



COMPTIA
A+[®]
COMPUTER SUPPORT
TECHNICIAN
PROGRAMME

Start A+ at
your school!

 **CompTIA**[®]



13

STEPS TO GETTING COMPTIA

A+

STARTED AT YOUR SCHOOL

The CompTIA A+ certification is an international industry credential that validates the knowledge of computer service technicians. Major hardware and software vendors, distributors and resellers accept A+ as the standard in foundation-level, vendor-neutral certification for service technicians. The exams cover a broad range of hardware and software technologies, but are not bound to any vendor-specific products. The skills and knowledge measured by the A+ exams were derived from an industry-wide and worldwide job task analysis.

1

Raise own awareness of benefits of running the programme at your establishment: visit the CompTIA Web site www.comptia.org and do some research — you'll find information here on test objectives, student and instructor testimonials, etc. Contact CompTIA and request their overview presentation. Visit schools that are already doing it. Ask CompTIA for a list in your area.

2

Establish how A+ certification can fit into your curriculum offer. Are you already offering similar curriculum, e.g. Cisco IT Essentials I & II? If not, would this new certification enhance your offer and attract students to your courses, perhaps as part of another qualification? If you are already delivering material which builds to potential A+ certification, it's only a small step to ensuring that all your students take this additional qualification. Exam costs are discounted for students if you are a CompTIA E2C member — contact CompTIA in the UK office on 020.7743.6153 for details.

3

If you wish to offer A+, make a case with the management of your establishment by establishing demand:

A. Check any local market research or skills analysis studies (Business Link, LSC, DfES 14-19 Curriculum, E-Skills) which reinforce the case for narrowing the skills gap in your area

B. Decide if suitable for KS4, 6th Form or both. Canvas past/present/potential students to gauge interest in the certification. For example, present the idea to students doing courses in other departments, etc. Build the course information into your Year 9 options choices and your school's careers guidance information.

C. Consider student selection carefully. Do you offer the course to anyone who is interested or do you 'select' based on some criteria. Some KS4 students will cope well with the course others would be better waiting until the 6th Form.

D. If you wish to consider offering the courses to the paying public to raise extra revenue then research your current enquiry base to confirm demand. Bear in mind they may not be familiar with this qualification — be prepared to sell it to them. Use this research to establish most in-demand mode of study. Ask questions, get to know your potential market.

E. Consider potential to feed A+ students on to other vendor courses at your establishment, for example Microsoft, Oracle and Cisco.

F. Conversely consider courses that could be run in the earlier years that will feed into the A+ course. E.g. of this could be IC3 offered by Certiport, www.certiport.com, etc.

4

Once demand is evident, **document course implementation** in line with the requirements of your own establishment. E.g. course materials, timetables, budget etc. Present to school management for approval.

5

Assess potential funding available to your establishment. (see insert)

6

Join **CompTIA through the E2C (Education to Careers™) programme**, to enable your school to get the most out of the delivery of this qualification.

7

Appoint or delegate an enthusiastic staff member the role of course leader/supervisor, to manage the process at your school. It is recommended (but not compulsory) that all trainers should have passed the A+ examination themselves. Members of E2C receive some free testing vouchers for instructors, when they join.

8

Apply for Centre approval from OCR (www.ocr.org.uk/ipro) and/or City and Guilds (www.e-quals.co.uk) to allow you to run the course in a QCA approved manner. If you will have a reasonable number of students undertaking this course then you may wish to consider applying to become an official testing centre as well. Details of how to do this are included with the examination board centre approval documents. If you do not become a testing centre then your students will need to travel to their nearest Pearson Vue (www.vue.com) or Thomson Prometric (www.prometric.com) testing centre to take the final A+ examination.

9

Market the training you offer, highlighting the desirability of A+ certification in the jobs market. Don't forget to mention progression. Offer the full range of certifications if possible.

10

Establish contacts with local businesses' ICT departments. Input can provide you with a perspective on employers' needs, links to their own contact base, referrals, opportunities to obtain surplus equipment, work placements, mentoring, etc.

