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# HPAS – The hydrographic professional accreditation scheme by the IFHS

An article by DAVID VINCENTELLI and TANJA DUFEK

In such an international branch as hydrography, the need for standards – especially in certification of personnel – is of great importance. The recently introduced multi-national hydrographic professional accreditation scheme (HPAS) by the IFHS (International Federation of Hydrographic Societies) including its member societies AFHy and DHyG, allows individuals to gain a professional accreditation not only based on educational qualification, but also on their practical experience and continuing professional development (CPD). The HPAS has received recognition by the IBSC (FIG/IHO/ICA International Board on Standards of Competence) earlier this year, which increases the likelihood that such personal accreditation will become more established in the professional field of hydrography.

HPAS | personal accreditation | IFHS | IBSC | CPD  
 HPAS | accréditation personnelle | IFHS | IBSC | développement professionnel continu  
 HPAS | persönliche Akkreditierung | IFHS | IBSC | kontinuierliche Weiterbildung

Dans un secteur d'activité aussi international que l'hydrographie, le besoin de standards – tout particulièrement en ce qui concerne la qualification des individus et son suivi – est crucial. Le schéma d'accréditation (HPAS) récemment mis en place par l'IFHS (Fédération internationale des sociétés hydrographiques), dont sont membres l'AFHy et le DHyG, permet à tout professionnel du secteur d'obtenir une accréditation ne reposant pas uniquement sur son cursus universitaire mais également sur les acquis de son expérience professionnelle. Courant 2022, le schéma d'accréditation HPAS a été reconnu par l'IBSC (comité international FIG/OHI/ACI sur les normes de compétence pour les hydrographes et les spécialistes en cartographie marine), l'asseyant davantage comme un standard de qualification des personnels employés au service de l'hydrographie au sens large.

In einer so international agierenden Disziplin wie der Hydrographie sind Standards wichtig – insbesondere für die berufliche Qualifikation. Vor Kurzem wurde das HPAS – das »Hydrographic Professional Accreditation Scheme« – von der IFHS (International Federation of Hydrographic Societies), darunter auch die AFHy und die DHyG, eingeführt. Das HPAS erlaubt es Einzelpersonen, sich neben ihren Studienabschlüssen auch basierend auf ihren praktischen Berufserfahrungen und kontinuierlichen Weiterbildungen akkreditieren zu lassen. Anfang des Jahres 2022 hat das IBSC (FIG/IHO/ICA International Board on Standards of Competence) das HPAS anerkannt, was die Wahrscheinlichkeit erhöht, dass sich die persönliche Akkreditierung im Berufsfeld der Hydrographie stärker etabliert.

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## Towards a standardised, follow-up and international recognition of hydrographic skills

HPAS is the IFHS certification scheme, certified by the IBSC (FIG/IHO/ICA International Board on Standards of Competence), created to follow and certify professional hydrographers.

In regard to HPAS multiple questions may arise: Why this need for a new certification scheme? What are the differences between HPAS and the famous Cat. A and Cat. B?

We shall first outline the differences between diploma and certification. Both Cat. A and Cat. B diplomas are well known and accepted within the industry and beyond. This certification is

given by the IBSC to educational programmes to award the completion of such IBSC certified »scholar« path, including a minimum list of course contents.

Certification schemes, such as the HPAS, certify the capacity of an individual to be a recognised hydrographer, not only thanks to the education qualification of that individual but also thanks to the experience gained during their career, the technics applied in the field, their management skills, their research, their lecture ...

The main objectives of a certification scheme compared to a diploma are:

- to keep certifying the capabilities of individuals all along their career;

- to allow personnel with academic or non-academic background in related science to be recognised as an hydrographer to a certain level, thanks to the experience gained (in its position, in the field, in office or based to additional courses taken).

To develop this multinational HPAS scheme by the IFHS – a federation gathering six hydrographic societies: THS:UKI for UK and Ireland, DHyG for Germany, HSB for Benelux, IHS for Italy, AFHy for francophone countries and HSSA for South Africa – has been a long process. It was expedited by the THS:UKI and driven by the general need for such an accreditation scheme in industry, governmental and educational/research institutions. All of them unite the demand for qualified people.

HPAS is not the first scheme to become certified by the IBSC. It follows the path of Canada, Australasia and recently America in that way, with the early goal to bridge the interest of the six associated societies, becoming a cross country standard, and the ambition to be recognised by all other IBSC approved schemes, helping the employment of professional hydrographers worldwide and increasing the confidence of the employers and clients of hydrographic professionals.

### How to apply?

HPAS offers three levels of accreditation. For each level multiple pathways are possible (Fig.1). Level 2

(AH-L2) is a practical hydrographic surveyor who can execute various survey tasks and instructions. A level 1 (AH-L1) surveyor has progressed in their career to a supervisory/senior level and is able to plan and lead complex multidisciplinary field projects. Level 0 (AH-L0) is the highest level given to professionals who have not only advanced their knowledge but also developed management and leadership skills and become people of repute in the profession.

