course management - primarily registry staff
- 55 • provide advice and guidance for prospective students and those on apprenticeships - a
- 56 range of student support staff, academic and registry staff
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- develop marketing materials, attend open days and other events to advertise the courses available, raise awareness with potential markets about the UoW apprenticeship offer - primarily staff from the Marketing Department and those involved in the external-facing activities from across the university.

Meeting stakeholder needs

Although the specific needs of each stakeholder group will vary, in principle the needs can be conflated into a broader summary need of Information, Advice and Guidance. Every stakeholder needs to be able to understand what is available to them and what is expected of them in terms of apprenticeship provision. The UoW wanted to find a way to facilitate this for each stakeholder group and each individual; the UoW identified that this could best be achieved through working in partnership with the stakeholder groups; the mechanism for this collaboration is the Apprenticeship Hub.

Working in collaboration

What are the benefits of working in partnership with other stakeholders and why is this relevant to the UoW in developing Degree Apprenticeships?

A collaboration is when *“two or more establishments work to achieve agreed objectives”* (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992, in Beddingham and Whitehead, 2015 p.44). Collaborations between education providers and between education and external organisations have long been *“recognised as mutually beneficial”* (Felce *et al*, 2016, p.263) whilst Kayser (2011) posits that *“collaboration works best when relationships are treated as genuine partnerships”* (Kayser, 2011, p.50) and that *“each collaborative partner is considered an asset because each brings something different to contribute to the relationship”* (Kayser, 2011, p.53). Five key lessons in the establishment and management of collaborations have been identified as: *“agree and state the aims of the partnership at the start, identify boundaries, allow time but set deadlines, acknowledge the evolutionary nature of partnerships and experiences create cultural capital”* (Felce, 2010a, p.75).

However, caution is needed because *“collaboration is not an end in itself”* (Hansen, 2009, in Fullan, 2010, p.4); there needs to be *“a willingness to collaborate for mutual benefit”* and *“full commitment and loyalty to the cause, not any individual”* (Fullan, 2010, p.38). Felce points to the need for the approach adopted to meet *“the needs of the context for which it has been developed”* (Felce, 2010b, p.20) and that the approach *“should be revisited regularly to review the impact of changes and developments in both the external and internal environments”* (Felce, 2010b, p.33).

Through collaboration it is possible to bring together a diversity of organisations who have their own specialist expertise that can be combined into a positive relationship to build synergies such that the resultant partnership allows the combined needs of the stakeholder groups to be met. The UoW recognised that it could not, on its own, meet all the needs identified. It is a relative newcomer to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, and whilst the UoW could be considered an expert in provision of Higher Education and engagement with schools and colleges to raise aspirations towards accessing HE, it has much to learn about apprenticeships. FE Colleges and PTPs are experienced in the delivery of Intermediate, Advanced and maybe Higher Apprenticeships, they have established employer partnerships for apprentices and they are familiar with the funding and

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3 reporting mechanisms (which are somewhat different to HE). Employers are
4 knowledgeable about their workforce development needs and role requirements.

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6 The different needs and experiences of the stakeholder groups and the different
7 approaches and services that they offer led to the conclusion that there are benefits in
8 working together through a collaborative approach to provide and promote clear and
9 integrated progression routes for technical and professional qualifications that meet the
10 needs of learners, employers and providers. The means through which this is being
11 achieved is the Apprenticeship Hub.
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13 14 **The Hub in a Pub**

