

Security Document Seminars in Europe

A fundamental evaluation – Seminars live up to expectations

by Isabel Baltazar
and Fons Knopjes

Over the past 12 years, a large number of security document seminars have been organised under the auspices of different EU programmes. The purpose of this article is to review the success and impact of these seminars, and to highlight areas for improvement. To this end, the authors sent a questionnaire to 228 seminar attendees. This article contains an analysis of the responses (and feedback) received.

Since 1992, a considerable number of security document seminars have been organised on behalf of the EU member states. These seminars, which were held in Belgium, the Netherlands and, more recently, Portugal, were organised with the financial support of the European Commission. Whereas early seminars were funded under the Sherlock and Odysseus programmes, more recent seminars were financed under the Argo programme. In all instances, the aim of the seminars was to impart specific knowledge and work methodologies, enabling attendees (read: document inspectors) to differentiate between genuine and fraudulent documents. To make sure that the seminars would ultimately stimulate the streamlining of work processes, they were based on the Pyramid Approach. This approach focuses on the principle of transferring knowledge (also known as the 'train the trainer' concept). The seminars were primarily document-oriented. As part of the coursework, participants were shown a consistent and systematic methodology for identifying suspicious documents.

Over the years, two types of seminar have evolved. The first, which looks to impart a basic level of knowledge, is specifically targeted at document inspectors and anyone whose daily work involves basic document analysis. The second type of seminar is more advanced and targeted at document security advisors and laboratory professionals.

The methods and materials used to manufacture security documents have changed considerably in recent times, primarily as a result of technological developments. However, as the counterfeiting community has managed to keep pace, a need to

update the content of both seminar types on an ongoing basis soon became apparent. In turn, this required a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of previous seminars, allowing new knowledge requirements to be ascertained and formulated. The above assessment was conducted by Portuguese officials with the administrative support of the Council General Secretariat.

The approach

Over the years, eight basic and four specialist seminars have been organised. To avoid a disparity of knowledge, the specialist seminars were only open to those who had previously attended a basic seminar. In total, 240 trainees attended the basic seminars while 60 participated in the specialist courses. As is customary for similar EU training programmes, the seminars included assessments (on completion of a module) as well as an overall evaluation (on completion of the course). The course organisers took into account the results of both tests when evaluating possible changes to the course material.

Despite the above, it was nevertheless considered necessary to conduct a thorough assessment of all previous seminars. The aim of the exercise was to determine the level of knowledge imparted on participants, to evaluate the effectiveness of this knowledge, and to validate and endorse future changes and/or structural adjustments.

Objective

The objective of the assessment was to upgrade the European Seminars for Basic and Specialist Examiners of Security Documents.



Isabel Baltazar heads the ID and Fraud Unit of the Portuguese Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras, specialising in fraud and forgery. Isabel is a member of ICAO's DCFWG (Document Content and Format Working Group) and EPWG (Education and Promotional WG).



Fons Knopjes is a forensic document expert and director of the IDManagement Centre in the Netherlands. He has advised on the development of more than 20 ID documents and is currently working on an electronic ID card. Fons is also a member of ICAO's EPWG.

Target Group

The target group consisted of all trainees who attended either basic or specialist seminars between 1992 and 2004 were considered target group (228 participants in total).

Methodology

The assessment was conducted with the assistance of a questionnaire consisting of three sections:

- Identification
- Assessment of seminar
- Organisational and structural issues

To facilitate an analysis of the results, the respective tables were reorganised slightly, giving rise to the following categories:

- Implementation of knowledge
- Assessment of the seminar
- Organisational and structural issues.

Results

- Of the 228 attendees who received a questionnaire, 140 responded (61%);
- Over 50% of respondents included suggestions and/or comments in the sections entitled 'Other remarks' and 'What changes should be considered';
- On average, approximately 70% of trainees from a given country responded;
- No response was received from a single country only;
- Only two countries scored a return rate below 50%;
- The results of the questionnaire are ranked by seminar type (basic and specialist);

Questionnaire

| | Answers basic seminar | | | | | Answers specialist seminar | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|----|----------------------------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------|
| | yes | no | yes | no | no | yes | no | yes | no | no |
| Implementation of knowledge | | | | | | | | | | |
| Are you still employed as a document expert? | yes 87% | no 13% | yes 88% | no 22% | no | yes 88% | no 22% | no | yes 88% | no 22% |
| Do you teach on the subject of document security in your country? | yes 73% | no 27% | yes 78% | no 22% | no | yes 78% | no 22% | no | yes 78% | no 22% |
| Is your knowledge used for the development of new documents? | 1 | 2.3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2.5 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Assessment of seminar | | | | | | | | | | |
| Is the documentation you received during the EU seminar of use to your teaching activities? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.0 | 5 |
| How useful is the knowledge acquired during the seminar to your daily work? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.1 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.4 | 5 |
| How useful was the EU seminar for you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.4 | 5 |
| Does the knowledge that you acquired during the seminar have an impact on your daily working methods? | 1 | 2 | 3.7 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3.9 | 4 | 5 |
| Does the content of the seminars meet your knowledge requirements? | 1 | 2 | 3.9 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3.9 | 4 | 5 |
| Does the knowledge acquired provide you with the skills needed to recognise fraudulent documents? | 1 | 2 | 3.9 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.1 | 5 |
| Is the duration of the seminar (2 weeks) sufficient? | yes 90% | no 10% | yes 97% | no 3% | no | yes 97% | no 3% | no | yes 97% | no 3% |
| Is one seminar a year enough for EU member states? | yes 70% | no 30% | yes 60% | no 40% | no | yes 60% | no 40% | no | yes 60% | no 40% |
| Organisational and structural issues | | | | | | | | | | |
| Is there a document fraud coordination unit in your country? | yes 75% | no 25% | yes 60% | no 40% | no | yes 60% | no 40% | no | yes 60% | no 40% |
| Is there a national organisation or institute that is responsible for training? | yes 77% | no 23% | yes 78% | no 22% | no | yes 78% | no 22% | no | yes 78% | no 22% |
| Are you aware of a willingness in your country to organise an EU seminar in the future? | yes 58% | no 42% | yes 29% | no 71% | no | yes 29% | no 71% | no | yes 29% | no 71% |
| Do you perceive a need for a European Knowledge Centre for ID documents? | yes 92% | no 8% | yes 84% | no 16% | no | yes 84% | no 16% | no | yes 84% | no 16% |

