

ECDL at the French Ministry of Defence

Project Background

The French Army now requires that all Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) show comprehensive basic ICT skills before being introduced to complex military technologies.

Since November 2009, ENSOA, the National NCO School has included the ECDL programme in its curriculum. ENSOA is the first Ministry of Defence (MoD) school that has joined the ECDL community in France. Having agreed to deploy ECDL, ENSOA purchased 1,000 Skills Cards.

In February 2010, more than 200 candidates attended the first ECDL test session. Since then many test sessions have been undertaken by hundreds of ENSOA candidates. With each candidate passing a test session, ENSOA and MoD satisfaction with the impact and quality of ECDL has increased.

Project Description

In January 2009, Olivier Goulas met the Ministry of Defence in Paris, a Ministry known to be very conservative and cautious with innovation and “not-invented-in-France” systems. However, following Olivier’s meeting, a presentation was sought and delivered in July 2009 by the Colonel in charge of the ENSOA School.

The meeting was attended by ENSOA School IT Staff in order to assess the requirements for delivering the ECDL certification programme in an offline environment. In total, 15 representatives from the School Management took part in the presentation.

Following on from a successful presentation and subsequent accreditation of the School’s technical and quality capabilities, sample tests and materials were sent to the School’s Managers for testing and approval.

The decision to proceed with ECDL was made despite strong competition from Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS), the French public certifications body which provide the B2I for Adults and also the C2I which is used primarily by the Ministry of Education.

One of the biggest challenges with this project was the provision of automated testing in a highly secured LAN environment. A solution was found based on an off-line test system made possible thanks to the INCA ATES used by ECDL France.

INCA offers a Client-Server architecture which fits these restricted requirements and has been used in many other restricted environments in France, such as prisons and large commercial companies.

Since the access to Internet was not possible from any PC terminals used by ENSOA Officers, the local server architecture of the INCA platform allowed ENSOA IT technicians to load all test sessions and exam results from one secured place. Once the information was made available at one of the secure online places within the school, the information would be synchronised with the National Server residing in ECDL France.

Impact & Quotes

The impact of introducing ECDL at ENSOA is significant and evidenced by the many comments taken from conversations between ECDL France and Norbert Mattiuzo, the key person at the ENSOA school advocating for the use of ECDL. Norbert explains why ECDL was chosen and its impact within the School just a few months after its introduction:

“We opted for the ECDL first because it is an internationally recognised certification with a real value in the professional world. The obligation to follow the ECDL Syllabus led us to follow an innovative approach in our pedagogy, opening our vision often restricted to the internal tools and existing methodologies of the MoD”.

“Another advantage of the ECDL is its flexibility thanks to its modularity and the fact that failing an ECDL test does not mean a personal failure but an incentive to become better and pass the next time.”

ECDL is a challenge for all ENSOA ICT Teachers since they must pass the certification themselves, and then bring their students through the certification.

Some of the changes made to IT training at ENSOA:

1. The number of training hours was increased (4 additional hours were agreed to assist those with the least IT skills)
2. A virtual online environment was built to allow everyone to access the courses and exercises in order to better prepare for ECDL

The ECDL training programme is an in-depth comprehensive project within ENSOA. With the dedication of both staff and teachers at ENSOA, this project continues to provide the MoD and their NCOs with the skills they require for the 21st century.

At ENSOA ECDL certification for NCOs is taken very seriously as it represents the final aspect of their training. An illustration of this is the fact that an entire page in the Professional Booklet of every pupil is dedicated to ECDL and the details of results in each module are registered there.

As of today, a large majority of Officers reported a positive appreciation for the ECDL programme. ECDL France is now preparing to offer high-level staff the opportunity to take ECDL which now seems to be a popular undertaking for those approaching retirement as they believe that ECDL would assist them in securing new employment once retired from active service in the military.

As stated by Norbert Mattiuzo, the impact of ECDL has been very positive for ENSOA. The MoD's interest in the ECDL programme is yet another acknowledgment of the importance of basic ICT skills. In September 2010, the MoD has decided to increase its use of ECDL in training of NCOs by enrolling over 4,000 soldiers in the ECDL certification programme.