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SME Apprenticeship Pilot Case Study

[Far'n'Beyond](#) and [Sheffield Hallam University](#)

Driving SME Growth, Productivity and Innovation through Higher-Level Apprenticeships

Aligned to the [UK Industrial Strategy](#) and [Digital & Technologies Sector Plan](#)

“The apprenticeship route expedited our growth in the packaging industry.”
Adam Moody, Managing Director, Far'n'Beyond

Why this case study matters to government priorities

This case study demonstrates how **higher-level apprenticeships can act as a direct lever for productivity, innovation and SME growth**, supporting the Westminster government’s ambition to build a **high-skill, high-productivity, tech-enabled economy**.

Far'n'Beyond’s experience shows how targeted investment in skills — particularly in degree apprenticeships — enables SMEs to:

- Adopt new technologies and specialist capabilities
- Strengthen competitive positioning in high-value markets
- Translate digital and creative skills into measurable commercial outcomes

The case aligns strongly with the **Industrial Strategy’s focus on people, productivity and place**, and the **Digital and Technologies Sector Plan’s emphasis on building advanced digital capability, innovation diffusion and business-led skills development**, particularly within SMEs.

Business context

Far'n'Beyond is an award-winning independent creative agency specialising in **design, print and digital marketing**, operating at the intersection of creativity, digital capability and manufacturing supply chains through its growing packaging portfolio.

As an SME operating in a fast-evolving, technology-enabled market, the business is committed to:

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- Continuous skills development
- Adoption of new techniques and industry best practice
- Remaining agile while scaling into new, higher-value markets

This places Far'n'Beyond squarely within the government's priority cohort of **innovation-active, growth-oriented SMEs** that require flexible, high-quality skills pathways.

Using apprenticeships to support strategic growth

(SME Apprenticeship Pilot – Theme 1: Getting Apprenticeships Right from the Start)

Far'n'Beyond used the apprenticeship route not simply as a training mechanism, but as a **strategic workforce development tool** — aligning individual progression with business growth in a priority area.

The decision to enrol Sam, a designer specialising in **packaging design and print**, directly supported the company's ambition to expand its packaging offer — a sector increasingly shaped by:

- Digital design tools
- Advanced production techniques
- Sustainability and innovation requirements

According to Managing Director Adam Moody, apprenticeships offered:

- A structured pathway to develop specialist, high-value skills
- Access to wider industry knowledge beyond the constraints of day-to-day SME working
- A mechanism to align talent development with long-term business strategy

Policy relevance:

This reflects the Industrial Strategy's emphasis on **employer-led skills investment**, ensuring public funding supports areas of real economic demand and growth.

Pilot link:

The SME Apprenticeship Pilot enables managers to identify where apprenticeships can best support strategic priorities, ensuring uptake is intentional, informed and growth-focused.

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Day-to-day impact and knowledge transfer

(SME Apprenticeship Pilot – Theme 2: Managing and Supporting Apprentices)

Sam's apprenticeship delivered immediate and tangible value to the business through:

- Access to packaging industry networks, events and innovation-led practice
- Exposure to emerging ideas, techniques and technologies
- Application of learning directly to live client projects

Crucially, learning did not sit in isolation. Sam worked collaboratively within the team, enabling **knowledge transfer across the business** and strengthening Far'n'Beyond's collective capability.

Policy relevance:

This reflects the Digital and Technologies Sector Plan's focus on **diffusing innovation and technical knowledge into SMEs**, rather than concentrating expertise solely within large firms.

Pilot link:

The SME Pilot supports line managers to confidently integrate apprentices into day-to-day operations, ensuring skills investment translates into real productivity gains.

Accelerating capability, productivity and commercial outcomes

(SME Apprenticeship Pilot – Theme 4: Completion, Retention and Beyond)

The apprenticeship played a critical role in accelerating Far'n'Beyond's growth in the packaging sector — delivering clear commercial impact.

As Adam Moody explains:

"The course has expedited our growth in the packaging industry, which has contributed to our increase in turnover."

Through Sam's apprenticeship, the business was able to:

- Maintain strategic focus on developing packaging products and services
- Build momentum more quickly in a growth market

Dr Mandy Crawford-Lee, Chief Executive, UVAC
February 2026

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- Strengthen its competitive position and market credibility

Policy relevance:

This provides direct evidence that **skills investment through apprenticeships can drive SME productivity, innovation and turnover**, supporting the Industrial Strategy's goal of sustainable economic growth.

Pilot link:

The SME Pilot encourages employers to plan beyond completion — supporting retention, progression and long-term return on investment.

Working effectively with higher education providers

(SME Apprenticeship Pilot – Theme 2: Collaboration and Communication)

Far'n'Beyond highlights the importance of a strong, accessible relationship with the training provider. Sheffield Hallam University supported the business through:

- Early, practical engagement via video calls
- Clear explanations of expectations and processes
- An employer-focused, SME-friendly approach

This reduced perceived complexity and enabled the business to engage confidently with a higher-level apprenticeship.

Policy relevance:

This supports the government's aim to strengthen **employer-provider collaboration**, ensuring higher education provision is responsive to SME needs and economic priorities.

Pilot link:

The SME Pilot helps employers navigate provider relationships effectively, maximising the value of public investment in skills.

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Key learning for the SME Apprenticeship Pilot and policymakers

The Far'n'Beyond case reinforces several messages central to the SME Apprenticeship Pilot and the government's wider industrial strategy:

- Apprenticeships can be a **direct driver of SME growth and productivity**, not just workforce development
- Aligning apprenticeships to **emerging digital, creative and technical priorities** maximises economic impact
- Confident line management enables **rapid translation of learning into commercial value**
- Strong employer-provider partnerships make higher-level apprenticeships viable for SMEs

As Adam Moody reflects:

"An apprenticeship is a great way to support your team's growth and bring new opportunities to your organisation. Finding the right people is hard, so courses that help them develop and commit to the company are rewarding for everyone involved."