



3/3/17

MSSC BOARD-SUGGESTED QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES FOR INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATIONS

Industry recognized certifications (IRCs) are being used increasingly in the workforce development arena at both the national and state levels. They are the main tools through which industries communicate their skill needs to the education and training community and against which potential certificants are assessed. Since they can be easily counted, IRCs also provide clear accountability data for federal agencies and thus for funding through federal programs.

Because of the value and growing demand for IRCs and the potential for government resources, there is now a plethora of them. This is a special challenge for federal and state agencies who need to make decisions about which certifications to qualify for training and testing funds. There are currently no clear guidelines from any federal agency against which to assess the quality of IRCs.

The guidelines provided below are designed to distinguish high quality, well-established, national IRCs with strong nationwide industry support from those local, academic, and state credentials that not nationally nationally portable, have no infrastructure for nationwide delivery and thus offer less value to companies, students and workers. Again, these proposed guidelines apply only to IRCs, the first category in the WIOA definition of "Postsecondary Credentials." This paper does NOT address the question of quality assurance for the other categories in the all-encompassing WIOA definition, which includes apprenticeships, licenses, BA and AA degrees.

These guidelines are also rooted in a distinguishing feature of IRCs in terms of quality assurance: the International Organization for Standardization has already approved a quality standard for personnel certification: ISO 17024. ISO is the quality standard accepted by industry globally and is used by leading accreditation bodies in the U.S.

The MSSC is forwarding these suggested guidelines to DOL by virtue of its own authority as the only industry-led, non-profit national certification body:

- whose industry-defined, industry-wide nationally validated skill standards were officially recognized in 2001 by the federal National Skill Standards Board and are updated annually by subject matter experts to ensure that they are keeping pace with technological change; and
- is accredited by the American National Standards Institute under ISO 17024 for both manufacturing and logistics. MSSC has been vetted and used by the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, Justice, Defense, the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the VA, Job Corps, a host of state agencies, and endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES AND RATINGS FOR IRCs

Meets the Definition of "Industry"

For purpose of quality assurance of IRCs, the first step should be a clear definition of "industry." At the federal level, the DOL already defines "industry" by using the North American Industrial Classification System. For example, NAICS uses Codes 311-339 to identify the principal 21 sub-sectors of manufacturing. The U.S. Department of Education and the Career-tech Ed (CTE) community has long used "16 Career Clusters."¹ Any entire industry or industry sector identified in the NAICS or CTE "Career Clusters" system or any major occupation with large numbers of jobs and found commonly throughout the nation could qualify.

There should be documentation that the underlying skills for these industries are accepted by a broad cross-section of the industry that the certification body claims to represent. This is best accomplished by proof of nationally validated skill standards defined by the industry. There should also be documentation that these IRCs are not only nationally portable, but also ***accompanied by an infrastructure to deliver the related instructional services and testing nationwide.*** In ***all*** these cases, the underlying skills should apply nationally and the certification should be nationally portable, since these skills are defined by industry needs, technologies and practices, not by state, regional or local boundaries.

Meets the Definition of "Recognition"

The prerequisite for "recognition" should be demonstrated recognition by bona fide third party organizations. Within that form of recognition, there are two categories that should be used for rating purposes. The first and highest tier is "Accreditation" and the second tier is "Recognition."

FIRST TIER - THIRD-PARTY ACCREDITATION:

ISO standard 17024 is used in the U.S. by three nationally-recognized accreditation bodies to accredit organizations that provide IRCs:

National Commission for Certification Agencies (NCCA). To date, NCCA has accredited 330 certifications for 130 organizations and offers ISO 17024 accreditation in partnership with the International Accreditation Service (IAS). For details: see www.credntiallingexcellence.org

American National Standards Institute (ANSI). To date, ANSI has accredited 170 certifications for 56 certification organizations. For details, see www.ansi.org

International Certification Accreditation Council (ICAC). To date, ICAC has accredited 108 certifications for 7 organizations. For details, see www.icanet.org.

¹Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Architecture and Construction; Arts, A/V and Communications; Business, Management and Administration; Education and Training; Finance; Government and Public Administration; Health Science; Hospitality and Tourism; Human Services; Information Technology; Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security); Manufacturing; Marketing, Sales and Service; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math; Transportation, Distribution, Logistics.

