Chapter XV

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL): A Standard of Basic Competence for Personal Computer Users

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INTRODUCTION

There is a recognized need to spread computer literacy across every level of society to generate an inclusive global information society, in which every citizen has an opportunity to participate (WRC, 1998; Dolan, 1997; European Commission, 1996; Green Paper, 1996). The visionary comments and actions of Commissioner Bangemann of the European Commission sparked off the recognition of the need for a computer literate population. He suggested that launching initiatives in areas of education, training and work organization was a basic requirement for supporting inclusion for the citizen in the information society. Establishing the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) as a basic standard of computing competence for every citizen underpins this objective. Computer literacy programs based on encouraging and motivating people to obtain an ECDL support the objective of including all citizens in the development of our information society.

ECDL deployment programs have been launched to address the recognized need to increase computer literacy. Some of the issues raised in the European Commission reports were the following:

• Greater efforts must be made in our schools, to prepare the next generation to participate and benefit fully;
• Greater efforts must be made to stimulate European citizens to create content for new services whether education, entertainment or business;
• Continued efforts must be made to keep Europe at the forefront of technology.
and infrastructure development and deployment for everyone;
• Sustained efforts must be made to increase the public awareness of the
benefits of active participation in the information society;
• New collective efforts are needed to realize broader social benefits, particu-
larly at local and community level.

The European Computer Driving Licence addresses most of the above issues.
The overall objectives of the ECDL dissemination program are:
• To raise the level of computing competence for all European citizens, for those
in the work force, seeking to join the work force, for those at home and for
students.
• To increase the productivity of all employees who need to use the computer
in their work.
• To enable better returns from investments in information and communica-
tions technology.
• To ensure all computer users understand the “Best Practices” and advantages
of using a computer.

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is a certified standard of
basic competence for the users of a personal computer (any brand of personal
desktop or portable computer). The ECDL, discussed subsequently in detail in this
Chapter, is a certificate awarded to a person who has achieved a basic standard of
knowledge of the concepts of information and communications technology and has
acquired a basic standard of competence using a personal computer.

The objective of this chapter is to describe the ECDL standard. It gives the
background to what has been done in Europe, with the European Computer
Driving Licence (ECDL) initiative. It describes the ECDL standard in terms of
content, procedures for certification and the organization around the deployment
of the ECDL. It concludes by outlining the development plans for the ECDL and the
aspiration to establish a ‘de facto’ standard through the general acceptance and
worldwide take up of the ECDL concept.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The vision of a Computer Driving Licence (CDL) was first formulated in
Finland in the early 1990s. The vision was realized in Finland with the introduction
in January 1994 of the first Computer Driving Licence certification and deployment
program. The program was support by the Ministry of Education, the Central
Organization of Finnish Trade Unions, the Confederation of Finnish Industry and
Employers, the Finnish Information Processing Association and the Ministry of
Labour. The first Computer Driving Licences were awarded in early 1994 and well
in excess of 45,000 have been issued.

The ‘Computer Driving Licence’ concept is based on the idea of a certified
standard of basic competence for computer users. The driving licence establishes
a standard for everyone who uses a computer in either a professional or a personal
capacity. It is a certificate that verifies a user’s competence, declares his or her
computer skills and makes them readily mobile within the global information
society and business world. The licence targets competence in, what might be
termed, current office applications independent of the specific software or actual
Duties and Ethics of Information Scientists
www.igi-global.com/chapter/duties-ethics-information-scientists/45382?camid=4v1a