



A Case Study

# VODAFONE NEWBURY, UK



Regional Winner 2009  
South East  
National Training Awards

“This is the  
Rolls Royce of  
Apprenticeship  
schemes”

Steve Robinson,  
Head of Accreditation, Vodafone UK.

Vodafone is a member of the world’s largest mobile community, with over 260 million customers worldwide. Vodafone’s UK Product Validation and Testing Group needed to eliminate a dependence on expensive contract labour without sacrificing efficiency or quality. This case study discusses the award winning Higher Apprenticeship programme developed with Partnership Development Solutions (PDS) to meet those needs.

## Background

At the end of 2006, Vodafone employed up to 15 contractors in the Product Validation and Testing Group. Ed Cowmeadow, Head of Devices, wanted to create a solution that would reduce reliance on contractors, establish a stable workforce and reduce overall departmental operating costs. After considering various options, Cowmeadow, together with Steve Robinson, Head of Accreditation, and Simon Spackman, Technical Specialist – Device Planning, agreed to initiate a Higher Apprenticeship (HA) programme within the department to replace contractors with apprentices. Because of demanding product validation needs in a quickly changing marketplace, it was vital to maintain departmental workflow and ensure that Vodafone customer needs were met. However, the team required assistance with the planning and implementation of the HA programme.

## PDS – The Fast Track Solution

Vodafone selected Partnership Development Solutions (PDS), a national business consultancy specialising in developing talent and skills in the workplace. “Because the project was so important and time-critical, we needed a partner that was familiar with all aspects of people development,” says Cowmeadow. “PDS had been highly recommended as a company that moves quickly and provides high quality, appropriate solutions.”



vodafone



Unit 1, Fyfield Barn | Lower Fyfield | Marlborough | Wiltshire, SN8 1PX  
[www.pdsolutionsltd.com](http://www.pdsolutionsltd.com) | 01672 861073



## A Case Study

**“I feel a lot better about my personal skills, confidence, leadership and communications skills. This is my first real job – and I’m achieving an NVQ in the process.”**

Phillip Moffatt – aged 19, a former supermarket worker with 4 A-Levels.

In late 2006, PDS was tasked with developing a pilot scheme for the recruitment and training of four Higher Apprentices in the Newbury area. Time was short and expectations were high; Vodafone wanted the apprentices on the job by July 2007. PDS initially worked with Vodafone to develop the business case for the programme. Next they organised the educational delivery partnership and managed the attraction, recruitment and selection process, working with Vodafone to develop a bespoke training programme for the new recruits. PDS would continue to monitor progress and ensure the apprentices were on track to complete the qualification requirements.

### Educational Partnership

Selection of the right educational partner was critical for success. A key attraction of the programme – one that would draw the very best candidates – was the combination of on-the-job training and a respected and valuable educational qualification. PDS reviewed several options and ultimately selected Thames Valley University (TVU). “Many universities offer off-the-shelf programmes,” explains PDS Director, Dave Willett. “But TVU offered to create a highly relevant Foundation degree for the Higher Apprenticeship programme.” The apprentices attend TVU one day a week and complete required coursework in their own time. “It’s fast-paced and the workload can get really heavy, but it’s manageable,” says James Mortlock, 20, a former warehouse worker. “It’s interesting because what we study in the classroom is relevant to what we do on the job every day. The in-house training, mentoring and support we get from Vodafone makes it all fit together.”

### Attraction, Recruitment, Selection

PDS worked with Vodafone to define the role, scope the position and establish applicant criteria, before producing advertisements and promoting the programme to various local colleges to broaden the base of qualified applicants. “We wanted the very best selection of candidates for Vodafone to choose from,” says PDS founder Jenny Harman. “As people development specialists, we know that choosing the right candidates and aligning the right partners for our clients will ensure they achieve every objective.”

After reviewing numerous responses, PDS produced a shortlist. Candidates were invited to participate in a series of activities, beginning with an afternoon in the Vodafone Devices department to gain a better understanding of the working environment. “Giving potential employees the opportunity to meet colleagues and management increased our chances of getting committed applicants,” explains Spackman.

PDS then organised an open evening to showcase the apprenticeship programme to candidates and their families. A senior manager from Vodafone spoke about the business, the company and the opportunity, and a representative from PDS discussed the benefits of apprenticeship and the value of work-based qualifications. The evening was an ideal opportunity to demonstrate an alternate path for those candidates who were considering University.



**vodafone**



Unit 1, Fyfield Barn | Lower Fyfield | Marlborough | Wiltshire, SN8 1PX  
[www.pdsolutionsltd.com](http://www.pdsolutionsltd.com) | 01672 861073



## A Case Study

**“My dad couldn’t believe it when he realised I could get work experience and a qualification.”**

Steve Walters, Vodafone Higher Apprentice.

