

Steve Wood from The University of Cumbria's Growth & Partnerships team spoke to Ruth Hawkin from Evolto Ltd about her experiences on the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, one year after starting the programme.

Hello Ruth, tell us about your business...

Evolto Limited is a small electronic design house specialising in contract design and consultancy work. We are based in Northumberland, just 3 miles from the Cumbrian border.

What was it about the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship that interested you initially?

I have come into business as a recent change in career and although I brought many transferrable skills from my previous work in education, I was looking to find a course that would build on these and give me some real knowledge and understanding of business.

I stumbled upon the Chartered Manager Degree by accident, but as soon as I read about it I knew that I had found 'the one'. I love the fact that rather than it being a purely 'academic' exercise, everything we are learning applies theory and techniques directly within the real context of our own business environment. I'm sure this makes what we are learning easier to understand, but I also feel that the business benefits immediately too.

How has the programme benefitted you personally?

I am finding that I have grown in confidence in my new role much faster than I was expecting. Once we have covered a topic in university I feel I have a solid foundation on which to build on in the workplace. This means I can implement new strategies and ideas with real conviction.

It is also great to be making a new network of contacts who are in a similar place in their careers and facing similar challenges in their organisations. I think that is another real strength of the programme – we can support each other both at university and in our wider work.

Have you made changes to the way you do things in work?

Yes. Whatever I am doing I approach in a more structured and strategic fashion now I have a better understanding of the wider business context. I think I have more confidence in trying new approaches and evaluating the impact that they have.

What modules have you completed so far and what have you found the most interesting or stimulating

I have completed Business Finance, and Data and Analysis, and I am approaching the end of Managing Self, Business Operations and Digital Literacy.

I was a little nervous approaching Business Finance as traditionally numbers aren't really my 'thing'. However, once I got going, I was surprised to find that I found it really interesting! You soon realise that in business pretty much everything you do comes around to finance eventually, and that it is essential to be able to confidently understand and interpret the figures that you are dealing with, which is something I now not only do, but also enjoy.

I am also really enjoying the Managing Self module. In education reflective practice is very much the norm so, with that as my background, it made perfect sense to me to be looking at understanding my own proclivities as a starting point for development. There is so much interesting and thought-provoking material to read, it's great. I'm really eager to get going with Managing Others next semester.

How has the University of Cumbria Supported you?

From the initial enquiry about the course the University has been great at providing information, answering questions and making everything as easy as possible for us with regards understanding both the degree and the apprenticeship side of things.

Academic staff are engaging and seem genuinely willing to offer their support – we get feedback on work and guidance where needed. It is great that they also acknowledge the fact that we are also professionals with jobs and tailor things towards that. We've not your typical bunch of undergraduate students!

What impact has you joining the CMDA had on your business?

Since starting the course we have gone from a hand-to-mouth consultancy, not knowing where the next job would come from, to a business that is proactively managing our finances, sales pipeline and ultimately our growth. We have a much more considered and innovative strategic plan that includes the development of further revenue streams. I am pleased to say we are already beginning to see rewards in terms of increased enquiry and sales levels because of this.

What would you say to anyone considering the Chartered Manager Degree Apprentice with the University of Cumbria?

Go for it. As long as you're willing to work hard, it's a great way to gain an academic qualification, develop your skills and your career, and get to keep earning a living while you do it!

If Ruth can help you contact Evolto at <https://www.evolto.co.uk/>

The next cohort for the Chartered Manager Degree starts in January 2019 - If you're interested in finding out more about the programme and how it can help you and your business contact Steve Wood on apprenticeships@cumbria.ac.uk