

PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate release

President Barroso receives 9 Millionth ECDL Skills Card to highlight the importance of digital literacy for employability and sustainable economic growth.

Brussels, 12th February 2009: José Manuel Barroso, President of European Commission received the 9 millionth ECDL Skills Card at a ceremony highlighting both the success of the ECDL programme and the necessity of keeping investment in digital skills high on the public policy agendas of all Member States in order to increase employability and build a competitive European economy.

Accepting the ECDL Skills Card, President Barroso stressed that digital literacy skills are essential for Europeans and stated that the Commission is proud to have been at the origin of the 'great work of the ECDL programme' and its 'amazing' progress in reaching 9 million Skills Cards. President Barroso noted that 'digital literacy is part of basic competences such as reading and writing and that this is the message the Commission is conveying to all European citizens; in this difficult economic situation many workers will need to be re-trained and the digital competences they can gain will help them find new opportunities for a better life'.

To help address the economic situation, the Commission has launched the European Economic Recovery plan which calls for 'smart investment' to yield higher growth and sustainable prosperity in the longer-term. It calls on Member States to invest more in education and re-training to protect Europe's citizens from the worst of the economic crisis.

As part of this plan, the European Commission has proposed a €1 billion investment to bring broadband to rural areas. However unless this investment is supplemented with IT training, Europe risks an additional widening of the digital divide in areas where digital literacy levels already lag behind the European average according to a 2008 Eurostat report which indicated that in 2007, 49% of citizens in sparsely populated areas never used the internet.

Prior to the presentation ceremony, in a meeting on the contribution of digital literacy to making Europe a leading knowledge-based economy, ECDL Foundation delegation welcomed President Barroso's view that digital skills training enables society to fully reap the benefits of technology.

Speaking at the event, Jim Friars, Chairperson of the ECDL Foundation Board, noted that ECDL is a true European success story, outlining how the original concept was developed with the support of EC funding. By presenting the ECDL Skills Card to President Barroso, ECDL Foundation recognises the Commission's work to empower individuals by creating better employment opportunities and an inclusive information society. Damien O'Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer of ECDL Foundation noted that ECDL Foundation is proud to present the 9 millionth skills card to President Barroso to highlight the organisation's success in delivering digital literacy to Europe. Yet with 40% of Europeans still without the basic skills needed to use the Internet, much remains to be done. Mr O' Sullivan underlined the commitment of ECDL Foundation to the objectives of the i2010 Strategy as digital literacy is a key enabler for building an inclusive information society and a knowledge-based economy.