



# Career Progression

**ISEB & ISTQB**



An article on  
Software Testing  
Certification  
and resources  
to grow your  
testing career.

# Career Progression: ISEB and ISTQB

Career progression is a choice. No one will look after your career like you can. Therefore, most of the motivation for career progression needs to be intrinsic (from within). There may also be some extrinsic motivation (from your boss, parents, peers, pals). Never before has it been so important for individuals to maximise their employability. Here is a checklist of recommendations to progress your career in testing:

## Checklist

1. Get a mentor [ ]
2. Choose a path [ ]
3. Get certified ISEB / ISTQB / QAI / IIST / ASQ<sup>1</sup> [ ]
4. Attend one or more test training courses a year [ ]
5. Learn to use test tools and utilities [ ]
6. Apply lessons learned from your training [ ]
7. Learn the products and industry you are in [ ]
8. Self-learning – learn from your experiences [ ]
9. Read testing books/magazines (see list on page 12) [ ]
10. Do Internet research test sites/forums/blogs [ ]
11. Contribute to testing magazines/forums/blogs [ ]
12. Attend Specialist Interest Groups [ ]
13. Present at Specialist Interest Groups [ ]
14. Create a career portfolio [ ]
15. Join a discussion group with other testers [ ]
16. Start a testing Specialist Interest Group in your organisation [ ]
17. Subscribe to newsletters on the Internet [ ]
18. Report testing progress and quality accurately. With your name on [ ]

How many do you score out of 18? Can you add 3 to your score every year?

The single most important factor is finding a good testing mentor: someone that you look up to, aspire to, who motivates you and knows you. You may already have someone like this. Ask them formally to be your mentor. It is usually taken as a compliment. You could add to this and have a role model, a superhero. Or even better, a splice-super hero. This is the best of several heroes that inspire you every day.

One is unlikely to make progress without a plan in place. Write some short, medium and long-term goals. This plan will probably have several achievements on the path to an ultimate goal, each building on the success of the previous one. Reflect on the plan at least every quarter. You can change the plan, but you must also trust who you were when you made the plan. It is inspiring to look back at your achievements.



“The single most important factor is finding a good testing mentor ...”

1 See points 1 - 5 under the heading “Get Certified”

“One is unlikely to make progress without a plan in place.”

## Choose a path

Reduce the infinite options to something established and achievable. You can select an available model and adapt it to your requirements and those of your organisation.

It is preferable to select a progress plan that is transferable and internationally-accepted as you may move employer several times in your career.

See figure 1 below for the career path promoted in the Computer Society of South Africa Special Interest Group in Software Testing (CSSA SIGiST).

There are alternatives such as Skills Framework for the Information Age (SAIF) and SAIFplus, which require membership of the BCS for full access.

## Get Certified

“Get Certified” (item 3 on the checklist), assists with obtaining an interview, building skills, competency and confidence. There are five main offerings for certification in software testing;

