



Microsoft UK Education Partners in Learning Case Study



Fast Facts

Education Institution: The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA).

Country: Scotland

Web Site: www.sqa.org.uk

Profile:

SQA is an executive non-departmental public body and is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

The SQA has an annual turnover of approximately £51m, employs around 650 staff and works with 1,750 centres approved to offer our range of qualifications.

Partners in Learning

Partners in Learning is a Microsoft education investment initiative, delivered in Scotland as a partnership between the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Microsoft, and guided by an Advisory Council with representative from Learning and Teaching Scotland, HM Inspectorate of Education, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and others.

For more information about other Partners in Learning projects, please visit: www.microsoft.com/emea/PartnersinLearning.

Transforming the Content and Delivery of the ICT Vocational Curriculum

"We're delighted that Microsoft has decided to invest in Scotland's education and qualifications system, and we are very pleased to be involved in directing that investment.

This is trail blazing work which can only benefit Scotland's young people, Scotland's education community and ultimately, Scotland's economy as we strive to provide the skills and knowledge needed to allow Scotland to excel in the global market-place."

Anton Colella, Chief Executive, SQA,

Education Challenges

In striving to find a sustainable model for the ICT Vocational Curriculum in Scotland, the SQA faced three challenges:

- Students required, and employers demanded, skills and competencies on current ICT products. This created a need to have curriculum flexibility to respond to the fast moving software sector.
- Learning Providers required support to be able to deliver complex and changing courses.
- The SQA needed a framework to engage with all of the major players within the ICT industry.

In responding to the challenges, the SQA partnered with Microsoft to provide correct and appropriate solutions.

Curriculum

Through a modernisation programme, the SQA and Microsoft worked to renew the curriculum for ICT technicians and network & software engineers (Higher Nationals) by defining specifications that could be delivered using Microsoft Official Academic Courses for current and future products.

The result is four new awards giving complete coverage for full and part time ICT students on long programmes of study. Professional Development Awards were also created as subsets to meet the needs of those in employment requiring specific skills upgrade.

In helping the SQA to design the curriculum for users, Microsoft gave early input to the PC Passport award, now the fastest growing qualification in the SQA's portfolio.

Learning Providers

In addressing the needs of the learning providers, the SQA and Microsoft jointly set up a College-based consortium to support and develop the capacity of lecturers to deliver the new awards.

This consortium built on the Microsoft IT Academy model by extending to give learning providers the knowledge, support and technique to deliver Microsoft courses within academic curricula.

The consortium is built on a business model that is now self-sustaining, and has 70% participation from relevant Colleges.

Framework for Engagement

Microsoft actively helped the SQA to develop an engagement strategy, called DIVA, to engage with the ICT industry.

Now in its second phase of development, this initiative has seen the SQA engage with Apple, Avid, Cisco, CompTIA, Macromedia and Oracle, as well as its long standing partnership with Microsoft.

By acting as a responsible industry leader, Microsoft has helped a widespread engagement that is bringing current benefits to students and providers, and will enhance future economic competitiveness and prosperity for Scotland.

Microsoft®

Aberdeen College

has been offering Microsoft Office Specialist exams on the Office 2003 platform for a little under a year, reports Chris Osbeck at the Assessment Centre.

"In this time few difficulties have been encountered and we've had many candidates achieve Office Specialist qualifications."

Chris says: "Candidates have been pleased with the exam delivery system, the clarity of the questions in the exams, and the prompt issuing of certificates upon completion".

The College has found that many candidates are keen to progress onto MOS, after having completed ECDL, as it offers them a greater challenge and has the prestige of having the Microsoft branding.

Chris adds: "Following the completion of the first year, it is the aim of the college to increase the number of candidates it examines, by increasing the number and type of courses"

Adam Smith College,

At this Fife College, Alan Gannon, Department Head reports that coursework centred around Virtual PC and Microsoft Official Academic Curriculum courseware is paying off.

