



## Overview

**Country or Region:** Sweden

**Industry:** Education

### Customer Profile

Portalens Gymnasium is an IT school in Lidköping, Sweden, for 16 to 19 year olds. The school provides education for students who want to go on to attend university or vocational classes.

### Business Situation

School leavers in Sweden often find it difficult to get a job. IT support jobs are especially hard to fill and schools needed to bridge this skills gap.

### Solution

Microsoft has partnered with educational institutions, including Portalens Gymnasium, to provide training and certification, preparing students for jobs in IT.

### Benefits

- Student skills match requirements
- Regional job opportunities increased
- Work experience improves prosperity
- Instructors spend more time teaching

## Student Certification Raises Profile of School and Improves Economic Outlook for Sweden

“Microsoft Student Helpdesk is superb. It combines the needs of employers with the interests of youngsters.”

Mats Gerdau, Chair of the Committee on Vocational Training, Swedish Parliament

Finding qualified employees to fill IT positions is always a challenge, but companies in Sweden have an especially difficult task because a small population is spread over a large geographic area. The pool of potential employees is smaller and recruits often have to move to employment hubs. To increase the number of qualified workers and stimulate economic growth throughout the country, Microsoft has partnered with educational institutions to help bridge the gap between the knowledge graduates have when they leave school and the skills employers require. Portalens Gymnasium, an IT-focused secondary school in Lidköping, Sweden, is one of the schools that has raised its profile and improved job prospects for graduates by joining the programmes offered by Microsoft® Student Helpdesk.

“We wanted to be more professional—to be one of the best IT schools in Sweden—and Microsoft Student Helpdesk was offering us an opportunity to do that.”

Martin Brodin, Teacher, Portalens Gymnasium

## Situation

Sweden is the third-largest country in Western Europe. But, with a population of nine million, there are only 52 people per square mile, making it one of Europe's most sparsely populated countries. This presents a number of challenges to rural areas. When people of working age leave their communities in search of jobs in the city, local business withers, schools suffer, and the elderly are left to live alone.

Even with an influx of people from the country, employers in urban areas have trouble finding qualified employees. In the technology sector alone, there are 9,000 open jobs. One way companies and schools work around this lack of qualified IT professionals is to centralise IT services into hubs that serve large geographic areas. This practice of providing remote support further perpetuates the lack of business opportunities in regional areas, and little, if any, local technical support.

Despite the fact that employers have trouble finding skilled workers, 100,000 young people can't find jobs after leaving school. There is a clear imbalance between the skills employers require and the education system. Mats Gerdau, Chair of the Committee on Vocational Training in Swedish Parliament, says: “Generally, our schools need to be more open to the world outside. For a long time, all our focus has been on academic skills, but we have to recognise vocational skills as a good alternative for young people. We are shifting our perspective—a modern society needs both academic and vocational skills.”

A number of strategies are emerging to address this need. A good example of which is Portalens Gymnasium, a secondary technology school in Lidköping, Sweden, for 16 to 19 year olds that has partnered with Microsoft to help bridge the knowledge and skills gap. Eva Pethrus, Academic Programme

Manager of Partners in Learning, Microsoft Sweden, says: “If we can give young people in rural areas a greater chance to acquire the skills they need, they will have the option of staying in the communities they grew up in.” This will have a knock-on effect on the local economy. With technology helping to increase the profitability of local businesses, companies will be able to employ more people, bringing economic growth to rural areas.

## Solution

When Martin Brodin—the teacher responsible for information and communications technology at Portalens Gymnasium—attended a seminar on Student Helpdesk at Microsoft, he was convinced it would work well at Portalens. The programme combines classroom instruction with e-learning, and gives students the opportunity to take certification exams at a reduced price. It also provides free and low-cost software, trains students in technical support, and encourages instructors and students to share ideas with other schools. “We wanted to be more professional—to be one of the best IT schools in Sweden—and Microsoft Student Helpdesk was offering us an opportunity to do that,” says Brodin.

Portalens joined the programme in August 2007. So far, all students from Portalens who have taken the exams have received Windows Vista® Configuration certification. Next year, these students will study and sit exams for Microsoft Developers Network (MSDN®) Professional certification to become Microsoft support technicians. “The students who took the exams did very well,” says Brodin. “To pass the exam, candidates need 700 points. Portalens students all scored over 837.”

IT Academy is an integral part of Student Helpdesk. Schools that join the programme can offer their students and teachers training

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Martin Brodin, Teacher, Portalens Gymnasium

on the latest Microsoft technologies, and the opportunity to qualify for Microsoft certification. Schools in the IT Academy Programme, such as Portalens, get at least 50 licences for all of the Microsoft software they need.

