



VOLUNTARY NATIONAL ACCREDITATION PART 2

Fire Protection Accreditation Scheme—beginning the journey to professionalism

A voluntary national accreditation scheme for the fire protection industry was officially announced in *Fire Australia* magazine Spring edition 2012. Here we follow up with some important terminology and detailed information, including accreditation levels, categories and business recognition information.

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Over recent years there has been much discussion within the fire protection industry about the possible introduction of a skills-based accreditation system that would incorporate an acceptable standard of competencies and knowledge for individuals.

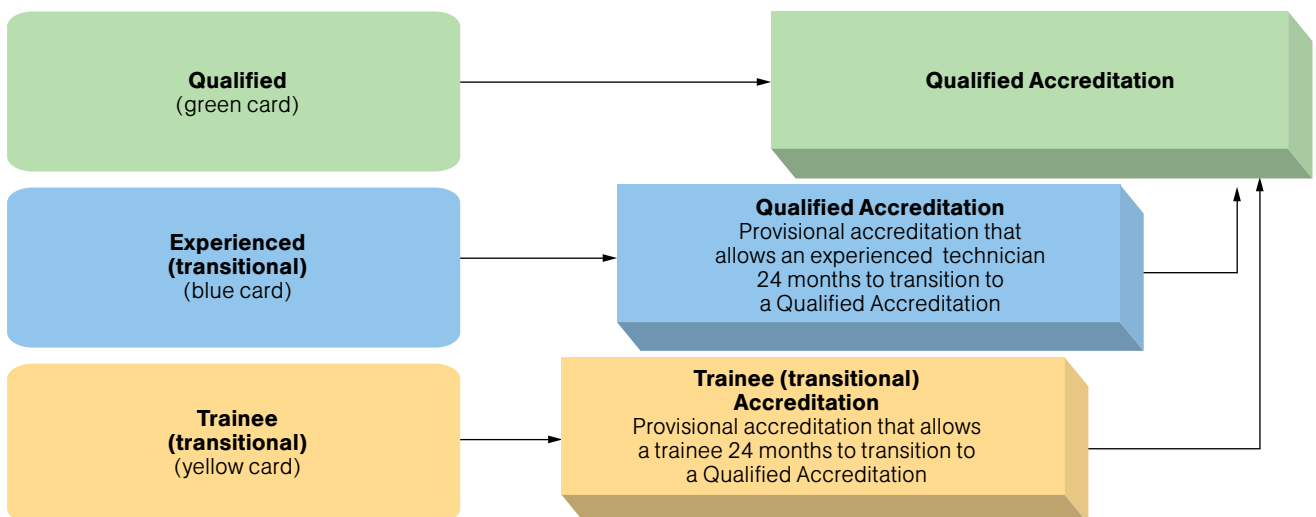
Apart from Queensland and some limited requirements in Victoria and Tasmania, there is no regulatory framework for the formal recognition of individuals who undertake much of the work in the fire protection industry. This is despite many jurisdictions referencing the need for 'competent persons' in regulation.

More recently, the industry has been criticised by

various sectors of the community in response to some high-profile fire incidents. Criticism has particularly related to a lack of regulation, variations in levels of competency among fire protection industry workers, supervision, training and the need for skills-based accreditation of the fire protection workforce.

This criticism led the Board of FPA Australia to explore options available to improve the standard and consistency of work undertaken within the fire protection industry to address the need to increase the level of confidence among the Australian community about fire safety concerns and the quality of fire protection work performed.

Three accreditation types available under FPAS



In 2012, the Board agreed for FPA Australia to develop a skills-based voluntary national accreditation scheme for the fire protection industry (FPAS).

The scheme was formally announced in the Spring 2012 edition of *Fire Australia* magazine [p 14–16]. This article, 'Voluntary national accreditation part 2', follows on from that introduction and provides more detailed information, including accreditation classes & categories, business recognition and rollout.

Accreditation levels & categories

FPAS will allow regulators, other practitioners and customers to identify fire protection service providers with greater assurance and confidence that the individuals carrying out work are competent for the work being undertaken. This is because individuals who make application to the scheme have the option of entering under two accreditation pathways.

Experienced pathway

The experienced pathway recognises individuals who have worked in the industry for a significant period of time, and hold the necessary skills, but may not be qualified or may be part qualified but have not completed the recommended units of competency. These individuals will be required to obtain the additional units of competency over a 24-month period before achieving qualified status.

Qualified pathway

The qualified pathway recognises those individuals who are already qualified and who have obtained all units of competency required to undertake work. It is important to note that some individuals may wish to only be deemed qualified in one or two work categories while others may wish to be recognised under all work categories.

Business recognition

At the commencement of the scheme, business entities will have the opportunity to apply for business recognition. This demonstrates the willingness of the business to meet the minimum criteria to enter the scheme.

The individual categories that will be accredited under the inspect and test class are:

- Fire Sprinkler Systems (R, C)
- Fire Pumpsets (R, C)
- Fire Hydrant Systems (R, C)
- Fire Detection and Alarm Systems (R, C)
- Gaseous Fire Suppression Systems (C)
- Fire Hydrant Systems (C)
- Fire Detection and Alarm Systems (C)
- Pre-engineered Fire Suppression Systems (non-gaseous) (C)
- Portable Fire Equipment and Fire Hose Reels (C)
- Fire and Smoke Doors (C)
- Fire Seals and Collars (C), and
- Emergency and Exit Lighting (C).

FPAS: Some important terms

ACCREDITATION SCHEME A non-governmental, voluntary formalised process to recognise appropriate levels of skill, knowledge competencies (whether in the form of a qualified certification, other credentials, or on-the-job experience) along with quality assurance components.

