



PATHWAYS TO POTENTIAL



Mentor Induction Guide

Supporting SMEs to Recruit, Support
and Retain Diverse Young Talent

Audience: Volunteer mentors with HR/people experience

Delivery format: 3 x 1-hour online 1:1 sessions

Approach: Coach-led with light critical-friend challenge

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1. Purpose of this Guide

This Mentor Induction Guide equips you to confidently support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through the **Pathways to Progression** pilot.

Your role is to help employers:

- Build confidence in inclusive employment
- Understand social mobility and barriers facing young people
- Take realistic, proportionate action that supports NEETs

This is **not** about turning SMEs into HR experts or forcing hiring decisions. It is about reducing fear, increasing understanding, and enabling action.

By the end of your mentoring journey, SMEs should feel:

- Better informed
- More confident
- More connected to referral pathways
- Ready to offer employment, placements, or work experience



2. Programme Overview & Outcomes

The Pilot at a Glance

- 25 London SMEs
- 25 volunteer mentors
- Free-of-charge supported pilot
- Blended delivery: 1:1 mentoring + app-based learning

What Success Looks Like

Success is measured by **behaviour change**, not perfection.

For SMEs:

- Increased confidence in inclusive recruitment

- Engagement with referral partners supporting NEETs
- Offering at least one of the following within 12 months:
 - Paid employment
 - Apprenticeship
 - Paid work placement
 - Structured work experience

For mentors:

- Confidence coaching employers on inclusive practice
- Clear boundaries and consistent delivery
- Contribution to improved social mobility outcomes.

3. Understanding Social Mobility (Mentor Lens)

Core Principle

Talent is evenly distributed. Opportunity is not.

Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face:

- Limited professional networks
- Financial pressure
- Lack of work experience
- Recruitment processes not designed for them

These are **system barriers**, not individual deficits.

Mentor Mindset

Mentors should:

- Focus on potential, not polish
- Challenge assumptions, not people
- Keep discussions practical and business-focused

Avoid:

- Deficit-based language
- Stereotyping young people
- Positioning inclusion as charity



4. Mentor Role, Boundaries & Safeguarding

You are:

- A coach and sounding board
- A confidence-builder
- A translator of complexity into manageable action

You are not:

- An HR consultant
- A legal advisor
- A recruiter or broker

Safeguarding & ethics:

- Do not encourage unpaid or exploitative work
- Be alert to inappropriate language or practice
- Escalate concerns to programme leads
- Maintain confidentiality and professionalism

Clear boundaries protect both you and the SME.

5. Coaching vs Critical Friend

Coaching Mode (Default)

Use most of the time, especially when SMEs feel unsure.

Techniques:

- Open questions
- Reflection
- Encouragement
- Normalising uncertainty

Example prompts:

- “What feels most achievable right now?”
- “What support would make this easier?”

Critical Friend Mode (Selective)

Use gently when SMEs:

- Overstate risk
- Default to exclusionary thinking
- Avoid action through fear

Techniques:

- Evidence-based challenge
- Reframing back to business need

Example prompts:

- “Which of those tasks actually requires experience?”



6. Session-by-Session Delivery Guide

Session 1: Readiness & Confidence

Focus: Business need, costs, feasibility

Suggested flow:

- Introductions and goals
- Growth gap discussion
- Cost and funding myth-busting
- Agree 1-2 actions

App follow-up:

- Hiring readiness checklist
- Reflection journal

Session 2: Inclusive Attraction

Focus: Recruitment redesign & social mobility

Suggested flow:

- Reflection check-in
- Barriers and inclusive routes
- Job description review
- Referral pathway discussion

App follow-up:

- Inclusive recruitment checklist
- Job description upload

Session 3: Onboarding & Progression

Focus: Support, retention, next steps

Suggested flow:

- Onboarding planning
- Mentoring techniques for young staff
- SME Action Pledge
- Final reflection

App follow-up:

- 30-60-90 day plan
- Final reflection entry

7. Common SME Concerns & Reframes

“We’re too small to do this.”

→ Small businesses are often better placed to support individuals.

“We need someone experienced.”

→ Separate skills from exposure and confidence.

“We don’t have HR.”

→ Focus on good basics and signposting.

“We tried before and it didn’t work.”

→ Explore what was missing, not who failed.



8. Capturing Impact & Closing Well

What Mentors Capture

- SME confidence shift
- Actions agreed or taken
- Referral engagement

This is for learning and improvement, not judgement.

Ending the Journey Well

- Reinforce progress
- Normalise ongoing learning
- Encourage follow-through on the Action Pledge

Your role is to leave SMEs **more confident than when you met them.**



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