

Working in Vodafone — our survey said.....

In the last Vodavita we asked for your views on working in Vodafone. We know that the company takes its own employee survey seriously so we thought we'd do the same. We have not yet received a full breakdown of the Vodafone Employee Survey (VES), so in the meantime we present our headline findings below.

Do you feel that Vodafone consults in a meaningful way with its employees when they really need it such as in reorganisations, redundancies and outsourcing?

Yes 9%
No 91%

Have you ever suffered from work-related stress?

Yes 82%
No 18%

Has Vodafone ever changed your contractual terms against your wishes?

Yes 50%
No 50%

Do you think that your manager is fully aware of company policies and procedures?

Yes 41%
No 59%

Have you found it easy to receive information from HR about employment issues when you have requested it?

Yes 24%
No 76%

Have you ever used the company's policies to tackle any these issues?

Yes 52%
No 48%

Do you feel you were treated fairly and the issues were resolved quickly and confidentially?

Yes 31%
No 69%

Do you feel that the company listens to and takes account of your issues and concerns, other than in the annual Employee Survey?

Yes 5%
No 95%

We know that Connect members have asked the company to ask a question about union recognition in the VES. We understand that under a previous HR Director this was agreed verbally. However, the most effective way to demonstrate this to the company - and as importantly to us that you support the idea of union recognition - is to join Connect, and if you are already a member, to invite your colleagues to do the same.

Under the influence

A common question that people have about joining and being active in the union is how effective are we in addressing their concerns?

Members' feedback to us and their colleagues is that on an individual basis Connect membership is a valuable resource. For example, if you have a disciplinary or grievance at work, the union will be able to formally assist up to and including accompaniment at a hearing.

Much of our work though, is done informally. Our experience of dealing with the company, its policies, procedures, and its HR and management community means we are able to work productively with members over the phone, email or around the workplace.

We have helped members achieve results in terms of equal pay, grading, job role, relief from harassment, and a host of issues that without Connect involvement would have at best dragged on, and at worst had a negative and continuing impact on our members' working life.

Connect is at its most effective when we are working with significant numbers of members. You may know that in some units our members are a clear majority of employees, and we have several other areas heading that way. This has made it easier to assist members to successfully influence the company on challenging issues such as reorganisations, redundancies, outsourcing, changes to terms and conditions, contractual changes, under/overpayments, commission, benefits, shifts and so on.

Supporting our members to enable them to pursue their interests is what Connect is about. It will form

the cornerstone of any union recognition agreement, and is completely in keeping with Vodafone's notion that they prefer to deal directly with employees. We agree, and are busy helping informed and organised employees negotiate with Vodafone direct!

At the same time we are increasingly being seen as a credible and influential organisation by the company. During recent reorganisations Vodafone contacted us direct to explain the situation and name-checked us on an audio cast by the CEO UK. This reflects recognition at a corporate level - that Connect is reflective of a significant constituency of Vodafone employees. We were also contacted by external organisations, who requested our views to be published in the press, online and in broadcast media.

In correspondence in August 2005 Paul Chesworth, UK HR Director confirmed to us that Vodafone fully respects the rights of all employees to belong to a trade union - a position long established. He added that *'at the present time we do not believe that there is significant evidence that our UK employees wish to be represented collectively by a trade union. Until we see such evidence we will continue to take a neutral position on this matter'*.

We know that a member recently spoke to Tim Miles, Vodafone CEO UK, about Connect and invited him to join us. However the decision on whether or not we extend members' influence through union recognition is in your hands - as it should be. We hope that if you are not already a member you will consider the benefits to you and your colleagues in joining us and helping gain effective influence at work.

Join us! See why overleaf...

Consultation - must try harder

We all know that working for Vodafone means constant change. As you would expect, Connect members are keen to let us know their views around periods of major upheaval.

Whilst change need not be managed badly, it too often is. An example of this was what Connect members thought of the consultation process around the Retail Efficiency Challenge. Consultative Forum Representatives told us that, while they welcomed an opportunity to perform a new and different role, they felt that their part in the process was merely to rubber stamp previously-made decisions, rendering pointless their efforts to discuss the issues arising with their colleagues, and leaving them frustrated at the lack of influence they could have.

So why didn't Vodafone listen?

A short while before the Efficiency Challenge was announced, retail managers were asked at a conference, what Vodafone could do to improve their working conditions. Their answer to the company was more staff. The company responded with staff reductions.

The fall-out from this process appears to be loss of good will from many staff. Some dedicated and professional members of staff have considered quitting and some have already resigned, feeling angry and insulted at having

their hard work and effort rewarded with cuts to their working hours and therefore to their pay. Some areas are now employing temporary staff, and having to get cover from other stores, due to extreme shortages. This can result in lone working, lack of lunch or other breaks and insufficient staffing levels in instances of sickness and other absences. While store opening hours are shorter for some stores, the expectation on results hasn't changed, leaving staff subject to stress.

