



[Click here to print this page](#)



Exam-free MCSE warning

Patrick Lawnham

APRIL 10, 2002

FAKE Microsoft engineer certificates are being offered by degree racketeers, as the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee considers a national online verification service to fight counterfeiting.

Offers of fake degrees from Australian and other universities continue to be made by email and internet advertisements and on numerous dedicated websites despite monitoring by the institutions.

For \$US5000 (\$9460) - a fraction of the varying cost of courses and exams - aspirants to high-paying jobs can become a "Microsoft certified system engineer or administrator" exam-free in 40 days.

"You will receive a copy of the examination score report with your name, ID, registration ID, exam number, passing score, candidate score, grade and date. Your original certificate will be mailed to you directly from Microsoft," says the email offer.

The US software giant would not comment on its verification measures or any pressure it puts on forgers or scams.

One promoter is Dominica-based internet degree mill Saint Regis University, which says: "This program is offered by a third-party company through a service agreement."

Contacted by *The Australian*, Saint Regis "chief provost" Richard Hoyer initially said that "to the best of my knowledge, it is all on the level". Twelve hours later he emailed back to say: "I have elected to discontinue offering this program after further examination."

Next month an AVCC subcommittee headed by Newcastle University vice-chancellor Roger Holmes will report on measures to combat forged Australian degrees.

The AVCC is considering a proposal from a new company, degreeoftruth Pty Ltd, for a user-pays online verification service covering all degrees conferred by Australian providers since 1970.

Degreeoftruth director George Brown said the proposal followed the adoption of the National Protocols for Higher Education in 2000 for recognition of new providers and tighter definition of the word university in commonwealth and state legislation.

Mr Brown, an Adelaide-based manager of tertiary programs, is Australia's best known expert on degree mills and degree forgers, and says there are myriad websites from which anyone could buy a fake certificate (testamur) and transcript of subjects purporting to come from an Australian university.

The other director of degreeoftruth, Nick Mounstephen, said the proposal emulated models in the UK and China but also "streamlines the verification process by making

it totally web-based".

Newcastle University has become the latest institution to audit its computer security for possible cracking by fake degree merchants in the wake of internet offers of verifiable degrees and report no evidence of any tampering.

An offer of a verifiable Melbourne University bachelor degree and transcript within 21 days for about \$US7000 was received recently by the HES from an advertiser on a Singapore web portal. The offer, thought to be a scam, says degrees from most Australian universities are available.

The offerer expresses surprise that an Australian would be interested in buying a degree from an overseas source, saying "there are a lot of people or syndicate[s] over in Australia doing these verifiable degree[s]".

Far cheaper is the offer from a China-based website for an Australian bachelor degree certificate for only \$US235, or \$US475 "with completely customised set of transcripts" within 10 days.

The website, which displays a "Monash" certificate among its examples, expresses pique that other operators have been trying to rip it off.

It no longer sends samples direct to prospective buyers because "a competitor of ours ... was opening up free email accounts [and] using the samples we sent to them to create degrees for their customers. They were even so bold as to put a couple of our samples on their website."

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.
