

Training and Certificate Program Recognition. Options and Possibilities

by Dr. George Anastasopoulos, VP, Global Development & Compliance, IAS

The recognition of Training and/or Certification Programs remains a common requirement for Training Providers and Personnel Certification Bodies (PCBs). In this article, we'll explore some options for such recognition and their applicability.

It is important to note that this article is only referring to training and/or certification programs excluding traditional education degrees that are usually regulated by Education Departments and Ministries. This training can be offered by private or public organizations, institutions, unions, government agencies, employers, independent training organizations, community colleges, universities, professional and trade associations.

This article presents three distinct recognition options for training and/or certification programs. The key differences between the three programs are presented in Table 1.

Option 1: Utilizing ISO/IEC 17024, *“Conformity assessment — General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons”*;

The first option is only applicable to Personnel Certification Bodies (PCBs) that are operating a personnel certification program that includes “certified training” as a requirement. Recognition of such training programs is limited only to the ones aimed at achieving personnel certification. This certification is provided under a scheme (certification program) that is included in the PCB’s scope of accreditation. A sole training provider cannot be recognized/accredited under this option.

Option 2: Utilizing IPC SC-11-002 *“Specification on Recognition of Training Courses and Training Providers”*

The second option is available to Training Providers, Certificate Program Developers, Certificate Issuers and/or Personnel Certification Bodies (PCBs) that wish to approve their Training Programs. This option provides more flexibility since it doesn’t limit the fields of the training programs and doesn’t interrelate them to personnel certification scheme(s), which, remains an option, if applicable.

Option 3: Utilizing ASTM E2659-18: *“Standard Practice for Certificate Programs”*.

This option is available to Training Providers, Certificate Program Developers and Certificate Issuers. It doesn’t limit the fields of the training programs and doesn’t interrelate them to personnel certification scheme(s).

Table 1. Key differences between the three programs:

Recognition Standard	For Organization Types	Certificate Program Types	Internationally Recognized?	Recognized by who?
ISO/IEC 17024	PCBs	Competence Based personnel certification	Yes	IAF

IPC SC-11-002	PCBs and/or Training Agencies	Competence Based personnel certification	Yes	IPC
ASTM E2659-18	Training Agencies	Knowledge based personnel recognition	Yes*	Accreditation Bodies that operate such program

*Not supported by IAF MLA.

Those three options are presented in more detail below:

ISO/IEC 17024, “Conformity assessment — General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons”

International Standard ISO/IEC 17024 contains principles and requirements for Personnel Certification Bodies (PCBs) that wish to develop and operate a certification scheme for persons. This standard has been developed by ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, an international standard-setting body composed of representatives from various national standards organizations. Founded on February 23rd, 1947 ISO promotes worldwide proprietary, industrial, and commercial standards. ISO is limited to standardization activities and doesn’t provide certification or accreditation services.

ISO/IEC 17024 does not require PCB’s to include successful completion of a prerequisite training course as a requirement in the personnel certification process. However, it recognizes that training may be a requirement depending on industry context and needs.

More specifically, according to clause 5.2.1 of ISO/IEC 17024 *“Completion of training may be a specified requirement of a certification scheme.”* The recognition/approval of training by the personnel certification body is permitted under specific conditions described in the standard. In cases where training is identified as a scheme requirement, the training may take many forms and may serve various purposes.

Therefore, ISO/IEC 17024 allows variation in how competence is demonstrated, and consequently, different PCB’s will interpret and apply this in different ways. Developing a custom certification scheme of persons is the only realistic way for a PCB to accommodate the flexibility of ISO/IEC 17024 while at the same time is encouraging good practice. ISO/IEC 17024 does not mandate any specific way that PCB’s must design their certification schemes or, where required, introduce training course requirements.

It is important for interested parties to understand that under ISO/IEC 17024 the training and the certification examination are two independent processes. While the training is helping an individual to achieve knowledge, an examination utilizing a valid test is measuring in a fair, valid, and reliable way whether an individual has the necessary competencies for the job. Although competence is related to demonstrated knowledge, it is also frequently extended to include skills and experience.

To conclude, this option (ISO/IEC 17024) is only applicable to PCBs operating personnel certification programs that require “certified training” as a prerequisite for personnel certification. Therefore,

recognition of those training programs is limited to only those that are included in schemes featured in a PCB's scope of accreditation.

PCBs can be accredited to ISO/IEC 17024 by several Accreditation Bodies (ABs), that are typically signatories of the Multi-Lateral Arrangement (MLA) of regional and/or international associations such as Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC), European Accreditation (EA), International Accreditation Forum (IAF), etc. Non-internationally recognized accreditation bodies exist as well; however, they do not provide the same recognition as the above-mentioned signatories.