Table 2

Other remarks

| Topic | Number of times mentioned – basic seminar attendees | Number of times mentioned – specialist seminar attendees |
|---|---|--|
| <i>The seminar is a very important venue for meeting colleagues from other states</i> | 2 | 2 |
| <i>The certificate awarded at the end of the course is very useful when attending court to give evidence (as an expert witness)</i> | 1 | – |
| <i>Every EU state should have a centralised (English-language) document security centre</i> | 1 | – |
| <i>The course material should be translated (into the participant's language)</i> | 1 | – |
| <i>The seminar was well organised and structured. Trainers were clear and precise. Accommodation was excellent and the working environment good</i> | 1 | 1 |
| <i>The practical sessions – during which genuine and forged documents are compared – are highly effective</i> | 1 | – |
| <i>Participants to the basic course should be assured of a place on the specialist course within 2 years (if desired)</i> | 1 | – |
| <i>Refresher course</i> | 1 | 8 |
| <i>Courses (both levels) should be organised frequently to raise overall expertise and safeguard the quality of the document inspection process</i> | – | 1 |
| <i>The seminar should be taught in English and the participants should speak sufficient English</i> | – | 1 |
| <i>Develop a web-based training program (covering different levels of expertise)</i> | – | 1 |
| <i>Make information about stolen or lost documents available in digital format</i> | – | 1 |

- All respondents were positive about the EU-sponsored seminars.

Responses received

In addition to closed-end questions and questions requiring a rating, respondents were given the opportunity to suggest changes and improvements (to the seminars). In total, 50% of basic seminar attendees and 53% of specialist seminar attendees responded to these open-ended questions. The responses are shown in table 2.

Conclusion

If nothing else, the questionnaires highlighted how useful the seminars organised over the past twelve years have been. This applies to individual participants, individual EU countries and the EU as a whole. Bearing in mind the high response rate and the fact that the vast majority of respondents were very positive, it may safely be concluded that the (financial) investment was worthwhile. The evaluation results provide a solid basis for defining the content of future security document seminars that fall within the EU Training Framework.

Unless indicated otherwise, the diversity of responses was either insignificant or nonexistent (this applies to the basic and the specialist seminars in equal

measure). Based on the analysis structure identified above, the following conclusions may be drawn.

Implementation of knowledge

- States are very effective in the deployment of highly-trained experts (88%). Staff turnover rates would seem to be very low.
- Approximately 2% of respondents have left the area in which they worked altogether. In addition, some 10% of those who are no longer working as document experts are still involved in related fields.
- The European ‘train the trainer’ concept has been adopted by the majority of the member states (75%);
- The knowledge and expertise of well-trained document experts is not always used during the development of new documents (46%).

Assessment of seminar

- The answers provided would indicate that the needs of the EU member states are being met. The high scores (in excess of 80%) assigned to improvements to daily work processes and individual performance are encouraging.
- The duration of the course was not considered excessive. Having said that, 10% of attendees to the basic training course indicated that a duration of three weeks would be preferable.

| Topic | Number of times mentioned – basic seminar attendees | Number of times mentioned – specialist seminar attendees |
|---|---|--|
| <i>New technologies and materials</i> | 13 | 4 |
| <i>Additional document inspection sessions</i> | 9 | 2 |
| <i>Update of content</i> | 9 | 2 |
| <i>New developments in the field of document forgery</i> | 9 | 3 |
| <i>Biometrics</i> | 5 | 3 |
| <i>Digital and other printing techniques</i> | 4 | 2 |
| <i>Module on computer forgery techniques</i> | 3 | 2 |
| <i>Profiling</i> | 2 | 1 |
| <i>EU perspective on security documents</i> | 1 | 2 |
| <i>Issuance of identity cards</i> | 1 | 2 |
| <i>Modern techniques (use of plastics, cards, digital techniques, etc.)</i> | 1 | 2 |
| <i>Verification technology</i> | | 2 |
| <i>Electronic documents and related challenges</i> | | 1 |

Table 3
New material

- Although 65% of respondents who had attended the basic seminar considered one seminar a year to be sufficient, 40% of those who had followed the specialist seminar proposed a second annual seminar.
- Apart from updates, there is no need for structural changes to the content of the seminars. The updates should cover technologies and materials in particular. It should be noted that few respondents substantiated their wish to add or remove course components.
- One noteworthy development was the request for a refresher course, received from attendees of the specialist seminar.
- Taken all feedback into consideration, the Portuguese initiative to apply for ARGO funding for a European course on polymer security documents would appear to be well timed.

Organisational and structural issues

- Although there were some discrepancies, the establishment of a national document fraud coordination unit received across-the-board support. On average, 67% of attendees support the creation of such a unit.
- 80% of respondents indicated that they were aware of a national training institute (organisation).
- The majority of respondents (88%) perceived a need for a European Knowledge Centre for ID documents. The establishment of such a centre was particularly well supported by the basic seminar attendees (92%).
- Only 35% of those asked believe that the country in which they reside is able to organise training seminars.