

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

ICDL Makes a Difference in US Prisons – Inmate Education with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

Background

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) began delivering the ICDL programme in October 2007. This ICDL project has been funded centrally by the DOC, allowing inmates in 26 facilities to access an ICDL training and certification programme. Access to ICDL for each inmate involves a 75-hour training programme, taken over the course of one year, after which the inmate is invited to sit the certification examinations for ICDL modules 3,4,5,6¹.

According to Mr. Richard Lepley, Curriculum Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Correction, the main reason for choosing to deliver ICDL to Pennsylvania inmates was that “the DOC was looking to bring professionally recognised industry standards into inmate education.”

Why ICDL was Chosen

As part of a market-wide assessment of potential programmes that would be appropriate for delivery in correctional facilities, the DOC reviewed a large number of certification programmes in the area of basic/intermediate ICT skills development. In many cases, programmes did not match the requirements set out by the DOC due to one of the following reasons: the lack of international acknowledgement and recognition, the lack of employer endorsement, a limited syllabus, or the requirement for online access. In addition to this, the ICDL certificate was seen a valuable qualification for inmates to be able to present to potential employers upon their release from prison.

Flexibility of Delivery - Key to ICDL's Success in Secure Facilities

Delivery of certification tests in secure facilities usually requires a unique solution. In many cases, owing to the level of security required by each facility, it can be problematic to provide access to technology and to testing resources. In order to successfully deliver the ICDL programme, manual testing was implemented in all 26 facilities. Mr. Lepley has confirmed that the DOC has processed more than 1,000 candidates each year since 2007 through the ICDL programme.

“The flexible methods of delivery were a huge plus for ICDL in the State Correctional Institutions (SCI) facilities”, said Mr. Lepley, when referring to the ability of inmates to access an internationally respected certification, despite the fact that they cannot be provided with access to the Internet from within a secure facility. Mr. Lepley also feels that the length and breadth of learning available to inmates within the ICDL programme is ideal, allowing inmates to focus their attention on complex areas of ICT learning. This, in his opinion, has helped to change the attitude of inmates toward each other and education in general whilst incarcerated.

¹ For a detailed explanation of the ECDL / ICDL modules and certification structure, please visit: www.ecdl.org

Mr. Lepley adds a particular point about ICDL:

“Inmates see it as an attainable goal, and it, therefore, offers more encouragement than other computer programmes to continue studying. It keeps them committed and encourages a positive outlook preparing them for successful re-entry into society. It helps them make a change in their life.”

He added, “It puts candidates into a learning mode and encourages them to keep a clean sheet while incarcerated”.

Impact of Educational Programmes - Including ICDL - in Correctional Facilities

The importance of education in correctional facilities has been discussed in a number of high-level research studies on correctional education in the U.S. One of these studies, ‘Three State Recidivism Study’, conducted by the Correctional Education Association (CEA), has established a decline in the rate of recidivism for inmates exposed to education whilst incarcerated. Mr. Lepley believes that the ICDL and other educational programmes within SCI facilities are helping to reduce recidivism by between 8-11%; this reduction is seen as a substantial return on investment for Pennsylvania.

According to the authors of the ‘Three State Recidivism Study’:

“The drop in recidivism in each state clearly indicates that the (educational) programme returns at least \$2 for every \$1 spent in terms of saving cell space on those who do not return to the system. While it is difficult to generalise the results of a study from one state to another, the fact that recidivism results were similar in three different states is very encouraging.” “While the saving in dollars is important, the reduction in crime itself cannot easily be translated into dollars.”²

Pennsylvania currently has a prison population of approximately 44,000 inmates - one of the largest prison populations in the U.S.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections is constantly looking at ways to decrease the number of those incarcerated and combat the issues which can lead to re-offending. ICDL and other educational programmes are considered a means of reducing aggressiveness between inmates whilst incarcerated, and help to cut the number of those that may potentially re-offend.



² OCE/CEA – Three State Recidivism Study, September 30, 2001

The 'Three State Recidivism Study' baseline data on recidivism after accessing DOC educational programmes in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio:

Recidivism Data by State

		Participants	Non-Participants
Maryland			
Re-arrest	840	52%	56%
Re-conviction	840	32%	36%
Re-incarceration	840	31%	38%
Minnesota			
Re-arrest	1025	43%	54%
Re-conviction	1025	25%	34%
Re-incarceration	1025	14%	22%
Ohio			
Re-arrest	1234	51%	58%
Re-conviction	1234	26%	34%
Re-incarceration	1234	24%	32%

In September 2010, ICDL US introduced the Syllabus Version 5.0 manual testing to PA Department of Corrections. A full roll-out to all 26 facilities is expected to be completed by early 2011.

