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Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) Programme 'Apprenticeship Essentials' eLearning for SMEs

Embedding Good Practice in Legal Apprenticeships at Datalaw: A Case Study

This case study reflects well on the themes and importance of the Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) programme's recently developed practical, flexible eLearning (highlighted in bold) designed to help SMEs support apprentices with confidence. These [SME Apprenticeship Essentials](#) eLearning courses are fully funded by DfE and have been created especially for those working with apprentices in small to medium-sized enterprises with the explicit purpose of ensuring good retention and achievement in apprenticeships at all levels and for all ages of apprentices. These modules are designed and delivered by the Education Training Foundation (ETF) in partnership with the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), the Strategic Development Network (SDN) MESMA Group, and the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC).

This case study is provided by UVAC Member, Teesside University

Overview

Datalaw is a specialist legal training provider delivering continuing professional development (CPD), online learning and government-funded apprenticeships across England. Based in Liverpool and operating through a remote-first delivery model, the organisation offers structured apprenticeship pathways from **Level 3 through to Level 7**, covering occupations such as Paralegal, Solicitor, Conveyancing Technician, Chartered Legal Executive and Data Protection Practitioner.

With a mission centred on *delivering excellence in legal education and apprenticeships*, Datalaw has established a carefully designed apprenticeship workforce development model which places equal emphasis on **structured induction, effective line management, professional coaching and learner wellbeing**.

As a growing SME operating in a highly regulated professional environment, Datalaw recognises apprenticeships as a strategic mechanism for developing talent, strengthening organisational capability and supporting workforce progression within the legal sector.

This case study illustrates how SMEs can embed good practice in apprenticeship workforce development by combining **clear programme design, strong employer engagement and a supportive learning culture**. It also demonstrates the importance of equipping line managers with the skills and confidence needed to support apprentices effectively—an area central to the **Education and Training Foundation's**

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Apprenticeships professional development offer.

Getting Apprenticeships Right from the Start

For Datalaw, the foundations of a successful apprenticeship begin with **clarity, structure and early engagement**. New apprentices participate in a carefully planned onboarding process supported by a comprehensive induction programme designed to establish expectations, build confidence and provide a clear understanding of the apprenticeship journey ahead.

The organisation delivers a structured **10-day induction programme** covering:

- Organisational mission, values and professional culture
- Systems training and digital platforms
- Safeguarding, Prevent and British Values
- Apprenticeship compliance requirements including off-the-job learning
- Departmental structures and working practices
- Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSB) mapping and portfolio guidance

This early investment ensures apprentices gain a clear understanding of **how their workplace responsibilities align with their apprenticeship standard**, while also reinforcing the expectations associated with professional legal practice.

Progress is supported through a suite of quality-assured developmental tools including:

- Skills scans and diagnostic assessments
- Individual training plans
- Continuous professional development (CPD) logs
- Scheduled workshops and tutorials
- Formal review processes

Together these mechanisms provide a coherent framework through which apprentice progress can be monitored, supported and evidenced.

Managing and Supporting Apprentices in the Workplace

A key feature of Datalaw's approach is the emphasis placed on **effective workplace support and structured communication**.

Apprentice development is overseen through a shared accountability model involving the apprentice, their workplace mentor or line manager and the training provider. This ensures that academic learning and workplace practice remain closely aligned.

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Support mechanisms include:

- **Regular check-ins:** weekly touchpoints during induction followed by monthly meetings and scheduled one-to-one tutorials
- **Tripartite reviews:** structured discussions between employer, apprentice and provider to review progress
- **Aligned internal reviews:** workplace reviews mapped directly to the apprenticeship standard and associated KSBs
- **Senior leadership engagement:** managers remain actively involved in monitoring induction outcomes and supporting coaching conversations

This approach helps apprentices build confidence while ensuring that line managers remain fully informed about progress and development needs. Progress and outcomes are recorded through a combination of internal systems and apprenticeship platforms including the organisation's HR system, learning management environment and apprenticeship management systems such as Aptem (a UVAC Corporate Supporter). Apprentices also access a dedicated **Apprenticeship Hub**, providing visibility of off-the-job learning hours, portfolio development and diagnostic feedback.

Consistent documentation enables apprentices to clearly understand the relationship between their **academic learning, professional competence and workplace performance**.

Coaching, Communication and Learning Culture

Datalaw places strong emphasis on fostering a **learning culture in which apprentices feel valued as integral members of the organisation**.

From the outset, apprentices are encouraged to contribute meaningfully to the organisation's work, supporting research, drafting and client-related activities under appropriate supervision. Responsibilities increase progressively as competence and confidence develop.

Key elements of this approach include:

- Coaching-oriented conversations linking theory to practical application
- Encouraging questions and reflective learning
- Normalising learning through mistakes and constructive feedback
- Celebrating progress and achievement

This coaching culture promotes psychological safety while enabling apprentices to develop the professional confidence required within legal practice.

Coaches and managers also play a critical role in embedding **safeguarding awareness and reflective practice**, ensuring that apprentices receive support not only in developing technical competence but also in navigating the professional and ethical dimensions of legal work.

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Completion, Retention and Progression

One of the advantages of apprenticeship pathways within SMEs is their ability to support **flexible and responsive career development**.

At Datalaw, apprentices frequently identify new areas of professional interest as their programmes progress. The organisation actively supports these evolving ambitions, recognising that apprenticeships should enable both individual growth and organisational development.

This alignment is particularly valuable within a growing SME environment where emerging skills needs frequently arise.

Key practices supporting retention and progression include:

- Adapting learning plans as apprentices' interests evolve
- Aligning emerging skills needs with workforce planning
- Regular progress reviews to sustain motivation
- Coaching support and visible progression routes
- Inclusive policies and safeguarding systems supporting wellbeing

Curriculum design, assessment preparation and SEND provision are carefully mapped to apprenticeship standards, ensuring that **Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours remain central to programme delivery**.

Apprentices benefit from protected study time, structured workshops and flexible academic support to ensure successful completion.

Early exposure to real legal casework further accelerates the development of commercial awareness and professional capability.

Supporting Quality and Compliance

Operating within the legal sector requires careful attention to regulatory and professional standards. Datalaw's apprenticeship model reflects a commitment to maintaining high levels of compliance while ensuring efficient delivery.

Processes are designed to meet the requirements of:

- Apprenticeship funding rules
- Ofsted quality expectations
- End-Point Assessment arrangements
- Professional regulatory bodies including the Solicitors Regulation Authority

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By embedding compliance within programme design rather than treating it as an administrative add-on, Datalaw ensures that apprenticeships remain both **high quality and scalable**.

Conclusion

Datalaw demonstrates that apprenticeships can be a powerful workforce development mechanism for SMEs when **strong programme design is combined with confident line management and a supportive learning culture**.

Clear induction processes, structured coaching, regular communication and visible progression pathways enable apprentices to thrive while contributing meaningfully to organisational success.

For SMEs seeking to maximise the impact of apprenticeships, the key lessons are clear:

- invest in structured induction and onboarding
- support line managers to act as effective coaches
- align academic learning with workplace practice
- create visible progression routes that sustain motivation

These principles sit at the heart of the **Education and Training Foundation's professional development offer for apprenticeship practitioners in all roles including those in teaching, managing, strategic and support functions**, which aims to equip employers, managers and educators with the knowledge and skills required to deliver high-quality apprenticeship programmes.

Datalaw's experience illustrates that when these elements are in place, apprenticeships can deliver lasting benefits—for learners, employers and the wider apprenticeship professional workforce.