

# DISKUSSION ÜBER DEN ECDL IN UK

## 8. Jänner – 3. Mai 2016

[Jan 08 2016, 11:23](#)

There appears to be a growing number of pupils being offered/required to take the ECDL.

I would be most grateful to hear colleagues views on this trend both positive and negative.

I hope to include your views in a short publicly accessible report and I will take it that by contributing you don't mind me collating and including your opinions - obviously without names included. If you wish to offer a view but don't wish to post here please feel free to email me directly [a.mee@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:a.mee@ioe.ac.uk)

Any views at all welcome and specifically you may wish to include views on any/all of the following:

Is the "rise of ECDL" a good/bad thing? What is driving this trend? Does the qualification have strengths and weaknesses? What is your view on the value of what is learned? Does the course constitute a "broad and balanced curriculum" for Computing?

All views of whatever complexion gratefully received!

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 08 2016, 14:00](#)

Sorry to start off with a negative...

My own view is that it represents everything I despised about teaching ICT - ticklists of fairly trivial skills that 1% of people need 1% of the time.

I know a number of competent adults who completed various levels/modules as part of work-based training. Having gained certification, they can sometimes press the right icon/button to achieve something, but demonstrate hardly any understanding of how/why. Give them a different piece of software or even a different version of the same software, and they haven't a clue.

I can understand its appeal to schools: a very rigid structure/format; a straight forward approach to assessment - death by ticklist; clearly defined "skills" to demonstrate, practise and assess and no great level of knowledge, understanding or wisdom required or expected. At least the old KeySkills tests used to have an occasional opportunity to justify or express an opinion or independent thought.

These negative views probably arise from the delivery methods used by many trainers, rather than by the course itself, but I don't personally think the ECDL has anything to do with education or even professional training. It is most certainly not a broad and balanced Computing course.

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Recursion Computer Science Fair: Sat 2 July 2016.  
[www.recursioncomputerfair.co.uk](http://www.recursioncomputerfair.co.uk) —————

21 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 08 2016, 14:57](#)

A student who passes it will have adequate skills in Word, Excel and PowerPoint for most work place tasks that you would expect to be able to achieve without further training so that's good, in fact it probably leaves students more fluent in MS office software (which is what employers want) than GCSE ICT.

Is it valuable then...yes.

Is its Value work an A\*-C grade - definitely not very surprised its still in the performance measures but that makes sense as the DFE needed a route for non computing and I imagine they think its a good substitute to GCSE ICT.

16 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 08 2016, 15:49](#)

Thank you chaps - very interesting. Anymore views from people would be welcome.

Oh...if people feel they don't want to make a comment but see someone else's comment and agree with it....I'll take a "like" vote as "amplifying" the comment when I write up!!

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 08 2016, 17:33](#)

<The following is a highly personal opinion and does not reflect the views of my employers or, indeed, anyone else. I'm happy for Adrian to use this, anonymised, as part of a paper. Please don't quote me otherwise.>

A lot depends on the method of delivery and the cohorts at which it is targeted.

In principle the idea of providing students with practical skills using productivity software over a period of time is worthwhile. As a vocational subject it should be aimed at students who would benefit from a practical working knowledge rather than someone looking to study the subject in further detail.

In reality it is an 'easy' win for SLT. It counts in progress 8 and you can run it in a week. You can stick an entire cohort through on an hour a week (or a week intensively) and get incredible progress from KS2 (we're talking 5 or 6 levels for many students). The resit-till-you-pass mentality makes it quicker and easier to just shove the kids through repeatedly rather than teach them.

I'm a huge fan of a broad and balanced curriculum. A vocational IT qualification is a must-have in the toolkit, because for many students who will end up in front of a computer on-and-off for their entire professional lives would benefit from something appropriate. Onscreen testing is entirely appropriate for such a course. The problem is that it's a swizz if abused, and game theory means that it *will* be abused. The pressure on schools to achieve the right metrics lead to good people making bad decisions.

I'm not against ECDL in principle, and in the right hands, with the right motivation, it is entirely fit for purpose. In the current state, it's GNVQ, OCR Nats, etc. all over again.

21 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 08 2016, 17:44](#)

Thanks Mark - re "anonymised" = yes absolutely.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 08 2016, 19:07](#)

It is of very limited value. Yes, students do need to be able to competently use software. Can you stretch that out to make ECDL a 2 year course, well it is being done, but I question its value for many students. Is there any way to differentiate - not really so you end up with students who could easily pass the course quickly and others who will still not pass at the end of 2 years. There are only A-C grade equivalents possible (Pass, Merit, Distinction and Distinction \*) so for some, no matter how hard they try, they simply cannot achieve any pass grade. Is it equivalent to GCSE, absolutely not. SLT tend to like it because it counts in performance measures and the pass rate is usually good because it is so straightforward. Why does it still count in Performance tables? Call me cynical, but it is a qualification from BCS and BCS have the ear of the government. Would it still count if it was a qualification provided by OCR or AQA? I strongly doubt it.

20 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 09:13](#)

I took the ECDL in it's original manifestation in the mid 1990's to see what it was about...just another course that teaches you office products. In this case Clait provided more depth and was better resourced, having had to teach it.

I've seen it used in schools where SLT have entered KS4 students who were failing to achieve GCSE ICT grades. They put them through the ECDL in 1 - 3 days with limited teaching as the current skill level of students should get them through. In this respect it's about the pressures school's face at getting through performance measures.

So the questions that really needs to be addressed are *who are we trying to benefit with ECDL?* and *Why are schools really choosing to go the ECDL route?* Maybe the pressures of increasing technology costs on schools compounded with the difficulty in staffing ICT as Computing becomes the standard, makes it attractive to schools...

Like all others, I have my opinions, most being unfavourable...a shame considering I chose to go into ICT rather than be a science teacher.

8 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 09:51](#)

I imagine employers would benefit more from the skills gained through ECDL far more than a traditional ICT GCSE.

Ideally, if it had a short 'exam' style element, with questions related to the modern day 'everyday bloke' use of technology, then you'd have a perfect course for an entire year group to do and it would compliment and not overlap with Computing.

With regards to comments here, I don't see how anyone could drag this out over two years, and doing it in one week as an intensive course is a dangerous road to go down in terms of teacher's jobs.

We need to be careful we don't have another 'golden goose' here (like the OCR Nationals) that kills us off once and for all...

6 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 10:48](#)

We used to teach ECDL - I had to pass the qualification myself to be an assessor...I dropped it at the time because the administration was horrendously time consuming.. It took me less time to complete all the assessments for the units than it did to fill in the paperwork and set up the tests...

I am led to believe that it is better now!

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 11:42](#)

I took ECDL when there was a lifelong learning grant. I was bored out of my mind. Teaching ICT GCSE our courses were wildly oversubscribed and the department ensured pupils went well beyond the syllabus, producing real systems for real businesses and sometimes even developing new technologies (including programming). We probably spent about 4 hours in 2 years teaching 'Office skills' and only when essential. Our pupils were never bored - they groaned when the end of lesson arrived and stayed lunchtimes, after school etc.

I fail to see how ECDL equates to this GCSE course. Am I defensive of ICT - you bet!

6 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 12:21](#)

I was never keen on equivalence, it causes confusion, but i understand why it was done.

ECDL does have some advantages:

If done online no teacher marking, plus pretesting has advantages for entry. However, expensive and students need to learn testing system.

Students know exactly what they have to be able to do. Method of teaching very flexible, easy to combine with other content. Never used one of the online teaching methods, only done it by traditional teaching.

I would challenge anyone to do it in a day. Have done it in a week / 4 days. However, this does assume that most of content has already been taught.

Instant results reduces student stress.

A big disadvantage with any vocational course is that schools do seem to jump onto bandwagon of how they can be used to improve results rather than educate students. Not sure that this will go away. Started with GNVQ some time ago - this bit is sad really - but was promoted by those that should have known better.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 12:35](#)

Can't help feeling ECDL dumbs down teaching and learning. I don't think it opens eyes, builds higher thinking skills or even team work.

7 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 12:38](#)

One question is who is it valuable to ?

For students whose academics are less than stellar, I can see it as a nice little boost when they go for a job. However, it is rarely asked for in job ads, which is a negative signal about its reputation.

There is also another more complex pattern in employers in how they evaluate qualifications, where more is not always better.

I've hit this personally, having been a Basic programmer for 43 years, (yes really). However that skill *'disappears'* when I apply for hardcore work with C++ etc because references to Basic, Powerpoint, Pascal, MS DOS et al weaken the proposition that I'm a bleeding edge hardcore coder. The fact that some of my Basic code is almost identical to the C++ or F# is irrelevant, a CV is an advert, not a reasoned argument.

ECDL and ICT can get caught in this trap, so I'm with Keith in being concerned about 'equivalence'. Also, I have to share that many employers don't know what ECDL is, so if it is part of your student selling herself, I'd counsel using the full name not the acronym.

5 people like this. 2 people found this unhelpful. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 13:37](#)

A few months ago I had a conversation with my Headteacher as she was interested in the ECDL. She was pleased that it counts in league tables. I shared my reservations with her and luckily so far she has not instructed me to have students take it.

Just imagine the ELDL (European Language Driving License). The languages department switching to a course that requires people to learn 20 phrases for each of 3 European languages over a number of days. Then sit a test multiple times until they select the correct phrase 90% of the time. If the ELDL could count on the league tables, you can see the way languages GCSE would go. Would our Languages departments be in favour of this?

I would welcome a replacement qualification that could allow students to create their own portfolios of work in a range of given areas and then have a judgement by a teacher (not a tick list) which is externally moderated. Sounds a little like GCSE art assessment.

Any qualification that can be just a series of hoops will be abused by all Headteachers and sadly some teachers.

ICT is a vocational subject, it always has been. Students need skills so traditional methods of assessment are not suitable.

Sadly the ditching of GCSE ICT is more about its drop in value when being compared with other subjects. The way to go would be to have progress 8 include a separate bucket (bucket 4?) which could only have a vocational subject that counts. Wow, vocational qualifications would at last have some respect and show that the government are starting to want schools to create well rounded individuals. What am I thinking, this will never happen.....

6 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 14:48](#)

I'm sure I raised this point a while ago.

In the school in which I am a parent governor this is now implemented; as I mentioned previously, in 3 days

for the now abandoned ICT and Computing GCSE contingents and 5 for the rest of the school.

I have asked for my daughters to do it as Computer Science and ICT are now removed from the curriculum and something must be better than nothing.

I think 3-5 days is a joke and only an idiot would consider what can happen there to be of much more than minimal use. Bit like that great 2-day course where you thought you suddenly understood everything, walked out the door and realised you can remember nothing.

As to who it suits: management - tick (only need one room of PCs now), kids - most have no interest in Computer Science - tick, parents - another qualification - tick. Employers - what folly to think that they have any idea what the difference is between any of these qualifications or that they care - tick. The Government - what a saving on all those computer rooms - big tick.

And for 99%+ of kids it will be of far more use to them than Computer Science in their future careers.

Got a text yesterday from a friend of mine who has sweated his guts out implementing GCSE Computer Science (he is a single person department) and did a damn good job of it. His Head wants to remove CS GCSE (currently one class a year) and implement ECDL for all kids. At least his job is safe...

Too many Computer Science teachers thought that the death of ICT would result in the growth of Computer Science - instead it's going to give massive growth in ECDL. Too many Heads have got their eyes on results and pre-Ofsted performance indicators to choose the former.

The law of unintended consequences, yes, but really, it could have been seen coming along time ago, couldn't it?

12 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 18:05](#)

We have just begun to offer this to a small cohort of pupils who attend college one day a week. It is in no way equivalent to GCSE ICT (or Cam Nats) - there is no theory, no coursework and no development of systems. It is a skills course in Office applications and nothing more. The online courseware is pedestrian. The tests are similar to the Key Skills/Functional skills tests. I find the admin of the course very time consuming and unfriendly (eg registering as an approved centre, registering pupils, allocating diagnostic and real tests to pupils etc). It may be useful as an Office skills course but it is 'software training' not 'ICT education'. It most certainly does not constitute a "broad and balanced curriculum" for Computing. I too am surprised that it is part of progress 8. Our SMT pushed the ICT dept to offer it, against my advice, because they had heard that the course can be completed in a very short time frame, with good results.

8 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 18:22](#)

It's so cynical, isn't it Claire?

2 people found this unhelpful. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 09 2016, 19:31](#)

It's a cheap way of getting progress. The kids will (and routinely do) forget the things they actually learnt after a term. Only the basic stuff they already knew will stay such as how to make text bold.

My biggest gripe with the whole system is that you, as an actual teacher, can't actually TEACH them

anything. It's 'do this first, get your results, take the test. If you fail, repeat'. There's no creative way to make it interesting. There's no resilience involved and no actual development of skills. It's all muscle memory for the test. Once that's done, you're free to forget most of it as you will probably not use those skills again for a very long time.

It needs to disappear from progress 8 ASAP. All of that content can be better taught at KS3 in a creative way and blends the skills. It's a way of boosting a school's 'ego' and that's a shame as it does little to help the kids in terms of actual skills.

4 people like this. 2 people found this unhelpful. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 02:14](#)

@Dominic - that you equate Basic with C++ coding is jaw-droppingly naive; if you really understand the two languages, it is literally impossible to compare the skills like that.

When I studied Computing Science, the focus was on this kind of reflection and awareness: the meta-questions that outlive individual techs.

This is what the ECDL seems to skip over. To me, it does not seem to have any long-term, lasting, value to anyone who sits it. Every office I've worked in where people lacked these skills ... they rapidly picked them up from colleagues around them. Often learning some narrow but very advanced techniques this way - whatever was appropriate to the company and the role.

6 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 10:08](#)

Adam, A Real Programmer doesn't think in Basic or C++, he draws from the power set of programming ideas, using syntax merely as a means of expressing his intent.

You're 100% right that 'theory' is the thing that has lasting value, not 'syntax', be it Java loops or the keystrokes to right adjust font size in Excel (I've been asked that in a programming interview).

By 'theory' I mean "what is going on here" and when it's time to learn a new language or package, having a model of the system means it is easier. This is critical because at 15, if you don't intuit why Word is acting the way it does, someone has the job of helping you. At 30 or 40, there isn't anyone and you look like the sort of old fool the business can lose more easily.

You call me naive, you're not the first or the last, actually you've reversed the reality. My cynicism is like the Freemasons Temple in Covent Garden. It is so huge that most people don't notice it. I believe the way you're treated is a function of the fear your employer has of your departure, combined with the pain/gain you endure in leaving your job *and almost nothing else at all*

ECDL doesn't induce any fear at all and since the skills age quickly and badly the pain/gain of changing jobs is very much lower.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 14:15](#)

ECDL is a test of basic competence in MS Office packages, nothing more.

Whatever the merits of the course, I disagree with Dominic as I've found the vast majority of employers have heard of it and know what it means, you can't say the same for some of the qualifications we offer.

When we mentioned our plan to introduce it at a governors' meeting it was met with lots of head nodding and widespread approval. The other benefit is that it allows students who do not wish to take Computing to get some sort of IT qualification on their CVs.

In one respect I am lucky. We have introduced it as an enrichment option and therefore it has not affected our curricular offerings. I have started to get inquiries about 'certain' Year 11s and whether they could be put on the course between now and the end of the year, but fortunately I am in a position to rebuff these.

Maggie hits the nail on the head above when she says that there is no way it would continue to be approved if it wasn't a BCS product, as BCS do seem to have the ear of the DfE.

The current bandwagon jumping to ECDL reminds me of the move towards OCR Nationals a few years back. It is not a GCSE equivalent, it is not in-depth enough. As I said at the start, I regard it as a test of competence rather than anything else. The course is very expensive to set up and run and as a result the main beneficiaries of this are the BCS who I'm sure are laughing all the way to the bank.

4 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 14:20](#)

In talking equivalences, let's look at another equivalence that perhaps is never considered: time! A 40 week year and in most schools I've taught at in over 16 years, apart from GCSE, 1 hour of ICT a week at KS3 - 40 hours. In other words ICT teachers are expected to cover a wide range of topics and skills in the equivalent of just over 1.5 full days. We might as well do all the teaching over one week at the start of the year so that the students have an opportunity to remember everything they have learned.

Let's face it, also 120 hours for GCSE doesn't equate to much time either - 5 days. The students are trying to compete with subjects that have more daily time demands because they are considered more important.

So how important is ICT / CS when you consider timetabling? What chance do ALL students who choose it as an option really have to succeed effectively? The bright ones will....

ICT / ECDL equivalences: not the issue...schools will use what they consider will count to performance measures. Cynical yes...but it's happening. What really is in it for students?