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16 The UoW already works with many of the regional FE Colleges and provides a range of
17 progression routes for students from the colleges to access university courses; some
18 courses are offered in partnership e.g. UoW Foundation Degrees delivered by the FE
19 College with progression onto the final year of Honours Degree courses. There are some
20 relationships with PTPs although it is recognised that these will need further development.
21 The university, FE colleges and PTPs have long-established relationships with business
22 organisations commensurate with their respective education, training and research
23 profiles. These existing relationships will be further developed through the addition of
24 Higher and Degree Apprenticeships to the UoW portfolio. But what is the best way to
25 develop and grow these partnerships to provide a coherent and seamless integrated
26 approach to apprenticeship provision within the region and beyond?
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30 There is a complex landscape to routes into and through vocational learning; whilst
31 education providers and business organisations tend to have a clear picture of academic
32 routes from school, to college and university and into careers, less is widely known about
33 vocational education and training and access to apprenticeships and funding. However,
34 the landscape for vocational learning through apprenticeships is changing rapidly; known
35 changes include: new Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, Apprenticeship Standards
36 instead of Apprenticeship Frameworks, employers leading the design of new
37 Apprenticeship Standards, the Apprenticeship Levy. There is, consequently, a plethora of
38 new information and approaches and it is difficult to uncover what one needs to know to
39 meet an individual or an organisation's needs.
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42 The complexities, the rate of change and the needs of new entrants into the Apprentice
43 landscape to access relevant information, advice and guidance led to the decision to
44 create a central focus through which regional apprenticeship provision could be
45 articulated and which could inform the on-going development of new apprenticeship
46 provision to meet the needs of employers and the economy.
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49 The UoW tried to look at its own apprenticeship provision from the viewpoint of one of a
50 myriad of individual stakeholders. It was clear from the outset that there needed to be a
51 clear access point for those who are looking into the University for Apprenticeship Courses
52 as well as those inside the university looking to develop new courses for apprentices and
53 to effectively support employers and apprentices who are students. One solution was to
54 create a virtual point of contact through web-sites and web-based material but this is a
55 very passive approach and given the speed and complexity of the changing landscape it
56 was decided that a pro-active approach was needed with a physical presence that could
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3 be seen as the 'go-to' place for anything to do with Apprenticeships and the new UoW
4 course offer.

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6 In making the decision to create a physical presence the UoW was mindful of the need to
7 engage with other providers, employers, schools and business networks to make available
8 information about the regional apprenticeship offer which is clear and unambiguous but,
9 above all, that is accessible to everyone who wants or needs to find out about it. The idea
10 behind the Apprenticeship Hub emerged: it would be a place through which enquirers can
11 access what they want to know about apprenticeships and from where they can be
12 directed to solutions that meet their specific needs. Those who offer courses for
13 apprentices would be linked with the Hub and include their provision and services for
14 sharing with enquirers. Employers will be able to access both existing providers of
15 apprenticeships and engage with others to develop new provision to meet their workforce
16 development needs.
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20 The UoW wanted to establish the Apprenticeship Hub to provide a "shop front" for all
21 apprenticeships, for presentation and meeting space, offices and the required
22 infrastructure (including specialist equipment and digital technologies), to promote and
23 facilitate apprenticeships in the region. It wanted also to provide a venue through which
24 the UoW and its partners can host meetings with Careers Advisors and Teachers from
25 schools and colleges, with employers and others, to assist in raising the profile of
26 apprenticeships as an alternative option to traditional academic study.
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28
29 Key to the success of an Apprenticeship Hub would be the accessibility and visibility of the
30 facility. The UoW owns an extensive estate across the centre of Wolverhampton and in
31 four satellite Campuses ranging from one mile to 40 miles from the City Centre. A
32 recognisable and central location was required to ensure that the Apprenticeship Hub
33 could be seen as a being a part of the University whilst also being set apart from it and
34 offering something different to a traditional Higher Education.
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37 The solution was to make use of a former public house that was located within the
38 geographic footprint of the University but which was on the edge of that footprint, in
39 close proximity to the town centre and with easy access to public transport, road networks
40 and car parking. An added benefit is that the building is adjacent to the well-known local
41 landmark, Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club's Molineux Stadium.

42
43 The Feathers Public House was built in the early 20th Century and is a well-known
44 landmark which had been purchased by the UoW when it ceased trading as a pub. It has
45 the appearance of a large detached residential property and originally consisted of the
46 public area on the ground floor and the licensee's family residence on the first floor.

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48 The UoW successfully bid for funding from the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership
49 to renovate and refurbish The Feathers to become the Apprenticeship Hub. The funding
50 proposal noted the UoW plans to create "*a dedicated and high-profile space for*
51 *employers, young people and their parents, teachers and careers advisors, employees,*
52 *the wider community, private training providers, colleges of further education and*
53 *University staff to work together in delivering employment to new starters and the*
54 *opportunity to achieve higher level skills to those already in work*".
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57 Work to renovate the pub was completed in Spring 2016; the Apprenticeship Hub is known
58 within the University, and is becoming known with partner education / training providers
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3 and with local employers and employer organisations as a 'go-to' place for apprenticeship
4 enquiries. A recognisable brand identity has been created and a virtual presence has been
5 developed.
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7 The Hub in a Pub is still in its infancy and much work is still needed to firmly establish it
8 as a key part of the apprenticeship landscape within the region but early signs are that it
9 is meeting the identified needs to provide a physical presence for apprenticeships.
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