Within the department's HND Technical Support and HND Networking & Internet Technologies, numerous units are mapped to various Microsoft Curriculum.

Alan says "Using Virtual PC to deliver these courses has been a godsend, as up to that point we were using removable hard drives which apart from being bulky, were prone to failure.

"Virtual PC has solved these problems for us and also makes the courses easier to deliver," he adds.

"No more working in pairs, as each student now has the complete configuration required for a course on their own PC".

Alan adds that, as to be expected, they encountered a number of minor snags as the system bedded in, "but in the main it does what it says on the packet!"

Alan and his colleagues are about to launch a BSc in Applied Networking Technologies and he adds "Again we will be using Microsoft courseware, software and Virtual Server 2005, to enable students to build and test medium-sized enterprise network infrastructures,"

Edinburgh's Stevenson College,

Business and computing senior lecturer David Duncan says they introduced the Office Specialist program as part of the college's Access to HNC course in academic year 2004-05.

"To deliver this program we issued the students with the Microsoft Office e-learning library CD for home installation, and we also ran this program in our computer labs."

In addition to this David and his team provided the students with a series of related exercises developed internally. "They were also given access to online tests via the DCC Testing Centre – we used this resource for practice tests and as a 'Prelim' before taking the actual online test."

Student response to this program has been largely positive, although it had more appeal to mature students, and David says the delivery of the course continues to be a challenge.

"The students have found that a series of structured exercises which cover the main points more acceptable to the CD learning material."

He adds: "Students like the testing system and enjoy the challenge, but online testing is not for all."

Stow College

uses the Academy to teach all relevant units in HNC/HND courses. Feedback from students is very positive, appreciable of both the quality of materials and relevance to their chosen career.

In addition, the college has attracted European money to fund a course – SWIFT (Supporting Women into Information Technology). Ron Dillin, Department Head, explains: "SWIFT is aimed at women who are under-represented in the IT industry". The first group of students finished their coursework in June and a fresh group will start in August.

Stow's course is free to women aged 16 to 60 and students initially learn Microsoft's Office suite of programmes, before moving onto looking at PC faultfinding and repair.

"In one year these women will become Microsoft Certified Professionals, with all the skills needed to fix PCs when they crash, or upgrade computers as required. People with these skills and a Microsoft qualification can earn very good salaries while doing really interesting work," Ron adds.

Cardonald College

is fulfilling a key umbrella consortium lead role for a consortium of over 20 other member colleges. Deryck Nutley, Lead Centre Manager, explains that consortium membership covers the complete country

"This allows for a nationwide collaboration, to the mutual advantage of colleges, lecturers and students to take place," he says.

The collaboration involves curricular, technical, assessment and delivery support alongside the necessary professional development for both academic and technical staff.

Deryck adds: "The virtual national team has the experience and expertise to cover the wide range of Microsoft professional programmes. Furthermore, the group is well placed to respond rapidly to new qualifications as they emerge."

Additional benefits have been made possible because of the nature and size of the consortium, providing support for the training and assessment of students and staff."

Conclusion

Last word goes to Vanessa Ranaldi, Project Curriculum Manager at the Scottish Qualifications Authority, who emphasises that flexibility remains the key towards fulfilling the aims and objectives of the ICT Vocational Curriculum.

Vanessa says: "The general thrust of the modernisation programme has been to create a series of Microsoft-specific vendor type units within the qualifications framework.

"In the past we had found that a student would complete a Higher National programme – either a certificate or diploma – but then a potential employer would say they had to send the candidate on additional vendor training to make up that skill.

"Now in a direct link, the model gives the student an academic qualification and vendor training, and the employer receives a student with better skills and more ready for business."

At Higher Nationals level, courses in technical support, software development, computing, and computer networking each have some type of vendor unit embedded, be it that the unit is generic.

"The overall aim remains flexibility in both structure and programming for both student and lecturer and that is now being achieved," she adds.