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 15:04](#)

ECDL can be good, as long as you ignore what it wants to be, a basic Office certificate and see it as a means to an end, keeping OFSTED of your backs by pushing up grades. So saying there are even better options for this. As it stands it pushes staff into tick lists for an easy, if totally boring, life. I have to teach it, I hate it. At least with the Ingots from TLM, I could offer different units that might be more interesting/useful to the pupils. I know that you can make it much better, but you're just trying to make a silk purse out of a pig's ear, generating users who can follow instructions to end p with the same result as everyone else in the country. As you may guess I hate it.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 15:26](#)

Perhaps it's time to lobby for its removal from Progress 8?

We could use one of those not very effective online petitions?



It's not surprising that BCS has the Government's ear - those I know working in the computing world seem to think that BCS is at best an irrelevance.

Just the type of folk Governments listen to.....

7 people like this. 6 people found this unhelpful. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 15:51](#)

It has its place. It can provide a sense of achievement for some pupils who might otherwise struggle to get any good GCSEs, for many it will be their best GCSE. Yes it is often used to boost the school figures but is this necessarily a bad thing if it keeps certain people happy and having been through special measures in my school I would not wish it on anyone. I say make the most of it, boost your grades, give the kids a boost, it only has another year to run so your Yr 10s can take it, after that I think it will be history.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 10 2016, 22:30](#)

What is the purpose of your report?

ECDL has stood the test of time - it evidences a sound range of competencies when using Office software.

Good thing? - For those that need it, want to learn something new or have a sense of achievement - yes. For some prison offenders, it was the first qualification they got.

I'd hypothesise that a number of schools opted for ECDL when it was approved at the time when Cambridge Nationals was still 'unapproved'. (What we did). Also - perhaps teachers are sticking with this instead of learning new skills for teaching CS. I have no proof of either.

Sound course for teaching Office skills, valued in some workplaces and by trade bodies that report a gap in IT literacy.

4 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 01:03](#)

Is ECDL useful (as a basis for ICT skills development)? It depends on the context of the question. In its own right, it has its use and will give IT skills to many. There is a need for skills development across the board.

Is ECDL useful (as a substitute for a GCSE)? An entirely different question. In this context it becomes a threat. It does not mean the value of the ECDL is less useful in its own right, but that it is being used in the wrong context. There is no equivalence.

SLT and water do have an equivalence - they both take the easiest path!! Decrying ECDL will not win the day. If progress is to be made, it will be from a proactive approach of making the case for a robust ICT course and continued growth of Computing supported, where relevant, by ECDL for the wider student base.

5 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 07:50](#)

We are currently putting our Year 9 students through the ECDL with the intention of finishing by end of Year 10 with lower ability students being able to continue in Year 11 with other students completing the

Apps for Good program.

My frustration is that the ECDL online materials and assessment are so prescriptive on the particular techniques students must use. Many top students are becoming frustrated as they are failing practice tests due to not clicking in the right place at the right time. We teach shortcut keys to make students more efficient, no use at all in ECDL.

I have taught the CIE IGCSE ICT for 2 exam groups and feel this is a much more indepth and well rounded way of assessing students and providing them with a range of skills.

It is less assessment heavy due to no coursework, can't over support students with coursework either, 2 practical exams so keeps with the vocational nature of ICT and the theory provides a solid grounding in ICT topics which would help in day to day usage of ICT.

I feel ECDL is allowed to continue as a performance table subject as it has been previously pushed as a course for ICT skills for those who have left school and need a qualification for employment. It would be difficult to say that a course designed for adults to prepare them for the world of ICT work is less value than a GCSE ICT course. However that misses the point of a skills based course to prepare for jobs and a broad and balanced course taking in all areas of a subject.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 09:06](#)

Myles,

Yes, senior management does take the easiest route.

That means ECDL and no ICT or CS.

They don't give a fig about either of those and you are dreaming if you think that even the most convincing case would persuade them to spend money and curriculum time where they don't need to.

2 people found this unhelpful. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 10:41](#)

A few mentions here about preparing students for work... employers asking for/not valuing the ECDL. What about those students who will want to work for themselves one day? I for one would encourage more students to explore that opportunity and for them, creating good quality presentations, documents and spreadsheets is certainly going to be very useful.

But I do feel a little sorry every time I see that something students study at school is with the end goal that they can get a job afterwards. The ECDL examines their independent skills - we treat it with the same importance that we treat Computing/Computer Science work. (It's just that the students find it easier, work without input from me often and become resilient, independent learners, capable of thinking for themselves more often). Which is what we're aiming for isn't it?

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 10:51](#)

Our school have just found out about the wonders for progress 8 that ECDL offers. I am now required to teach it to large numbers of students with a very quick turnaround.

I have to say that I feel it completely undermines my subject, but I have to also say that I am glad these students are getting some instruction on how to actually use ICT efficiently. Whether they will actually remember anything about it..... who knows.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 11:36](#)

Remember that Michael Gove started the ball rolling with the statement:

“Instead of children bored out of their minds being taught how to use Word and Excel by bored teachers, we could have 11-year-olds able to write simple 2D computer animations using an MIT tool called Scratch.”

Can someone remind me what the content of the ECDL covers again. In fact, the ECDL has more of an emphasis on Office packages over the previous ICT qualifications. “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”.

7 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 12:06](#)

We deliver ECDL to some of our current yr11 students, alongside their GCSE ICT. It is a useful additional qualification as they already have many of the skills required. I do not see it as a 2 year course going forward but perhaps a continuing role as a supporting player.

The setup and admin is pretty straightforward, we do everything online. I could not entertain doing written tests and creating more marking when there is a viable alternative.

Some posts remark that it is expensive; this may be the case if students are not properly prepared and hence fail the test. Most students here pass first time with some retakes needed. In a year group there will be a very small number who need a third attempt but this should no way be the norm.

Chris Barnard

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 12:17](#)

In my experience I am pleased that ECDL exists because I have recently started at a new school where I found that a number of students picked Computer Science thinking it was ICT. Consequently they have struggled with the content and lack of maths skills has hindered them on topics such as binary and confidence has slowly ebbed away. ECDL is going to be the saviour for these pupils as they will hopefully leave school with a computer-based qualification whilst the CS pupils can continue. My only concern is it feels like a little ‘OCR Nationals’ to me whereby the quick fix will soon devalue the course.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 12:43](#)

I can’t usefully (or without causing difficulties) say what I think about much of this topic, but this remark caught my eye:

*“It would be difficult to say that a course designed for adults to prepare them for the world of ICT work is less value than a GCSE ICT course. However that misses the point of a skills based course to prepare for*

*jobs and a broad and balanced course taking in all areas of a subject.”*

I participate in a wide variety of training courses to make me better at my job, or to prepare me for new aspects of it. That's true for most/all of my colleagues too. Some of the courses are seriously challenging. Many are very expensive. Some require me/us to travel to other parts of the world to participate. Some take days to complete, some just an hour or two (and a few even less time than that).

Some of my colleagues take courses that lead to qualifications (like IAPP certifications which require days of preparatory study, or MBAs which take a year or more to complete). But I'd argue that many of the courses we take are definitely less than a GCSE in ICT. Suggesting everything has to be worth as much as a GCSE is missing the point of vocational training, which can be very targetted and limited in scope while still having genuine value.

*Declaration of Interest: I work for Google*

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 14:21](#)

@Peter I think what people are talking about when using the term “worth” is the currency of ECDL in the metrics of english school league tables rather than it being useful. In this case ECDL is seen to have the same worth as a gcse. What seems to be emerging is a view that what qualifications are worth in (LTC) league table currency is a key driver of what children are offered rather than what they want or need. That has wide and very serious consequences. A

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 15:12](#)

@Adrian

Of course you are correct, LTC is a key driver of curriculum offer, but it has been that way for a long time. The popularity of ICT with many headteachers was largely driven by the Thomas Telford model of a qualification worth 4 GCSEs. Plus ça change, plus c'est ...

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 17:13](#)

Peter makes a point that ought to be made just a little bit more often to students of any age. Post-school education and training can be eye bleeding expensive and unlike enlightened employers such as Google, many firms see training as a waste of money that helps their staff quite a bit for better jobs.

Take for example Goldman Sachs, a firm that is in the same league as Google if not the same business. Although their HR people have lovely policies on training and ‘personal development’ the reality I observe having worked in postgrad education is that their managers will actively seek to sabotage the after-work education and training of staff, even when they pay for it personally.

Whatever the variable value of ECDL it costs a damned sight less than it would cost you to get those skills if you buy them as an adult.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 17:52](#)

Year 9 students at Sale Grammar School gain Level 2 ECDL for Schools qualification.

Quote: “**We needed a course that could be delivered in a single year,**’ explains Simon. ‘Our ICT systems manager introduced ECDL to us, having achieved the qualification himself. **It helps prepare students for Key Stage 4;** they can take advantage of the skills they learn, in all their other examination subjects.’ Now a compulsory subject for all Year 9 students, ECDL is allocated on the timetable and introduced at the start of the school year.”

Perfectly good key stage 3 experience - it has clear utility. GCSE standard it is not. Will we see young people studying GCSE English in year 9 in order that they ‘ can take advantage of the skills they learn, in all their other examination subjects’ .?

Source: [http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/sale-grammar-school-case-study.pdf?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_campaign=website](http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/sale-grammar-school-case-study.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_campaign=website)

\*Note: I’d make the link active, but the tool to do so is non responsive.

5 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 11 2016, 18:03](#)

Dominic ,

Yes, it’s better than nothing and ‘free’ for the recipients.

But in this case, the price is the final nail in the coffin for ICT and how much longer does Computer Science now have?

I feel very fortunate that I no longer need a job but really annoyed for those relying on this subject area for a living and hoping for more Computer Science.

I fear SLT will be ruthless as described by Bruce.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 12 2016, 08:09](#)

Why I like it: I took the ECDL about 11 years ago when I first started my degree in Psychology at University. I was a complete beginner in the IT stakes and I found it very very useful in that it allowed me to learn useful skills (they were useful and I am still using them now on a daily basis in my job as a teacher)in a format that was useful. !2 years down the line and I have been an ICT Advanced Skills Teacher and am Head of Faculty for Computing and Maths...from little acorns grow...

In terms of my students: The thing that I think is where people get off on the wrong foot and start to talk about ‘devaluing our subject etc’ is when the qualification is thought of as a two day course. Yes you can sit the tests in two days..IF YOU HAVE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE..and that come from the previous four years of teaching and learning. This does not have to be explicit in terms of objectives but it is in everything that we do from sending the young person back to put the name in the header when they submit a piece of work to teaching them how to do absolute cell reference so that they can get involved in planning for their Year 11 prom. The teachers have been teaching these skills for five years..in context! Therefore getting them through tests at the end of Year 11 in a rush is just the same as Summer exams.

So people when asked if you can rush them through maybe you can say ‘I will be able to get them through

the tests but please don't think it is a rush as they have been preparing for this for five years.

For the kids: They get an extra GCSE and for some who are struggling for five to get them in to college then it is a bonus. I have never had a kid say to me...please don't try to give me a qualification for something that I have learned well. Being able to pass a qualification allows them to have confidence and self esteem. Our job as teachers is to make sure that they can access the tests and that they understand the format of the questions but exam technique is taught in all subjects so nothing different there.

Just as an aside I don't 'rush students through ECDL in year 11' so not trying to defend my position. SLT in my school are very appreciative of the job that I do and value the subject for many reasons ie Computing is EBACC, ECDL is performance points, so everyone is a winner.

Happy Days people

Beth R-B

12 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 12 2016, 13:21](#)

What is driving this trend?

With a reduction in number of vocational options available to count towards the progress 8, those that still count will increase in popularity.

Does the qualification have strengths and weaknesses?

Assessment methodology appropriate for what it is. I believe it is well known and employers will understand what it is (as opposed to some other qualifications that counted previously).

Does the course constitute a "broad and balanced curriculum" for Computing?

I am not sure it is supposed to cover the broad and balanced curriculum for computing, just a vocational skills part of it. More like a food hygiene certificate for a culinary skills curriculum (not that I have ever studied cooking so possibly a bad analogy).

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 12 2016, 15:45](#)

"I took the ECDL about 11 years ago when I first started my degree in Psychology at University. "

Which is exactly what this kind of course is good for. It gets you going when you perceive a need and opt in.

We are talking about imposing it on cohorts of students (and their teachers!) when it is certainly the case that anything beyond the basics of productivity software will have changed in 7 years time when the typical Y9 gets into anything like a work place.

The questions that occur to me are

"is ECDL interesting?" Well Not really.

"is ECDL challenging?" Not for most students.

“Should schools be in the business of training students in productivity skills?” Well, not in my opinion.

“do I like teaching ECDL?”. I leave that as an exercise for the reader.

4 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 12 2016, 19:57](#)

‘when it is certainly the case that anything beyond the basics of productivity software will have changed in 7 years time when the typical Y9 gets into anything like a work place’

Made me titter a bit - I think you are over-rating both Microsoft and the employers!

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 12 2016, 20:14](#)

The content doesn't concern me anywhere near as much as its effect on other things.

Don't we all know how these things work - your SLT will be going to various local meetings of school partnerships and confederations on a daily basis. Some bright spark will be boasting about how s/he got a group of kids through ECDL in a few days. A 'me too' race to the bottom of standards will then ensue as your SLT is blinded by the allure of cheap & quick Progress 8 points. Any suggestion that extra time is needed to deliver the subject properly will be met with a comment of 'well at St Cuthberts Academy they are doing the course in 3 days'.

I know that there is at least one 'consultant' providing the 'teaching' for this course in the Greater London area and this will most decidedly not help matters. Others will follow.

This nonsense threatens jobs, will kill ICT GCSE earlier than planned and choke off the development of CS which is still not embedded in schools any meaningful way.

Tedious content is at least bearable as long as teachers with relevant skills are retained in the profession - you can then campaign for the things you care about. 5 days or even let's double it to 10 days will not provide enough work for full-time ICT/CS teachers.

10 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 13 2016, 06:46](#)

*"...kill ICT GCSE...and choke off the development of CS..."*

Then maybe it's about time to embed ICT in a cross-curricular manner across the school. Have ICT teaching staff work with subject teachers in the ICT room. Subject teachers develop the required knowledge/content they are trying to teach and the ICT staff teach the application of content on software. I worked with an art department in one school in this manner and this was well received by both art staff and the Year 8 students.

There are many ways ICT staff can have an impact across the curriculum: spreadsheets in developing numeracy and analysing scientific data, use of databases in science and history/geography, use statistical programming in science / maths (R programming), graphics with art, DTP in literacy and all subjects...

Office productivity skills will always be needed so ECDL has its place...as a Progress 8 subject? Debateable...

There are ways and means to keep ICT and CS alive...it just needs a vision to see where and how and

determination and risk by SLT to apply. What employer group would really like to see the demise of a wide range of ICT skills in future employees?

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 13 2016, 07:00](#)

I resisted the move to ECDL until last year as my previous experience of it was a long time ago and I found it tedious. The loss of the 'interesting' combinations available in the OCR/CAM nationals, the limited range in the BTEC, along with some pressure from the leadership team made me try it again.

The process is a lot slicker than it used to be and the ability to put students in on-demand means it can be tailored to their needs.

As far as its worth goes I turn it wholly into a problem solving one that, IMHO, means they learn a skill that can be applied to any piece of software where given a problem they have to find an appropriate solution. This has increased most students self-reliance, as we progress through them I get fewer requests for 'help' as they become better at breaking down questions.

The instant marking provides a boost and I have had even the most surly of students work hard on their weaknesses to get a 'good' grade. The high pass mark means that there are lots of easy questions and I do like the concept that when they pass they have to get more right than they get wrong - compare that to a pass mark of 40% in some courses and I do wonder what subliminal message we are giving students by telling them they have passed when they get more wrong than they get right.

Considering its GCSE equivalence is a difficult one and I do fall back on my responses to the 'kids find ICT easy' comment about their grades. If you were to compare the 'average' adult to a school-leaver and their various understanding of topics such as ICT, English, history etc., I suspect that ICT would be higher than most by some margin. (How many stories do you hear at parent evenings that the child knows more about IT than they do?). If this is the case then surely students deserve the higher grades?

Head of Department

*Declaration of interest: Partner in Exam Dividers LLP and Infrared Pens LLP*

10 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 13 2016, 11:37](#)

"The process is a lot slicker than it used to be" - Crikey. I'm glad I didn't experience it when it was less slick than now ;)

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 13 2016, 20:52](#)

Employers seem to like it. I suppose you do demonstrate that you can use the standard packages but that is all it does. That isn't ICT and absolutely no use as a starting point for learning Computer Science.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 13 2016, 22:39](#)

One of the year 5 students I occasionally help mentor has just passed his ECDL: 86% in 17 minutes of exam time. Not bad for a 10 year old!



Does the panel think that it would be a good idea for all primary school kids to take?

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 11:29](#)

With my year 11s we had an ongoing high mark rank and shortest time rank. Always felt that it was a shame that they never got credit for it. To counter the above, I also had some bright students who struggled to pass without a lot of input. I could say a similar thing about my nephew when I let him do a science paper I was marking when he had just started secondary. It was a GCSE paper, he knew most of it.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 11:41](#)

We ran it last year for our struggling Yr 11s. It proved to be some of their highest grades at GCSE level. We signed up to BCS Gemini to help the kids learn the content - but most of them really struggle with this software and it actually frustrates a lot of them.

