

COVER STORY

New computer training certification

Introduction of International Computer Driving Licence will affect millions of workers and jobseekers and may drive many colleges out of business

BY JEVANS NYABIAGE

Want to drive computers? Now you need a licence. This is the new government order expected to push hundreds of colleges across the country out of business. If you want to teach in government schools you must have this document, referred to as International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL), the new standard for computer literacy in Kenya.

The government, through the Ministry of Information and Communications, now recognises ICDL as the only basic computer literacy certification, which is offered by a few training institutions in Kenya.

In a gazette notice dated November 2, 2009, Information and Communications minister Samuel Poghiso amended the policy guidelines on training in the country and set ICDL certification as the entry level computer certification to demonstrate competence in computer use. Under the proposed training curriculum, the minimum level for computer literacy will be an International Computer Driving Licence - a vendor neutral standard that is not linked to any software.

"The lack of standards on IT-related courses has encouraged the mushrooming of colleges that offer anything in the name of IT skills," says Dr Bitange Ndemo, the Information Permanent Secretary.

Kenyan employers have complained loudly that the lack of standardised training has left them with the burden of investing in skills upgrade for any new employees adding to their labour costs.

Quality & efficiency

Last month, the Kenya ICT Board chairman Paul Kukubo proposed that an international academic institution or stand-



ards body be hired to develop and implement a software developer certification programme for Kenya.

Many IT experts have blamed the lack of quality and efficiency benchmarks for the slow pace of growth in the ICT. Mr David Svarrer of Digital Age Institute Ltd, a local IT training and consultancy company based in Nairobi, explains that the skills being taught under the ICDL programme include being able to operate office tools such as text processors, spread sheets and presentations. He added that ICDL does not require a particular brand such as Microsoft Office or Open Office.

"ICDL is meant to teach how to operate a computer in an office setup. Once you have learnt either Microsoft Office or Open Office, you can very easily switch to any other office tool. That again proves

that the ICDL education is general and that it does not matter which platform you are being trained on," Mr Svarrer says.

There are those who say the move to have a computer training standard would be defeatist, arguing that the market should be left to decide what it wants with regard to computer applications.

Because of high demand, learning centres that offer IT and professional development courses are cropping up everywhere. Unfortunately, not many have qualified teaching staff resulting in sub-standard education.

In June this year, the Ministry of Education drafted a comprehensive information and communication technology (ICT) policy, which is intended to encourage use of computers in schools, colleges and universities to improve quality of teaching and learning.

But while there is no doubt that computer literacy is a prerequisite for school leavers entering the job market, the entire ICT education is in tatters.

With the arrival of undersea fibre optic cables, there has been great interest in ICT now, with an expected boom in comput-

Main: Employers spend lots of resources on computer training.

Right: Now computer literacy will go beyond word processing.

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The current average ratio of students to computers in Kenyan schools and colleges, according to government figures



ers use over the next three to five years and awareness grows. "People are taking advantage of others by offering certificates that do not help them attain minimum computer literacy. Further, these certificates are being presented as proof of computer literacy," says Dr Ndemo.

"Imagine a teacher with such bogu