

Digital literacy widespread among educators and public sector employees in the Gulf region

ECDL Foundation ranks GCC region third in the world in digital literacy advancement

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ICDL GCC Foundation, the governing body of the International Computer Driving License program in the Gulf States has announced that the digital skill gap in the region has undergone a sharp decline during 2005. The decline was described to be primarily in the educational and public service sectors. The GCC region was also declared as the world's third most advancing region toward a digital literate society by ECDL Foundation.



In an effort to transform learning and to improve student participation, a record number of schools and universities in the region have integrated the ICDL syllabus in their curriculum, and made the ICDL certification an essential qualification for their faculty and staff. As a result, over 32,000 GCC educators have enrolled in the ICDL certification program during 2005 alone. ICDL GCC Foundation considers educators the largest single group who undertook the ICDL program last year.

The second largest group that participated in the ICDL certification program during 2005 is government employees. Over 37 percent of the government organizations in the region have adopted the ICDL program and required their employees to validate their computer skills by taking the ICDL official test as part of a strategy to increase efficiency, drive up quality of service, and reduce cost on IT support. This group included employees of civil service and defence ministries, as well as semi-government organizations.

"The ICDL program in the GCC has doubled the number of participants during 2005 and we expect the numbers to increase even more during 2006. We strongly believe that those who do not jump on the bandwagon of digital literacy are likely to face difficulties in their jobs in the near future. Our digital literacy program has proven to influence the experience of candidates and its effectiveness not only on individuals but also on societies," said Jamil Ezzo, Director General, ICDL GCC Foundation.

"The GCC has ranked third in the world during 2005 in the drive to create a digital society. The region has also registered a dramatic increase in the implementation of the ICDL program", added Ezzo, "This is all attributed to the notable initiatives taken by several policy-makers in the region that focus on the need of digital literacy in government to improve the delivery of health and education services and to create a competitive economy."

"Despite the many achievements in the region, we believe that the road is still ahead in furthering digital literacy. ICT has become essential to socioeconomic growth as it creates new sources of income and employment opportunities. However, investment in ICT infrastructure must go hand-in-hand with basic IT training for all citizens. Digital literacy should be made available to all citizens by establishing national computer training institutes that offer free or subsidized training. Ultimately, a population that is e-literate is likely to apply its skills towards economic and social productivity," Ezzo concluded.