We had a massive success story with the course, this was due to small groups being taught the content inside out. I'd say there is bank of 60 questions for each topic at L2, I run the students through all of the possible tasks and make them show me they can do it.

I think ECDL may have become much bigger than BCS has predicted, I find it very hard to get support from them over the phone or online. Have had issues with setting exams, try to phone, try the online chat, send an email then get a reply the next day.

It can be pretty costly and can take a lot of time registering students, allocating credits, setting courses for them and so on.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 17:48](#)

@Jim - shame that year 5 is going to be stuck with only an 'A' grade when he might have been able to get the 'A\*' later ;) - also what is his target grade now for the Progress 8 measure now he has that as an input value? lol.

Head of Department

*Declaration of interest: Partner in Exam Dividers LLP and Infrared Pens LLP*

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 18:19](#)

Jim,

I would respectfully suggest that it wouldn't be a good idea, simple and undemanding as it is.

I suspect that you may possibly have once again been hanging around with a non-representative set of children.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 18:59](#)

@Howard: you sum it up *perfectly!* I'm terribly aware that the under 18 Raspberry Pi community is not a random selection (you mean 11 A\*s isn't the most common outcome of Y11?). Suggesting all primary school pupils take it was a *exceptionally* tongue-in-cheek comment (even by my standards).

I seem to work a lot with high achieving students. Either because they find me via the Raspberry Pi community or their schools point them at me via a local mentoring system. The latter is due to more or less all the local schools having "no pushing their high achieving students hard enough" comments from Ofsted.

Desperately getting back on topic I'd like to say that I have (almost) no problem with the ECDL. Basic (or should we call it "essential"?) computer literacy is very important and for students to be able to demonstrate that is very important.

Whether it should count as a GCSE and whether it should be totally Microsoft focused are my main concerns.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 20:46](#)

Gracious, there are some very interesting themes emerging.

I wonder if I may explore a particular one at this point.

We are clear that ECDL is not computer science and some say that it is not a preparation for computer science. That seems clear.

My question is:

1. Does ECDL equate to digital literacy?
2. If a pupil can complete ECDL could we call them "digitally literate"?
3. If we think ECDL does not equate to being digitally literate - what is missing?

I would love to know your views.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 14 2016, 23:06](#)

I would agree that ECDL isn't anything to do with Computer Science (from my CS graduate working in industry perspective). But I don't think that's the point.

I'm going to have a go at answering your questions. In a highly rash move I'm going to compare it with literacy. I'm sure teachers will (I hope!) correct me where I make mistakes.

By "digital literacy" do we mean the equivalent of "basic literacy" ("reading and understanding information in short, commonplace prose texts")? I think the ECDL Computer Essentials covers this.

To be called "digitally literate" I'd suggest an equivalent of "functionally literate" ("to manage daily living and employment tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level"). The advanced ECDL courses seem to meet this.

However it's a moving target. I honestly can't see a future where basic digital literacy becomes less

important. For example, there's been a lot of talk about making the benefits system entirely electronic. Therefore I'd suggest my *second* level because that's more likely to be needed in the future.

If someone couldn't get a GCSE C grade in English (or Maths) what would people suggest they do? I think we're at the digital literacy version of that (compare English literacy and numeracy).

This is just here as a starting point. *Please* feel free to comment!

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 08:32](#)

Many of our schools do the MOS (Microsoft Office Specialist) program. This means they (the students) get a certificate from Microsoft (I assume most employers have heard of them), but we map the work to our ITQ so they also get a L2 certificate and the school gets league table points. Everyone a winner.

Declaration of interest: I'm resource developer at TLM an Ofqual regulated awarding organisation.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 12:03](#)

Jim,

Entirely of topic, I think I remember you saying a while ago that you were going to do some work with less able or possibly even slightly naughty kids. Apologies if I have that wrong.

If you did you do it, was the first question they asked you 'Can you hack Sir?', did it work out and has it changed your perception of things?

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 12:32](#)

@adrian. To unambiguously answer your question then you would need an unambiguous definition of digital literacy.

However, in the general context, I would say not having an ECDL makes them further away from being digital literate.

Is ECDL not just part of a number of strands and channels towards digital literacy? I don't think you can sensibly say that it detracts from being digital literate. Not everyone will necessarily take the same route to being digital literate. It is just one method in a wider system.

I don't go with the view that somehow ECDL is going to take over the world and there will be no other ICT or CS, or in that case presumably the demise of CAS!!

The main issue I would have with ECDL apart from not being equivalent to a GCSE, is the unlimited resits. If they can't get it in two - they can't get it.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 13:57](#)

@howard: I planned to start with a year 9 lower/bottom set (those *not* expected to get GCSE C) Maths class

to get a feel for what the issues are. However there were a lot of exams at the end of last term so it wasn't a good time. I'm going to ask next week as the new term should be well under way (not even I'm daft enough to pester teachers in the first few days of the term).

I've never been asked "can you hack, Sir?". However I've been asked four times now "can you teach me to hack?". This is an ethical and legal minefield and I'm still working on a proper answer (beyond "no"). It gets more interesting when they've discovered a big pile of tools and start playing with them...

@Myles: Heroically getting back on topic I'd strongly agree that ECDL is "part of a number of strands and channels towards digital literacy." Maybe ICT could be called "advanced digital literacy"? There should certainly be something in that area and Computer Science isn't it.

Can I make a more general point? Do you need GCSE C (or above) in Maths to be numerate? English to be literate?

What are the skills we need a workforce to have to be able to function beyond stacking shelves or emptying the bins? I'm not talking specialist here, I'm talking basic English, Maths and Digital Literacy skills so that they can support being a semi-skilled worker (in a role not requiring specific Maths, English or computer using skills).

Perhaps a better definition would be an *inverse* one. I would suggest that *not* having "digital literacy" means that your life, both work and day-to-day living, are adversely affected. The same would apply to literacy and numeracy of course.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 15:37](#)

@Myles, Indeed. My question "does ECDL equate to digital literacy?" Is intended to explore what people perceive digital literacy to be in relation to MS office skills. Clearly, as a notion founded in the relationship between humans and digital technologies an unambiguous definition would be impossible. As society changes and technology changes thus the nature of what digital literacy "is" will be constantly changing. Incidentally differences in cultural values between societies would probably mean that what digital literacy "is" varies through both time and across cultures. A very good example of this is in Schmidt's book 'A new digital age'. The discussion it offers is lucid and interesting.....but..... The discussion and analysis takes place entirely within the hegemony of a western capitalist mindset. This does not invalidate his offering.....it simply says that what he offers as a reality is actually one reality as seen through a particular ideological and cultural lens.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 16:35](#)

@jim Re. Needing a C at gcse maths to be seen as numerate. I agree. As mathematics and numeracy are loosely coupled it would be possible to be good at maths and bad at numeracy. Likewise, it is possible to gain a good gcse in computer science and be largely digitally illiterate. Which is a problem we may find increasingly flagged up by employers.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 16:38](#)

ECDL can help towards digital literacy I guess, but if used as a 'let's get points' qualification as it is in many places it is more of a 'I can follow that instruction, but I have no idea why'. For digital literacy the freedom to decide what and how should be there (I'll plug TLM again as it offers much more scope for

creativity, one of our British Characteristics to jump on another band wagon ;)

You can teach towards ECDL anyway you want, but at the end of the day you'll be assessed in such a way that thinking is a hindrance.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 15 2016, 17:08](#)

@adrian: spot on! I've got first year uni maths (2nd and 3rd CS) yet don't know my times tables (though I do have O-level grade A and A-level grade B in Maths).

More interestingly I'd probably fail ECDL because it's all microsoft based (why?) and I haven't used that since '95. Meanwhile I've written Linux kernel modules and programmed Raspberry Pies in assembler language which I believe isn't covered in the ECDL.

But then I'm very much a specialist and I realise that means I'm atypical (to put it mildly) of what's needed for most jobs.

What I would say though is that if someone couldn't pass the ECDL that would put them at a significant life disadvantage.

I'm intrigued by the idea that someone can get a GCSE CS and not be digitally literate. What would be missing? I would think that it would be quite rare.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 16 2016, 11:30](#)

Jim, it depends what you mean by CompSci ?

I think it is *good* that a CS GCSE does not mean you are digitally literate. It's Computer **Science** for 16 year olds. The idea that any GCSE makes anyone competent in anything is at the very least ambitious, and hardly a worthwhile goal anyway.

We need to stop the apologetic retreat of CompSci and demand that it is treated like any other science, a subject that delivers *understanding*, not "If I press X then Y happens, because of the Holy Will of Steve Jobs, iPads are magic".

I did electricity at that age, do you want me to rewire your house ? How about using my biology to do a bit of freelance dentistry ?

Like you I learned scientific theory illustrated with some applications to help me digest the ideas. Try to wire a plug based only on GCSE physics, see how far you get. That's because Physics, Biology et al are *sciences*.

Every lesson you waste teaching 'literacy' is one that doesn't include logic, coding, security, numerical techniques, design patterns, version control, etc.

This is important because the timetable allocation for CompSci is pitifully small. Even at A level AQA deem it beyond the pale to teach kids the full set of basic logical operators. CS is a big thing, we need greater focus.

All STEM subjects intersect with 'literacy', the basic skills a functional adult needs. A good example is the

Biochemistry of drugs. It is important that we teach kids the dangers, but given the awesome complexity of even simple chemicals in biological systems, we don't even pretend that the teenagers understand much beyond 'This will damage your brain'

Maybe a Biology teacher is the right choice for teaching kids to avoid drugs, but drug education is not biology, in the same way e-safety is not CompSci. CompSci is about being *dangerous*, PSHE is about being safe, same with other STEMs.

Literacy is important, but it is distinct from science.

That's why so many parents, media and politicians **hate** ICT. They want 'literacy' but want kids who drive computers, not passengers.

7 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 16 2016, 11:46](#)

@Jim - but isn't the UK govt itself moving away from Microsoft software, because of the absurdly high costs (\*), the short support lifecycle (\*\*), and the political issues of being beholden to a foreign company?

I don't remember which specific dept, but I thought there were some large deployments converted to OpenOffice/LibreOffice in recent years, partly because of the WinXP end-of-life. And there's the GDS dept that is very pro-open-source for the full stack.

(\*) - obviously the licensing, but also the cost of getting support for these products, measured in millions of pounds when working at large scale with IT Consultancies

(\*\*) - e.g. Windows XP having support officially ended. Why? If a govt system is working fine on XP, the only reason to upgrade is as an excuse to pay massive extra costs.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 16 2016, 17:32](#)

We have started the ECDL course this year- but we also offer GCSE Computer Science. The way we teach it- I have two years as its a GCSE equivalent- so that's great- my year 10s can whizz through it, get good grades and feel really motivated, employers recognise it and on the whole it provide software skills that are used in a lot of business situations- so worthwhile skills for student and a happy SLT. Yes it a bit dull- but we teach around it- extend Office/ Software skills and then have enough time left over to teach more inspiring subjects like creating phone apps, cyber security, websites, video, animation and games. This also takes off the pressure for those students in year 11 as they already have the qualification and GCSE in the bag- one less to worry about. I suppose we should switch to a different course that gives them credit for the multimedia and app development- but this works for us at the moment and gives students who might struggle to get higher grades a GCSE, exploration time in IT and Computing without the pressure. We have been looking at the Tech Partnership Digital badges as an additional 'employer' driven award- looking forward to finding more out about this as it develops this year, as it will be free, accessible and mean something in the world of work.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 13:08](#)

While this is not a political forum and it would be nice to think that the Government makes decisions for reasons of economy, I would, with respect, suggest that what evidence we have would show that any decisions made regarding Microsoft and its products would be based on doctrine, prejudice and political

opportunism rather than an interest in the public purse.

I reckon any large organisation using open source software would learn the meaning of regret quite quickly although I am willing to be convinced otherwise.

2 people found this unhelpful. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 13:54](#)

@Howard: I work for a large organisation and we make extensive use of open source software to the point of having our own version of Linux. In the smaller company I used to work for we were almost totally open source (again all Linux) with massive savings.

To me one of the key points is being vendor neutral. We support our own Linux as well HP-UX, Solaris, AIX and a range of other systems. Yes, even Windows!

At work I use Linux with LibreOffice. I've been doing this for some 20 years now (with other Linuxes beforehand and with OpenOffice). Some people in the office use Macs though (generally management).

Getting back on topic, the notion of portability is very important these days. Tying yourself into a single vendor and/or platform is bad practice. So, for example, I personally believe we should be teaching word processing not Word, Spreadsheets not Excel and so on. By the time students hit work there will be new versions that look different anyway.

It all boils down to cost. It should be noted that the £4 Raspberry Pi Zero comes with a complete set of office (small o) tools (aka productivity tools), namely LibreOffice. OK, it needs case, power supply, SD card and so on but the entire "base machine" clocks in at under £20. It's certainly not going to win any speed awards, but it *is* usable. [I've heroically avoid a long diatribe here on "if you can't afford it, it doesn't exist"]

Right now I'm typing this into a Google Chrome browser running under KDE 4.12 on Mageia Linux 4. All open source.

Update: while writing that I just got an e-mail about the new Lego EV3 noting that it runs Linux!

4 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 15:32](#)

Jim,

That's great and I try to be careful not to extend the specific to the general or to draw over-arching conclusions from it.

But myself, I know no-one who works in a none-ICT focussed organisation or job that uses anything but Office etc.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 16:32](#)

Howard,

With the increase in use of Macs and Raspberry Pi machines (the latter especially in schools) and (perhaps far more importantly) the increased in web-based tools (I cannot think of a better example than Google docs

and I should have mentioned this earlier) I am unsure how long the use of expensive software on the desktop will last.

For shared documents we've moved almost totally away from LibreOffice/Word/whatever and the use of web-based wikis is now the norm. In fact the use of documents in files is now actively discouraged, we use a commercial web-based documentation system almost exclusively now. It has access control, version control, the ability to organise document hierarchies, links into our development systems and so on. We use a commercial system because it integrates with our software development process (Jira).

What I (personally) find annoying is things like ECDL insist on expensive software rather than the free LibreOffice or Google docs. Have a go at Google docs and tell me what you think.

It's about teaching *principles* not *specifics*.

One final point.: I play [Underwater Hockey](#). We found some old floppy disks from the 80s and 90s that contained some early documents of historical interest. It would have been great to be able to read them but they were in PageMaker 3, 4 and 5. There is now no reasonably priced way to read them so the contents are lost. [There are companies that will read them but for an *exorbitant* cost. The reason being that if you really need to read them it's usually for legal reasons and you have to pay up.]

What use PageMaker training these days? Anything product specific ages so rapidly...

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 19:30](#)

Aside

@Howard: [These organisations](#) are using non-Office tools, although they are paying for them (except the charities, they get these tools for free). They are examples of the more than five million businesses that have chosen to use that particular alternative tool suite. Some branches of [government](#) are exploring similar changes.

For balance & vendor-neutrality, I note that other tool suites are also available, some of them (such as Libre Office) at zero cost.

*Declaration of Interest: I work for Google*

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 19:48](#)

Peter,

Thanks for that but I was thinking about non-ICT focussed organisations of a decent size e.g. that I might have heard of.

And five million? Independently verified? How many use Microsoft in comparison?

But at least I now know why Ocado keeps getting my order wrong and failing to answer my emails about its mistakes.

Did make me chortle though that a Google employee posted a link talking about the Inland Revenue. Not really two organisations that have much to do with each other normally....

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)



[Jan 17 2016, 20:19](#)

Jim,

‘increase in use of Macs’ - is there really an increase in these? And they could be running office although I suspect they are mainly used for Adobe Creative Suite - a REALLY expensive old-fashioned desk-bound piece of software.

‘increase in the use of Raspberry Pis? - Jim - for Word Processing and other Office type activities? You really think so? Many of these sit in cupboards unused which is where I found the ones I taught with a couple of months ago. Really enjoyed working with them and was messing with my little Pi car earlier today but I wouldn’t say they have much of a public profile.

Your use of tools is impressive and admirable - I really mean that; but it’s more relevant in a development environment and I just can’t see the great unwashed using IT in that way any time soon and for most it would be irrelevant.

Google Docs - yes I’ve used it - I think it gets better as time goes by - just seems utterly inferior to Office online though and neither gets in the same space as the desktop Office in terms of power and versatility. I worked at a school which considered itself a ‘Google’ school last year - nobody used Google Docs - they created documents in Office and emailed them to each other - I think Microsoft Office has longer legs than Pagemaker.

ECDL is a problem yes - in all sorts of ways - I fear it is going to remove jobs and a broader ICT curriculum and result in the stillbirth of Computer Science - that bothers me a lot more than its Office centric bias.

