

Saudi Government and private sectors endorse ICDL as key employment criteria

Initiative complements Saudization program and boosts career prospects of Saudi nationals in IT sector

May 20, 2009

Government departments and business enterprises in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have recently implemented several key measures, including the endorsement of International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) certification, as a major criterion for employment, as part of a long-term strategy to support the Saudization program. The initiatives are designed to boost the IT expertise of the local workforce and increase the number of qualified Saudi nationals in the IT sector.

ICDL complements the Kingdom's Saudization program as IT skills and knowledge have become increasingly important factors in the growth strategies of various business organizations and in the government's goal of consolidating Saudi's status as a key growth economy in the Middle East. This has prompted a government-led campaign to enhance the IT competency of nationals and encourage them to participate in ICDL programs.

Studies have shown that Saudization faces several challenges, including the scarcity of qualified human resources in the IT field. ICDL Saudi Arabia, the governing body and certification authority of the ICDL program in the KSA, has responded by enhancing its IT literacy campaign and helping equip a greater number of nationals with basic skills to use computer and internet applications and ultimately acquire ICDL certification. Furthermore, ICDL's efforts support the Kingdom's goal of promoting Saudization on a much larger scale and across various fields.

"IT literacy has become an essential criterion in the recruitment field due to its extensive use in areas such as e-governance. IT solutions are rapidly replacing traditional systems, and so human resources need to be familiar with essential IT skills. We will continue to help nationals acquire essential IT skills as our own way of contributing to Saudization. By endorsing the ICDL certificate, governments and private organizations will enable many nationals to successfully enter the job market. This will lead to enhanced competition based on the highest levels of quality and excellence. We will continue to cooperate with authorities in the KSA and the whole Gulf area to develop initiatives that help strengthen the IT sector," said Dr. Sulaiman Al-Dhalaan, Managing Director, ICDL Saudi Arabia.

ICDL certification has gained a strong reputation as an important indicator of IT literacy, making it an effective initiative to help address unemployment. The unemployment rate in the KSA was around 27 per cent among women and 8

per cent among men during the first half of 2007. Statistics show that 46 per cent of jobless men are between 20 to 24 years old, while 45 per cent of unemployed women are between 25 to 29 years of age. Meanwhile, expatriates comprise an estimated 88 per cent of the Saudi workforce. By adopting ICDL as an IT standard, the Saudi government is at the same time making a significant step to improve the career prospects of the youth and ultimately overcome the problem of unemployment.

KSA has been investing heavily in IT infrastructure, supporting e-systems, and providing IT services for various fields over the past few years in line with its strategy of using modern technology to attain sustainability. On the other hand, many universities, governmental agencies and businesses have established training centers and offer ICDL tests to ensure that the highest international standards are adopted to qualify Saudi nationals and prepare them to join the work force.

ICDL is a vendor-neutral digital literacy program that is acknowledged through testing and proves that the certificate holder has fundamental skills in IT, using the computer, managing files, word processing, spreadsheet, database, presentation, and handling of the internet and e-mail. The ICDL certificate is recognized and endorsed by education ministries, universities and government organizations with accreditations from over 168 countries and available in more than 40 languages.