### Assessment Centre

The final stage of the selection process brought the candidates together for a full day of group and individual exercises in a more relaxed environment. This allowed Vodafone to test and assess behaviour in a variety of situations and provided an opportunity for applicants to showcase their best attributes outside the interview environment. “PDS designed the exercises and were on hand to support us on the day,” says Spackman. “But it was up to us to interact and evaluate the candidates so we could get to know them as individuals and see who would fit into our team most effectively.”

### Hiring the Candidates

In July 2007, five carefully selected applicants became full-time Vodafone employees. The original number of recruits was increased to five when the quality of the candidates became obvious. Twelve months later, all five remain in the programme and carry the workload even more effectively than their contractor predecessors, according to their managers, mentors and departmental statistics. The recruits are also mentored within Vodafone for both technical and career development and continue with TVU coursework. All are on track to receive their degrees. As Simon Spackman says, “They’ve lost the ‘apprentice’ tag and are all considered Test Technicians. Each is an essential member of the team with a clear career path in place. I am very proud of them all.”

### The Training Programme

PDS conducted training workshops with key Vodafone staff to produce a comprehensive training plan specifically tailored for the HA programme. Key elements included management of NVQ delivery and an offsite skills training workshop was held in North Wales. The skills training focused on Problem Solving, Communications, Working with Others and Improving Own Learning.

The outdoor experience model is designed around a business focussed, multi-stage project, which involves learners from the outset, ensuring their full commitment as they work collaboratively to achieve a common goal (in this case building and successfully launching a rocket) by the end of the week. Working closely together over the five day residential session, apprentices were given responsibility for planning, project management, budgeting, resource management and reviewing their performance throughout the week. “It was great!” says apprentice Frank Horwood. “It was tough and the days were long but the things we learned were really useful, practical knowledge you can’t learn in a classroom.”

### Results & Benefits

“We were challenged to cut our operating costs and to find a new way of working,” explains Steve Robinson. “This pilot scheme was a way of establishing whether a new Higher Apprentice scheme could be integrated into the department, and then developed further.”

**“I didn’t have any goals before, and now I have a six-month, two-year and five-year career plan in place!”**

James Mortlock, Vodafone apprentice.



Unit 1, Fyfield Barn | Lower Fyfield | Marlborough | Wiltshire, SN8 1PX  
[www.pdsolutionsltd.com](http://www.pdsolutionsltd.com) | 01672 861073



## A Case Study

**“At the end of the programme, I’ll have a major academic qualification and 3 years’ professional experience at Vodafone. My friends can’t believe how lucky I am!”**

Steve Walters, former supermarket employee.

After less than six months, with the inclusion of other cuts and cost-reduction strategies, budgets had been reduced by over 80%. “Each contractor eliminated resulted in a saving in excess of £70K per year and the newly-trained recruits have maintained — and even improved on — efficiency and quality statistics,” says Spackman. “We’re extremely pleased,” reports Cowmeadow. “In fact this programme won Vodafone’s ‘Best New Innovative Idea’ competition in 2007. Its success is a testament to PDS, the programme, and to the apprentices themselves.” “Programme implementation was much quicker and a lot smoother than we initially thought” adds Spackman. “Within Vodafone, if you want to go far, you will go far and as far as these recruits are concerned, the sky is the limit.”

### Industry recognition

PDS apprenticeship programmes are approved by The Institute of Engineering Technology (IET), one of the world’s leading professional societies for the engineering and technology community. Approved provider status will enable Vodafone apprentices to gain professional recognition – the new ICT Technician (ICTTech) standard – on completion of their apprenticeship.

In October 2009, Vodafone and PDS were jointly recognised for their partnership approach in developing the Higher Apprenticeship in Technology programme, by winning a National Training Award (NTA) within the “Partnership and Collaboration” category. The NTAs are organised by UK Skills on behalf of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), to honour the achievement of outstanding business success through investment in training. “This has proved that a properly planned Higher Apprenticeship programme can be a real alternative to graduate recruitment, can provide substantial savings, robust organisational change and, most importantly, deliver highly motivated employees,” Jenny Harman asserts.

### About Partnership Development Solutions (PDS)

PDS is a national business consultancy with renowned expertise in creating and managing all types of apprenticeship and upskilling programmes, up to Foundation Degree level, for employers across the UK. PDS specialises in helping companies secure direct funding so that they can invest in an apprenticeship programme that suits their business, so that they secure maximum value.

PDS aims to provide a quality value service in all aspects of the end-to-end delivery of apprenticeship programmes, so that its clients can improve business performance, productivity and profitability.

PDS is one of only three companies nationally to provide specialist vocational training for the Telecoms sector. PDS has developed apprenticeship programmes in partnership with Vodafone, O2, Ericsson, Virgin Media and Arqiva.



**vodafone**



Unit 1, Fyfield Barn | Lower Fyfield | Marlborough | Wiltshire, SN8 1PX  
[www.pdsolutionsltd.com](http://www.pdsolutionsltd.com) | 01672 861073