

# SME APPRENTICESHIP ESSENTIALS.

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## Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) Programme SME Pilot Case Study

### Embedding Good Practice in Degree Apprenticeships: [Rhotic Media](#)

#### Overview

Rhotic Media is a growing SME that has successfully embedded degree apprenticeships into its workforce strategy, creating a structured, supportive environment that accelerates apprentice development while delivering clear commercial value. London-based, Rhotic Media is an award-winning content agency specialising in financial services, business, and technology sectors and works closely with London South Bank University (LSBU) in the co-creation of its apprenticeship provision.

The organisation's approach reflects many of the core principles underpinning the forthcoming [Apprenticeship Workforce Development \(AWD\) Programme](#) SME Apprenticeship Pilot — demonstrating how practical management practices, clear communication and a strong learning culture can significantly improve apprentice success, retention and progression. The pilot has been designed and developed by the ETF consortium.

This case study highlights how thoughtful design and confident line management can help SMEs realise the full benefits of apprenticeships for apprentices of all ages and for all levels of skill, whatever the work or professional context, linked to the Pilot themes.

#### 1. Getting apprenticeships right from the start

From day one, apprentices follow a carefully designed onboarding and induction programme that helps them understand both the business and their apprenticeship journey.

In their first two weeks, apprentices:

- Explore the organisation's product proposition
- Map their job role directly to the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) of their degree apprenticeship
- Gain clarity on expectations, milestones and how learning links to their role.

A structured 100-day development plan provides clear early milestones and momentum. By the second week, apprentices begin employer-led technical training in personal finance — a 40-week programme that builds a strong foundation for their role.

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**January 2026**

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This early investment ensures apprentices feel confident, capable and connected to the organisation's purpose — reducing uncertainty and supporting early engagement.

## **2. Managing and Supporting Apprentices in the Workplace: Strong line management and tripartite communication**

Ongoing support is built around clear roles, regular communication and shared responsibility between the apprentice, line manager and university.

Key features include:

- Frequent check-ins with university study coaches
- Internal reviews aligned to the 100-day plan and apprenticeship KSBs
- Structured probation reviews involving senior managers to reflect on progress and future development

Progress and outcomes are recorded consistently in the organisation's HR system and, where relevant, in Aptem, Rhotic's data management system. This ensures apprentices always understand how their academic learning and workplace development connect.

This structured approach reflects the pilot's emphasis on early intervention, meaningful reviews and effective collaboration with providers — ensuring apprentices never feel unsupported or unclear about expectations.

## **3. Coaching, Communication and Learning Culture: Creating a positive learning culture**

A defining feature of Rhotic Media's approach is its commitment to treating apprentices as valued, contributing team members from day one.

Apprentices:

- Contribute meaningfully to commercial outputs early on
- Gradually expand their responsibilities across a wider portfolio as confidence and capability grow
- Are supported through coaching-style conversations that link learning to real work

The organisation fosters a culture where questions are encouraged, learning from mistakes is normalised, and progress is recognised — creating psychological safety and confidence.

By the end of year two, each apprentice has a clear pathway into a post-apprenticeship role, reinforcing the message that apprenticeships are long-term investments in talent, not temporary placements.

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## 4. Completion, Retention and Beyond: Supporting progression, wellbeing and retention

Over the course of longer degree apprenticeships, apprentices often discover new interests or adjacent career pathways. Rather than seeing this as a risk, the organisation embraces it as an opportunity.

As a growing SME, emerging skills gaps frequently align with apprentices' evolving ambitions. Their adaptability allows them to step into new areas, supporting both:

- Apprentice motivation, wellbeing and long-term engagement
- Business growth and workforce flexibility
- This forward-looking approach helps sustain motivation through later stages of the apprenticeship and supports strong completion and retention outcomes.
- Internal practices that strengthen impact

Across the programme, Rhotic Media places strong emphasis on connecting academic learning with workplace application, reflecting the pilot's focus on practical management practice.

Key practices include:

- Mapping Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) to in-house training so off-the-job requirements are met through meaningful work
- Providing additional study time beyond minimum requirements to accelerate development
- Creating conditions for rapid capability growth, with apprentices often becoming commercially viable within three months
- These approaches demonstrate how SMEs can design apprenticeship programmes that are both compliant and commercially effective.

## Conclusion: Learning for the SME Pilot

Rhotic Media's experience shows how apprenticeships thrive when:

- Managers are confident and well-prepared
- Expectations and communication are clear
- Apprentices feel supported, valued and connected to the business

The SME Apprenticeship Pilot builds on exactly these principles — equipping SME managers with the practical tools, confidence and approaches needed to create positive apprentice experiences, improve retention and secure successful outcomes.

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This case study offers a compelling example of the impact SMEs can achieve when strong management practice sits at the heart of apprenticeship delivery in England.