

ECDL Hell or Highroad?



Historically Bedford Modern School has focused its attention on providing computing skills to a small discrete group of students, who would later consider the prospect of Computing Science as a career path. However, the shift towards the predominance of Information Technology within the work place has increased the need for School use of IT, as well as the teaching of ICT as a discrete subject to pupils.

We are a private School of over 1,200 Co-Educational pupils. Up to this point it was very difficult to find a syllabus which was recognised and supported by any qualifying body that would be suitable for a younger age range. IT lessons had a tendency to underestimate the IT ability range of the pupils. Having sorted through the relative merits of many standard school led qualifications – it seemed time for a change.



We were interested in finding a qualification that had serious professional backing and impact. We opted for a BCS qualification as a measure of our commitment towards our pupils' future career development.

We piloted the ECDL syllabus in our classroom teaching for two years and found that without the final examination our pupils were more than capable of following the syllabus. Differentiation in ability range was a key issue and to manage this qualification meant teaching the pupils at their own pace – with large classes a challenge for teaching management.



“...Looking back, it has proved extremely worthwhile, both in terms of the qualification gained and the exam experience which proved vital in the years to come’
Luke Tilleray Year 13

The ECDL offered the opportunity for pupils to work hard for a qualification which would, at the end of their time in school – still be useful. In addition, it offered a skill set which supported the GCSE syllabus and created a benchmark with which to begin teaching at a higher standard. The main premise for development was to focus on the aptitude and ability of the pupils coming through – and set them a new difficult challenge.

We decided to integrate ICT into the main school curriculum and teach towards gaining the ECDL qualification before the age of 14 years old. This meant starting the ECDL teaching and examinations at the age of 11+. This placed a great deal of pressure on the ECDL learner at a young age – many find the qualification challenging but exciting.

We hit many hurdles including; reading skills, stress, comprehension of adult language, time pressured environments and a wealth of knowledge to learn for a serious exam. However, through support most can be overcome.

ECDL's main asset is its examination based strategy – many pupils are more excited by the option of getting things passed quickly than yet another piece of coursework.

We use Activ Software and the fact that they know by the end of the lesson what percentage has been gained and whether they have been successful is a fantastic incentive. The Activ route has reduced administration and the pupils really enjoy the 'electronic' option.

"taking the exams was certainly a challenge, it brought to the fore my problem solving skills and gave me confidence once I had passed a few modules – I was determined to get through them all"

Matthew Folker Year 13

Parents are actively involved in finding out whether the unit has been passed and are very supportive – as quite a few have taken the exams themselves!

Whilst pupils bring a wide variety of skill set to the classroom it is clear that the foundation offered with the ECDL offers a certain amount of IT and exam confidence.

Our pupils tend to sit two examinations in Year 7 and two in Year 8 leaving the final year to complete the ECDL. Currently we believe we are the only School in Bedfordshire successfully running this qualification at this age range. Our current pass rate stands at just over 88% at Year 9.

We are now seeing a large proportion finish in the Year 8. It seems that once started the pupils get the bug and indeed want to push on and finish early. We then tend to move them onto either DiDa or a GCSE style project.

ECDL does not just afford the opportunity for IT confidence; at this age range it offers a new skill – 'examination etiquette and stress management'. Our pupils are all put through their paces in a formal examination environment over an extended period – some deal with it very well – others panic and need additional support and preparation.

Such a widespread examination experience across a year groups allow the staff to help pupils work through issues before they reach the GCSE level over a three year period. Currently we find that over 90% of our pupils pass the ECDL by Year 9. This year all of our pupils will sit the Unit E exam which will entitle them to points equal to 46 QCA – grade B at GCSE. A worthy conversion of their ability at this age we believe.

So what next? Our older ECDL 'ers with over 98% pass rate at Year 9 are pressing for the ECDL Advanced qualification and this is now a focal point for our Enrichment Programme.



“the ECDL for me was a serious re-education. I had always held an interest in computers, however I had skated over the depth of some of the things covered the ECDL. The course taught me a broad base of skills which has helped me on a daily basis since completing the course. I feel sure that the coursework that I have produced since for subsequent GCSE and AS qualifications would have been at an inferior standard without the ECDL.”

Matthew Folker Year 13

We have become an E-Type centre to allow our Junior and Senior School pupils to gain qualifications in touch typing. We are currently investigating the use of BCS CAD examination in our D&T department. Each of these will represent a value added opportunity for our pupils outside of our curriculum teaching. They will leave knowing that they can prove their ICT abilities to future employers.

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