

Dr. Aatto J. Repo
TIEKE, Finnish Information Society Development Centre

TIEKE - National Meeting Point for Information Society Developers

TIEKE, Finnish Information Society Development Centre plays a key networking role in connecting various players in the development of the Finnish Information Society.

The primary mission of TIEKE is to serve its members and associates by performing as a neutral and non-profit forum in the development of the Finnish Information Society at-large and in promoting awareness of Finland's national goals.

TIEKE operates at the crossroads of private sector, public administration, and citizens

TIEKE's membership mirrors an entire spectrum of the Finnish society and all key players in the Information Society, totalling to more than one hundred organisations and companies. Members represent business enterprises who develop, manufacture, market, and support ICT products and services, as well as companies and organisations who deploy ICT in their operations. Also several ministries and public agencies, some of them directly involved in the promotion of Information Society development, have joined TIEKE's membership.

TIEKE's Current Activities

Presently TIEKE's focus is on interoperability, networking, and services to private citizens. Among the main activities are ICT standardization, further development of the Computer Driving Licence family, and efforts to increase electronic commerce and public sector services.

<p>Our Services</p> <p>Interoperability Focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electronic commerce• Learning technologies• Information security<ul style="list-style-type: none">- recommendations, guides- legal aspects, trade procedures, standards <p>Networking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- membership services- ICT Cluster- PR and information services <p>Services for citizens Focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Qualifications for Information Society<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Computer Driving Licence family <p>Adult education data base</p> <p>New areas of interest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-eHealth and eGovernment

Being that electronic trade, especially b-to-c, nor the use of electronic public access services have not taken off as originally anticipated, TIEKE presently pays special attention to both buttressing public confidence in the use of modern technology as well as in supporting content development from the point of view of the end user.

It has been estimated that approximately 15 Finns out of one hundred have some kind of a handicap in regard to the use of network/other Information Society services. Thus eAccessibility, especially in regard to private citizens, has become an area of particular focus. TIEKE works in close cooperation with R&D institutions, educational authorities, training companies and consultancies with an overall aim to guarantee the required qualifications enabling Information Society open and accessible for all.

Over Two Decades of Information Society Development

Based on long standing experience TIEKE is recognized as one of the major players in Information Society development both nationally and internationally. Since the early 1980's TIEKE has been a major contributor in the development international trade procedures and electronic trade in close cooperation with a variety of international organizations, including UN agencies and EU Directorates.

As services to citizens have always been considered the major corner stone in Information Society development, TIEKE initiated already in mid 1990's, before the coming of the Internet era, citizens' network service TELMO that offered a wide variety of advanced electronic services including timetables in public transportation.

Finland was among the first countries in the world with national Information Society Strategy. TIEKE was one of the major contributors in the development of the strategy as well as a key player in implementing the guidelines set forth. In this TIEKE's ultimate goal is to contribute to the sustainable development of the knowledge-based Information Society and over all well-being of the nation.

With its achievements in the past, with its understanding of global issues of today, and with its visions for the future, TIEKE aims at linking together various players in the global society.

Information Society Skills for All

The Information Society Skills Certificate (The Original Computer Driving Licence) is "a national joint venture" with the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education, the Ministry of Labour, and ICT teachers and other training experts. The concept is based on a research, which was published with the heading "Basic IT competence and training needs for adults in working life" by TIEKE, Helsinki 1993.

The first A-level certificates were awarded in 1994. The advanced AB-level was introduced in 1999, and the @-level in 2000. Until today, over 100 000 citizens have passed the A-level examination, which, by now, is the highest ratio in relation to population. Wireless examination will be launched in autumn 2002.

The A-level concept was adopted as a European and international solution by ECDL Foundation Ltd., and is now widely used on all continents.

At the time of its launch, there seemed to be a social and societal demand for the ICT examination, and a niche in the market accordingly. In the early 1990's, with high unemployment rates, the Ministry of Labour allocated financial resources in order to improve ICT skills among those who

were jobless or under pressure of losing employment. For one, the ICT examination generated opportunities for individual teachers and training companies, and for the other, the examination raised or maintained unemployed people's capability to apply for a job when the recession was to be over.

By the end of the 1990's, with growing employment figures and declining work force training funds, one out of four certificates were already financed by the employers. Also, the proportion of self-paced and degree-oriented education was on its way up.

A comprehensive set of certificates to meet the needs of tomorrow

The Finnish national strategy for education, training and research, as published by the Ministry of Education for the years 2000 through 2004, puts focus on information society skills for all. The @-level certificate could be a viable tool once those skills need to be tested. It now seems likely that the @-level certificate would be part of a forthcoming nation-wide trial on subsidised adult education.

TIEKE and its partners are currently developing a certification program in wireless communications. The first level certification includes basic knowledge of wireless technologies and its applications and the usage of wireless devices at work. The second level is targeted for people who want to specialise in a particular area of wireless communications.

The key areas are new and emerging technologies, changing work environment and new forms that link learning and work together. The challenge is to convey the latest know-how and techniques into further society skills development and to meet the needs of the upcoming Mobile Information Society.

To be an active player in the Information Society requires various skills and tools. Networking and technology as well as clear guidelines and goals are needed when developing and maintaining a functional exam concept. Voluntary work and co-operative efforts with education authorities, ministries, training organisations, and ICT companies are badly needed.

From the traditional concept to an Information Society Skills Certificate

The content of our work, our learning methods and even our entire every day lives have changed a lot as a result of extensive use of information technology. The challenge today is to measure ICT-skills needed in the real life context. What is needed now is to shift from mastering application program properties to mastering real working life tasks.

The time has come to study the information society skills needed in today's working life environment. The research, once conducted, would give a strong and solid base to create a new information society ability examination. This examination could be used in work places and educational institutions to evaluate citizens' abilities to manage in modern knowledge based environments. The results would indicate those who need support and further training in order to cope with demanding conditions of tomorrow.

This goal is in line with The Ministry of Education's strategy to raise the common level of citizens' competence to act in the information society.

Dr. Aatto J. Repo

Dr. Aatto J. Repo currently serves as the Managing Director of TIEKE Finnish Information Society Development Centre. He holds a Ph.D. in information studies from the University of Sheffield in England. His doctoral thesis topic was "An Approach to the Value of Information: Effectiveness and Productivity of Information Use in Research Work".

Prior to joining TIEKE in 1998, he worked as Senior Information Scientist at the Technical Research Centre of Finland, as Marketing Executive at TeliaSonera (Telecom Finland) Telematics, and as a Director at Finland's Post Ltd in Quality and Business Development. Currently he is also Docent?? in the University of Tampere's Department of Information Studies.

Dr. Repo is a widely published author of numerous books, pilot studies, and articles covering various aspects of information technology and information society practices. During the past few years he has concentrated on Public Private Partnership efforts to develop the information society in Finland.

Additional information on TIEKE at <http://www.tieke.fi> and on Computer Driving Licence at http://www.tieke.fi/ajokortti_english.nsf