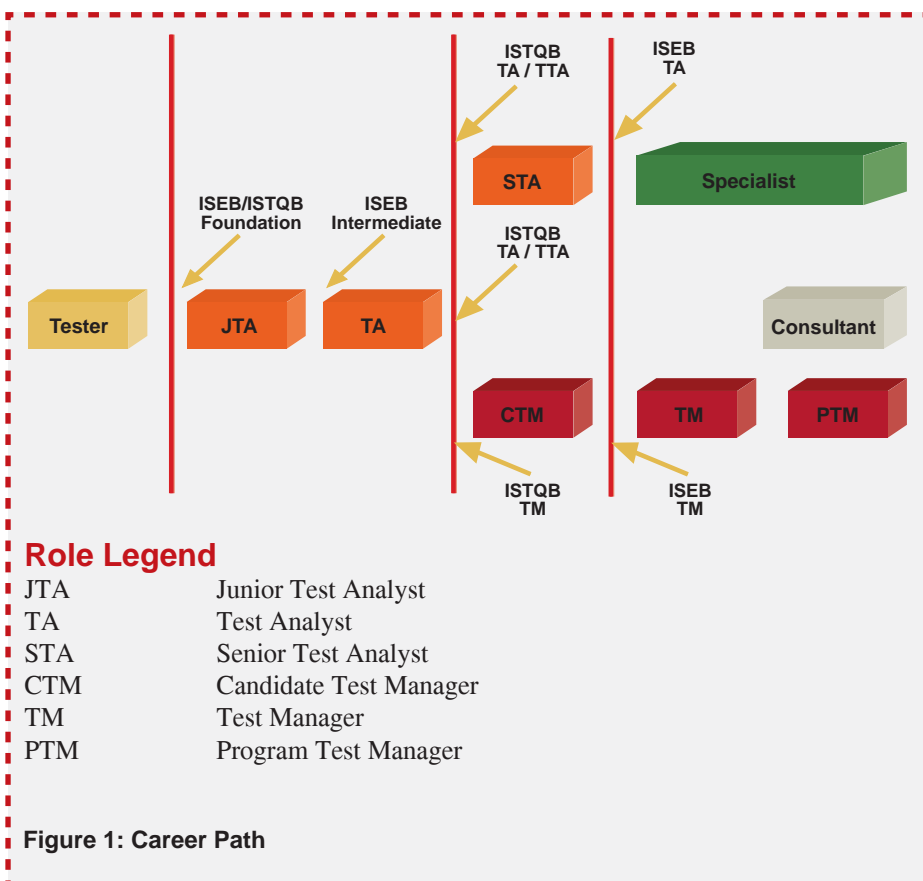
1. **British Computer Society Information Systems Examinations Body (BCS ISEB)**
  - Foundation Certificate in Software Testing
  - Intermediate Certificate in Software Testing
  - Practitioner Certificate in Test Analysis
  - Practitioner Certificate in Test Management
2. **International Software Testing Qualifications Board Certified Tester (ISTQB)**
  - Foundation Certificate in Software Testing
  - Advanced Test Analyst
  - Advanced Technical Test Analyst
  - Advanced Test Manager
3. **Quality Assurance Institute (QAI)**
  - Certified Software Test Engineer

4. **International Institute for Software Testing (IIST)**
  - Certified Software Test Professional
  - Certified Test Manager
5. **American Society for Quality (ASQ)**
  - Quality Engineer Certification

Straight away it seems that there is too much choice and little to help differentiate the choices. This is normal in life. We often make choices on similar products based on how we feel about them. These feelings are usually influenced by marketing, availability, personal recommendation and, of course, value for money. “Which should I choose?” you say. Read on.

## Advantages of Certifications

- Transferable skills
- Learn from other people’s experience, basically lifetimes of knowledge
- Knowing where to start – know the models, then bend them to your context
- Common terminology and standard frameworks
- Credibility
- Tool up

