

Workforce Development Agency (Singapore) - Promoting Recovery, Enhancing Productivity

Background and Aims

Being vulnerable to global economy shocks, Singapore was the first East Asian country to fall into a recession from the global economic crisis after July 2008. To manage the economic slowdown and, in particular, to save jobs and build up capabilities for recovery, the Singapore Government quickly launched a series of initiatives to help industry.

Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (SPUR) is an enhanced funding scheme developed to up-scale training programmes, launched by Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and its tripartite partners, the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF).

During early 2009, when SPUR was launched, WDA Generic Skills Development Division was looking for a computer skills training programme that would improve workers' employability and build up their capacity for economic recovery. After consultation with their stakeholders, they elected to integrate the ICDL programme into these efforts.

ICDL Meets WDA's Strict Quality Control Standards

ICDL Singapore met with WDA and provided further endorsements and case studies from across the world. WDA was quite satisfied with the nature of the ICDL programme, although it required several additional assurances to the programme operation before it could be approved under the SPUR scheme.

WDA requested ICDL Singapore to conduct an additional audit of the existing centres and to only recommend centres which meet with all the criteria jointly set by WDA and ICDL Singapore to be SPUR centres. These criteria include:

- A minimum of three years of testing experience with ICDL, achieving excellence grading in all areas in the centre auditing
- At least two full-time trainers with 3-5 years of training experience
- More than 800 candidates per annum and positive candidate feedback
- No historical complaints recorded and a good corporate/client reputation from the industry#

WDA also requested ICDL Singapore to implement standard courseware for the four SPUR centres, so that the training quality could be standardised. In response to this request, ICDL Singapore carefully selected one of the globally reputed courseware offerings and distributed it to the SPUR centres whenever needed.

All SPUR funded centres operate ICDL at a standard price rate. The training package includes ICDL registration (Skills Card number), 1-2 days training, depending on the module, and one standard courseware book. This standardisation of pricing eliminates the potential price war among the centres, thus forcing them to compete on other criteria, such as the quality of the training programme.

WDA selected the ICDL programme as an independent international benchmark certification with transparent regulations, processes, and operating principles, that could be officially endorsed and adopted by all stakeholders in the workforce development process – the government (WDA as funder), the employers (through SNEF), and the employees themselves (through NTUC).

Impact and Funding

From 15 July 2009, the ICDL programme was officially listed under the SPUR scheme until 31 March 2011. Under the SPUR scheme, 90% of the course fee is covered by the government, capped at S\$11 per trainee per hour. In addition, the employers who send staff for training will get absentee payroll of 90% of hourly basic salary, capped at S\$10 per trainee per hour. Therefore, for a S\$300 course, the employer is able to send their staff for ICDL training at almost zero cost.

By the end of March 2010, approximately 9,400 tests had been conducted in Singapore, of which 6,400 tests (or 70%) were under the SPUR scheme. Employers who send their staff to ICDL training and certification include a number of multinationals and large local corporate organisations, such as: Hitachi, Panasonic, BNP Paribas, Danone, OCBC Bank, DBS Bank, Shangri-la Hotel, Singapore Police Force, Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Additionally, in November 2010, ICDL signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the SWDA, aligning certain Singaporean national ICT training frameworks (namely the ES WSQ Programmes) to the ICDL programme.

According to Dr. Hee Soo Yin, Director, Generic Skills Development Division of WDA:

“The collaboration between WDA and ICDL will also add value to individuals who, on achieving the ES WSQ Statement of Attainment for successful completion of relevant ES WSQ ICT Programmes, will also be conferred the relevant internationally recognised ICDL certification.”