Certification courses at Portalens meet for one hour a week for two months. Students at Portalens can also log on to <http://itacademy.microsoftlearning.com> and take e-learning courses at any time, from anywhere, with an Internet connection. Teachers at Portalens also use e-learning modules to prepare for teaching Microsoft certification classes.

Not only does Student Helpdesk give students access to training in current technologies, it also allows them to download and use products before they reach the market. Brodin says: “With the MSDN Academic Alliance programme. We used Windows Server 2008 R2 Standard Edition for our network course before it was on the market, so our students had more up-to-date knowledge than local IT professionals. It is an exciting, affordable way to provide our students with cutting-edge software.”

Schools that are part of Student Helpdesk can also participate in the Microsoft Innovative Teachers Forum. Teachers and students at Portalens have already attended several of these seminars in Stockholm. “When you have a chance to network with others who are using the same programmes, you start to see new ways of using applications in your lectures. I’ve certainly learned how to be more flexible as a teacher,” says Brodin.

The Microsoft Student Helpdesk programme addresses the lack of local IT support in schools. It trains students to provide technical support to their peers, and the helpdesk at Portalens, managed by Brodin, is

staffed by the students who have already received certification. “They can show off their expertise in Windows Vista and get some valuable experience,” says Brodin. In addition to the Student Helpdesk, Microsoft provides members of the programme with an e-learning class in troubleshooting.

## Benefits

The reach of the Partners in Learning Programmes has already extended beyond Portalens, as students are networking with peers through the Innovative Teachers Forum and are taking their newly obtained knowledge out into the community. “Making people employable is good for everyone,” says Pethrus. “If we all contribute to the economy of Sweden, there is more to share and we can continue to have an excellent standard of living, including good education and healthcare systems.”

## Students Trained in Relevant Skills

Word is getting around that Portalens is producing qualified IT technicians. One of the pupils who gained Microsoft certification is working as an IT technician after classes, helping younger students in the computer lab of a local secondary school. Two different companies that have local area networks with Windows Server have approached Portalens to ask groups of students to analyse the best solutions for their companies.

Many IT support jobs don’t require university degrees. If students leave school with Microsoft certification, they are immediately qualified to work as support or IT technicians. “Certification is a very good qualification,” says Brodin. “School leavers who have it are more likely to get an interview. If they continue on to university, they are more likely to start work at a higher level than their fellow graduates who don’t have certification.”

Regional Job Opportunities Will Increase  
As students leave school with the skills needed to fill empty IT positions, they will be

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For more information about Portalens Gymnasium visit the Web site at: [www.portalensgymnasium.se/lid/index2.html](http://www.portalensgymnasium.se/lid/index2.html)

qualified to take local jobs and contribute to the economy. Small and medium-sized enterprises will expand, encouraging local growth as new companies are formed to provide IT support, and networking and communications services. Pethrus says: "If local services are available, small and medium-sized enterprises can improve both core systems and communications between partners and suppliers, while giving better service to customers."

### Students Get Work Experience

When students are encouraged to help each other, they learn quickly, and pass this education on to their peers. "Young people learn best in context. They quickly become experts if they feel they are providing a valuable service to their fellow students," says Brodin.

This is also a good opportunity for students to gain experience providing technical support to other users. According to Pethrus, it is difficult for students to find internships and work-study opportunities in Sweden, because companies often do not have the staff or the time to supervise student workers. When schools provide this type of work experience, students will acquire the practical experience they need.

### Instructors Spend More Time Teaching

The Student Helpdesk reduces the burden of IT support on teaching staff. When students rely on one or two teachers to help them, instructors often become overwhelmed with technical support issues that take time away from teaching and strategic planning.

If a computer breaks down during class, teachers often have to stop the lesson until the issue is resolved. When helpdesk is available, lessons run more smoothly, teachers can teach more effectively, and less time is wasted.

"Microsoft Student Helpdesk is superb," says Gerda. "It combines the needs of employers with the interests of youngsters. I like the idea that a multinational company such as Microsoft engages in young people's education."

## Microsoft Learning

Microsoft Learning builds innovative learning products that enable both individuals and organizations to make the most of their investment in Microsoft technology. Offerings from Microsoft Learning—encompassing Microsoft training and certification, Microsoft Press® books, and Microsoft TechNet publications—include skills assessments, books, certification programs, classroom and lab-format curriculum, e-learning, and other online reference materials. Our goal? To make you a more efficient user of Microsoft technology. Learn more about Microsoft Learning:

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