

The Implementation of ECDL in the German Federal School System

Background – German Education System

Germany is made up of 16 separate federal states (Bundesländer). Each state has a large degree of autonomy, particularly in budget distribution, but also at a strategic and policy level as to how educational initiatives and policies are implemented within the different education sectors (secondary and vocational) and also how these policies are financed and delivered within that state. Each state has an individual education ministry which takes a limited amount of direction from central government as to the education areas that their systems should cover. At central level, the importance of ICT skills has been highlighted and communicated to each individual state's education ministry. However, each state maintains their own autonomy in the individual ICT skills programmes they choose to endorse and in how they implement them.

Why ECDL was Chosen

ECDL Germany has signed framework agreements with 10 of the 16 federal states, which endorses and permits the delivery of ECDL within the education sectors as a recognised standard of digital literacy and ICT competence within those particular states, and also internationally. The compelling reasons for these individual states governments in endorsing ECDL are based on:

- Its independence (i.e. vendor-neutral certification)
- Its international recognition
- The cost effectiveness of its implementation
- Its recognition as a quality certification built and validated by independent experts from across the world

Both central and state governments have identified the importance of foundational education in ICT and media in the wider context of economic and social development in Germany. Integrating this foundational education into existing education structures presents its own challenges. Through working with ECDL Germany, these governments have been provided with appropriate solutions to these challenges. Today, ECDL Germany is working on an ongoing basis in the deployment of ECDL to secondary and vocational schools within each state. A series of teacher training programmes has been embedded into many schools, resulting in ECDL being delivered as part of the annual curriculum to students.

Delivery on Bundesland Educational Strategy

Common across all Bundesländer is the role of socio-economic development within each state. Investment in capital infrastructure and education are the foundations on which socio-economic progress occurs. The role of ICT and media, from a technology and from a skills perspective, is of vital importance. As each state recognises the role that technology can play, they have recognised that skills, not just at the implementation and innovation levels, are important, but also that users' skills are integral for the successful uptake and adoption of technology. Consequently, the individual state education ministries have integrated ICT and media skills into their education policies, both within secondary level and vocational educational institutions.

Suitability of ECDL to Educational Streams

Key to the adoption of ECDL into the individual education programmes within secondary and vocational schools has been the ability of its modular structure to work in tandem with existing ICT skills training classes¹. The ECDL syllabus provides an up-to-date and clear path which teachers/instructors can follow and can integrate with other subjects where appropriate. The availability of up-to-date courseware and the ability for schools to become Accredited Test Centres further simplified the implementation of ECDL in schools.

The provision of additional supporting material through ECDL Germany's 'moodle' learning platform, when combined with approved e-learning and published courseware, and the secure automated testing system, provides a ready-made, cost effective solution which is simple for schools to implement.

Delivery Details

The project rollout takes place in four phases:

- Signature of Framework Agreement - During this phase, the framework agreement is reviewed and negotiated between ECDL Germany and the state's Education Ministry. The ECDL programme is technically aligned with the state's 'ICT in Education' requirements.
- Dissemination of ECDL Information to Schools - Following signature, a programme of information dissemination to schools in the state is undertaken. Schools with an appropriate interest and the facilities to deliver ECDL certification sign up as partners to the programme and become ECDL Accredited Test Centres.
- Teacher Training Programme - ECDL Germany engages in a teacher training programme within the schools. Teachers of informatics are trained and certified in ECDL, and are then equipped to oversee the implementation of training to their students.
- Student Training Programme - Students undertake the ECDL certification programme - usually over the course of one or two academic years.

Impact of the Project

To date, the largest 10 of the 16 states within Germany have signed landmark framework agreements, accepting ECDL as the recognised benchmark standard for ICT skills competence in secondary and vocational schools. The remaining six states are currently engaged in discussion to sign framework agreements. To date, already 400 secondary schools and 400 vocational schools have become ECDL Accredited Test Centres.

Approximately 3,000 teachers and almost 50,000 students have already enrolled in ECDL programmes, and this number continues to grow as the annual programme of rollout to secondary and vocational schools in each state progresses.

Most importantly, ECDL's growing successful implementation in the vocational education sector has been recognised by the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – BIBB (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training). In October 2010, President of BIBB, Mr. Manfred Kremer, completed his full ECDL certificate.