ABs are developing their own explicit programs that describe the rules for PCB accreditation to ISO/IEC 17024. One example of such an accreditation program is IAS AC474 *"Accreditation Criteria for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons"* developed by the US based Accreditation Body IAS (International Accreditation Service). More information and guidance can be found [here](#).

IPC SC-11-002 "Specification on Recognition of Training Courses and Training Providers"

The IPC specification describes the fundamental principles for the design, provision and approval of training courses offered by Training Providers, Certificate Program Developers, Certificate Issuers and PCB's. This specification has been developed by IPC, the International Association of Personnel Certification Bodies and Training Providers. Starting in 1995 (known as IATCA) IPC has been actively involved in improving the quality and credibility of professional personnel certifications. IPC is a US registered non-profit organization and together with its signatory members has developed specifications related to certification of persons and training providers. IPC is an association, not a certification body; all activities associated with examination and certification are executed by its members. IPC is also the scheme owner of the globally accepted and operated *"IPC Management System Auditors certification scheme"*; the first personnel certification scheme endorsed by IAF. As such, it is used as the common competency-based personnel certification scheme for Management System Auditors.

IPC specification SC-11-002 offers alternate approaches and methodologies for Training Providers, Certificate Program Developers, Certificate Issuers and/or Personnel Certification Bodies (PCBs), along with the relevant stakeholder groups. It can be applied both to standalone training programs and/or to training programs that are a prerequisite for an accredited personnel certification scheme (under ISO/IEC 17024).

IPC SC-11-002 requires that Training Providers establish learning objectives and identify training methods that suit the learning objectives. It also contains the requirements for approval of Training Providers, Certificate Program Developers, Certificate Issuers and PCB's.

Annex I of IPC SC-11-002 includes good learning and training practices that can be utilized by interested parties.

The Training Providers, Certificate Program Developers, Certificate Issuers and PCB's that comply with IPC requirements are recognized by IPC after becoming signatories of the IPC MLA on Recognition of Training Courses. This way they can use the IPC logo on approved training program certificates which demonstrates their compliance and provides global recognition. In order to achieve the IPC MLA signatory status, the interested organizations must first become either associate or full IPC members, then apply for IPC MLA status which is achieved through the process of peer evaluation.

More information and guidance can be provided by IPC secretariat at secretary@ipcaweb.org and at www.ipcaweb.org.

ASTM E2659—18: Standard Practice for Certificate Programs

Standard practice ASTM E2659 provides guidance to certificate issuers for developing and administering quality certificate programs and to stakeholders for determining the quality of certificate programs. It was developed by ASTM in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee. ASTM International, formerly known as American Society for Testing and Materials, is an international standards organization that develops and publishes voluntary consensus technical standards for a wide range of materials, products, systems, and services.

ASTM E2659 includes requirements for both the entity issuing the certificate as well as requirements for the specific certificate programs provided. It also provides the foundation for the recognition or accreditation, or both, of a specific entity to issue a certificate or certificates to persons after successful completion of a certificate program.

It is important to note that this standard does not provide guidance pertaining to certification of persons nor does it provide guidance pertaining to education or training programs in general.

The standard is considering “Certificate programs” as the ones that are typically offered by community colleges and universities, government agencies, employers, independent for-profit training organizations, and professional and/or trade associations. It is complimentary to standardization documents regarding continuing education and training providers in general (such as IACET 1-2013) and for entities offering personnel certification programs (such as ISO/IEC 17024).

ASTM E2659 aims to:

- Provide Certificate Program Developers and Certificate Issuers guidelines for quality program development and administration;
- Form the foundation for a recognition or accreditation system, or both, that enable consumers, employers, government agencies, and others who rely upon a skilled workforce to distinguish between qualified workers and those with fraudulent or less-than-quality credentials;
- Assist stakeholders in differentiating certificate programs from personnel certification;
- Assist stakeholders in differentiating certificate programs from other programs that confer certificates, including but not limited to, certificates of attendance or certificates of participation.

Accreditation to ASTM E2659 can be provided by Accreditation Bodies (AB’s) that are offering such programs. One example of such accreditation programs is IAS AC371 “*Accreditation Criteria for Training Agencies for Workforce Qualification Programs*,” developed by IAS (International Accreditation Service., a US based AB. More information and guidance can be found at:

<https://www.iasonline.org/services/training-agencies/>