

BEST EARLY CAREERS STRATEGY

WINNER

ONTIC

The soaring aerospace industry faces a grounded reality: an ageing workforce threatens innovation and growth. To tackle this, Ontic, a manufacturer of aerospace parts, launched its Next Wave Talent programme, a holistic early careers strategy designed to attract and develop the next generation of engineers and business leaders, in 2020.

Ontic's Next Wave Talent programme includes school outreach, apprenticeships, and university partnerships. The programme offers pathways for participants to attain engineering qualifications, and is open to university students as year-long internships or graduates pursuing careers in engineering, finance, or HR.

Next Wave Talent has diversified Ontic's demographic using an all-inclusive approach. The programme is open to all ages, and 10% of Ontic's apprentices were recruited and retrained from completely different sectors to engineering, including the police force, poultry farming and gardening (tree surgery). The life experiences of Ontic's apprentices reflect the dynamic and inclusive workforce they are building.

Ontic has built strong partnerships with schools, colleges, and community organisations to inspire and attract early talent. For example, they offer regular STEM days to schools,



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inviting the entire student body to take on team-based challenges that simulate real business scenarios that often include an ethical dilemma.

The people team's commitment to workforce growth extended beyond recruitment though, focusing on personal development as well as professional growth.

This was reflected in initiatives such as Ontic Life Essentials, which offers a schedule of workshops covering personal financial literacy, life event planning, cooking on a budget and coaching skills. Sessions are delivered by a mix of the company's own senior leaders, internal experts and current apprentices, modelling a multi-generational and multi-organisational approach to collaboration.

From 2019, Ontic has more than doubled in size, from 650 employees to 1,600 today. The Next Wave Talent programme has contributed to this, boasting measurable successes since its launch. The business now has 35 apprentices in post, and

received 160 apprenticeship applications in 2025, compared to 40 applications in 2022. Additionally, the business has a 95% retention rate of apprentices into permanent roles.

Eighteen graduates are currently part of Ontic's early career programme, and 13 more are scheduled to join this year. The company is projecting a 30% Generation Z workforce by 2030, and has inspired its sister sites in the US to launch similar apprenticeship programmes based on its now award-winning model. International exchange programmes also help to build its strong global network of emerging talent.

Continuing to look to the future, the Ontic team plans to train early career employees in AI, automation and digital transformation skills. Judges described this early careers programme as holistic, and "a lovely demonstration of proactive action in tackling organisational challenges". They praised its future focus, and the inclusive way in which it provides career pathways for all.

Thanks to its stellar HR team, Ontic is deliberately growing its own talent, driving growth, embedding culture, improving diversity and preparing the next generation of leaders in the process. It looks like the future of aviation is in excellent hands.