



How Firebrand and New Signature Developed Microsoft Azure and Office365 Skills Fast Through Apprenticeships

New Signature is a cloud-first, full-service Microsoft Gold partner delivering innovative technology solutions. With a workforce of over 400 permanent employees, New Signature hires Firebrand apprentices to help with their Azure and Office365 skills strategy.

New Signature's relationship with Firebrand started in 2015 after having implemented Azure and provided managed services for Firebrand's cloud environment. Their ongoing relationship - initiated through the Microsoft Partner Network - gave New Signature and Firebrand a strong mutual understanding of their Microsoft expertise and competencies.

Closing the Microsoft Azure and Office365 skills shortage with Apprenticeships

New Signature's vision for apprentice skills development in 2017 was to "train people in the specific areas and technologies" and to grow their team "without excessive costs", says Darren Taylor, Director of Service Design at New Signature.

One of the key drivers for their apprenticeship programme was to make sure it addressed the Microsoft Azure and Office365 skills demands for the organisations New Signature deliver services to. To do this, they worked with Firebrand to build bespoke **Azure Apprenticeship** programmes as a solution to develop their in-house skills faster through award-winning accelerated training and certifications.

Opportunities from the Apprenticeship Levy

With a short history of hiring apprentices, New Signature started to learn quickly how apprentices could begin to play a key role in their workforce development when they started paying the **Apprenticeship Levy** in 2017.

"It has given us the opportunity to think and invest in our first ever two apprentices, which is so successful we need another two to join us," says Carolyn Deer, HR Manager at New Signature.

The scale of New Signature's growth means they need to support their teams with a strong, diverse talent pipeline addressing the skills demand of the markets they serve. To support this, New Signature are pledging to hire two more Firebrand apprentices in the next 12 months.

Hiring exceptional apprentice talent

To hire the right people for the job, Firebrand helped New Signature with their apprentice recruitment, giving them an extra level of expertise that resulted in hiring apprentices hungry to learn and develop themselves. Carolyn Deer, HR Manager explains, "when Darren and I interviewed them we were hugely impressed by their maturity, politeness and the fact they were passionate about joining us too."

Securing a long-term apprenticeship strategy

Line Manager to New Signature's apprentices, Darren Taylor is already seeing a long-term impact of apprentices Vwegba and Jonathan. Since starting in January 2018, they've taken quickly to "working within a busy team environment" and have developed a "good understanding of live cloud environments", providing customers with additional resource to speed up projects and offer an extra level of support.

New Signature are setting an example for other Levy-payers hoping to develop their in-house skills, hoping to offer apprentices a full-time job after they complete to continue "developing their skills and career".

Learn more at firebrand.to/microsoft-apprentices

“ We are passionate at New Signature in ensuring that we develop talent but just didn't have the chance to do it! With the Levy, it has given us the opportunity to think and invest in our first ever two apprentices, **”** which is so successful we need another two to join us

Carolyn Deer, HR Manager at New Signature

Top tips for organisations wanting to take a similar approach

- 1 Identify where your digital skills gaps are.** Sit down with your IT teams and make sure that those involved in the decision-making process for the Apprenticeship Levy understand where the investment can be best spent on the right skills that can be achieved through the training included on the programmes
- 2 Work in partnership with Firebrand to create bespoke programmes.** Take time to browse through Firebrand's full suite of apprenticeship Standards and identify where you can substitute pre-selected accelerated courses for training suited to your business needs
- 3 Maintain regular reviews, and ask for team feedback.** Listen to your apprentices; try to encourage them to be open with their progress and to share any concerns early so you can ensure both you and your apprentices can adapt and improve the environment for future hires.

Meet Vwegba, Apprentice IT Service Desk Engineer at New Signature



What inspired you to do an apprenticeship?

I was inspired to do an apprenticeship because I wanted to get hands on. Doing an apprenticeship offered me the opportunity to gain knowledge and then apply this knowledge that due to this I would be able to solidify my knowledge and gain more experience in my field of interest.

What's the coolest project you've worked on and why?

I am still in my early stages. So far, I enjoy dealing with some of the tickets that some of our clients solve. I've been able to so myself go from not having a clue what was going on to understanding a few of the problems and how I can resolve them.

How has your apprenticeship helped you achieve more in your career?

I am still in the early stages of my apprenticeship. But so far, I can say that an apprenticeship has helped me a lot. It has allowed me to better understand how IT is applied in the working world. Also, it has opened new doors for learning as I am shown frequently different aspects of business that utilise IT in ways I didn't know.

What are your plans after you complete your apprenticeship?

I started this apprenticeship with the goal of being able to grow and become an expert in my field of work. Since I've started my apprenticeship I've been motivated to continue striving to reach that goal.

Any advice to anyone thinking of doing an apprenticeship like yours?

I would advise them to think about what field they want to get in to, then go for it. An apprenticeship gives knowledge and experience that aren't wasting because you'll use it in your everyday. it offers you a foundation to start of your career and it also allows you to get hands on with work instead of constantly reading from a text book.

“ *I've just managed to get my IT Career started with Firebrand. The members of staff at Firebrand guided me through the process very smoothly and patiently, helping me to understand all areas and aspects of the field that I have decided to enter...Due to the efficacy of Firebrand team, I was able to land myself a Level 3 Azure Infrastructure Technician Apprenticeship with New Signature* **”**

Vwegba, Apprentice IT Service Desk Engineer at New Signature

Visit www.firebrandtraining.co.uk/apprenticeships to learn how other businesses have successfully grown through apprenticeships



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