11

Recruit students
See Appendix A for suggested prerequisites.

12

Prepare the classroom/lab. See Appendix B for Teacher/Lab resources, configurations and additional lab components.

13

Look out for unwanted and surplus computers. CompTIA is developing information on sources of computers for teardown. See the CompTIA Web site for the latest information.

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For further information about CompTIA membership and certifications, please e-mail e2cuk@comptia.org or call 020.7743.6153.

APPENDIX A

Suggested student prerequisites for A+

Students who would benefit from such a course are those with an interest in a computer related field; They could be students who want a career in the IT industry, possibly as an IT Technician, or they could use it as the first step to higher qualifications such as the CCNA. The course would also appeal to those students who just 'love messing with computers', but who will not be taking up a final career in the IT industry.

If you are considering offering the course to paying customers in the evenings and/or holidays then it would appeal to those who are looking for a career change into a computer related field. Technicians already working in such a field will benefit from the confirmation of their skill level as a result of completion of this certification or they could also use it as the first step to higher qualifications such as the CCNA.

Prerequisites for the course could include: computer literacy or basic familiarity with a computer; good reading and mathematics skills, although these are not compulsory prerequisites.

There is a range of test preparation software available, e.g. Self Test Software (www.selftestsoftware.com), that could assist you in determining the starting point of your students, if the school deems this necessary. Most schools already know the ability of their students much better than colleges tend to, as they have taught them for much longer. However, paying customers may benefit from using this route.

This software can also be used as mock exam material for the final preparation before the A+ examination is taken at the end of the course. You can also consider becoming a reseller, thus generating extra income for your school.

APPENDIX B – RESOURCES

Classroom/Lab

This course is best taught in a computer lab with internet access. The web is a great source of technical information. When you are teaching the software part of the course, access to computers is necessary. It is desirable to use a dedicated room for this course, as you will need to allow students to strip computers down and rebuild them, etc. This will require proper benching and tools, etc. If you do not have a dedicated room then the course can still be done, but you will need to consider the timetabling and planning requirements much more carefully.

The room chosen can be used for other classes when the A+ courses are not being taught. Ideally, these other classes should be restricted to similar courses, such as the Cisco CCNA and related courses, or the Microsoft IT Professional courses. If this is not possible then extra detailed planning and possibly storage facilities will be required.

If another room for lab work is available, then the computer hardware part of the class can be taught in this classroom.

One lab computer for every two students is an ideal situation but many classes have up to 3-4 students per lab computer. Lab computers do not need to be the latest or newest systems, but it helps if they are all identical. It is recommended that you do not use the computers used by other classes as students may tear down the machines. You should have a supply of redundant computers for this task, and CompTIA is working to establish sources of supply for this equipment.

When you replace your old PCs keep them for use in this and similar courses rather than selling them off.

Teacher Resources

- One LCD Projector (or TV with hook-up to computer)
- Workstation hooked up to network (both LAN and Net) with CD-Rom and CD burner for making copies of CDs, for collecting/showing student work and using teacher CDs that come with text.

Lab Resources

- Computers on LAN with Internet access — suggested ratio of one for every student (for theory work).
- One server to save class work (student presentations etc.)
- One lab area with tables, electrical outlets, extra network jacks and, if possible, elevated storage shelves for routers, switches and monitors.
- One or two storage cabinets for tools and consumables.
- Storage area for lab computers and spare parts (shelving, cabinet etc.)
- Lab (tear-down) computers — suggested ratio of one for every two students.
- One copy of the Win 98SE, Win 2000 Pro and Win XP Pro installation CDs for each lab PC.
- Copies of DOS Boot disks with FDISK etc.
- It may be useful to have a copy of Partition Magic on hand

Lab Computer Configuration

Old computers are acceptable, but a common configuration among all computers makes teaching the class easier.