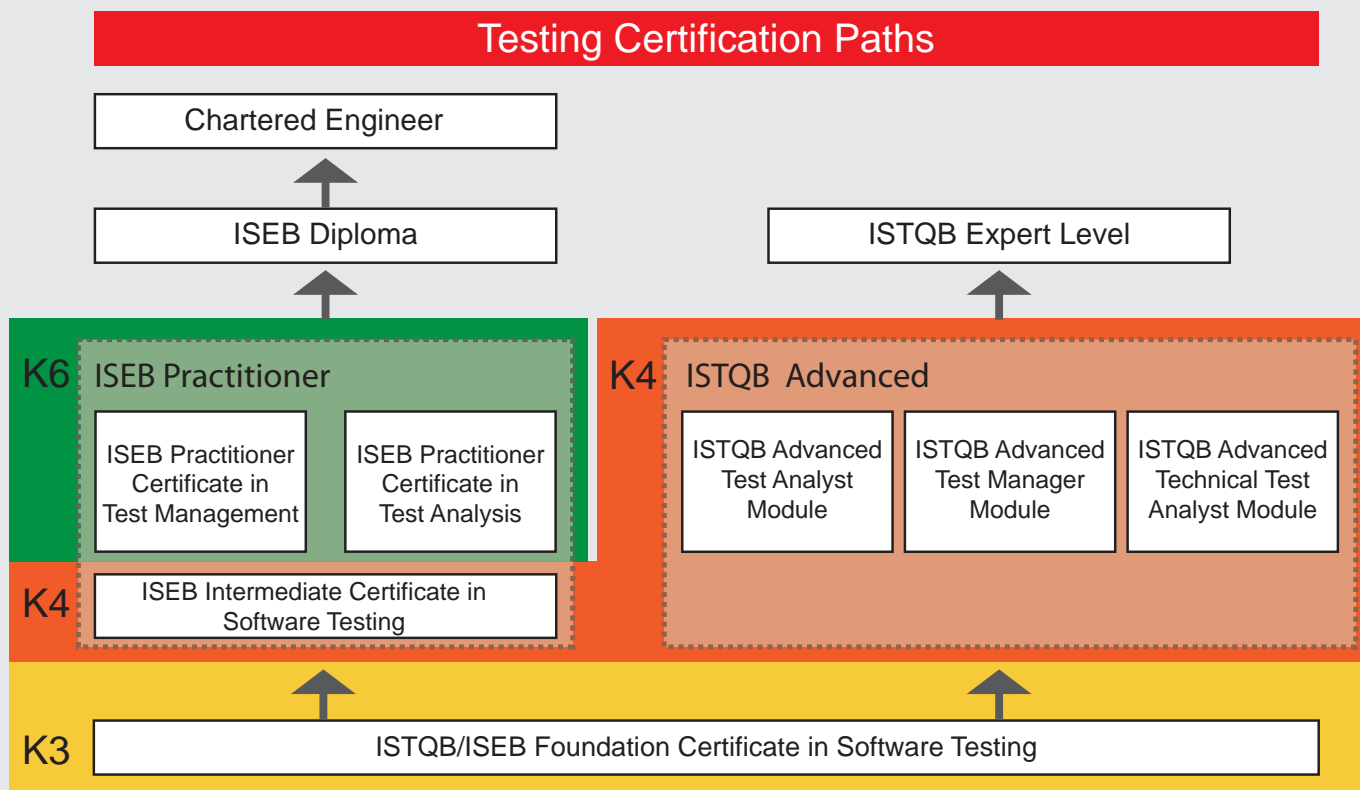


A grand test master once said, “If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” This means that if your only tools are overtime and repetition, this is all you can apply (and probably getting stressed and having your health impacted at the same time). The syllabi are designed to put more tools in your Sport-Billy Omni-Sac (tool bag). You have to choose to take a tool out and use it. More likely, though, a combination thereof.

“You can change the plan, but you must also trust who you were when you made the plan.”

## Comparison of Certifications

The two most readily available certifications within South Africa are ISEB and ISTQB, which I will focus on. Much like the World Series of Baseball, the other three organisations are more focused on the USA market. There is a great deal of detail within ISEB and ISTQB. However, this article is intended to have sufficient detail for you to find prices and make a decision on which suits you. The worst scenario would be to do nothing.



The Foundation is common to both ISEB and ISTQB. Further certifications then become divided into ISEB Practitioner (on the left) and ISTQB Advanced (on the right).

The K level refers to Bloom’s Taxonomy. It refers to the ceiling knowledge level of that certification, which increases with complexity from parrot learning (K1), application (K3), and culminates at K6 with **making judgments of value**.

Importantly, the K4 Analysis level includes separating key context information from the project “noise” within a scenario to establish the most appropriate action. It is very skilful to achieve this in testing (usually whoever makes the most noise gets his way), and the examinations are targeted at establishing if the candidate can do this, based on the learning in the syllabus. The ISEB Diploma and ISTQB Expert level are not available to the public currently.

