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The FIA Qualification Scheme

The FIA Qualification Scheme, launched September 2005, adopts a revolutionary but highly integrated approach to personal qualifications, training course provision and training provider quality assurance within the fibre optics industry. The scheme has the principal aim of improving the levels of expertise within industry and seeks to deliver benefits, both tangible and intangible, to all involved. The details of the scheme and all the associated documentation are to be found on a designated area of the FIA web-site at www.fia-online.co.uk/equals01.htm.

The Qualification Scheme addresses three inter-related areas: learner development, via a series of qualification stages with associated status "Awards" that reflect increasing levels of education and skill levels; training courses, via the approval of specific agendas and assessment systems to enable the progression of learners from one stage to the next and, finally, training provision via the appointment of Certified Trainers employed by Approved Training Providers.

A key feature of the FIA approach is its flexibility to adapt to the relevant skills required for a job function. One's job should not prevent anyone from achieving any level of FIA Award and no irrelevant training needs to be undertaken in order to gain that award.

The qualifications comprise a base, Level I, award but concentrate on four higher level awards. Learners at Level II have Technician status and will have obtained a basic qualification (such as City & Guilds 3466/3666) plus a recognised industry award and an appropriate health and safety qualification. Learners can progress from this to higher levels of award by a combination of attendance and successful assessment on FIA Approved Course Units and, in the case of the highest levels, submission of a thesis and oral examination. The status awards for the higher levels are Level III: Specialist, Level IV: Engineer and Level V: Expert. Enrolment for learners on the Qualifications Scheme is free for FIA Personal Members and carries a small fee for others.

The scheme encourages the approval of new course units and even allows the development of new, alternative, routes to higher level awards. This flexibility is essential to meet the needs of a diverse industry. Without such a flexible approach, high level qualifications would either be absent, due to the relatively small numbers of learners, or inappropriate to many learners. Training providers are encouraged to submit the agenda/syllabus and assessment criteria for each of the courses they operate for inclusion at the appropriate level within the Qualification Scheme.

In order to maintain the FIA Award status achieved by successfully completing the high level awards, a minimum of eight hours continuing professional development must be registered each year based on a wide range of technology orientated events and training courses.

Organisations providing the principal courses/units are required to be FIA Approved Training Providers and use FIA Certified Trainers to deliver the training.

Certified Trainers have to be knowledgeable in all aspects of fibre optics to a level beyond that required to pass the City and Guilds 3666 scheme. They also have to be qualified, trained or experienced as trainers and practically experienced in the field of fibre optics. After 31st October 2005, Certified Trainers are required to pass a written FIA examination and to have a qualification to show that they have achieved a suitable level of expertise as a trainer. There are a number of trainer qualifications and certification schemes that will satisfy the FIA requirements and in order to encourage the uptake of such professional qualifications the FIA is allowing significant periods of grace in this area. The Certified Trainer is provided with a Photo ID Card that requires renewal every two years.

FIA Approved Training Provider status is renewed annually and in order to gain and retain this approval, the organisation is required to be an FIA Corporate Member and commit to using only FIA Certified Trainers on any course units leading to awards that are recognised within the FIA Qualification Scheme. In addition, applicants shall be either a City & Guilds Centre approved for the delivery and assessment of 3666 or 3662 series

qualifications or, alternatively, be willing to undergo and successfully complete initial and subsequent annual audits by FIA staff.

Learners completing course units as part of their career progression are required to provide feedback, covering the quality of both training and facilities to the FIA Qualification Scheme Directorate. This provides effective quality assurance controls for the entire system.

Immediate benefits of the Qualifications Scheme are web-based listings of companies supporting the scheme, FIA members with "Certified" employees and separately, pending employers permission, "Certified" personnel including those Level V Award "experts" for clients requiring consultants in specialist areas.

The more intangible benefits include improved job prospects and increased competitiveness through the use of "Certified" personnel. Corporate members are able to use the Qualification Scheme logo on corporate letterheads and promotional literature. "Certified" personnel are able to feature the relevant Qualification Award "status" on their business cards.