



IT Skills and Certification Put Australian Students on Fast Track to Employment

Box Hill Institute (BHI) in Melbourne prepares students for Australia's workforce by ensuring that they have the skills employers need today and in the future. As a partner in the Microsoft IT Academy Program, BHI helps students develop a high level of IT skills literacy. Along with other program benefits, students earn industry certifications that help qualify them for the workplace or that count toward higher-education courses. For students earning Advanced Diplomas at BHI, certification and other program strengths have led to a job placement rate of more than 90 percent.

Education Needs

When it comes to information and communications technology (ICT) skills training, Box Hill Institute has earned a reputation as one of the leading trade- and vocation-based training institutes in the state of Victoria. BHI is one of 17 government-owned Institutes of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in the state, and a key part of its mission is to work closely with the business community to identify skills needs and help address shortages in Victoria and across Australia.

Simon Taylor, manager of the Centre for Information & Communications Technology at BHI, says technology has become a major enabler of a growing knowledge-based economy in Australia.

"In the last 10 to 20 years, the Australian industry has moved from being manufacturing-based to services-based—similar to the U.S. and other Western countries," Taylor says. "We need a curriculum that allows us to deliver a level of training that satisfies those skills needs within the industry, from a service and service delivery perspective."

BHI also must meet the diverse training needs of the approximately 1,000 students who enroll in its ICT programs annually. Most students in BHI's vocational programs range in age from 16 to 25, although a sizable number are older adults. Some students choose a TAFE because they see it as a pathway to higher education, in which case they take certificate-based courses that give them credit toward a college degree. Others come to develop vocational skills that will enable them to get a job in a technical field.

Solution

BHI has successfully incorporated Microsoft educational materials in its certificate programs for more than a decade. It cemented this strong relationship with Microsoft as one of the original members of the Microsoft IT Academy program.

"As a Microsoft IT Academy member, Box Hill Institute has access to excellent resources and support that enable our students to get industry-relevant skills



Customer: Box Hill Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE)

Web site: boxhillinstitute.edu.au

Number of students: More than 40,000

Number of faculty/staff: 1,400

Location: Victoria, Australia

Industry: Education

Customer profile: Box Hill Institute is one of Australia's leading vocational and education training providers. Its four campuses in Melbourne offer a range of trade- and vocation-based programs that focus on developing the skills required for the 21st century workforce.

Software and services: Microsoft IT Academy Program

training," says Taylor. "The blended style of learning materials enables our teachers to provide students with an inspiring mix of learning, with the online materials allowing our teachers to focus on individual mentoring of students, thus maximizing learning outcomes."

BHI makes use of IT Academy materials for multiple types of learners who seek training, including students enrolled in vocationally oriented programs and industry and community customers who are retraining or building skills in a particular area.

Industry certification is core to the training offered to both groups. BHI recognizes that skills certifications are highly regarded by employers, thus giving students with certifications the upper hand in the job market.

"Box Hill Institute believes strongly in Microsoft certification for skills for employability," Taylor says. "We see it as a great addition to our vocationally focused programs, as well as a way to differentiate ourselves in the training market."

While certifications are viewed as the most important IT Academy program benefit at BHI, curriculum tools are also invaluable resources for teaching and learning.

"We primarily use the Microsoft Official Courseware material in instructor-led delivery of our classes," says David Brooks, Microsoft IT Academy coordinator at BHI. "However, an emerging delivery mode entails utilizing the rich set of online resources available through the Microsoft E-Learning portfolio."

BHI uses the program's E-Learning resources to deliver professional development training to its staff and to teachers in Victoria's primary and

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secondary schools. BHI is also looking into using the Microsoft IT Academy E-Learning courses as part of its distance learning program. In addition, BHI's Centre for Business Programs is investigating the E-Learning materials for Microsoft® Office 2007 with an eye toward offering them to business students to prepare for certification.

Benefits

By applying Microsoft IT Academy resources and support to its training efforts, BHI helps ensure that it provides enterprises, small businesses and government with well-trained graduates who possess a high level of current IT skills literacy applicable to a wide range of fields and types of work.

BHI supports a number of sought-after certifications in its training courses, including Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS), Microsoft Certified Desktop Support Technician (MCDST), Microsoft Certified System Administrator (MCSA), and Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE).

As with all the curriculum content, skills and knowledge gained from

the IT Academy program, BHI maps those certifications to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Because AQF is a national competency-based set of standards, any training that students complete at BHI will be recognized across the country as having fulfilled national competencies.

"Our ability to embed Microsoft IT Academy skills into nationally accredited Certificates, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas ensures our students exit with qualifications that meet AQF requirements, with relevant and highly sought-after industry skills," Taylor says.

Brooks points out that the Microsoft MCSA certification has been embedded in BHI's Advanced Diplomas for the past 10 years, and in that time, there have been numerous examples of student success stories.

"Combined with other program strengths, certifications have enabled our students to achieve an employment rate of more than 90 percent for the past five years," Brooks says. That rate refers to students finding jobs in a relevant industry field within three months of completing their studies. Brooks notes that for 2008, the employment rate reached 92 percent.

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