

VPS UK

Highly Commended - SME of the Year 2026



VPS UK's Story

VPS UK was Highly Commended SME of the Year in recognition of their strong commitment to people, skills development and creating career opportunities. Through apprenticeships, training and partnerships with local providers, VPS has increased vocational learning participation from 7% to 22%, helping colleagues progress their careers, improve retention and support local communities across Greater Manchester. We asked Dave Butcher (Head of Digital Learning) his view on the importance of skills development at VPS, and how being recognised by the GM Skills Award benefits the VPS business...



**What does being
recognised as
Highly Commended
mean to your
organisation?**

“Being recognised as Highly Commended SME of the year validates VPS UK’s investment in people, our local community and the future skills of our sector. As an organisation our core values represent that “people are our most important asset”, and this recognition reinforces our culture of personal & professional development and creating long-term career pathways. It reflects the progress we have made, improving access to learning and creating opportunities for people across Greater Manchester, particularly in Oldham where VPS head office is based.

It also means a great deal to our colleagues, apprentices and young people who have engaged with VPS through work experience, placements, apprenticeships and training programmes.

The highly commended stamp gives recognition to their commitment, ambition and achievements, while motivating us to continue investing in education and capability across the business.”

“Skills development remains a priority at VPS because it is directly linked to our people plan: to attract, recruit and retain the best in class, this not only is the right thing to do but keeps us commercially comparative. We have strengthened this commitment by appointing a dedicated Head of Learning and Development to build relationships with local providers, prepare the business for future growth, manage the talent pipeline and improve the overall colleague learning experience.

We work closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, local charities such as Positive Futures, colleges and training providers to ensure our learning offer supports both business needs and local skills priorities. This includes active engagement with young people through placements, experience days, mock interviews and job safari days, which provide meaningful experiences for young people aimed at building confidence to prepare them for working life.

**How do you ensure skills
development remains a
priority within the
business?**

Training is embedded across all levels of the organisation. For young people, we recruit apprentices from Hopwood Hall and Oldham College, we have hosted T Level students in Finance and HR, supporting them to develop workplace confidence, essential skills and digital capability, including the use of AI tools. For existing colleagues, we have accessed GM funding to deliver programmes in AI, automation and the modern workplace, as well as Growth Hub funding to develop Microsoft Excel skills for local teams.

We also ensure learning is inclusive and accessible. Over the past 12 months, role-specific training has evolved significantly through the introduction of digital learning, with a focus on accessibility tools and inclusive learning interventions for neurodivergent colleagues."

"Apprenticeships and training have had a significant, measurable impact on our workforce. Since 2024, VPS has increased the number of colleagues in vocational training from 7% to 22%, demonstrating a clear commitment to using apprenticeships as a route for development, progression and retention.

What impact have apprenticeships and training had on your workforce?

The impact can be seen in the confidence, capability and career progression of our colleagues. Apprenticeships have helped colleagues move from entry-level roles into technical positions. We have examples of colleagues progressing to MD, Sales Directors and Heads of Department following leadership apprenticeships.

For young people, apprenticeships have opened the door to meaningful careers. Apprentices recruited from Hopwood Hall have gone on to receive Highly Commended recognition in apprentice awards and continue to build technical careers with VPS.

Finally, being a member of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and in tune with the work that GMLPN does, keeps VPS aligned to the growth aspirations and funding opportunities within the Region. The wider impact is equally important. By investing in skills, VPS is improving retention, reducing churn and promoting careers within the region. This supports financial stability for colleagues and creates positive outcomes for their families and local communities."