

SME APPRENTICESHIP ESSENTIALS.

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SME Apprenticeship Essentials Programme and Alignment with the UK Industrial Strategy Priority Sectors: Case Study - Rhetic Media

The [UK's Industrial strategy and sector plans](#) focus on growth areas central to national productivity and competitiveness (Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy Industries, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital & Technologies, Financial Services, Life Sciences and Professional & Business Services) and Rhetic Media sits at the intersection of several of these, including:

1. Creative Industries & Digital and Technologies

As an award-winning content agency operating in financial services, business and technology sectors, Rhetic Media directly contributes to:

- The **Creative Industries** sector through specialist content creation
- The **Digital and Technologies** sector via digital publishing and business communication
- The professionalisation of high-skill knowledge work

Its structured use of degree apprenticeships strengthens talent pipelines in exactly the sectors identified as nationally strategic.

2. Financial & Professional Services Supply Chain

Rhetic Media supports financial and professional services clients — themselves core Industrial Strategy sectors. By embedding degree apprenticeships into its workforce model, the organisation:

- Builds sector-specific technical knowledge (e.g., personal finance expertise)
- Enhances productivity within knowledge-intensive services
- Strengthens SME capability within priority supply chains

This reflects a key Industrial Strategy objective: **building domestic capability through skills-led growth**, especially within SMEs.

When considering the direct link to the newly launched [SME Apprenticeship Essentials Programme](#), developed by the Education and Training Foundation and its consortium of delivery partners (AoC, AELP, SDN Mesma and UVAC), it is worth remembering that the resources are:

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- Free to use by SMEs
- Designed to strengthen line management confidence
- Focused on practical workforce integration
- Built around improving apprentice retention, completion and progression

Rhetic Media provides a live example of the programme's core principles in action demonstrated by the following thematic alignment:

SME Essentials Theme	Rhetic Media Practice	Strategic Relevance
1. <u>Getting apprenticeships right from the start</u>	Structured onboarding, 100-day plan, KSB mapping	Reduces early attrition; strengthens productivity
2. <u>Managing and supporting apprentices</u>	Clear tripartite communication, structured reviews, HR/Aptem tracking	Improves compliance and clarity
3. <u>Coaching and learning culture</u>	Coaching-style conversations; psychological safety	Builds resilient, adaptable workforce
4. <u>Completion and progression – support for assessment, wellbeing and next steps</u>	Clear pathways to post-apprenticeship roles	Improves long-term SME retention of pipeline talent

Rhetic also demonstrates how SME Apprenticeship Essentials can move beyond compliance into **strategic workforce design**.

Working closely with [London South Bank University](#), Rhetic Media exemplifies strong employer-provider co-creation — a core ambition of apprenticeships in England.

Key policy-relevant features include:

- Meaningful mapping of Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) to live commercial work
- Integration of off-the-job learning into real productivity
- Early commercial viability (within three months)
- Strong retention pathways

This demonstrates how SMEs more widely can:

- Improve completion rates
- Enhance apprentice confidence

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- Strengthen sector-specific expertise
- Align academic learning with industrial application

Industrial Strategy Impact: Why This Matters

Rhetic Media's model of apprentices' support in and through work meet three national priorities:

1. Productivity

Apprentices become commercially viable quickly, reducing lag time and increasing output.

2. Talent Retention

Structured progression pathways reduce churn — particularly important in competitive digital and financial services labour markets.

3. Workforce Agility

As a fast growing SME, Rhotic aligns evolving business gaps with apprentice career aspirations — strengthening adaptability in priority sectors.

This reflects the Industrial Strategy's emphasis on:

- Skills as infrastructure
- SME-led innovation
- Workforce resilience

From Case Study to System Impact

Rhetic Media demonstrates what the SME Apprenticeship Essentials Programme seeks to scale:

- Confident line management
- Structured onboarding
- Transparent communication
- Coaching-led development
- Clear progression pathways

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The case illustrates how SMEs operating within Industrial Strategy priority sectors can:

- Deliver commercially viable apprenticeships
- Improve completion and retention outcomes
- Strengthen national growth sectors
- Embed apprenticeships as strategic workforce assets

Rhetic Media represents:

- A practical example of Industrial Strategy-aligned workforce development
- A live demonstration of the principles embedded in the SME Apprenticeship Essentials Programme
- Evidence that SMEs in growth sectors can design apprenticeship models that are both compliant and commercially effective and lead to higher paid careers

As England seeks to strengthen skills pipelines within priority sectors, this case study offers compelling evidence that **strong management practice — supported by ETF's SME Apprenticeship Essentials Programme — is a critical lever for national productivity and sustainable SME growth.**