



Q&A with Vaughan Fulmer on the ACC In-house Certification Program

Skills and Professional Development



In-house counsel must always hone their skills to compete in the ever-changing legal industry. To meet this demand, the [ACC In-house Certification Program](#) teaches in-house counsel the essential competencies that demonstrate their value to the business. The intensive program is virtual and attracts in-house counsel from around the world.

Vaughan Fulmer, general counsel and company secretary at Norilsk Nickel Australia, recently graduated from the virtual certification program. Below, he shares how the program teaches the practical skills that complement the knowledge taught at CLEs.



Vaughan Fulmer

General Counsel & Company Secretary

Norilsk Nickel Australia

ACC In-house Certification Program 2021 graduate

ACC: Why did you decide to participate in the ACC In-house Certification Program? What made it stand out?

Vaughan Fulmer: Although I'm a general counsel, I've been the sole legal counsel for my company for nine years and this can at times leave you feeling a little isolated from others in the profession. I find it doesn't matter how many CLEs you attend — it's important to be able to acquire and practice practical skills that support your ability to be a good in-house counsel.

Being able to develop that practical component is a big part of being an effective in-house counsel. I believe this program is unique in that there is simply nothing equivalent that provides these practical skills.

Can you share a key takeaway(s) from the program? In other words, what was a key lesson or message that you were able to take back and immediately apply in your legal department?

I took a lot away from the development of the corporate compliance program, and it gave me some key points to review in our own program here at Norilsk Nickel. I also enjoyed the session on legal risk management.

Before being becoming a lawyer, I was a health and safety professional for large mining companies, so risk assessment has been a large part of my existence. It was great to revisit this from a purely legal perspective.

How did you find the virtual format over two weeks, and did it still provide opportunities to connect and engage with your fellow attendees?

The virtual format worked surprisingly well for the completion of the practical aspects of the course. It also allowed for a large number of lawyers to attend from a range of jurisdictions. Of course, the downside of the virtual format was the lack of networking that you gain from the casual interactions you have if you were in the same room.

The curriculum for the program has been developed by our Education Advisory Council (EAC). What if any, additional skills or areas of focus do you believe would have made the program even stronger? Are there other skills the program should consider addressing in the future?

One additional skill that I have acquired elsewhere, such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors, is a finance/accounting for non-financiers. As an in-house counsel, it's important to be able to understand "the numbers" that often dictate key decisions.

The certification program intended to explore several core competency areas, including developing stakeholder relationships, law department management, and legal services. In your opinion, why are these skills — or core competencies

— essential for in-house success?

These are two key areas that in-house counsel must continue to develop and manage across their entire career. If you're unable to relate to your in-house client, you are going to struggle to implement any change or be actively involved in the business.

Looking back at the course, how will the In-house Counsel Certified (ICC) designation help advance your in-house career?

I believe that it identifies you as a lawyer who values staying up to date with the evolving roles and requirements of in-house counsel. While it may not be well understood by hiring managers yet, the certification provides you with a good point of differentiation to show that you have a broader and accepted skillset than those that have not undertaken the certification.

Would you recommend ACC's In-house Certification Program to your colleagues? What advice can you offer other corporate counsel who want to participate in the program, but may need to convince their GC or boss?

Yes, I would recommend that program to colleagues. I would advise them to delve into a bit more of the detail of the course content beyond the title of the modules and explain how these areas will make them a more valuable asset to their line manager and the broader operation. Some of these skills your line manager may have only acquired after years spent in the role so I'm sure they would appreciate a course that allows these to be acquired more expeditiously.

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