2 people found this unhelpful. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 21:37](#)

At work we’re about a 50/50 Mac/Linux split. At the risk of overgeneralising managers tend to use Macs and developers Linux: though we certainly have several developers using Macs! The software written is in Java and is expected to run on Linux, Mac and Windows though its dependency on high-end databases and (more so) clustering normally means Linux for deployment. None of that’s really relevant though.

I’ve certainly used a Pi 2 for LibreOffice and e-mail (via thunderbird). It works and is usable. At Zero would work but not nearly as fast and using both at the same time would be painful (one core and less RAM). Also not really relevant.

The real issue is that we’ve moved our documentation onto web-based and hyperlinked work. It’s like a mash-up of google docs and wikipedia but with *far* better organisation (work areas, access control, revision control and so on). When a document references another it’s a for-real hyperlink you can click on. This is now so useful that around 95% of all work is on it. I expect that to be 100% by the end of this calendar year. No new work has been performed on “just files” for well over a year now. I strongly suspect this to be the future. Once y... [show more](#)

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 21:58](#)

Jim,

To say the least, you work in an interesting world but it is in no way an ordinary one!

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 17 2016, 22:54](#)

Thanks for that Howard.

The key point I'm trying to make is that we need to teach what will be useful in the future rather than the specifics of today. I honestly believe that web-based collaboration software will become the norm as will cheap computers (from the Raspberry Pi to the Chromebook).

A good example is that I used to keep personal project notes on my local machine. Now they're in the cloud so my team can access them if (for example) I'm on holiday. They can even pick up and edit them and I get to work on the changed version when I return. Everyone automatically has the latest version and it's centrally backed-up. The only downside is that I have to be less libellous as others can read what I write.

I've been desperately trying to find an example of free collaboration software, sadly without success.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 18 2016, 12:30](#)

Howard - FYI ... having supported educational software in circa 800 UK Secondary schools, and worked for a Maths charity working with hundreds more UK Secondaries ... I'd say your experience of Google Docs is not indicative.

Schools using Google *really* use Google. Google's spreadsheet is especially popular, and we saw it used daily by teachers for ... well, everything. Writing documents, tracking progress, monitoring pupils, sharing information, communal authoring, databases (!), etc.

To the point where we had many debates about "will the rest of office suite eventually disappear, and only Excel / Google Sheets / OpenOffice Calc be left?"

(the Google word processor is a lot less popular - it reproduces Word, but Word today is a terrible application, much harder to use than the software it replaced).

1 person likes this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 18 2016, 14:25](#)

Adam,

You visited them all, yeah?

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 18 2016, 14:26](#)

I have always understood that Open Office can also be used with ECDL

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 18 2016, 18:36](#)

I believe the NHS are now exploring open source and have set up their own department called [Apperta](#) that is designed to explore and implement open source, not just to save the public purse, though that is a given,

but to give real control over what is created and managed. The Cabinet Office has advocated (across 3 different political parties and many years now) the use of open standards and most government departments now talk of open standards. As mentioned earlier on this forum whole departments have moved to [Libre Office](#). Many contracts from government departments now specify open source to such an extent that if people don't mention it on their bid they will not get a look in. I agree with Jim and had this argument when I was teaching IT, it is about teaching principles, not being a marketing department for some software company. My analogy was that I don't need to learn to drive in a Bentley in order to be able to drive. I just need to be able to drive and give me any car and I will learn it's peculiarities. Most people only use about 5% of the features of any office application so it makes no sense to teach children on these systems if you are just teaching a particular product's "market advantage". Also, the children you are teaching at present probably don't use a desktop other than in school and when they leave and get a job, who knows what they will need to use? I suspect the recent "saving" for schools on office software was pressure because so many schools are now using free alternatives. Of the schools who submit coursework to us for moderation, I would say 50% (and growing) is on office applications that are not Microsoft. We don't care what they do it on as we are only assessing their ability to meet criteria such as editing and formatting. Those skills are transferable. If you want your students to get an office certificate, do the Microsoft MOS. We have schools doing this and using our ITQ to get league table points as well. I would think Microsoft themselves would be far happier if people used their cloud based stuff. I recently attended a meeting of the OSC (Open Source Consortium). One of the council members runs a UK company that makes control chips that are in virtually every device you use (smartphones et al). They use open source compilers because they are the best. RedHat is an open source company and set to reach \$2 billion this year. These things don't work because they are free, but because they are better. Everyone in the world can look at Libre Office's code and find and fix bugs, only x developers can fix Microsoft bugs, should they want to and assuming it was worth the cost.

@ Jim. We now have a Linux L2 qualification recognised by DfE on their [16-19 performance tables](#). I use Owncloud for collaborative work. Alfresco Community is good, but quite resource hungry.

Declaration of interest: I'm resource developer at TLM an Ofqual regulated awarding organisation.

2 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 18 2016, 22:49](#)

That's interesting ,Paul,

I've always thought that the major exam boards specifically bias their offerings towards Microsoft Office by requiring stuff that doesn't happen on the relatively limited Office and Google apps or until recently, Libre Office. Yes, teaching principles is one thing but you are limiting what kids can do if you use online apps - I don't know where Libre Office stands in functionality nowadays in relation to the traditional Microsoft offering. Bet you that 99.9999+% of the users don't want to edit that code though and even if they did that could be a bad thing

For the record, I think most people could achieve what they want to in the online apps but in my experience that isn't happening. Granted it's just my experience and I understand the limitations of that.

But where are the whole departments using Libre Office? And as for politicians and civil servants talking of Open standards - aren't we all old enough to know how little that means and to what extent is that translating to using less well known software? In the hospital next to my house no-one uses anything but well known software for Office work and I would say that awareness of Libre Office is hov... [show more](#)

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Jan 19 2016, 16:46](#)

@Howard - no, but my colleagues (who I worked very very closely with), did.

I worked remotely for most of them, and only went on-site when severe tech problems required it.

My colleagues spent Monday to Friday visiting as many schools as physically possible, every week. They reported back on things like use of Google specifically so that we could make sensible decisions on which documents to send to schools, in which formats, for minimal hassle for the schools.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 19 2016, 20:14](#)

I don't think they do that deliberately Howard, and neither do we, as 90% of people still use MS Office, but as a tax-payer, I would like to do what they have done in many parts of Germany, Spain, France, Central America et al and stop paying the Microsoft tax and put it towards other things. If Libre Office is "good enough" for 90% of what we need, let's use the extra money saved in licences to hire UK companies to develop the extra bits we need. That is the power of an open system I guess. If students are introduced to this way of thinking, then hopefully they will be the people installing and supporting your local hospital's system in 10 years time.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 20 2016, 12:06](#)

Howard - some PFI schools only had access to "Open Office". Schools should show students e.g. MS Office, Open Office and Google Apps. When I made such choices that is exactly what I did. I don't believe that I was alone in doing this.

I would argue that open source Moodle is the best, and probably most popular VLE. It was interesting that when VLE were being pushed, often it was a paid for one that was provided, but users wanted Moodle.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 21 2016, 08:33](#)

"Moodle was the best"

You obviously didn't see *Kaleidos* then...?!

;) )

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 21 2016, 16:09](#)

I did. Tried it went back to Moodle. Was on a Moodle course some time ago. many of the people on it had something in common, their LEA had bought Kaleidos!

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 21 2016, 19:21](#)

Dear all,

Many, many thanks for all the thoughtful and balanced contributions. I think we have the makings of an

analytical and critical perspective on ECDL but more importantly this is more generalisable. It allows us to construct a framework for evaluating examined courses in general. I shall seek to knock the ideas into some coherent form and feedback.

Again, many thanks for the contributions.

Regards Adrian

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 24 2016, 11:50](#)

After looking at it but not yet delivering ECDL. I am as a professional can see why schools are opting to go down this Avenue. But it lacks creativity, diversity, expression. It is inflexible and most of all it does not need a professional to deliver it.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Jan 24 2016, 14:12](#)

@chris: that's why it appeals (I suspect).

I was talking to a local CS teacher (with a masters in CS) and we seriously *unimpressed*. Can't say I disagree. It *is* a useful entry-level qualification but *nowhere* near GCSE ICT.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 04 2016, 10:01](#)

At the end of the year I will have 95% of students with massive value added as they have done a very expensive, scandalously easy course that is supposedly equivalent to a GCSE after a week of curriculum time. Read into that what you will.

Interestingly if you ask local colleges whether they would accept a student with ECDL as one of their x5 GCSE's they most likely will say no. I can only presume that it is worthless to them.

Not sure how long this gravy train will keep going for but it can't have much life left in it surely?

6 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 04 2016, 10:30](#)

Alastari,

Yes, it's like a new dumbed-down GNVQ / OCR Nats isn't it?

Make hay while the sun shines.

I think the involvement of BCS needs some investigation.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 04 2016, 13:03](#)

All depends on how you teach it. We know what the outcomes are, it is up to us as teachers how creative we

teach the skills.

I personally have no problem being creative or engaging pupils with it.

I find it very valuable and with it having transferable skills pupils take those and improve work across other subjects.

Not everyone wants to work in CS jobs some people want to work in the digital literacy world.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 04 2016, 15:31](#)

“Yes, it’s like a new dumbed-down GNVQ / OCR Nats isn’t it?” Howard - they are very different!

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 04 2016, 15:37](#)

Keith,

Of course.

I never heard of anyone teaching the GNVQ / OCR Nationals in a few days.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 05 2016, 10:10](#)

Thank you Adrian for starting this thread. I am about to set up ECDL in my school. Good to know the pros and cons. Claire, your experience of administering ECDL gave me head start about what to expect. Great discussion!!

Sheela

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 05 2016, 12:27](#)

@Howard Not from scratch but there were a few occasions with the OCR nationals where if a student was a unit short of finishing they were taken out of their other lessons and they could complete an individual unit in 1 day.

Head of Department

*Declaration of interest: Partner in Exam Dividers LLP and Infrared Pens LLP*

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 05 2016, 12:46](#)

Howard. it has been done. I recall some time ago taking the micky out of the Head of BS when an article in a sunday paper claimed A Level BS can be taught in a couple of days. I bet it has been done with GCSEs as well.

None of them are intended to be taught like this. Is it about passing exams or education, not the same thing.

Sadly, this no longer seems to be understood. The certificates should be a vehicle to achieve education.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 05 2016, 16:06](#)

David and Keith,

Yes, you're right, if I think back, I have been involved in the process myself.

Well, I remember taking kids off timetable and getting them through a GNVQ Animation unit in 3 days. Having said that all of the kids did individual animations and used a wide range of techniques in excess of the spec requirements. It was fun.

An individual unit in one day is pushing the boundaries of professional ethics, well, if they exist any more in the market driven teaching environment.

I guess the point is that some quals lend themselves to abuse more than others and the supposed point of current policy was to remove those that were abused the most widely. We need a level playing field.

And this is a far easier choice than CS GCSE which won't exactly breathe life into that subject.

Head of BS - interesting title...

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 05 2016, 20:17](#)

Dear all,

Sorry...I didn't know the thread was still running!

I have not been idle though. I have a summary report which I just need to proof read then I'll distribute. It's certainly not a "down with ECDL" document and the conclusions relate largely ECDL as a phenomena resulting from the broader context in which it has grown. I guess we have to evaluate any course in the same way that we evaluate any tool or device. We can't say that a hammer is good or bad unless we specify whether we are putting up a picture with a nail..or opening a tin of peaches :-) "Is ECDL any good" has to depend on if we are looking at the mechanism for delivering the NC PoS computing to all pupils as a part of a broad and balanced school curriculum or ensuring that some new employees to a company have shown adequate competence in applying productivity software in a business environment. I suppose if the work has any value it is that it adds to the work which has been done in defining what a "good course" should look like.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Mar 07 2016, 19:27](#)

It should make an interesting read. I know lots of schools in this areas seem to be taking the 3 day approach to a qualification and it's considered normal and good practice by Head teachers. Personally I'm here to help students learn, struggling to keep up with the demands of CS and a less than interested cohort of pupils but I'd take ITQ, BTEC OCR Nat or GNVQ, most of which I have delivered over this model. ECDL as a statement of competence is business is not the same thing as pass and forget in 4 days. intensive units reaching high standards as mentioned have their place in helping pupils achieve more than expected and may help some to catch up but not as a replacement for the longer game of developing skills. Many schools

seem to be taking the switch off statement too far and forgetting to restart.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Mar 07 2016, 19:47](#)

I need a retirement plan!

Is anyone interested in developing “GCSE equivalent” courses in English, maths and science which can be done in 3 days?

If we’re successful we could extend this to an array of 9 GCSE’s which would pan out like this:

The kids start on September the 1st and spend 3 days on each GCSE and finish on September the 27th.

Then they can bring in games for the rest of the year!!!

We could develop a degree in Computing along the same lines and market it under the slogan....Start October “and it’ll all be over by Christmas”.

5 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 01 2016, 18:01](#)

Dear all,

Finally a summary report which can be found in the resources area under:

Digital curriculum trends A casestudy of the European Computer Driving Licence

Many thanks for all the contributions which seemed to paint quite an interesting picture with a message which runs far beyond our own corner of the curriculum.

Regards Adrian

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 02 2016, 05:31](#)

A [link](#) to the report.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 03 2016, 10:41](#)

Is there a public version? 1. so I can point to people outside CAS and 2. because I’ve given up on CAS resources - I get spammed incessantly by this site if I even click on the link (I don’t even have to download it! Simply visiting the page triggers the spam avalanche :( )

1 person likes this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 03 2016, 17:39](#)

@Adam - can you post this behaviour to the site issues forum? This will ensure the tech team are alerted as



this seems wrong to me. I only rarely get that feedback request window ...

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 03 2016, 22:07](#)

Hi Adam,

Please feel free to distribute as you feel fit. The report wasn't commissioned by anyone and is not "owned" by anyone.

Regards Adrian

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 04 2016, 13:03](#)

@Adam: "because I've given up on CAS resources - I get spammed incessantly by this site if I even click on the link" - presumably you refer to the CAS site offering you a "rate this resource" (or somesuch) pop-up window as opposed to email spam being generated? "Incessant" is not the adjective I'd use to describe my experience; "fairly often" more like. Perhaps someone in the know can say what lies behind the algorithm that determines when the window pops up? I'll try and capture a screenshot the next time it happens to me was to be sure we're talking about the same thing.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 04 2016, 13:04](#)

An interesting report from Adrian Mee.

My general feeling from the thread is that schools seem to be utilising the ECDL (2000% increase in Adrian Mees report) in order to boost their league table positions. It is a no brainer for a head teacher as it means they don't need hard to find computing teachers or to retrain ICT teachers, they can then get a cohort a GCSE equivalent in 10-20 hours.

Meanwhile the new GCSE in CS has been made harder in with about 25% more theory to learn and a very specialised content. It takes about 150 hours to get through with everyone working hard. And some won't pass even if they try hard.

My problem with this is that it is inequitable. The result, which is happening, is that people won't teach Computer Science in the main. This gives a lack of opportunity to most students, but also undermines the efforts of those who do obtain a difficult qualification.

The end result is that after all the hard work from CAS and the community, I feel that we are heading to a situation where the whole thing could fall apart due to the gaming of the system.

Given that CAS receives substantial funding from the government, does it not have a duty to inform the DfE and minister for education of what is happening? The ECDL isn't Computing and is far less so than ICT was (which was scrapped). Why is it attracting points on progress 8. (Perhaps it should attract some points, but if it is possible to achieve in 20 hours, perhaps this should be 1/7 th of the points it currently attracts).

So three simple questions for those who lead CAS (or anyone responsible for the use of government funding for CAS):

1. Do you feel that the ECDL furthers the ideals of Computing as laid out in the Royal Society Report?

2. Do you feel that the qualification is equitable with with GCSE Comouter Science?
3. If the above two questions have no as a response, do you feel that this should be brought to the attention of the DfE and OfSTED who make and check the rules?

I really hope this post isn't negative or combatative, it isn't meant to be. My only fear is that in CAS and passionate teachers having made such a positive difference, it could all be undone by a couple of tweaks to league tables.

10 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 04 2016, 18:05](#)

You couldn't get through ECDL in 20 hours if you had no prior knowledge of how to use office software. People think it's "easy" because they are familiar with office software. Now children are not expected to learn to use office software at Primary & there is not a lot of space to teach it at Secondary, since the new KS3 curriculum is jammed packed, there are a lot of students who would benefit from doing ECDL or some sort of ICT. I have no idea how people teach KS3 Computing in ~ 1 hour a week. I think there is an issue with the grading of ECDL, because it is skills-based. The fact that with practice a student can get a higher grade than in their other GCSEs will lead to schools using it as a way to enhance their progress 8 results.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 00:25](#)

Good points Andrea.

In no way am I belittling the ECDL qualification, it has credence and used in the correct way it is a valid qualification.

My question is whether it meets the Computing curriculum and whether it is equitable to a GCSE in Computer Science.

