

What makes a good certification scheme for professional people? There are three primary objectives for a successful scheme:

- there is a basic understanding of the subject matter
- it provides value to those who gain the certificate (and their employers)
- it is fair to all concerned, independent of vested interests

This book supports a scheme for software testers which meets these objectives. The subject matter, software testing, is well enough understood to provide an agreed basis for a foundation level certificate. The new German ASQF scheme and the successful ISEB scheme in the UK will soon be extended internationally. I believe that the key reason for the success of the UK scheme is the independence of the accrediting and examining body, as described below. I also believe that this philosophy will ensure the success of the international scheme for certified testers that is now being pioneered in Germany.

There are two aspects to independence: accreditation of training providers and examination of individual candidates.

What is the difference between certification and accreditation? Certification applies to individuals; accreditation applies to training organisations. An individual person receives a certificate for demonstrating his or her knowledge of a subject area. Their knowledge is developed through on the job experience but also through training courses in the subject. When there is an agreed basis for the knowledge (a syllabus or a "body of knowledge") then an independent body can assess courses provided by a number of training providers - this is accreditation. Accreditation gives confidence that the training conforms to a standard of content and administration. If training providers accredit themselves, this has little value; accreditation by a recognized independent body has far more credibility.

In order to award a certificate, the candidates need to take an exam based on the agreed syllabus. If this exam is set, monitored and marked by an independent body, then there is an equal "playing field" for all candidates (and all training providers). The independence of the examining body gives the certificate awarded to the passing candidates far more value.

There are some schemes where training providers are self-accrediting, and exams are set by the training providers. Although these schemes do provide some value, an independent scheme is better. Those who oppose all certification schemes are very aware that there can be problems with all such schemes, which is true - no scheme will be perfect. However, I believe that an independent scheme such as ISEB, ASQF and the planned international scheme will provide significant value for candidates and their employers.

How do we know that an independent qualification scheme will work? because the ISEB scheme is already working in many countries. ISEB stands for Information Systems Examination Board. ISEB was first formed as an independent body for qualifications in systems analysis and design. It is now part of the British Computer Society and offers qualifications in ten areas, including project management, IT service management, business systems development, data protection, information security, and since 1998, software testing. Each qualification is managed by a subject board consisting of volunteers from industry and academia. Each board also has panels to deal with specific areas; the Software Testing Board has an Accreditation Panel and an Exam Panel. ISEB staff provide administrative support for the boards and their panels, as well as distributing and marking exams (set by the Exam Panel), and engaging invigilators (proctors) to monitor candidates while they sit the exam.

The ISEB Software Testing Board was formed in 1997. The Foundation Syllabus in Software Testing was written by a working party of volunteers from the board, and the first course was run in October 1998. Since then, the scheme has been very successful, exceeding everyone's expectations - it is now ISEB's second most popular qualification (after IT service management). By mid-2002, there were 23 course providers accredited for the Software Testing Foundation course, including organisations from Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, Eire and Australia as well as the UK. Over 8000 candidates have taken the Foundation exam in less than four years. This scheme has succeeded in raising the profile of testing and improving recognition and respect for testers. In the UK job market, it is now typically a pre-interview requirement to hold the Foundation Certificate.

What will happen next? The International Software Testing Qualification Board (ISTQB) has been formed in 2002, so accreditation and examination at Foundation level will soon be done consistently by independent bodies throughout all participating countries. Testers throughout the world will have a greater common understanding and recognition. This book is an important means of supporting this in German-speaking countries. The international certificate will provide assurance and recognition of basic testing knowledge throughout the world. This a very exciting time in software testing!

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June 2002