

Microsoft, ADvTech team up for educational hackathon

Microsoft in partnership with ADvTech will host what they are calling the first-ever educational hackathon in the world, during September and October 2020. Set to take place virtually, students from across ADvTech schools in South Africa, Botswana and Kenya, will log on simultaneously and - in a race against the clock - troubleshoot and 'break' and improve, among others, MS Teams, the online learning solution used by ADvTech Schools during the nationwide Covid-19 lockdowns.



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“ADvTech, as a strategic Education partner of Microsoft, gets the opportunity to pilot education products from Microsoft before they are released to the general market,” says Quinton Mulder, Academic Development Coordinator at African private education provider, ADvTech.

He says the aim of the upcoming Hackathon is to provide Microsoft with user-generated insights to improve their products, particularly from the user experience point of view of students.

Called Hack-It, the competition will give students the chance to utilise their research and digital learning skills to analyse and evaluate Microsoft products, by harnessing their creative thinking skills to collaborate with their teams and develop innovative new ideas to improve software. They will be working directly with Microsoft teams with the aim to improve the MS Teams and OneNote environments.

“The process involves four steps – Hacking, Assessment, Creation and Knowledge transfer,” says Mulder.

- **Hacking** requires students to identify bugs, explore and find unexpected results in product utility, discover how to break something and learn what parts of the product don't work, and record their findings.
- **Assessing** requires students to identify feature gaps, in terms of ways to improve the product, exploring what is missing which could improve user experience, and gathering and organising ideas.
- **Creating** requires students to innovate – building something new through collaboration with the team to identify actionable ideas, and developing a strategy for implementation.
- **Knowledge transfer** lets students work with others to refine and improve upon identified ideas and producing solutions, and identifying avenues for ongoing collaboration.

Mulder says the decision to pilot the Hackathon in collaboration with ADvTech and its students represents a tremendous vote of confidence on the part of the global software giant.

Learner experience

It will also give students invaluable real-life exposure to machinations involved in software development.

“Students will work in a pre-set Teams and OneNote test environments and are challenged to test, troubleshoot and even break the products in any way they can, looking for behaviour that is either unintended in the software itself or features that can be manipulated for unintended use. This can be driven in any way our education partners see fit, either as a pre-planned objective or as a spontaneous ‘bug hunt’,” he says.

“Subsequently, their needs analysis developed in respect of their own learning and learning environment and mapping of their product against that marketplace, will give them experience that will be of real value in any real-life work environment.”

Mulder says students will be given the chance to write a wish list, mapped against their hack results and self-assessment, and develop a case study and proposal for future features which will be delivered straight to Microsoft Engagement and Engineering.

Creating creators

Stephen Reid, Senior Customer Engagement PM (EMEA) at Microsoft, says the company is committed to the development of student education and wellbeing, not just in school but beyond into the world of work and social engagement.

“The Hack-It programme is designed to help students become creators, not just consumers. By opening up our products to allow students to ethically hack, we are creating an ecosystem within our product portfolio that allows students to spend time exploring, understanding, reverse engineering and rebuilding our products in a way that makes sense to them, ultimately building critical skills for their future while allowing us to develop our products in direct alignment with their findings and ideas.”