



Competency Recognition - The IRSE Licensing Scheme

INTRODUCTION

The Licensing Scheme was developed by the Institution of Railway Signal Engineers between 1991 and 1993 and was formally launched by Sir Anthony Hidden in January 1994. It was developed at the specific request of British Railways (BR) and London Underground (LUL) with an intention of facilitating the cross-acceptance of skills and competencies for people carrying out safety related signalling and telecommunications activities. Its scope has been widened to be applicable to all countries and thus follows the international character of the Institution. The Licensing Scheme achieved accreditation to EN45013 in January 1999.

Licence applicants are assessed against the published competence standards and membership of the Institution is not a requirement for the issue of a licence.

The following is gives a broad overview of how the scheme operates.

ORGANISATION

The scheme is run by the Institution's Licensing Registrar, who operates from the IRSE's London office. The Registrar reports to the Licensing Committee, which in turn reports to the IRSE Council. The Licensing Committee's structure safeguards impartiality and enables participation from all parties concerned with the licensing scheme without a single interest predominating.

STANDARDS

Competence standards for a wide range of signalling and telecommunications activities have been prepared by a number of expert working groups and these standards, once approved by the Licensing Committee, are published to all employers who are registered with the Scheme. These standards list the specific skills needed to carry out any particular class of work. Each class of work has been allocated a Licence Category and a range of categories exist within each class of work to recognise the differing skill requirements. For example the licence categories for signalling maintenance are - Assistant Maintainer, Maintainer, Fault Finder, Maintenance Team Leader and Maintenance Manager.

ASSESSMENT

The next step in the process is that employers arrange to assess their staff against the competence standards. This is a two-stage process, the first of which is a workplace assessment usually carried out by the local supervisor or manager wherever practicable during normal work. The workplace assessor has to complete a checklist for each individual which checks that all the competencies which are listed for a particular task are demonstrated on equipment and systems used by that company.

The second stage is a formal assessment which includes a review of the workplace assessment and an interview by a competence assessor from an Assessing Agent approved by the Institution. The Assessing Agent provides facilities for the assessment of licence applicants across a range of licence categories. When assessing its own employees, the assessing agent is required to ensure adequate independence between the workplace assessor and the competence assessor who undertakes the formal assessment on behalf of the Licensing Scheme.

THE LICENCE

Once the assessors are satisfied that the applicant is competent, the record of competence assessment is sent to the Registrar by the Assessment Agent with a request to issue an IRSE Licence for the licence categories assessed for that individual. The Licence is normally valid for five years. Prior to renewal of their License, holders are required to show that they have been employed regularly on licensable work, that their training and experience have been kept up to date, and then to complete a reassessment.



As additional skills are acquired, the categories on a licence can be increased following a satisfactory assessment. For example a signalling designer may initially have a 'Designer' licence, but with suitable training and experience, would be able to add a 'Signalling Tester' category. A signalling installer with an 'Installer' licence category would be able to add the 'Installation Team Leader' category, once he had demonstrated the required additional competencies.

LOG BOOK

The log book is a valuable personal document. Both assessors will want to see evidence of work carried out, training records, qualifications etc. and this information should be recorded in the log book. Licence holders are required to maintain their log book, and this is reviewed during the "mid-life" review of a licence, and at its renewal. The log book can also be used to record a member's Continuing Professional Development activities. A Log Book folder can be bought from the Institution or provided by the employer.

EQUIPMENT

It is obvious that you may need specific knowledge when dealing with certain types of equipment. The assessors will want to see evidence of work on a representative range of systems and equipment on which the individual normally works. The types of equipment can be recorded in the log book and will be countersigned by a supervisor. If work is done on different equipment, say because a new system is installed, the log book will have to be suitably endorsed with the results of further equipment specific assessments as supporting evidence for the future renewal of the licence.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

Errors may be made by people doing work, and so there is a facility to record any complaints about workmanship in the log book. If a complaint has been made, the results of any subsequent investigations and/or remedial actions taken should also be recorded. This enables the licensee to demonstrate how a competent level of performance has been regained, so that it can be seen in subsequent assessments. In more serious cases a recommendation to revoke a Licence may be made to the Institution, normally by the employer. A licence will only be revoked after an independent review of the circumstances by the Institution. The licence holder has the right of appeal to the Institution Council if it is considered that unfair treatment, in respect of withdrawal of licence or licence category, has occurred.

REGISTERED EMPLOYERS

The Railway Safety Critical Work Regulations (RSCWR), within the UK, encourages companies to formally assess their staff's technical competence. The IRSE Licensing Scheme provides a suitable framework for doing just that and those employers wishing to use the IRSE Licensing Scheme's Competence Assessment system for this purpose should register with the scheme.

The scheme is operated and supported in Australasia by a number of organizations. Employer and individual information packs, including the Licensing Scheme Scale of Charges, are available from your local Committee Member.

Alternatively please contact the registered licensing administrator, i.e. the IRSE Licensing Registrar, at the London Office.