The minimum duration of work experience given in Fig.1 have to be understood as an absolute minimum. The variety of tasks and types of executed projects as well as the assigned responsibilities and roles are of greater importance.

The affiliate is not a level and therefore does not provide an accredited professional status but addresses students/trainees who want to show commitment to the profession during their education/training.

To apply for a certain HPAS level, the proof of the educational qualification and work experience have to be provided. The particular required documentation varies according to the level sought and the preconditions of the applicant and might include:

- a CV with two referees,
- a logbook of hydrographic survey activities,
- two recent survey reports with a critique providing detailed information about the ap-

		Applicant Qualification and Experience			
		Category A	Category B	Surveying Degree	Certificates/Diplomas
Affiliate		Certificate or proof of study.	Certificate or proof of study.	Certificate or proof of study.	Certificate or proof of study.
Level 2		1 years relevant experience.	2 years relevant experience.	Additional formal courses. 3 years relevant experience.	Additional formal courses. 4 years relevant experience.
Level 1		2 years relevant experience including supervisory time.	Additional formal courses. 3 years relevant experience including supervisory time.	Additional formal courses. 5 years relevant experience including supervisory time.	Additional formal courses. 7 years relevant experience including supervisory time.
Level 0		10 years relevant experience including supervisory time.	15 years relevant experience including supervisory time.	16 years relevant experience including supervisory time.	N/A

Fig. 1: HPAS levels and pathways

plicant's role in the provided projects as well as an evaluation,

- an experience matrix, which lists different survey types and tasks according to the subjects of the IHO standard S-5 (these S-5 subjects need to be covered by IBSC certified Cat. A or B programmes).

The applicants have to indicate which kind of projects and in which responsibilities they have been involved. Depending on the level applied for, a certain number of tasks and types as well as roles are expected to be accomplished.

A qualification mapping is necessary for the applicants who have not completed a Cat. A or B programme. The mandatory theoretical competencies required by the IHO S-5 for the IBSC recognised Cat. A or B programmes need to be covered by the applicants by other formal courses or trainings.

A level-specific overview of necessary documents, examples of filled forms and a detailed explanation of them for each level are given in the HPAS applicant guide published online (<https://hydrography.earth/hpas>).

The submitted applications are reviewed by the HPAS panel. In case certain aspects in regard to the accreditation level cannot be clarified based on the provided documentation, the applicant can be invited to an interview.

The panel consists of at least eight members from IFHS societies coming from industry, academia or government and are in office for three years. IFHS will advertise the vacant panel seats annually and nominations are then received by the HPAS steering committee, which selects the panel member. The steering committee consists of representatives of the IFHS societies and gives strategic direction and guidance to the HPAS.

There are two HPAS application deadlines per year: 31st of March and 31st of October. The time between application deadline and being informed about the decision might take about 15 weeks. The regular accreditation fee of 140 to 200 € (depending on the level sought) is reduced to 70 to 100 € for members of the IFHS societies. The annual renewal is about 30 to 50 € for members.

### How to maintain an HPAS level?

To maintain an HPAS level, members have to show annually that they have been employed in the hydrographic field for at least six months of the last twelve and submit a record of at least 40 hours

CPD from that year. The CPD log ensures HPAS members currency of knowledge and practical experience as well as the enhancement of skills. For the CPD record different professional, educational or volunteering activities related to hydrography are supported. They also include non-technical skills to improve personal qualities as well as formal and informal time. The minimum required time of formal CPD is 20 hours per year and includes activities of structured learning that have a clear learning objective like a professional course, technical authorship or a learning activity with assessment measures. Informal CPDs are self-managed learning like private study, on-the-job practical training, attendance at informal seminars or events focusing on knowledge sharing. HPAS accredits can also transition from one level to the next higher one after gaining more experience and educational or other qualification. Depending on the transition level, the applicant has to hand in some or all of the documents listed above for the regular application.

### Conclusion

The first two sessions of HPAS have well demonstrated the interest of public and private sector professionals lacking standard hydrographic background to apply for HPAS accreditation, indeed a large majority of applicants were missing Cat. A or Cat. B recognised courses. However, this success needs to be confirmed by a larger interest from the Cat. A/Cat. B hydrographer community.

As within the area of IFHS such personal accreditation is new, the scheme needs to be advertised and introduced and acquainted in the community. Its successful establishment in such an international operating branch like hydrography has a lot of benefits. It facilitates, for example, the staff recruitment, tenders, company-internal CPD or general administration. If the CPD keeping becomes a larger focus, a greater and international training industry offering e-learning and online trainings might develop further.

HPAS is not the only personal accreditation scheme in hydrography: in Canada, Australasia and America similar schemes – also with IBSC-recognition – are in place. Succeeding to obtain a mutual recognition between them would be of great importance for the overall international establishment and implementation of these schemes. They constitute the foundation for a new international standard in the hydrographic profession. //