

## The Value of Certification for Software Test and Quality Professionals

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Software test and quality professionals around the world have been seeking ways to boost their credibility both within their own organizations and in the software community. There are several national and international certification programs available, and some decide to pursue this route. However, there have been many questions and even doubts regarding the value of certifications. Hiring managers are getting frustrated when they hire certified testers or certified quality personnel and discover that they are not capable of performing some of the most basic tasks in their job. This has caused some hiring managers and organizations to question the value of certification.

I think we all agree that the value of any certification program lies in its ability to meet individuals' diverse needs and interests for both breadth and depth of content so that it helps them improve the way they perform their job on a day to day basis

In order to understand why certifications have received mixed reviews, one has to realize that there are essentially two ways to obtain certification. One is what we call ***“Exam-Based Certification.”*** This is when the certification is awarded entirely based on passing an exam administered by the certifying party. Individuals normally prepare for this exam through self-study by reading literature that covers material most likely to be required for the exam. While some feel confident about their ability to pass the exam based solely upon their own reading, others may prepare by attending a typically 2 or 3-day testing course. While attending a course is not required for a person to take the exam, many candidates undoubtedly believe that attending a course offered or approved by the certifying authority is critical for passing the exam. Such courses are normally viewed as an examination prep course that covers knowledge required for passing the exam. Some providers essentially guarantee that attending their course will result in passing the exam. Two organizations now offer this type of certification for software testers. These are QAI and ISTQB. In addition, ASQ offers a related CSQE certification which is not specifically regarding testing.

***Education-Based Certifications,*** on the other hand, are awarded only after the individual has completed a course of study that covers a comprehensive Body of Knowledge, and after passing an exam in each course attended. Like any other educational or vocational diploma, the course of study is taught through instructor-led sessions that aim at maximizing learning and gaining experience with the methods and techniques being taught through hands-on workshops.

Most of us will agree that one of the most effective ways to establish a profession is through education that covers areas of study important to the profession. Developing a Body of Knowledge (BOK) that defines those areas of study are essential first step to establishing software testing as a profession and educating our testers. Education is a key way to establish testing as a discipline and to change the perception that it is an ad hoc activity that requires minimal skill or knowledge.

Since 1999, the **International Institute for Software Testing** (IIST, [www.iist.org](http://www.iist.org)) has taken the lead in offering Education-Based certifications. An Advisory Board of industry experts and practitioners ([www.iist.org/advisory.php](http://www.iist.org/advisory.php)) was formed to provide direction to the effort, starting with developing a Body of Knowledge which a professional tester should know.

IIST's first education-based certification was the *Certified Software Test Professional* (CSTP). As the testing industry matured, IIST's Advisory Board responded to the need for separately recognizing different roles by approving the Certified Test Manager (CTM) Body of Knowledge and certification program.

To achieve either CSTP or CTM certification, a candidate must attend 10 days of instructor-led training and pass an examination for each course. The passing score is 80%. The IIST curriculum offers a number of courses that meet the criteria for each Body of Knowledge area. Candidates can choose their own course of study as long as courses cover all seven areas of the Body of Knowledge for the specific certification.

In addition to the educational requirements for these certifications, a candidate must also demonstrate that he or she has been working in a software test related job for at least one year and has had the opportunity to apply the formal training to their job.

To work with and support other certifications, IIST's Advisory Board has agreed to grant credits toward the CSTP certification to holders of ISTQB's Foundation Level and QAI's CSTE certifications. Holders of these certifications, which are based on material covered typically in no more than three days of training, receive two days credit toward the CSTP certification, satisfying the CSTP Body of Knowledge Areas 1 and 2.

Testing has truly become a recognized and clearly identifiable profession. We need to make sure individuals who take testing as a career have received the education they need to perform the best way possible. Certification furthers professional status, and education-based certification provides an indisputable basis for enabling superior performance and growth.