As you may be aware, we have been supporting our members at risk of redundancy through the closure of Woodlands, Newbury and Brindleyplace, Birmingham. Whilst at the time of writing consultation continues, it will be interesting to see if Vodafone has listened to the lessons of the past or if consultation merely reinforces the views expressed in Connect's survey (see left).

Connect and our members believe that there is no substitute for consultation with staff through their independent and professional trade union. We know that this is a fast moving industry, and we are not against change. What we are against, however, is a process of change that marginalises those affected directly by it. Our members are committed and hard working professional people who want Vodafone to be a successful company. It seems that they are still not being given the full opportunity to help.

Connect - union on the move in Vodafone

2005 was another strong year for Connect's dedicated Vodafone Branch.

The number of Connect members working for Vodafone is at an all time high – following another excellent year of recruitment. If you would like to know how many members Connect has in your area, please speak to your local contact, or alternatively get in touch with the Connect Vodafone team who will let you know the relevant levels of membership.

Nearly all new Connect members join through the recommendation of at least one colleague. We are keen for this to continue as members remain at the heart of our plans and it means that we are only as strong as our reputation as an open, accountable and worthwhile organisation to belong to.

2005 saw Vodafone members at the heart of Connect and the UK's democratic process, with a full Branch delegation to the Connect conference in Scarborough and members from Technology visiting Parliament to talk with the Secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Telecoms. Young Vodafone members have visited Parliament and the TUC as part of Connect's Young Professionals Network, which has had members working at music festivals and joining campaigns such as 'Make Poverty History'.

We were also delighted to support

Newbury members in their 'Not the Vodafone Party' evening in September as a 'tribute' to the main event. It was great to see so many members from different areas of the company chatting about work-life over some delicious food. Given the excellent turnout, food and company, we will be looking to support another event in 2006 – if you want to help arrange one for your area then get in touch as we are open to suggestions!

At the same time, we have met with more members than ever around their workplaces as well as via email and phone. We are continuing to improve the Vodafone section of the Connect website www.connectuk.org, and adding more news stories, many with restricted access for members-only advice. Our Vodafone members and their activities have also featured heavily in our all-members' magazine *Connected*.

If you are reading this and are already a member of Connect, you can help us help you by keeping us informed of issues that are of importance to you and your colleagues. You could also help your union grow by passing a newsletter to a colleague – if they decide to join, make sure you claim a voucher as our small way of saying thanks for spreading the word. We have sent out record vouchers in 2005! Contact the Vodafone team for more info at vodafone@connectuk.org.

Outsourcing – a measured response?

We know that outsourcing of work is a very real concern to Vodafone employees. Some areas of work have been outsourced, for example in parts of Property or payroll as well as desktop services.

However, a recent NOP survey for Manpower showed that whilst 20% of employers not outsourcing are planning to do so, 14% of current outsourcers were planning to bring services back in-house.

Interestingly an outsourced contract of work with Regional Operations (Technology) was ended recently and the work brought back in house.

This would seem to be sensible given the views of the National Outsourcing Association (NOA) who according to *Labour Research* (August 2005) admit that: "Many companies, eager to keep up with the Jones's and employ the latest solutions, fell over themselves in the bid to outsource".

Given that the reality of outsourcing is that it does not always deliver on either the improved level of service or expected level of savings, we would like to commend Vodafone for not looking at outsourcing in a dogmatic way which puts financial gratification over long term considerations such as network management and customer services. We trust that the company will have a measured response in future discussions as well as considering the views of employees.

Employees who are outsourced have protection under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (TUPE) – see box below for more details.

If you want to join your colleagues and add strength to our growing membership in Vodafone, then you can join online at www.connectuk.org/join, or call 020 8971 6000. Membership is £6.25 a month, payable by direct debit.

As well as representation and expert advice on all work-related matters, membership includes the following services

- **income replacement scheme of up to £400 per month**
- **free legal assistance on non work-related matters, and personal injury to you or your dependants**
- **death gratuity of £1000 paid to your nominee**
- **access to discounted financial services including insurance and impartial financial advice**
- **low-cost online conveyancing service**
- **a fixed-cost tax return service**
- **shopping vouchers giving up to 10% discount on purchases in high street stores, and a bespoke travel service**
- **Opus2, the union's employment agency**
- **a career counselling service**

What is TUPE?

TUPE protects your terms and conditions (but not your pension rights) so that they cannot be changed without your agreement.

If a company is bought out or a service contracted out, TUPE legislation lays down the statutory conditions for the transfer of employees. Broadly speaking contracts of employment existing at the date of transfer automatically transfer, regardless of the intentions of new or old employer.

Where a union is already recognised, employers must consult with them, and this gives people working in a unionised workplace the clear advantage. Where there is no recognised union, the employer must consult with specially elected employee representatives with a view to seeking their agreement to measures being taken. Bearing in mind the difficulties that previous employee bodies have had in consultation processes, Connect believes that employees affected by transfers would achieve a fairer resolution by working together with the union towards these ends. We have successfully supported Vodafone members in circumstances to improve transfer terms.

If you are in a position covered by TUPE, or think that you should be, seek expert advice. Call the union! Connect – your best resource in protecting your employment rights.