SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES (ITALY)

ICT skills in the Italian Education System – ECDL as the National Standard in Schools and Universities

Background and Policy Context

An agreement was signed between the Italian Ministry of Education and the Italian Computer Society (AICA) in 1999 making ECDL the official standard for evaluating computer skills in the Italian education system. This agreement is renewed every three years with the aim of improving its implementation and activities, and ensuring successful execution of the agreement and continuous monitoring of the results.

The agreement involves all schools and universities at national level and focuses in particular on the promotion of ICT skills certification, the validation of excellence, and the realisation of multimedia projects based on a methodology which enhances problem solving and interactive teaching.

The partnership between the Ministry of Education and AICA is of key importance for the successful implementation of the initiative, as AICA provides technical and organisational support. In particular, AICA agreed to offer schools special prices to participate in the programme, as well as a discounted purchasing price for the ECDL Skills Cards. Special discounts to Accredited Test Centres are agreed for Skills Cards and automated tests.

Why ECDL for the Italian Education System?
The choice of ECDL as the official standard for evaluating computer skills in the Italian education system was made on account of the reputation of ECDL being officially recognised as the leading European ICT skills certification.

Aims and Objectives of the Agreement with the Italian Ministry of Education
The initiative aims to enhance digital literacy and improve the connection between schools, higher education, and the world of work.

The agreement outlines four common objectives:

- To diffuse digital literacy through the promotion of the internationally recognised computer skills certification, ECDL; the use of specific teaching material, the exchange of experiences and information, and the monitoring of digital skills
- To validate excellence through the organisation of specific competitions (e.g. the Informatics Olympic Games and online problem solving contests) and through the award of prizes to the winning schools or students
- To enhance synergies between the education system and the marketplace through the promotion of European professional certifications and specific training tailored to companies' needs
- To promote multimedia and e-learning projects based on interactive methodologies and implemented through specialised labs

Delivery Details

For successful implementation of the agreement, as well as to guarantee continuous monitoring of the results, a joint AICA-Ministry committee has been appointed. The committee launched a series of initiatives, such as 'ECDL Docenti', offering free training courses to 900,000 school teachers to obtain ECDL certification.

The latest version of the agreement, signed on 1 April 2009, reveals a stronger mutual commitment to strengthen the Information Society through the promotion of various activities for the widespread development of digital skills and the recognition of the latter through ECDL certification. It also reflects the need for an adaptation of digital skills training for the reformed school system (the new school system in Italy is composed of five study streams: classical, scientific, technological, musical-artistic, and linguistic). The modular structure of ECDL provides flexibility and, therefore, perfectly suits the requirements of the different school streams, enhancing an education system that is able to provide tailored skills for specific professional roles[1]. ECDL training can be adapted in each school so that the students can learn how to use ICT in a more specific way, depending on their area of study. For example, students from musical school learn applications specifically related to music and arts, whilst students from technological schools focus on applications specifically related to science subjects.

Implementation and Funding

The project does not receive any funding from the government, with each student paying for the certification.

From a technical point of view, ECDL training and testing are carried out by teachers and examiners in schools which have become Accredited Test Centres. Test sessions are supported by a testing system specifically designed by AICA.

Impact

Since the initial agreement with the Ministry of Education, approximately 640,000 candidates from the public school sector and approximately 200,000 university students have obtained ECDL certification.

A total of 80 middle schools, 1,900 high schools and 200 universities have been involved in the initiative to date.

Various education institutes have also made ECDL a prerequisite for enrollment on university courses. Additionally, to hold an ECDL certification is positively valued by employers of several work fields.

[1] For a detailed explanation of the ECDL certification programme and the modules offered, please visit: www.ecdl.org