

Frequently Asked Questions answered by Steve Long, Chair of the Training Panel:

What are accredited qualifications?

Accredited qualifications, also known as regulated qualifications are those that are reviewed, recognised and monitored by a regulatory body in order to make sure that they meet specific criteria and quality standards. For mountaineering activities the appropriate regulatory body at an international level is the UIAA.

What are the advantages of accredited over non-accredited qualifications?

The most obvious advantage of accredited over non-accredited qualifications is that the accredited ones provide the learners and stakeholders with a guarantee of quality of both the qualification programme and the awarding body that offers accredited qualifications. Non-accredited qualifications, on the other hand, are not regulated and there is no external guarantee that they meet appropriate qualification standards - making it difficult for a sponsor or government department to tell whether they are fit for their purpose, whether they include relevant content or even if appropriate methodology for assessment is used.

How does the UIAA ensure high quality of accredited qualifications and their compliance to the Mountain Qualification labels?

The regulators use several methods to ensure high quality of accredited qualifications before and after they are listed in the Register of Accredited Qualifications. In order to be recognised and have their qualifications accredited by the regulators, the awarding organisations first has to fulfil the UIAA's affiliation requirements before being allowed to register with the Training Panel, at which point an experienced mentor or validator is assigned in order to help with the process.

The Mountain Qualification Label services carefully review both the awarding organisation and the proposed qualification, culminating in a field visit to compare the course reality with the paperwork. If the qualification programme meets the UIAA's criteria, it is recognised and listed online. If the programme does not meet the set criteria, it is rejected and an action plan is negotiated to help reach the standard. In order to make sure that the accredited qualifications maintain appropriate standards and quality, they are kept under review by the UIAA Training Panel who also have the power to withdraw accreditation.

What are the other advantages of registration and accreditation?

Training Officers for registered member associations will be kept informed of seminar reports and training advice gathered from the UIAA Commissions. This

will benefit members by gaining immediate access to advice on accepted current best practice. Registered associations also have exclusive access to the UIAA's Training Memento/Handbook for the use of their trainees.

Although the UIAA Mountain Qualification Labels are intended primarily for voluntary use within the member-association's home borders, the association is free to recommend the qualifications as appropriate training also for professional instructors operating within its borders. There is no obligation for cross-border accreditation but several federations have already recognised the benefits of shared core syllabus areas and have developed simple systems to accredit prior learning to simplify career pathways between countries.

What is the difference between training and a qualification?

Training can be divided into:

1. Unregulated basic skills training, which is provided for individuals and might be delivered by pretty well anybody.
2. Regulated basic skills training, similar target group but provided only by instructors authorised by a recognised body
3. Qualifications: Again, these can be regulated or non-regulated - however unless there is a bona fide training organisation overseeing this there is little room for wider recognition beyond the trainer.
 - ✓ Leader training - ideally with skills training as a pre-requisite (or an exemption process) Leaders are simply qualified to supervise a basic session, usually for novices.
 - ✓ Instructor training - sometimes linked to leader training as an optional or essential pre-requisite.

The UIAA currently focusses on regulated qualifications for leaders and instructors.

1. The courses are administered by member federations and/or their nominated training body (e.g. AMGA was nominated by AAC to provide single pitch instructor);
2. Therefore we require evidence of governance system, syllabus, prospectus, provider induction process, train the trainer/assessor;
3. The process towards UIAA accreditation is mentored - the association registers and is then helped towards fulfilling the above requirements;
4. One exception to the above is the IFMGA, which is in fact a UIAA member and we have simply endorsed their QA system without requiring an inspection (several members of the Training Panel have first-hand experience of IFMGA training anyway);
5. The UIAA does issue guidance on what the syllabus and prospectus should include, but this is very much an outline and deliberately non-prescriptive.

The UIAA is currently looking into the possibility of endorsing skills training programmes, which if I understand correctly is more along the lines of what you are looking for. The idea is that we would authorise member federations (including IFMGA member organisations) to nominate skills trainers who would work to an outline syllabus and quality manual and issue UIAA certification at the end of the course. However, this will be a big cultural shift for the UIAA and therefore will probably require approval by the General Assembly (next meeting October 2016), therefore it is unlikely to be in place before the start of 2017 - however it may well be possible to award certification retrospectively IF the courses previously delivered meet the QA requirements.