CLASS The different types of work undertaken in the fire protection industry. These include design, install and commission, certify, inspect and test, and maintain.

CATEGORY The types of fire equipment or fire systems worked on by fire protection technicians.

LEVEL The two levels, routine (R) or complex (C), are based on the skills and knowledge required to work within a category.

FIRE PROTECTION TECHNICIAN A worker or practitioner who works in the fire protection industry.

INSPECT To visually examine the components of fire protection systems or equipment to establish correct settings, physical condition or fitness for purpose.

TEST To test, after inspecting, by the confirmation of correct function or performance of a component or system.

ROUTINE (R) Individuals accredited with R in a given category have been deemed competent to conduct activities up to and including six (6) monthly.

COMPLEX (C) Individuals accredited with C in a given category have been deemed competent to conduct activities beyond six (6) monthly.

All businesses recognised under FPAS will be required to engage appropriately accredited fire protection technicians to provide services in each category for which the business provides a service.

FPAS accredited technicians will hold one of the three accreditation cards shown in the schematic accompanying this article—Qualified, Experienced or Trainee. The reverse sides of these accreditation cards will list all of the categories the accredited individual has been approved to work in (under the scheme). This list will also include whether that individual is recognised as having the relevant skills to undertake either routine (R) or complex (C) activities within those categories.

At the launch of the scheme, all recognised work categories will fall within the 'inspect and test' class, with more classes to be introduced over time.

After the scheme is launched, a business entity will have the opportunity to apply for business recognition in parallel with the introduction of individual accreditation.

The term 'business recognition' will apply to a business seeking recognition in the first two years of the scheme. Recognition will be awarded to business entities that have invested in the skills, knowledge and experience of engaged technicians, and supported them in achieving individual accreditation. This will allow the community to identify and source service providers engaging accredited individuals.

As the scheme provides for both Qualified and Experienced (transitional) accreditation,

Table 1 Business recognition

Entry prerequisite	Conditions to satisfy entry requirements
Engage one or more accredited fire protection technician(s) in each category for which the business provides a service.	Business entity can only provide 'inspect and test' services where it engages one (1) or more accredited fire protection technician(s) in that category
	A signed undertaking that the business entity will ensure that all fire protection technicians engaged by the business will become accredited within three (3) to twenty-four (24) months
	Payment of all required fees

The accreditation scheme will:

- be called the Fire Protection Accreditation Scheme, or FPAS
- be introduced in the first half of 2013
- feature both individual accreditation and business recognition
- allow action to be taken immediately within the industry, thanks to transitional provisions
- provide clear pathways to achieving Qualified accreditation status for fire protection industry workers
- incorporate existing essential components of the Australian Government training agenda on competency-based training and assessment
- provide fire protection 'inspect and test' accreditation levels that meet the requirements of individual state government regulators and are based on qualifications recognised by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- be financed through a fee-based system on the application, attainment and renewal (two-yearly) of accreditation and on applicable competency assessments after the first assessment in each category. Fees will apply for both individual accreditation and business recognition.

sufficient numbers of fire protection technicians will be accredited under the scheme to support the requirement for businesses to engage accredited fire protection technicians for each 'inspect and test' category for which the business provides a service. Table 1 shows the requirements for business recognition.

There will be significant commercial advantages for those businesses that choose to take up business recognition. A business entity that has achieved business recognition under the scheme demonstrates to regulators, other practitioners and customers that it engages accredited fire protection technicians to undertake all 'inspect and test' activities in each category for which the business provides a service. In addition, recognised businesses will be supporting the efforts of the fire protection industry to engage a technically competent workforce and to increase safety outcomes for the community.

FPA Australia will, in turn, actively highlight recognised businesses on the FPA Australia website at www.fpa.com.au. This will create a competitive advantage for recognised over non-recognised businesses. FPA Australia will also provide marketing materials to help promote recognised business status, including logos and other branded collateral.

Business recognition will need to be attained in each category for which the business entity provides a service. For a business entity to be eligible for entry into the scheme, it will need to engage one (1) or more

accredited fire protection technicians in each category for which the business provides a service.

Transitioning, fees and launch

On successful application for accreditation under the scheme, fire protection technicians will receive an identification card that confirms the accreditation type of the card-holder and the categories of work the holder is authorised to perform in the 'inspect and test' class. It also notes if the individual is R or C recognised in each of these categories.

The coloured band on the top of the card will reflect the type of accreditation currently held by an individual as:

- Green—Qualified
- Blue—Experienced (transitional)
- Yellow—Trainee (transitional).

After the launch of the scheme, individuals with Trainee or Experienced status will have 24 months to transition to Qualified.

Significant work is currently underway at FPA Australia to ensure the Association has the correct systems in place and capacity to deliver this important scheme. None of this would be possible without considerable investment in capacity and infrastructure, which is why fees will be necessary for both individual accreditation and business recognition.

On top of the logistic and marketing work currently being undertaken, the Association is actively lobbying all Australian state and territory regulators, peak bodies and other decision makers to ensure the scheme is properly supported and that the importance of using accredited individuals and recognised businesses is widely promoted.

A detailed fee structure and all other relevant information for individuals and businesses will be released in the coming months when FPAS is officially launched. FPA Australia is committed to ensuring this scheme provides safer and more professional outcomes for the industry and the community, and we look forward to working with all stakeholders to achieve these shared goals. ■

The voluntary Fire Protection Accreditation Scheme does not replace any existing requirements for licences or permits in any federal, state or territory jurisdiction. For more information on the Fire Protection Accreditation Scheme contact FPA Australia on 1300 731 922.