- Computer with separate video, sound, network (Ethernet/Combo) cards
- Hard drive over 1 gig
- CD-Rom 32X or bigger
- 3 1/2" floppy drive
- Windows 98, XP or 2000 Operating System
- Keyboard and mouse
- Laser and inkjet printers

Additional Lab Components

- Extra hard drives
- Additional memory to install into lab computers
- Some SCSI cards with SCSI devices
- Network hubs
- Network Ethernet patch cables
- Network Thinnet Coaxial cables (along with terminals and T-connectors)
- Network crossover cables
- DCC cables (serial or parallel)
- Digital multi-metres with extra fuses and batteries
- Anti-static wrist straps (one per student) and mats
- Small toolkit for each lab group that includes: screwdrivers +/-, star, multiple head etc., crimpers, needle-nose pliers, cable cutters, electrical tape, small ruler, black felt pen, small roll of masking tape, small jar for screws, inexpensive cable tester, and torch
- Anti-virus software
- Extra computers or components to replace damaged equipment

THIS INFORMATION WAS PUT TOGETHER BY:

Bedford College	www.bedford.ac.uk
Bolton Curriculum ICT Centre	www.bgfl.org.uk
Bridgend College	www.bridgend.ac.uk
City of Sunderland College	www.citysun.ac.uk
Cornwall College St. Austell	www.st-austell.ac.uk
Deanery High School	www.deanery.wigan.sch.uk
Gateshead City Learning Centre	www.gatesheadclc.co.uk

Kingston University NTI	www.nti.kingston.ac.uk
Merton College	www.merton.ac.uk
NESCOT College	www.nescot.ac.uk
NTI Tyne and Wear and Northumberland	www.northumbria.ac.uk
NTI West Yorkshire	www.nti-westyorkshire.ac.uk
South East Essex College	www.southend.ac.uk
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funding for schools

Funding a CompTIA A+® Course

With the development of VRQs (Vocationally Related Qualifications), it is now possible for schools to deliver vocational courses such as CompTIA A+ courses, as well as courses for various other vendor certifications. Some of the new VRQs (specifically the City & Guilds e-Quals Diploma in Systems Support www.e-quals.co.uk and the OCR iPRO Certificate for IT Practitioners, www.ocr.org.uk/ipro) allow A+ to be delivered as a single embedded unit within the qualification.

The main advantage offered by the use of VRQs in the funding of vendor certification programmes, in the case of schools, is that they have been approved by QCA (www.qca.org.uk) and so are listed on the DfES approved courses list (www.dfes.gov.uk/section96). A secondary advantage is that the vendor certification exams are now recognised as the method of assessment for units of the funded qualification. This solves the problems that were traditionally encountered by schools wishing to follow this route.

In the case of CompTIA A+ certification, there are now two awarding bodies offering this certification as an embedded unit. These are City & Guilds (as part of the e-Quals suite) and OCR (in the iPRO suite).

In choosing between the City & Guilds and OCR qualifications as a funding vehicle for an A+ course, the following points should be considered:

- Both the OCR iPRO programme and City & Guilds e-Quals suite offers unit certification for the embedded A+ module. (This currently only applies to colleges)
- If you choose to run a full qualification rather than a single module, the additional modules required for the City & Guilds e-Quals programme map more closely to the A+ content than do those of the OCR iPRO programme.
- If considering progression routes, the OCR iPRO programme contains more embedded vendor-certified modules than the City & Guilds e-Quals programme, providing a smoother progression to Network+, CCNA and MCP.

THE FOLLOWING TABLE SUMMARISES THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE QUALIFICATIONS

	OCR iPRO	City & Guilds e-Quals
advantages	Flexible additional modules for full programme Best multi-vendor support	Additional modules for full programme map well to A+ content
disadvantages		No flexibility in choice of modules for full programme

Two common concerns specific to schools are the allocation of league table points and the allocation of university points to this type of course.

QCA have now solved the league table points issue by allocating the above courses points that can be used in the compilation of the league tables. These will be available from September 2004.

The question of vocational qualifications attracting University points is one that QCA is currently looking into and they hope to have a solution to the problem very soon.

It is fair to say that more and more universities are beginning to accept this type of course, and in fact are delivering them to their own students.