If it isn't meeting the curriculum and isn't equivalent to the GCSE then there is a serious problem for Computing as a subject.

I have no problem with children learning software or skills, nor proving it with ECDL etc. I have a big problem in Computing dying due to an easier league table option being available. Most importantly, I think it unfair to the children who really want to study something meaningful and not just be a pawn in a league table game.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 08:10](#)

James,

You can't expect CAS 'Part of BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT' to take much of an interest in your concerns, can you?

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 09:13](#)

I wouldn't worry too much about this phenomena. In a couple more years the numbers will have dropped off. The reason they can do it in three days with the school nurse is because they're "digital natives" (ie.

have had some teacher input at some point, however boring). When cohorts who've had no IT in their Computing, or even no Computing at all, pass through, heads will have to have a rethink. However, by that time the "loophole" will have been closed.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 10:55](#)

Kaz,

Your risk there is that ECDL will be embedded as a curriculum subject. SLT will see it as a golden goose and they don't change course too quickly unless, as in this case, it's to an easier option.

They won't suddenly say 'Oh, ECDL isn't working let's do Computer Science instead; they'll expect those easy grades and IT/CS staff will be bullied into getting them.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 13:27](#)

Hi Howard,

I take your point about the BCS perhaps not being overly interested in taking away support for the ECDL, especially as they are the only operator for the course in the UK.

However, CAS receives (I understand) about £750,000 from the government to support Computing as a subject.

CAS failed to prevent GCSE ICT disappearing as an option. Currently it is failing to prevent the ECDL from being the go to qualification.

Essentially, the result of the Royal Society turn off/restart campaign is to translate the subject of ICT into that of Microsoft Office skills (ECDL).

This would seem like a very bad situation and one which risks the CAS funding.

I understand why CAS couldn't jump too loudly about ICT GCSE disappearing, after all, we had supported the idea that ICT wasn't that great.

But to allow the ECDL as an option without raising official concerns seems like a big mistake.

To the outside world, the abolishment of GCSE ICT for schools to then take up ECDL which is run by the BCS which gets government funding to support Computing, would appear very fishy. I'm a member of the BCS and don't believe that there is anything fishy at all, but a lack of response to these posts and a lack of an official response would seem strange to an outsider.

One scenario to play out would be that an investigative journalist writes about the whole thing, the government get annoyed at negative press and pull the funding in the name of austerity.

This certainly isn't something I would want to see, so two simple questions:

1. Does anyone who has executive powers over CAS spending believe that a 2000% increase in school take up for ECDL is furthering the mission of CAS and computing?

2. If not, will anyone be raising the league table anomaly officially.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 14:22](#)

Being 'easy' and 'not worth doing' really aren't the same things, it's like the idea that to be good for you, medicine must taste bad.

It's all very well for teachers to believe their students are individuals, each special in their own way, but employers just want to know "if I give this a kid a job putting orders into a PC will he set the bloody thing on fire?"

We all bodge our way through life, occasionally we find something we're actually good at, but even this needs to float in our personal sea of mediocrities if we are to be employable.

In this we need inspiration from McDonalds who are taught in the better MBA's as the class act in quality control. Yes, really.

Few think their burgers are excellent, they employ skilled professionals to ensure they never excel. You know what you get with a Big Mac, their goal is to never disappoint, never delight and firms who charge 5 times as much for what tastes remarkably similar can play the excellence game.

Fact is that in most areas, we each are at best a Big Mac.

It's nice to be excellent at C++, but if you're going for a job as a section manager at Waitrose and can do a bit of Excel you have an edge over the other applicants.

4 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 16:07](#)

Dominic,

I don't think that a 3-day, boded through, course where learning is minimal and kids come away with nothing or virtually nothing they will remember is going to prepare them for flipping IT burgers after school. (I know some are and will be trying to actually teach the kids something for their ECDL courses)

I thought the old ICT GCSE was ok, generally useful, likely to embed some learning, far more useful than C++, sorting algorithms etc and actually involved some girls. But that's not to say that I think CS is without value.

I don't believe that ECDL is without value - it gives points and of course can be very easy.

James,

I think the situation is a little 'fishy'. I think about the only near official response to the GCSE ICT situation was 'that ship has sailed'. The ECDL tanker is laying waste to opportunities and is going to keep on ploughing forward with no comment at all. Just watch.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 05 2016, 18:09](#)

Re your previous post Howard, I suspect it will be worse than that: ECDL reducing the offering of ICT/IT at

KS4/KS5 and that of Computing at KS3 - increasingly just Y7 and Y8. Even two further years of ECDL might see a Computing/ICT department's staffing reduced. I agree that ECDL won't be a great factor in Computer Science numbers: that appears to be more related to school-specific issues such as curriculum ethos, specialist availability, P8 strategy and projected results for possible cohorts with a tougher spec. I fancy that the academy business model and P8 gaming have greater influence on curriculum design and change than ANY Computing/ICT/IT/Computer Studies interest group. The politicians have moved on.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 06 2016, 01:05](#)

It's worth remembering that computing GCSEs and ECDL are not an 'either/or' choice, they have different discount codes so both can be taken by a student. I'm certainly not going down the road of ditching my other IT based options to concentrate on ECDL, they are doing it in addition.

Head of Department

*Declaration of interest: Partner in Exam Dividers LLP and Infrared Pens LLP*

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 06 2016, 07:15](#)

David: Not being a teacher, I'm not sure if I'm understanding correctly: can they both count towards Progress 8? Or does taking both give impact on Progress 8 and one or more other metrics?

*Declaration of Interest: I work for Google*

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 06 2016, 08:13](#)

Peter, They can both count to progress 8. Computer Science can count as part of the science strand with ECDL counting in the other subjects section.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 06 2016, 11:11](#)

David, don't the other Level 1/2 vocational IT/ICT qualifications have the same discount code as ECDL so would be wasted for the P8 "Other" slot? Whilst I truly admire the value you place on offering subjects that are best for the pupils, I'm sure some heads will see this as an opportunity to remove the vocational IT/ICT offering. GCSE ICT (now on its run out), though not clashing, sounds close enough to ECDL to parents and pupils to allow a head to justify removing it from the options offer. Thus, IT/ICT gone at GCSE level and staffing and resources saved. Computer Science's inclusion, of course, is not ECDL dependent.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 06 2016, 22:15](#)

Some very interesting threads have emerged through this discussion and I'd offer that relatively few of them relate to ECDL as a course or learning experience in isolation.

Emerging are big questions.

Questions which need to be addressed in the current and emerging policy context.

1. In respect to a world suffused with digital technologies, what would you expect a school curriculum to do? What skills, knowledge and conceptual understanding should pupils be taught? Here we note the central imperative of parental wishes in education policy since 1944. Strangely the debate regarding our corner of the curriculum assumes that the driving need is “what business needs”. I know of no other subject which is so driven by this obsession with the purpose of learning being the training of “typists or programmers”.
2. At a time when when a new government white paper effectively abolishes a national curriculum and hands the control of the curriculum “to the profession”.....what criteria will the profession use to decide the “usual old questions”? What is taught?....To whom?.....Why?.....and How?
3. If we are a “nation” and have a national education system.....who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that children in England, the UK, Britain (etc.) are adequately prepared for the world they will encounter? Surely preparing children for a “digital world” is a national challenge and a national enterprise? Are we really going to suggest that the solution is to devolve curriculum decisions to school level whilst concentrating control at ministerial level (via “progress measures”)?

I think this bizarre notion has already done huge damage to the way we educate young people about digital technologies.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 07 2016, 08:09](#)

Kaz and Peter, yes in part...I did a list for the 2017 IT based qualifications (<http://edividers.co.uk/index.php/level2>).

ECDL has the code CN1 which puts it against the other vocational courses (with the exception of the BTEC which is CJ3). The computer science GCSEs are CK1 and can go in the third bucket if they are not used in the science bucket. (Any approved qualification can go in the third, or open, bucket).

Computer science can go in the science bucket or in the third bucket.

Peter: If two subjects have the same discount code only one of them can count in the school's figures. So it is possible to do ECDL, BTEC and a GCSE and have all 3 count in the figures.

Before the BTEC lost its computer science elements I had considered combining a computer science GCSE with it as there was significant overlap and they would count as two separate qualifications (this is exactly the reason why it was not approved - though of course if they had given it the same discount code that would have had the same effect).

Head of Department

*Declaration of interest: Partner in Exam Dividers LLP and Infrared Pens LLP*

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 07 2016, 08:50](#)

ECDL is a valid qualification. As much as Microsoft Academy is. These type of qualification show skills in the use of aspects of software (not necessarily Digital Skills or literacy). ECDL should not be removed from the menu of examinations available to learners.

In fact one could argue that it is part of the Nat Curr as this states that ‘must have the opportunity to study aspects of information technology and computer science at sufficient depth to allow them to progress to higher levels of study or to a professional career’. It does not say that this career has to be in Computing and

one could argue that a thorough knowledge of say Outlook is useful to all.

However, and before people think that I have gone completely mad, the issue is that ECDL has been given performance table points by the DfE. If it did not have points then schools would not be following the exam. (@Adrian - a response to the points you made). It is very much a case of the tail wagging the dog. There are some schools who have stated that they will only allow learners to take GCSEs and then hypocritically push them through ECDL.

Schools/Computing departments do need to take the moral high ground and pro... [show more](#)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 07 2016, 18:19](#)

Hi Ian,

There is much in what you say. In some schools ECDL is a part of a wider curriculum or offered as an “extra” and in such cases I’d suggest it can be a “nice bonus” for pupils. The real worry is the potential model where the school curriculum becomes:

Year 10 = 120 pupils. Computing provision 30 pupils - GCSE Computing. 90 pupils ECDL in 6 days ...then nothing.

In many cases I know that departments would very much like to take the moral high ground but many now have little or no say in the curriculum they offer which is passed down from SLT based on league table models. School management teams don’t do this kind of thing because they don’t want the best for pupils, they simply do it because they have almost no choice given the high stakes “performance and output measures” driven system - I would almost certainly do the same :-)

There are some small glimmers of light though. OFSTED have made “grumpy noises” about mass ECDL which may make a few more cautious.

What would be a good bit of work for CAS to do is construct some “High quality curriculum models”. This would show some practical examples of what a good curriculum can look like in real schools. It could also include some (made up) models of “bad practice” in terms of curriculum design.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 08:49](#)

Ian, I certainly agree with you that ECDL is a valid qualification. It has currency with employers and across Europe. The skills are certainly relevant to many jobs.

I totally agree with your point that it is performance points for this which is bad. I actually wouldn’t mind the performance points if they were relevant to the time spent, so if they carried perhaps 1/4 points and could be used if a pupil didn’t get an 8th qualification (although I appreciate this could become overly complicated).

Adrian, your solution may perhaps give a third way. CAS does have a responsibility to show paths which are good and meet the curriculum’s expectations (e.g. CS GCSE), and paths which are inadequate, eg ECDL delivered in one week. This would at least give teachers who don’t want to do it some evidence that it was gaming, it would also give a basis for OFSTED to criticise, and would give pause for thought for any head teacher.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 10:55](#)

For background info: it looks like Ofsted will start asking questions about schools' decisions to enter large parts of a cohort into 'obscure' Progress 8 scoring qualifications. See <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/exclusive-ofsted-penalise-schools-gaming-league-tables> for more in which ECDL is singled out.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 14:21](#)

Adrian Your model of the year 10 curriculum was already present in many schools. Apart from option groups with say 20 doing Computing (and maybe 30 doing GCSE ICT which will now stop) what other Computing do the others receive?

Remember the PoS states 'be given opportunity for further study'. There is an inherent weakness at KS4 which means that many schools meet the regulations without too much effort.

The use of ECDL in many schools has been in addition to their curriculum model and has not necessarily replaced another subject. The 'gaming' part of the system.

The definition used by Ofsted is a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. Does the option of computing at KS3 and GCSE Computing to a few learners in KS4 count as 'broad and balanced'?

This partly explains why I feel that schools should have a vision for their computing curriculum which builds into the schools expectations making it easier for subject leaders to argue their position with SLT. Yes the moral high ground is difficult, but careful preparation of the soil always leads to better results.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 14:28](#)

Regarding discount codes - I believe OCR's Creative iMedia has a different discount code. This means an ICT(ish) option in addition to Computer Science can be offered that doesn't exclude the use of ECDL.

This is what I am doing for next year (I'll re-look at ICT for the year after when the performance tables come out.)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 17:56](#)

Hi Ian,

The fragmentation of the KS4 curriculum has, as you say, always been with us. The history of "IT...ICT" is an interesting one and differs widely from the relatively simple model of most other school subjects. At KS 3 you do ...history.....at KS4 ...you do GCSE History...same for most subjects.

Certainly we suffered from a range of issues over the years.."double awards" etc. The PoS at KS 4 is now a major problem and with "forced academisation" it is likely to get worse. Having a GCSE for Computer Science as the assumed subject default when the subject is Computing was, I feel, a mistake.

About 18 months ago I did a survey of 162 schools and the picture was worrying. Decline in time at KS3



and a growing number of pupils getting no input at KS4.

Good old Kurt Lewin's change model springs to mind. Unfreeze - change - refreeze. I think that the curriculum was "unfrozen" in 2010 and we have experienced a period of incoherent and largely unmanaged "change". I think we probably now have 3 years to make something useful and workable before the curriculum "refreezes" in a form which we will find difficult to repair.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 20:27](#)

ECDL and Rock and Pop vocals are causing a bit of a stir. [Guardian report](#) . I hope that teachers are not working hard this year to implement ECDL, will then find it removed from their schools because it is no longer on the performance tables.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 08 2016, 21:06](#)

Amusing if depressing article.

Good spot.

Meanwhile 'CAS 'Part of BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT' remains silent.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 09 2016, 00:21](#)

Ah, Gareth, you beat me to it!

I was very pleased to read this article and the fact that the DfE and OFSTED are both against the gaming.

I have to say that I am very surprised that neither CAS nor the BCS have chosen to comment to this forum or the media. We now have a national news story which has been brewing for 3 months on this forum alone and no official response to it.

I really hope that something official is coming from CAS and the BCS or that you are working on something behind the scenes if not as the lack of response could increasingly look like vested interests.

The worst thing about this is that by not managing the story we have a chance that both the BCS and CAS get negatively affected.

I see nothing wrong with the ECDL nor CAS nor the BCS. It would be a real shame not to protect all the good that has been done and disassociate, at least on this forum, from the bad of league table gaming.

PS I had nothing to do with the guardian article, just want to put that out there in case many schools are upset that the scam has been unearthed!

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

Post by Howard Bennett marked as not helpful ([expand](#))

[Apr 10 2016, 19:47](#)

## Friends

I have been slow to respond publicly, but I have been paying attention, and I have had a lot of conversations about ECDL in the last few weeks. What I say here comes from me personally.

- I fully understand and share the concerns about ECDL, expressed so articulately on this thread, including [Adrian's helpful report](#). It's plain wrong for schools to sweep entire cohorts through ECDL as a cheap way to get Progress 8 points; but it's hard to blame them if the system is set up to encourage that behaviour.
- To quote the Programme of Study for KS4, every student should have "the opportunity to study aspects of information technology and computer science at sufficient depth to allow them to progress to higher levels of study or to a professional career". It looks as if that goal is under threat as things stand, and CAS should be very concerned about that. The CAS Board and CAS Assessment Working Group have both expressed that concern.
- As many have said, ECDL is a perfectly valid and useful digital literacy qualification. The question is not whether it has a place, but only whether it has a place as a P8 measure.
- The decision of what qualifications count for P8 is one taken by Ofqual and DfE. They do not consult CAS or BCS, and neither BCS nor CAS has had an influence over the process. So it's hardly BCS's fault.
- Over the last few weeks, specifically motivated by this thread, I have raised these matters at the most senior levels of BCS. I know for a fact that the last thing they want is to see KS4 computing education harmed by ECDL, and they are keen to work with CAS, DfE, Ofqual to make sure that does not happen.
- I have arranged to meet with senior colleagues in BCS this coming week; I will report back.

All this has blown up very suddenly, triggered by the loss of the GCSE in ICT. (For the preservation of which, incidentally, the BCS fought tooth and nail; I know because I was in the room.) I'm pretty confident that with the level of scrutiny that is now being applied, by the education media, [DfE](#), [Ofqual](#), and BCS, it will be dealt with pretty quickly.

Meanwhile, Adrian Mee has suggested that it would help if CAS was to offer a clear model of what a good KS4 provision might look like. I think he's right. Here, in his words, is the model he proposes for good KS4 provision:

- **Path 1** - CS GCSE for those who feel they wish to study it (NOT just for those predicted a B+ in maths!!)
- **Path 2** - One of the more substantial "vocational" qualifications - again for those who wish to choose it. There are a large handful of such qualifications, [listed here](#).
- **Path 3** - The pupils who do not wish to do either of the above. A well designed course focusing on functional digital literacy, computing and "office skills" (not a dirty word!) - integrated with the other subjects pupils are doing e.g. applying media literacy, critical information skills, presentation skills etc. in the context of their wider learning. I think something useful could be done in 1 lesson per week and to top it off their skills could be accredited via ECDL earning a qualification in a genuinely useful and legitimate way.