These accreditations are *based on direct audits by well-qualified quality experts* in the personnel certification field. Under ISO Standard 17024, the accreditations protect the integrity and ensure the validity of individual certification programs. The 17024 standard addresses the structure and governance of the certifying body, the characteristics of the certification program, the information required to be available to applicants, and the recertification initiatives of the certifying body. It is designed to help organizations conduct well-planned and structured evaluations in order to ensure impartiality of operations and reduce any conflict of interest.

For *legal defensibility* purposes, IRCs accredited by these bodies will also provide direct confirmation that their assessments are consistent with federal civil rights laws and all federal regulations.

For further details on accreditation, see "Industry Recognized Certifications: Third Party Accreditation, A Guide for Educators" published by GSX. (www.skillsdmo.com and go to "our services")

SECOND TIER - THIRD-PARTY ENDORSEMENT

Well-established national professional societies and national business associations often endorse certifications, typically non-profit, for their key personnel. This is common practice, for example, in the health care, IT, financial and construction industries. The National Association of Manufacturers has met the WIOA call for "stackability" by endorsing a series of non-profit stackable certifications, including those offered by the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC), the American Welding Society (AWS), the National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS), the Association for Quality (ASQ), and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME).

As another form of authoritative endorsement, some industry-defined, nationally validated standards, which provide the best substantive foundation for IRCs, are also endorsed by federal and state skill standards agencies or workforce boards. Another rating metric for these organizations is their documented success in helping their certificants with the three major accountability metrics: securing employment, seeing an increase in wages, or continuing their education within the same field.

State and federal agencies should exercise caution in supporting any IRCs that do not meet the required guidelines and definitions above for "industry-recognized."

Special Case

While the guidelines and ratings above apply to most well-established, national, and largely non-profit IRCs, state and federal agencies will always preserve the right to deal with exceptions on a case-by-case basis. An example of potential exceptions is **Proprietary Corporate Certifications**: Some leading multinational corporations (MNCs) have created "education" programs that provide certifications for high-level competencies within their respective industry sectors, but may not have third-party accreditation or third-party endorsement. These are all global leaders with high levels of expertise who often lease, license or sell their equipment or software to educational institutions and businesses and who operate on a national--indeed, international--scale.

These certifications serve individual corporate interests by strengthening brand awareness and assuring users of their products and services are able to leverage and meet their individual interests. At the same time, they provide value to learners and professionals by demonstrating evidence of high technical skills

attainment and improved access to employment opportunity by virtue of affiliation with globally recognized and respected brands. Examples of providers include: Microsoft, ESRI, Cisco, Snap on Tools, and Trane.

Aligns with Other Federal Best Practices

If DoL followed these MSSC Board Recommendations, it would also be aligned with best practices in this field with other federal agencies.

DOD – Congress has taken a clear position on this topic by passing bipartisan legislation on this topic. Section 561 of the National Defense Authorization Act FY 17 clearly defines “Quality Assurance for Certification Programs and Standards” as those that meet any of the following criteria:

1. “Accredited by a nationally-recognized, third party certification accreditor”
2. “Sought by employers within the industry or sector involved as a recognized, preferred or required credential”
3. “Endorsed by a nationally accepted trade association or organization representing a significant part of the industry or sector...”

The MSSC Board recommendations align fully with these criteria and MSSC standards and certifications meet all three NDAA criteria. Literally all of the other well-established, nationwide industry certifications would meet at least Criteria 1 and 2. Here are some well-known examples by industry, sector or major occupations found in more than one industry or sector:

- Manufacturing – MSSC Certified Production Technician (CPT), National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS), American Welding Society (AWS), Association for Quality Assurance (ASQ), Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME)
- IT – CompTIA, Microsoft, Cisco
- Health Care – National Professional Societies
- Supply Chain Management – American Productivity and Inventory Control Society (APICS), Institute of Supply Management (ISM)
- Construction – National Council for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
- Energy – American Petroleum Institute (API)
- Automotive Service – Auto Service Excellence (ASE)
- Distribution-Logistics – MSSC Certified Logistics Technician (CLT)

DoED - Educational institutions cannot receive Department of Education funds unless they are *accredited by nationally-recognized, third party accreditors*, the first criteria in the NDAA FY 17 for DoD.