

## ICDL GCC calls for urgent steps to tackle IT illiteracy

Governments and educational institutions should give top priority to IT education from the school level

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Accelerated pace of computer literacy holds the key to the Middle East's ability to achieve fast economic growth and catch up with the developed nations, says ICDL GCC Foundation, the governing body of ICDL programme in the Gulf States and the regional arm of European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

"Information Age and Knowledge Economy represent the core of modern business," says Jamil Ezzo, Director General of ICDL GCC Foundation. "In the near future, the very survival of an individual at the workplace will be linked to his levels of computer literacy. To some extent, this is already happening."

"Organisations must recognise the need for timely managerial reforms to improve managerial efficiency and focus on organisational restructuring. Decentralised management with a keen stress on transparency and a vision to constantly innovate, will maximise employee productivity and efficiency," added Ezzo.

While in recent years, the speed of IT penetration in most countries in the Middle East has picked up considerable momentum, led by government-level initiatives, ICDL GCC Foundation believes that a more aggressive campaign to promote computer literacy among all segments of society is needed to bring the majority of the people into the computer literacy net.

"The world is witnessing a dramatic transformation in which proficiency in computers is the driving force to socio economic development," says Ezzo. "Whether you are a traveling salesman or site inspector or a university professor, expert knowledge of computers can help raise performance, stay connected and work from anywhere. In the days ahead, the mobility factor is going to play an increasingly important role, and people would be required to communicate and exchange data through mobile devices."

Referring to the role of ICDL programme, Ezzo said all over the world ICDL has been instrumental in raising the performance levels of people in all scenarios, and pointed out that ICDL GCC Foundation was working closely with GCC governments to suggest ways of increasing IT penetration in society and among government employees.

Both developed and developing countries are using their investment in ICT to reform education. ICT is transforming schools and classrooms by bringing in new curricula based on real world problems, providing tools to enhance learning.

"Education is at the core of the knowledge economy and learning society, making it crucial to implement timely reforms in the educational sector. Global market competition, growing access to primary education, and ICT has created a fast growing demand for more and better secondary education services and a need to improve the quality of education," remarked Ezzo.

"Quality reforms should aim at generating the types and levels of skill that students will need in an internationally competitive economy. The greatest need is for higher-order cognitive skills, such as those in learning, problem-solving and making judgments under conditions of uncertainty."

Pointing out the importance of early introduction of ICT to schools, Ezzo said, "Governments and other decision makers have to recognise that, today PC skills are just as important to students as basic skills of reading and writing. The earlier ICT is introduced in school curricula, more effective and fruitful it will be for students."

"A major area in which governments can contribute towards increasing computer literacy is allocating funds for providing cost-effective learning opportunities to people," said Ezzo. "The price of computers and fees charged by computer training institutes are sometimes beyond the reach of the common man in some countries in the region. The authorities need to address this problem by providing subsidies and incentives."

"ICDL's global expertise in delivering systematic and customised computer training can help countries in the region narrow the digital divide between them and the developed world," added Ezzo. "To many governments, it is a challenging job, given social and economic constraints, but what is most important is commitment and conviction

## In the news

that computer knowledge is the key to success in today's world. It is also the key to higher learning and knowledge enhancement. Once a person is properly computer trained, he can be a success in any field."

Commenting on ICDL's success in Ireland, Ezzo said, "More than 6 per cent of Ireland's population is ECDL certified and we have managed to create around 4,400 jobs. All our programmes have been strongly supported by the government of Ireland." ICDL has contributed significantly to the economic progress and overall development of Ireland, which has the second largest growing GDP.

## About ICDL

International Computer Driving License (ICDL), is an internationally recognized computer proficiency standard that is owned by the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) and introduced by the UNESCO's Cairo Office (UCO) for Arab states in 2001. ICDL is gaining increasing acceptance in the Middle East, with several governments adopting as a requirement to their employees. The ICDL program exists in over 132 countries, and is offered in 32 languages, including Arabic. The programs offered are all based on one standard syllabus and question set. There are more than 15,000 centres worldwide, and over 10 million exams have been taken globally since the launch of the program.

## About ICDL GCC Foundation

ICDL GCC Foundation was created by the ECDL Foundation, the not-for-profit global governing body of the ECDL and ICDL member countries dedicated to helping raise the general level of computer skills in societies and providing access for all to the information society, to serve the to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States with their implementation of ICDL and for providing them with localised support to ensure quality of ICDL programs. The ICDL-GCC Foundation is the sole ICDL licensee and accreditation body that is responsible to support ICDL accredited training and testing centres in the GCC. It also acts as the reviewing and approving body for the local adaptation of ICDL programs, including authorizing the sale of Arabic ICDL content and testing material in the region.

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