Path 3 is then, by design, less time-consuming and demanding than a GCSE or Level 2 vocational qualification (paths 1 or 2). ECDL would have a legitimate place as recognising/accrediting that path but would not be expected to be comparable to other GCSE/L2 qualifications.

I say "by design" because those students who choose to focus most of their KS4 efforts elsewhere should still have the opportunity (indeed the POS says the obligation) to develop their DL/computing skills with a more modest investment of their time.

There is still the concern about the effect of Progress-8 league-table pressure, but perhaps a combination of

clear models (as above), and DfE/Ofsted guidance (eg in the [TES article](#)) would suffice to bring things into balance. As Adrian often reminds us, we should be careful what we wish for. If there is no league-table incentive whatsoever for schools to offer Path 3, they may not offer it, which is hardly the result we seek.

Simon

12 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 08:04](#)

Hi Simon,

Many thanks for the reply. It certainly puts my mind to rest a little that this has been considered and I appreciate that sometimes it isn't possible to say and that effort was made to prevent the ICT GCSE from going.

I think your reply is spot on for this stage. The problem is a difficult one to solve. CS GCSE isn't suitable for all students and no one should be forced to take it.

Personally, I think that those with lower than B grade maths should be aware that the course has many problem solving capabilities and will be hard to get a C grade without that ability (or whatever the new benchmark number is). Students that wish to take without this are fine if they are aware. I remember going around 8 students a few years ago to let them know they would find it hard, but to do a take home bit of weekend work if they were interested. 5 could not cope with the work. Of the three that could, all of them struggled to pass with a C grade - but all of them de sparsely wanted the C grade. I have had in my teaching career of over a decade, only one student who was happy taking a course and getting below a C grade. They continued even when it was impossible to pass as they liked t... [show more](#)

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 08:33](#)

A very well thought through item James.

However it ignores one major issue. Academies and Free schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum.

David Brown (Ofsted) has stated that what they look for is a 'Broad and Balanced' curriculum across **all** subjects.

If you look at eBACC as providing a broad and balanced curriculum where does IT for all fit into this?

I also disagree with the sentiment that 'academic and vocational qualifications are not equitable' - different qualifications have different values and are suitable for different people. To expound on this take the difference between English and Maths. English does not rely on logic and therefore is not worthwhile! I feel carrying on to disparage the vocational exams will only lead to their total redaction - is this what you want?

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 09:51](#)

'ECDL is a perfectly valid and useful digital literacy qualification' even when done over 3 days.

OCR NATs / GNVQ ICT were appalling PowerPoint-based, fake, time-wasting, pointless qualifications that

had to go.

Is that the official line here?

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 11:26](#)

I think the “3 day ECDL” is the real iceberg we need to address. If the Office skills for ECDL are embedded in a KS4 SoW lasting for 2 year for (e.g. 1 lesson per week) and it is only a part of the course then I’d rate the idea as “better than the worst we could do”.

Ideally - and I think “ideally” is now out of the question - is a GCSE called computing which covers the whole programme of study. If I had a magic wand I’d want to see all pupils at KS4 doing a GCSE called computing made up of 6 strands.....

1. Digital citizenship, identity and safety.
2. CT and problem solving.
3. Understanding technology.
4. Digital application skills
5. Information, data and media literacy.
6. Digital creativity, communication and collaboration

But I reckon I ain’t gonna see that ... :-)

4 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 12:01](#)

Ian, James, ‘academic and vocational qualifications are not equitable’

I think this issue is about perceptions. I think the worst thing that ever happened to vocational qualifications was the idea to make them equivalent to academic qualifications.

Vocational Qualifications are valuable and should be respected but by trying to turn them into something they are not (not better than or worse than) creates a problem.

I don’t have any answers though(actually I do, scrap league tables)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 13:36](#)

Vocational quals V Academic

The number of children achieving the government’s benchmark five *A-C grade at GCSE level has reduced significantly over the last two years. In 2013, 59.2 per cent of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at A-C. In 2015 the figure had reduced to 53.8 per cent.*

Last month the Royal Society Arts released the latest in a series of commissioned reports exploring regional variations in curriculum offers.

The latest report “[Educating the ‘failing’ 40 percent](#)” concluded:

“Key Stage 5 options for students not achieving five A\*-C grades at GCSE vary considerably. Of children

who fail maths and English at GCSE, in some parts of the country half will be entered for three Level 3 vocational qualifications. In other parts of the country up to 85 percent will not.

In most parts of the country, vocational education is provided only for those students who do poorly at GCSE, resulting in a notion of failure attached to studying vocational qualifications. However, there are a small number of exceptions in which excellent technical and vocational qualifications attract significant numbers of students with strong academic records.

It is very hard to disentangle the degree... [show more](#)

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 13:40](#)

I think there is too much confusion about what ECDL is. We do it as our core ICT course with all students at Key Stage 4, however this is a continuation of our Key Stage 3 curriculum where all students study ICT / Computing. We don't completely ignore the subject and then introduce it at KS4 as a quick fix, point scoring exercise. We teach it across 2 years with pupils finishing early moving to additional Maths/ Science/ English classes to focus on areas where they are weaker.

In addition to ECDL, we offer GCSE Computing as an option course. This all goes towards offering a broad-balanced curriculum. How many parents make comments at parents evenings such as "most jobs now use computers so it's really important they study it...". ECDL covers the skills that most people use in everyday employment, with Computing providing the more specialist input for those who are interested.

ECDL has a discount code of CN1 (Computer Appreciation/Introduction) whereas Computing (OCR) has CK1 (Computer Science). Most of the GCSE ICT courses are CJ (Computer Technology).

All the courses have their place in the curriculum. The issue comes when something like ECDL is used "instead of" computing- despite being so very different.

1 person likes this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 15:05](#)

It is not new that 'vocational' educational is seen as for the underclass. I recall teachers being actually worried that I was too clumsy to be able to use various tools, how would a working class lad like me possibly hope to make a living if he couldn't dig or hit things with a hammer ?

I was literally laughed at for suggesting I make a career out of these new 'computer' things I'd seen on Star Trek.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 16:57](#)

Ian - totally agree with your points.

I fully accept that the Academy and Free school side of things means that schools can reject a curriculum and even the subjects of ICT and Computer Science wholeheartedly. Only English, Maths and Science must be taught in these schools; but it appears that RE must also be taught as part of a contractual requirement of academies (perhaps the ultimate push would be to say that some computer technology related subject must be taught too!) [[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/basic\\_curriculum\\_in\\_academies](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/basic_curriculum_in_academies)]

But, If CAS, BCS and OFSTED all agree on what a good broad and balanced curriculum look like, and what

a bad one looks like, then heads and heads of dept will be wary of ignoring it. Free schools/academies don't have to do sex/relationships education, but if they do teach it then they must follow the statutory guidance. In the same way, we could have the situation where schools don't need to teach computing/ict/computer technology, but if they do they need to be held to account from OFSTED as to what good/bad curricula would look like. The BCS/CAS/OFSTED are ideally positioned to get this out there and educate the inspectors with responsibi... [show more](#)

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 20:15](#)

Hmmm... Although coming at this from the other direction. It may well seem to be possible to prepare a child for ECDL in 3 days but could you do that if there had been no ICT lessons with that child for at least a couple years beforehand?

2 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 20:43](#)

Just for clarification here, and this is my own understanding of things, the Wolf Report got shot of 96% of vocational qualifications as they were not fit for purpose. They increased the demands of AOs for their qualifications to be supported and funded (for adults and children) and 5 or 6 made the cut for IT. These all have 120 GLH as minimum. I can't speak for the other AOs but we have on demand moderation of coursework which we have to pass before students can take our exam. The exam then scales to A. *The A* candidates have to know their stuff and I have checked our cohorts against maths and English ones at the same centres and the pass rates and grades are comparable. We did all this to get the rigour into our qualifications, as per DfE, Ofqual etc recommendations, and we are regularly inspected to maintain this. When the announcement came out that GCSE IT was going, the impression from most people was that it was the end of IT. Many jumped on to ECDL thinking it was the only option (and the most marketed which helps). I tried to say there were alternatives but it never quite got through. My understanding from my meetings with DfE was that they were now happy that the ... [show more](#)

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 21:57](#)

Well I must say, that CAS as an idea has drawn some frowns and some cheers be what can't be denied is that it's provided a splendid platform for genuine debate and this did not exist before CAS. The above posts attest to a healthy diversity of opinion and (with the occasional exception) a professional respect for the views of others and an acceptance that "the truth is out there"....but we don't quite know what it is.

Beveridge, when seeking to identify his enemy in the popular consciousness used the metaphor of "5 giants".

We have giants to slay too:

1. Giant 1 - "Vocationalism". A Greek hangover which was never really valid beyond the elite of 4C Athens. The obsession with "workers by hand and brain" and the notion of "academic" and "vocational" is, I would argue, THE major problem in education in that its snobbery underpins the "lesser evils".
2. Giant 2 - "Credentialism". The assumption that learning needs to be "accredited" and that this accreditation automatically leads to some form of financial or social advantage. Thus what is "valuable" is not judged by its value to society or to the learner but by the "credential score" current.
3. Giant 3 - "Rigour- species A". The assum... [show more](#)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 11 2016, 23:30](#)

An excellent post Adrian.

This is just a place holder response. What I want to do is double check things then come back with how this is viewed in other countries.

I think it's too easy to forget that there's a rest-of-the-world out there and we ignore the experience of other places and cultures at our peril.

In my work group I'm the only one in the UK and one of two in Europe. The American system seems to ignore vocation qualifications as they have "high school" (14 to 18) instead. I hear that "graduating" high school is roughly the equivalent of six to eight GCSEs. Their "vocational" qualifications are per state and not highly recognised.

I'll have a word with my German colleague tomorrow. That should prove *enlightening*. Report to follow. I can also poke Belgium and see what they say.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 12 2016, 11:49](#)

Now then, hands up anyone who's surprised that Germany has a strong emphasis on apprenticeships. They have the concept of a "Master Craftsman" with a highly-regarded certificate.

They have the concept of "vocational schools" which seem to start from what we'd call year 10.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 12 2016, 16:29](#)

Adrian I'd add to your list "Bill Elliot-ism", the belief by the promoters of STEAM that millions of kids are living unfulfilled lives when they might have become successful ballet dancers. That fact the ballet does things to children that people have been executed for in war crimes is irrelevant. It applies to the CS/ICT debate. Even now only 6-7% of workers are IT specialists, maybe it will hit 8 or even 9%, but should we give everyone the chance to be Alan Turing ?

I agree with your points and we have to decide whether to slay the giants or harness them ?

The giants are umm, err, big and existed not only in ancient Greece but even earlier in China, they form a pattern we see in programming where given systems tend to have the same bugs even when coded by different people. To badly mix analogies, these are superbugs that are hard to kill.

Vocationalism is an untapped force for good, and like any large uncontrolled force it is causing trouble. Politically it enjoys almost uniform cross party support and the media (yes including the Daily Mail) love it. It ought to be a driver for industrial grade funding for training IT teachers.

Credentialism is what Alvin Toffler would call... [show more](#)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 12 2016, 17:19](#)

For reference [ECDL on radar](#)

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 12 2016, 17:21](#)

Excellent post, Adrian, worth a thread itself.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 12 2016, 18:44](#)

Dominic. My mind turns to a phrase from (I think I recall)...Solzhenitsyn's 'A day in the life of Ivan Denisovich'. In his 'internal monologue' he reflects "...a man who is warm cannot even understand a man who is cold". I think we see the world across an ideological and experiential gulf which is unbridgeable.

3 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 14 2016, 22:58](#)

Friends

I said above that I was going to meet with BCS about ECDL and would report back.

I met today with Paul Fletcher (CEO of BCS) and Jon Butriss (CEO of BCS's commercial arm), along with Bill Mitchell. So from the start it was clear that BCS is taking the ECDL issue very seriously indeed.

I was, frankly, rather anxious about this meeting, but the tone of our conversation was open, receptive, and constructive. I expressed, as clearly and vividly as I could, the difficulties about ECDL that have been expressed so eloquently earlier in this thread. I can tell you for certain that (a) they are paying attention, (b) they had all read this thread, (c) they can see that there is a problem. The BCS's Royal Charter says (more or less) that the BCS exists to make the world a better place, and I believe that Paul, John, and Bill are all powerfully motivated to do just that. The fact that BCS is both an advocate for the subject and a provider of qualifications in the subject is a complicating factor, but I gained a reassuringly clear impression that education goals ultimately take precedence over commercial considerations.

Here is my personal summary of what we agreed.

- ECDL Level 2 is a perfectly sensible digital literacy qualification, that does what it says on the tin.
- At the moment ECDL counts for Progress 8. That isn't BCS's decision. But it sets up a situation in which schools have an incentive (for which they should not be blamed) to game the system by sweeping whole cohorts of students through ECDL to gain cheap Progress 8 points. No one wants that to happen *including BCS*.
- It may not be BCS's *fault*, but is BCS's *problem*, because ECDL is a BCS qualification. I strongly urged them to take active steps to solve the problem, rather than to keep quiet and hope it will go away. I was pushing on an open door.
- We discussed at length Adrian Mee's Path 1/Path 2/Path 3 model for KS4, which I [summarised above](#). By design, Path 3 takes fewer learning hours than Paths 1 or 2, allowing students to spend more time on other areas; but it still embodies the aspiration of the National Curriculum, that every student can continue to develop their computing knowledge at KS4. In that model, ECDL (or, more likely, some development thereof) would have a valid place as a Path 3 qualification.
- BCS can't solve the current problem on its own, because the underlying difficulty is with the current incentive structure (exacerbated by the loss of GCSE IT), which is not under BCS's control. So we agreed that BCS will proactively approach DfE, Ofsted, and Ofqual, identifying these concerns, and asking for a dialogue about how best to address them. (As I mentioned above, it's not simple; e.g.



simply removing ECDL from P8, and doing nothing else, might remove schools' incentive to offer Path 3 at all, which is not at all what we want.)

I think that's a good outcome. Knee-jerk changes risk creating other unintended consequences. We need a small group of stakeholders to sit down with DfE/Ofsted/Ofqual to work out (a) what a good KS4 provision in Computing looks like, and (b) how to give schools and incentive structure than allows them to offer it. I would like to see Naace, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and the UK Forum for Computing Education represented in that group, but it's not my decision.

The positive thing is that out of this we may get a good hard look at the entire KS4 offer in computing, which has evolved rather than been designed, including a robust conversation about what provision will meet the diverse needs of *all* our children.

Meanwhile, although an institutional (BCS/DfE/Ofqual/etc) discussion about these questions should ensue, I think it would be very constructive for CAS to flesh out Adrian's sketch into a 2-3 page description of what a good KS4 provision might look like. If we know what we think, and write it down, it's more likely to happen. Would anyone like to lead on doing that? ("CAS" is, remember, just us.)

Simon

10 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 15 2016, 07:22](#)

Hi Simon,

That is great news that BCS are taking this seriously and very encouraging that they are putting educational values above commercial interests.

I think that pathway 1 and 2 is pretty much a given, especially in light of the GCSE disappearance.

Path 3 is valid and preferable to nothing. But in my view should not attract progress 8 points. Here is why we should be doing it:

1. It has educational value for the students
2. The qualification itself is recognised internationally
3. Ofsted should praise seeing it, if it a good use of 1 hour a week for 2 years in preparation for the course

The risk that people won't do something if it isn't on progress 8 is of course true, but that is a symptom of our times. That said, schools do have other considerations. Here are the sort of people where the qualification would still have incentives:

1. providing a broad and balanced curriculum to all pupils
2. Pupils gaining a meaningful qualification
3. OFSTED being impressed to see it as an extra
4. a good use of home study for pupils who are out of school due to illness or exclusion or school phobia
5. A good use, which can impress Ofsted of an after school club once a week

I agree that these incentives are not the same as being in a league table, but the second you put it into the league table you have to consider gaming.

If it is possible to gain the qualification in 10-15 hours then you have to appreciate that it is about 10% of the

value of GCSE CS. I believe that you can't get 10% of a qualification on progress 8 so you would need to change the whole league table system.

It would seem easier to get the government to change the regulations that all schools must teach a digital related qualification (as us the case of religious studies, maths, English, science and PSHE). This would then be a way they could do this.

That would be a great change, but perhaps too ambitious and difficult.

I totally agree that this shouldn't be a knee jerk reaction and I applaud you and the BCS for giving it careful consideration.

One complete alternative, is that CAS and the BCS look at providing a second qualification ECDL, which adds in elements of practical computing, such as graphic manipulation, video editing, desktop publishing, web design, audio editing and so on. This could be something like ECDL2. Both qualifications together, with OFSTED expecting 120 hours or more of study, could then be worth part of progress 8. But this is obviously far more ambitious and I'm not sure if it is needed given the crossover with existing vocationals.

I think that it is best for Adrian to have the opportunity to write down the ideas if he wants to, but I am more than happy to help wherever I can, (or indeed do it if Adrian doesn't want to).

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 15 2016, 07:59](#)

Given the expense of ECDL I would imagine it will be dropped like a stone if withdrawn from Progress 8.

Whilst pupils are of course important, there are no real hard incentives and lots of disincentives to make them a priority. If it were free then it might happen, but spending £50-£100 on ECDL per pupil when competing with proposals that raise key attainment figures is not going to happen.

This is a shame in some ways. The digital testing model feels like a step forward in many ways - removing the blight of endless coursework marking that comes with many of the vocational options.

I think beefing up ECDL would be my preferred outcome - although more modules would then require a reduction in cost per module as it is already seen as expensive.

4 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 15 2016, 09:40](#)

So, in summary, 'no P8 incentive, no ECDL'?

I reckon you're bang on as usual, Paul.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 15 2016, 15:20](#)

James Franklin: **One complete alternative, is that CAS and the BCS look at providing a second qualification ECDL, which adds in elements of practical computing, such as graphic manipulation, video editing, desktop publishing, web design, audio editing and so on**

This is a brilliant idea James. so much so that Ian Lynch also had the same idea back in the Wolfe Report days and this is why he designed, developed and accredited the TLM ICT qualification in this style and then

successfully gained league table points for it at both Level 1 and Level 2 for 2010. A status it has maintained all the way through to 2018. The 2019 submission date to DfE for us AO's is very soon and we are making no changes for its submission as it works well and does not need fixing.

If you look at the official document for the Level 2 ECDL on the Ofqual Register ([HERE](#)) and then compare it to the TLM Level 2 ICT ([HERE](#)) you will see that they both contain the exact same units for IPU, Word, Spreadsheets, and, Presentation.

However the TLM version then goes on to show the availability of further 80+ units, as well as the availability of the Level 1 variant, again, with league table points.

This means that if you want your learners to use Microsoft Office, then you can, you can even then go for the **real thing** of Microsoft Office Specialist certificates (info [here](#)) and have this count towards our league table points qualifications, but if you want them to use Apple products, or Google Docs or any other software package, then we allow you to.

The philosophy at TLM is for learners to demonstrate independent skills at the level required, with supporting evidence, that will then allow them to sit our exam unit that grades them. Moderation is on truly demand and with valuable feedback given, because we understand that you can not do quality control without knowing what went wrong and to be informed on how to fix it.

However, we are very conscious that you as the teacher understand the demands and needs of your learners far more than we do. So we allow you to use your professional judgement on the learning journey you use that will be rewarding, engaging and be fully supported by TLM. So if you want to follow a combination of office and creative units, you can. It is available now, it has been available since 2010 and hopefully will be available for many more years to come.

Declaration of Interest: I am the commercial Director of TLM and wish Ian Lynch was still here to answer these threads.

6 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 15 2016, 16:18](#)

Interestingly I have just got an email from the BCS warning schools against gaming and pushing people towards teaching CS and using CAS.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 16 2016, 09:06](#)

Paul and Howard, I agree that without progress 8 value most schools would drop it.

My point was that there would be incentives; I agree most schools would not be interested compared to alternatives, but I don't personally see that as a bad thing. Progress 8 is meant to contain qualifications which take 120+ hours to study for. ECDL clearly doesn't meet that criteria and shouldn't be in there.

Steven, thanks for your post. I forgot about TLM. It does seem to cover the whole area well.

I think that we could scrap ECDL quite happily from progress 8 without any negative effects on students. Schools which wish to do it may, and Ofsted can show they are pleased, but no points to progress 8.

The alternative is to beef up ECDL with ECDL+, but to work this would need to genuinely be taking 120+

hours to learn, and have a price the same or less than now with all the extras.

I agree with Paul that it's a shame that we can't do digital testing as it's easy for the teacher and fairer than the coursework routes, but I think that ECDL in progress 8 has too many negatives.

My view is that CAS and the BCS should be lobbying to have ECDL removed from progress 8. I am quite sure this will happen anyway, given the media interest, but surely CAS and BCS look more credible if we are behind the change rather than sitting on the sidelines.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 16 2016, 09:08](#)

Paul, is it possible to post the message here? Or if that's not possible, who wrote it? I would be interested to see the wording.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 16 2016, 16:30](#)

The boilerplate on the bottom of the message says no, but it is from the Deputy CEO of BCS Learning & Development and looks like it has been sent to a mailing list of some kind (probably auto-subscribed when I got set up for delivering ECDL.)

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 09:33](#)

Steven, thanks for your post. I forgot about TLM. It does seem to cover the whole area well.

Indeed! There are **six** KS4 non-GCSE Level 2 qualifications in "ICT" that count for Progress 8 (including ECDL and two from TLM), and **three** in "Media and communications".

They are [all listed here](#).

I think it would be very helpful for those who have experiences of these qualifications to share their experience.

Simon

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 15:33](#)

The boilerplate on the bottom of the message says no

I thought you'd probably like to see BCS's letter, so I checked back with them. They are certainly happy for CAS members to see the letter in full; it appears below. They ask that it be read in this context:

- It was written for a leadership audience in our schools, not specifically for CAS members,
- It needs to be read as part of a larger suite of actions around this problem ([my post above](#) is a summary).
- BCS expect to have more to say when they have had the chance to progress those other actions

With that in mind, the letter is below.

Simon

### Letter from BCS

We have become aware of references in the media to some schools attempting to use BCS Level 2 ECDL Certificate in IT Application Skills to 'game' school league tables. We are writing to tell you that we do not condone 'gaming' in any form and that we will actively work with the relevant regulatory bodies to ensure it does not take place in relation to our qualifications.

The purpose of BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, is to make IT good for society. A critical part of this is making sure that our young people are well educated. To this end, we believe that ... [show more](#)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 16:05](#)

Thanks Simon, that's much appreciated

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 16:13](#)

Generally a good letter although lacking in specifics such as a definition of 'gaming'.

I do feel a bit moany saying this but I would have been much happier if that letter had said 'To this end, we believe that every student must be given the opportunity to study the academic discipline of **ICT or** Computer Science at Key Stage 4.

If every kid were to be given the 'opportunity to study GCSE Computer Science', there would be an awful lot of disappointing failures starting at average all the way down to the bottom of the ability levels hence the sudden growth in ECDL.

Quite surprised that BCS 'runs' CAS; I just didn;t know that.

Sorry for the reality check and quite happy to be voted into invisibility.

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 16:29](#)

It is a move in the right direction BUT....at risk of turning into a parrot.....

EDCD in 3 days or in 120 learning hours is not digital literacy. It is a part of digital literacy. If pupils are to go onto HE or employment claiming to have developed their digital literacy they will need:

Digital innovation, creativity and scholarship  
Communication, collaboration and participation  
Digital learning and self development  
Information, data and media literacy  
Digital identity and wellbeing

.....oh and some MS Office skills would help too.

JISC..... <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy>

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 17:05](#)

Howard, isn't it the case that education is *supposed* to be about disappointments? There's a vast array of subjects in which I have no talent and only being exposed to them allowed me to find out.

We don't say that because less than 1% of kids have enough talent to make a career in music that we should have lessons devoted to learning Pet Shop Boys lyrics ?

Ever heard a class playing the recorder ? Reckon the worst case of failing to understand loops is anything nearly as horrible ?

In languages, we try to teach the language despite few kids ever achieving the level expected of (say) a French 8 year old.

So should we abandon grammar and show them how to use Google translate ?

Why not ?

Really, why not ?

What *precisely* is the difference between not offering CS to all and not offering languages to all ?

Explain to me why all kids do Shakespeare, despite the fact that a child is more likely to be... well more or less anything is more likely than becoming a playwright.

Our school teaches that the Earth is the centre of the universe to 6 year olds, does it matter ? They 'use' the universe without this being a problem. Why not simply teach the electricity is 'magic' that good wizards create (wave power) in their fight against bad wizards who use dark new clear magic.

Yes you will fail to explain recursion to many. And ?

I think its better to fail in this than learn obsolete versions of MS Office.

6 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 17:50](#)

Dominic,

The long-term benefits of failing are rarely disputed amongst most teachers and ties in with the idea of developing a growth mindset.

But when it comes to failing a course or summative assessment, I think that opinion would change dramatically, by all parties, for many different reasons.

Thinking well outside of the box: What about a modular qualification whereby the grades of individual modules are accessible allowing employers to understand where the strengths of the individual student lies. A\* in Digital Literacy, C in Computer Science etc. (Although this has been attempted on BTEC courses with a massive selection of modules). This would technically allow students to 'fail' in one area, only to succeed in another.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 18:28](#)

In response to Howard:

I can see what you're saying and the letter is the response to a problem rather than (I hope) a serious suggestion that every child should/must "do" Computer Science. I think the BCS letter is really a response to the problem....rather than a serious suggestion about the shape of the digital curriculum. That's fair enough as it most certainly is not the role of the BCS to define the digital curriculum. They can contribute to the process of definition ....but there are many other stakeholders who must have a voice.

If we can move beyond the notion that in the 21st Century, schools will prepare young people to be citizens in a digital world by either teaching them Computer Science or training them in office skills....then we will be at the starting point rather than the destination.

In response to Dominic.....

"Explain to me why all kids do Shakespeare, despite the fact that a child is more likely to be... well more or less anything is more likely than becoming a playwright."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAvmLDkAgAM>

Because it's more powerful than drugs Cheaper than drugs Lasts longer than drugs

.....And that's only Branagh!!

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 19:46](#)

Adrian,

Well maybe you are right but the letter is certainly susceptible to my interpretation and as far as ICT is concerned, BCS never seemed concerned that 'that ship has sailed'.

Dominic,

Yup, failure is ok I guess but in the real World of Academies judged by academic performance where schools can still choose the easiest option (hence this thread), Computer Science, an undeniably difficult GCSE with poor results won't last long. That's an undesirable consequence.

And of course, there will be a much greater rate of failure in the type of schools that I used to teach in and that will be met with a negative / possibly scary response from the pupils - that will mean that Computer Teachers won't want to be there. So who will teach it?

As for languages, have a look at the (not overly convincing) article in today's BBC News Education section about them.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 18 2016, 20:29](#)

Howard - Indeed, yer right. I guess all we can do is try to make the best of the situation. Of 30 years in education I can't remember such a "perfect storm" with multiple strands of uncoordinated change often acting in contradiction to each other...using rhetoric rather than reason...and elevating haste above

thoroughness. History will bring some to account. If the “policy process bible” was ever torn up ...it was between 2010 and 2014.

But ...as some bloke once asked .....”what is to be done?”

I guess that’s what we’re about now. Making the best of what we have and seeking to move forwards. Of course that requires us to define what “forwards” means. Forwards in the interests of “computer science” as a discipline? Forwards in the interests of “what the employers want”? Forwards in terms of “the league tables”? Forwards in the corporate interests of those who sell courses?

Or Forwards in the interests of pupils?

Every professional principle which underlies what being a teacher is points to the latter. The fundamental legislation which shapes our education system is based on the latter.

Some may have forgotten and other never understood it.

The role of the teacher is to work in the interest of their pupils. I have every confidence of their determination to do so.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 19 2016, 08:48](#)

Many thanks for posting the letter Simon.

In general it is well written and makes points well.

I did have one concern with it: > As an accredited centre, your teaching of the minimum 120 guided learning hours for this qualification consolidates all the IT user experience and skills that your students have amassed throughout their academic careers.

I’m not entirely sure what this is meant to mean, but it comes across that the 120+ hours can be made up from study anywhere in key stage 1-4 (a student’s academic career). An hour a week in key stage 3 alone would create around the 120 hours alone.

This is not what guided learning hours are meant to be. They are meant to be the hours of guidance delivered in key stage 4 for the subject - not time amassed during an academic career. Although I can’t find a QCDA or DFE document that says this, it is implicit in the documents produced.

I applaud the BCS for writing a letter to make it clear they don’t endorse gaming. At the same time, I fear that any school leader who doesn’t understand the background to the letter, will think that it is giving them the excuse they need for Ofsted and the press....

Continue to do ECDL and justify the 120+ hours by saying that they studied for the course during key stage 3 lessons.

Personally, I would expect that any school offering ECDL structures 120+ hours into the timetable for it with a qualified teacher during key stage 4. The letter could have made this clearer in my view (assuming that this is what CAS and the BCS would like to see).

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)



[Apr 19 2016, 08:55](#)

But James - every school that I have worked in has entered students whose native language is not english for a GCSE in their native language. Most get A's, but with zero guided learning hours. The difference?

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 19 2016, 11:23](#)

James,

Yes, I agree - the 120 hours thing is essentially a get-out clause for 'gaming'. In fact, it gives Heads and others the ammo they need to justify entries

If you can point to 120 hours total ICT/Computing learning in a pupils entire school history then you are not 'gaming'.

On that basis, the letter moves the 3-day, ECDL, basket 3 gaming thing forward not a jot.

Or am I being cynical?

Keith,

Difference is that those kids will be able to speak a language, something that is worth recognising - ECDL kids will come out of their 3 day exam-crashing session with bugger-all Digital Literacy.

Down votes welcomed.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 19 2016, 15:45](#)

"I did have one concern with it: > As an accredited centre, your teaching of the minimum 120 guided learning hours for this qualification consolidates all the IT user experience and skills that your students have amassed throughout their academic careers.

"Minimum 120 GLH... consolidates..." strongly suggests to me that the 120 GLH should be in addition to whatever they've already done."

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 19 2016, 21:06](#)

Hi in response to Simon's request I have delivered ECDL in the past to get accreditation for 6 form students who wanted evidence of it skills. That's how it was designed. I personally had to sit the tests to become head of centre no I didn't do a 120 course and sat 8 unit tests in 2 hours. But I had been teaching IT for 3 years by then.

We have been delivering TLM ITQ forma few years and the combination of cwk as a minimum requirement and then a final assessment works very well. Pupils with more prior knowledge complete tasks quicker as expected and to a higher standard but as long as they all meet the minimum standard that's all that's required from my marking. The range of units allows us to be flexible although the timetable and pupil independent learning ability limits this somewhat.we can build up an office style theme a web design theme, animation and video sound or even include composition or programming through the specialist software unit.

I discussed with Ian and the developers at TLM ways to further reduce the admin and marking requirements and TzIM have been very proactive in introducing new features. Admin is easy managing on demand moderation and exams is great too.... [show more](#)

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 20 2016, 08:18](#)

Rick, thanks, that's good info.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 20 2016, 14:33](#)

Keith - I take your point, but the expectation would be that for students who have gone through a typical school structure they should have to do 120+ hours of structured lessons (e.g. for whole cohorts).

Of course, if you have a student who has parents who are fantastic ICT users and the child has amassed thousands of hours of experience at home (as they would have if they were a native speaker of a language) then they should be able to take the test with no preparation. But this shouldn't be the norm.

Mike - I accept that there are different interpretations and that perhaps this was the intention meant by the letter. However, if I were a head reading the letter and I had my students doing ECDL, I would take it to mean that their academic careers were from year 7 to year 11 (as I would be responsible for them during this time). Indeed, I would use the letter to justify to ofsted that I was doing the right thing.

It would be far less ambiguous if the statement read "during key stage 4" as it suggests the need to structure into the timetable at least 1.5 hours a week for two years.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 20 2016, 18:36](#)

Since **last autumn** BCS has been working with colleagues at Microsoft UK to obtain a YouthSpark grant to develop a headteacher toolkit. I'm pleased to say that's been successful and is now public knowledge <http://goo.gl/X1pq23>

It was **always** our plan that part of the toolkit will focus on helping headteachers understand the range of computing qualifications available, what they are for, and how to get help providing them, especially Computer Science GCSE as well as other valuable qualifications in IT and digital literacy.

That toolkit will go to every headteacher of a secondary school in England, and there will be a follow up campaign to ensure it has the maximum impact. We've kept DfE informed about this project from the start, and are making sure it will also be supported through the CAS Network of Excellence.

*One* of the things BCS want to see is the number of pupils taking Computer Science GCSE reach a similar number to those taking say Physics or other natural sciences, and we want every single pupil to be offered the computing qualifications that are best suited to them whoever provides them. We think ensuring GCSE Computer Science is successful is essential to the long term sustainability of computing in school. If it isn't successful that will be a major blow to computing lasting long-term as a school subject in my view.

It's probably worth remembering BCS went to a great deal of effort to bring together a coalition able to persuade DfE to include Computer Science in the EBacc in the hope that would clearly signal to headteachers its importance. Perhaps it's worth noting this was of commercial advantage to every GCSE exam board but not to BCS. We did everything we could to make sure there was an IT GCSE, but that didn't

work out sadly. Had that worked then again it would have been to the commercial advantage of the GCSE exam boards, but not BCS.

One thing we have learnt from the EBacc experience is that trying to change school behaviour through changing performance measures does not always lead to the desired result. The YouthSpark grant from Microsoft is an example of how we are now trying to influence school behaviour through a more holistic approach.

As Simon Peyton-Jones has mentioned we are talking to Ofqual and others about what's happening, and will do everything we can to make sure students take the exams that are the best ones for them, whether these are from the BCS or some other awarding body.

Bill Mitchell (I'm director of education for BCS)

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 20 2016, 18:37](#)

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1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 20 2016, 19:01](#)

James:

'It would be far less ambiguous if the statement read "during key stage 4" as it suggests the need to structure into the timetable at least 1.5 hours a week for two years.'

Exactly.

Won't happen, though.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 20 2016, 20:55](#)

One of the true benefits of CAS has been this platform for exchanging information and engaging in professional discourse (however - like/not helpful...imperfect it is). It is diverse, and to be honest, generally good natured and allows for a range of discourse from "tech tips" to fundamental questions. For all its faults

I cannot think of a more lively and diverse subject related platform for discussion.

Bills post raises one of those fascinating questions which has connections to some perennial and far reaching educational debates. On the surface they seem simple but from the perspective of the history and sociology of education they are like a fuse ...fizzing :-)

” and we want every single pupil to be offered the computing qualifications that are best suited to them”

Who decides what is “suited” to a particular pupil? What criteria are to be applied to make such a decision?

This debate led to the coining of that phrase....”vocational education... a great idea for other peoples children”.

What algorithm might we construct to allocate children to particular destinations? Perhaps we need a sorting hat? :-)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 21 2016, 10:51](#)

or the 11+.....

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 21 2016, 11:07](#)

Adrian captures the political zeitgeist perfectly, I will use the “other people’s children” elsewhere :)

It’s even worse than that.

Very nearly all decision makers around vocational education are middle class, typically since birth. They grew up in an environment that nurtured them, which is of course why they are decision makers.

My gang is working on a project for what we call ‘the middle half’ which is the subset of young people who will be users and maintainers of the technology of 2020, 2030 and beyond.

A career *should* be 50-55 years post graduation for a current teenager, longer if my wife’s gang have their way.

You’re teaching kids who will trying to earn a living in 2070, which tells us that they need to be learn new skills and may need wholesale upgrades during their career.

Conversely, they need to get their first job and these are inherently conflicting goals.

Employers, especially the loud poorly paying subset who lobby loudest only want staff who hit the ground running. This means driving packages, knowing the syntax of a specific language or being able to mend the currently popular type of machine, 3D printers will be a source of employment for many dextrous bu... [show more](#)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 21 2016, 18:09](#)

I think we need to take care with the 2 dimensional model of “academic” and “vocational” rationales for teaching “Computing” - it positions our subject in the 1960s. Then “studying physics” at school 14-16 was

about the first steps towards further study of physics or a useful theoretical background for the engineering gang (of which I was one....and I loved it!!!).

But in “the physical sciences” things moved on and painfully and sometimes against resistance we evolved the notion of “citizen science”. This is the idea that we live in a scientific world and we live in a democracy where we must make informed choices. Whilst on the one hand the “physics purists” may shun citizen science....on the other hand they like the idea that this justifies ALL pupils studying science!! Those of us who did O level physics would probably attest that on achieving it you were not ready to design a power station or repair a car engine.....but you did have an understanding of how they worked in principle.

As such I am rather against the idea of “academic” sheep studying Computer Science and lesser goats “doing digital literacy”. Surely ALL pupils at KS 4 should develop their digital literacy AND learn “Citizen Computer Science” in order that they can pass informed judgement on the way technology is developed and deployed and contribute to a deliberative democracy.

3 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 22 2016, 07:35](#)

Adrian, I think perhaps that there is the potential to kill two birds with one stone.

Make computer science part of the compulsory science curriculum, or alternatively, turn maths into a more relevant computer based maths curriculum.

All students study the subject, some for digital literacy, some for further academic study.

Leave aside all vocationals and alternatives so that there can't be any cheating.

Of course, this pains me, as I would love a system with meaningful vocationals, but the debate doesn't exist for science or maths, or geography or history, or MFL, or English, so why does it exist for Computing?

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 22 2016, 08:04](#)

=====

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 22 2016, 08:09](#)

I do not think that just providing GCSE Computer Science is the right answer. There are other alternative examinations that are valuable and should not be ignored. The argument is akin to that in which only subjects that have national strategy status should be studied until 16 years of age. Therefore pupils should not be able to study Chemistry, Biology and Physics as there is the general subject of Science. This strategy also cuts out Business and other non Nat Curr subjects. Surely it is better to have flavours of qualification which are suitable for different learners.

The issue is in the equitability of the standing of the qualification in the performance table. In this case I blame the tool not the behaviour of the schools.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 22 2016, 09:29](#)

The problem is that schools are now exam factories, judged on a narrow range of measures.

There was nothing wrong with vocational qualifications - it was the usual difficulties in getting the right people to teach them (no training budget) and pressure for performance that led to cheating etc.

At the height of vocational ICT, I taught in a school with kids that were completely alienated by the educational system and traditional exams. The criteria-referenced, coursework-based system saved many kids in that school and brought them back into the educational world with many finding an ability to perform across the board once they found something they could deal with. I didn't cheat - at the time there was no pressure to do so.

I didn't find it patronising to have those kids doing vocational qualifications and neither did they. The idea that those qualifications were second rate was, as far as I see it, a result of the system encouraging cheating, not anything innately wrong with the vocational idea.

Digital Literacy for all, yes, maybe, but I can't support Computer Science for all at KS4 - a substantial percentage and I would say, a majority of kids HATE Computer Science and find it dull. I can't see the point of making them suffer or the poor buggers that would have to teach them. Failure rates would be shocking and career damaging for many.

And as for cheating - this is a major, major problem for GCSE Computer Science - I hear about it all the time. Is it just me that hears about messing about in Controlled Conditions?

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 22 2016, 09:44](#)

I think the issue of CA cheating is moving a little off-topic, but FWIW it seems to me to be a consequence of a degree of ambiguity on the requirements from the boards combined with the course often being delivered by teachers who aren't that confident in the topics themselves, plus pressure from above to deliver good grades. The move in the new spec to have just one CA, worth a lower proportion of the overall marks and not released until September of Y11 would seem to help some of the issues, although at the expense of a lot of flexibility in teaching and to the detriment of students who don't deal well with exams.

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[Apr 22 2016, 17:58](#)

Mike,

I didn't move it there!

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 22 2016, 18:29](#)

I really must keep up!! Things have "moved on" since I last looked.

The conversations branch to where should Computing sit in the curriculum, what drives the way it's taught or what it is? Who gets access to it and why?

.....It's not "off topic" it's just what happens when you start investigating a problem. You take lid off one thing.....and find another issue inside. Behind that is another factor. Everything is connected to everything else.

Are any of these issues relevant to a thread called “The ECDL phenomena”? Yes .....absolutely! Quite simply because the “problem of ECDL”.....isn’t with..ECDL. The reason I raised it was because I feel the same forces which “corrupted” ICT ....were left untouched when we imagined that the problem was with “the curriculum” and set about redesigning the PoS. ECDL is not the “disease” .....it’s the symptom!!

As such I’m not really convinced that the problem is with Baldrick like “cunning plans” to push ECDL. That wouldn’t be very cunning..and wouldn’t be a sustainable plan.

The forces that are shaping the Computing curriculum model in schools are acting across the curriculum and acting on different subjects in different ways.

So.....do you get “the minister” to include CS in the EBACC ...so using the performance measure lever to your advantage and then.....find that the same forces are acting to shape the curriculum for “the remainder” who have not been allowed to do CS in a negative way?

As that morose prince pondered....”ah...there’s the rub”.

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 23 2016, 07:11](#)

I’m all for vocationals, and agree totally with Howard’s point that this is all caused by the exam factory status of schools.

I do believe that computing could be for all as part of maths. Some won’t like it, some will fail, but I believe that a computer based maths would be far more valuable than a paper based one (it’s interesting that Wolfson is the keynote at this year’s CAS as he is the creator of Computer base Maths and already has it running in Estonia).

I do however concede that mucking around in controlled assessment is an issue, and computer science is very difficult compared to other options. I’m lucky that I have mostly keen and bright students. If I went back to a tougher school I worked in, I would at best offer it as an option for the top students and then stick everyone else onto a vocational which I could factory them through.

The system is broken, but ECDL seems to be breaking far more than average.

It really shouldn’t be getting points on progress 8 and it is highly damaging leaving it with that status.

2 people like this. [Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 24 2016, 10:35](#)

The issue is trying to influence human behaviour using high stakes incentives. The people in the system generally respond to the incentives rather than reason behind the incentives. This leads to a distortion which they then try to fix by adjusting the incentives.

Prior to this year, children who were getting Fs in English were being ignored because they would never contribute towards 5A-C *including English and Maths*. Now, with Progress 8, they become much more important - so schools focus on them. *The issue now is that it is far simpler to get a child from F to a D than it is from a B to an A*. To counter this, Progress 8 is to be adjusted with schools getting more progress points for high grades than low grades. This then hits schools with high numbers of low attainers (coming in with sub L4 English and Maths from KS2), making them look poor for progress. So it continues.

What is missing in all of that is the perspective of what is best for the students. Those struggling on an F

need our help to be able to navigate this literate world. Those on a B need to progress and shine. Those who just don't care need our support, but if it continues then they need to fail to stop their result mocking those that are less intrinsically able but more determined.

We are running Cambridge Nationals and several local colleges do not accept these as part of the APS for entry onto A-Level qualifications. ECDL, I suspect, will almost certainly be lumped into the same category. Why then are we running these qualifications?

I suspect I am suffering from a ridiculous delusion that schools are there to educate children. I can hear Sir Humphrey Appleby's snorts of derision as I type.

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 24 2016, 12:03](#)

I'm afraid that at the root of our problems is a lack of imagination in terms of policy making. Faced with a desire for things to become better governments must "do something". Policy levers are usually seen to be spend money, pass laws, set targets. Spend money is no longer an option. Passing laws is a long and messy process and politically risky. Targets are the easy "go to" lever which shows "we are tough...and we are doing something". But it has been long known that "targets" are tricky beasts. Management literature is full of useful ideas and tales to make you smile. Such is the tale of 'Targets and the boot factories'. Radio hisses to life... "Now time for the news. There is good news and bad news. The bad news is that the factory producing left boots has failed to meet its production targets. But the good news is that the right boot factory has exceeded its target by 150%. Therefore we are closing the left boot factory and moving all the workers to the right boot factory". And the person who took a stool to stand on to see over the crowd at the football match. It worked only for one week. Can you guess why? :-) When you go to A&E and are given a card to fill in by a nurse when yo... [show more](#)

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 24 2016, 12:25](#)

Paul - "I suspect I am suffering from a ridiculous delusion that schools are there to educate children."

Indeed "what is school for?" has been asked by so many:

Some interesting insights offered by:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio\\_Gramsci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Gramsci) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo\\_Freire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo_Freire)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan\\_Illich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Illich) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel\\_Foucault](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Foucault)

Their ideas were once discussed critically to cast light on some possible answers to your question. But their works were felt to be so corrupting and dangerous that their books have been burned or locked away. I understand that the new OFSTED framework includes a search of teachers lockers and pigeon holes to ensure they are not hiding secret copies of Emmanuel Goldstein's works!!!!

:-) a

2 people like this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[Apr 24 2016, 13:51](#)

@Paul Your students are experiencing progression barriers from level 2 to A'level because they hold vocational qualifications. Your right to be annoyed for those students.



Are your students experiences isolated or part of a pattern experienced by other students? The Royal Society Arts open public services network reexamined post-16 education data at a regional and local authority level. By analysing the National Pupil Database, the RSA's OPSN sought to understand how qualification entries and completion vary by institution and local area. They published their findings in March 2016:

[“Report: Educating The ‘Failing’ 40 Percent”](#)

For those who might be time pressed.

Key Findings:

Key Stage 5 options for students not achieving five A\*-C grades at GCSE vary considerably. Of children who fail maths and English at GCSE, in some parts of the country half will be entered for three Level 3 vocational qualifications. In other parts of the country up to 85 percent will not.

- In most parts of the country, vocational education is provided only for those students who do poorly at GCSE, resulting in a notion of failure attached to studying vocational qualifications. **However, there are a ... [show more](#)**

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[Apr 25 2016, 12:14](#)

I don't recall the following paper being mentioned in this thread (apologies if I've missed it).

<http://www.ecdl.org/media/Position%20Paper%20-%20Computing%20and%20Digital%20Literacy.pdf>

It concludes: “ At the moment ECDL Foundation is actively engaged in exploring how to define the relevant essential skills and knowledge in the area of computing in a way that complements the acquisition of digital literacy.”

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 25 2016, 17:55](#)

Thanks Simon. I'm sure the government's recent [review of publicly funded digital skill qualifications](#) will be of value to the Foundation.

Liz Williams

Chair of the Digital Skills Qualifications Review Steering Group, Director Tech Literacy and Education Programmes, BT Group, Board member, The Tinder Foundation.

“To enable learners to enrol on courses leading to qualifications that signal they have the skills employers want, **they need effective diagnosis of their skills gap**. They also need better information, advice and guidance to make sure they are aware of the basic to advanced and specialist digital skills that the economy needs. This in itself is reliant on accurate and timely labour market information, as well as information **on the outcomes** that particular qualifications may support.”

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 25 2016, 18:27](#)

Simon.....

On page 4 it moves to the challenging task of functionally defining “Digital literacy”. The conclusion is that being digitally literate in 2016 will be..... Wordprocessing Spreadsheets Email Internet searching Web browsing That may have been OK (ish) for 1995.....but for 2016 I’m going for JISCs model

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy>

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 25 2016, 19:52](#)

Bruce..... Re. “review of publicly funded digital skill qualifications”. Yes!!!...A good one!!

Whilst it is about “digital skills” in relation to the economy and employment the report takes a rather heartening and broad approach recognising that in the 21st century the skills of the digital citizen are inextricably linked with work and learning skills and moves beyond the tired old dichotomy of “digital creators” and “digital users”.

So ....well worth a read!!!

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 25 2016, 21:38](#)

@Adrian,

but for 2016 I’m going for JISCs model

And I wouldn’t disagree ... will you contact ECDL?

@Bruce

Thanks for the link.

It is fun how politicians have caught on to the word ‘digital’ isn’t it ...?

[Like Not helpful](#)

[Apr 26 2016, 09:27](#)

Simon — “will you contact ECDL?”.....I’m on it!

Re. “It is fun how politicians have caught on to the word ‘digital’ isn’t it ...?”

If you look at any coverage of IT related initiatives or indeed many other initiatives over the last 20 years the accompanying photo is of two children looking excitedly at a computer monitor with one of them pointing (usually a boy and a girl). This association in the political consciousness between “change”, “transformation” and modernity and computers has been a blessing and a curse. What it is though is transitory. The main word on the lips of politician, journalists and many corporates is (increasingly was) “coding”. Much trumpeting, much news coverage, even some money .....and then....for the next headline.

It has always been so.....so the old tentmaker says.....”The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

But we are in for the long haul....not transformation....but dragging heavy bags of sand up a hill :-)

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[May 01 2016, 15:07](#)

“Ofqual has written to exam boards this week [April, 2016] demanding proof their qualifications are up to scratch.

The regulator has ordered boards to provide evidence their qualifications can be “trusted”, *including how long they take to teach.*

Exam boards will have to justify the overall time it takes to complete a qualification and, separately, the expected number of guided learning hours – time spent with a teacher.

If the qualifications are found to fall short of Ofqual’s expectations then they could be removed from league tables.”

Source: [Click here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/awarding-organisations-must-justify-sizes-of-qualifications>

1 person likes this. [Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[May 01 2016, 17:44](#)

Hopefully this letter will be more effective than the ‘here’s how to get away with it’ BCS letter.

[Like](#) [Not helpful](#)

[May 02 2016, 09:37](#)

A very interesting development Bruce.

Once the awarding bodies have stated how the 120+ hours are allocated and how many guided learning hours, OFSTED should then inspect that schools are allocating those guided learning hours on the timetable.

Any school which doesn’t provide the expected guided learning hours, unless there were extenuating circumstances would then be automatically deemed inadequate as they are not even trying to allocate the recommended time for students!

Extenuating circumstances might be a grammar school which gives all subjects less time, or a couple of students sitting Polish as their native language is Polish.

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[May 03 2016, 12:23](#)

There’s an interesting recent post on the Education Datalab Blog [here](#).

It looks at the average points scored by candidates in a particular non-GCSE qualification and compares with the average points scored by the same candidates in all of their GCSEs. Most non-GCSE qualifications have students scoring slightly more points than in their GCSEs (although Cambridge Nationals do not). ECDL stands out among all of the others as allowing weak candidates to score lots of points.