### Industry magazines

Reading industry magazines (item 9 on the checklist) will improve your awareness of what is happening in the industry and how some of the big players cope with the world of testing;

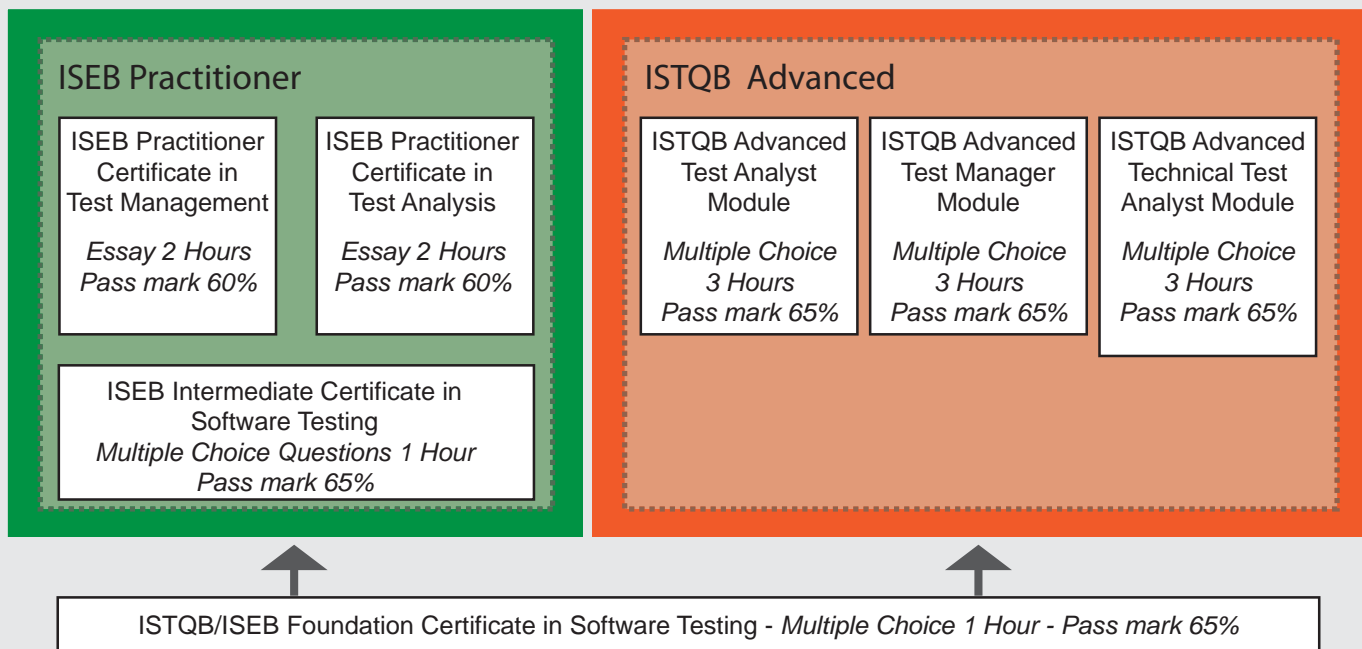
- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Test Focus                  | <a href="http://www.testfocus.co.za">www.testfocus.co.za</a>                                   |
| Testing Experience          | <a href="http://www.testingexperience.com">www.testingexperience.com</a>                       |
| Better Software             | <a href="http://www.stickyminds.com">www.stickyminds.com</a>                                   |
| Professional Tester         | <a href="http://www.professionaltester.com">www.professionaltester.com</a>                     |
| Software Test & Performance | <a href="http://www.stpmag.com">www.stpmag.com</a>   |
| The Tester                  | <a href="http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.9265">www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.9265</a> |

Most of these are free. If you work for a large corporation, suggest that your organisation subscribe to the hard copies.



## Exam Format

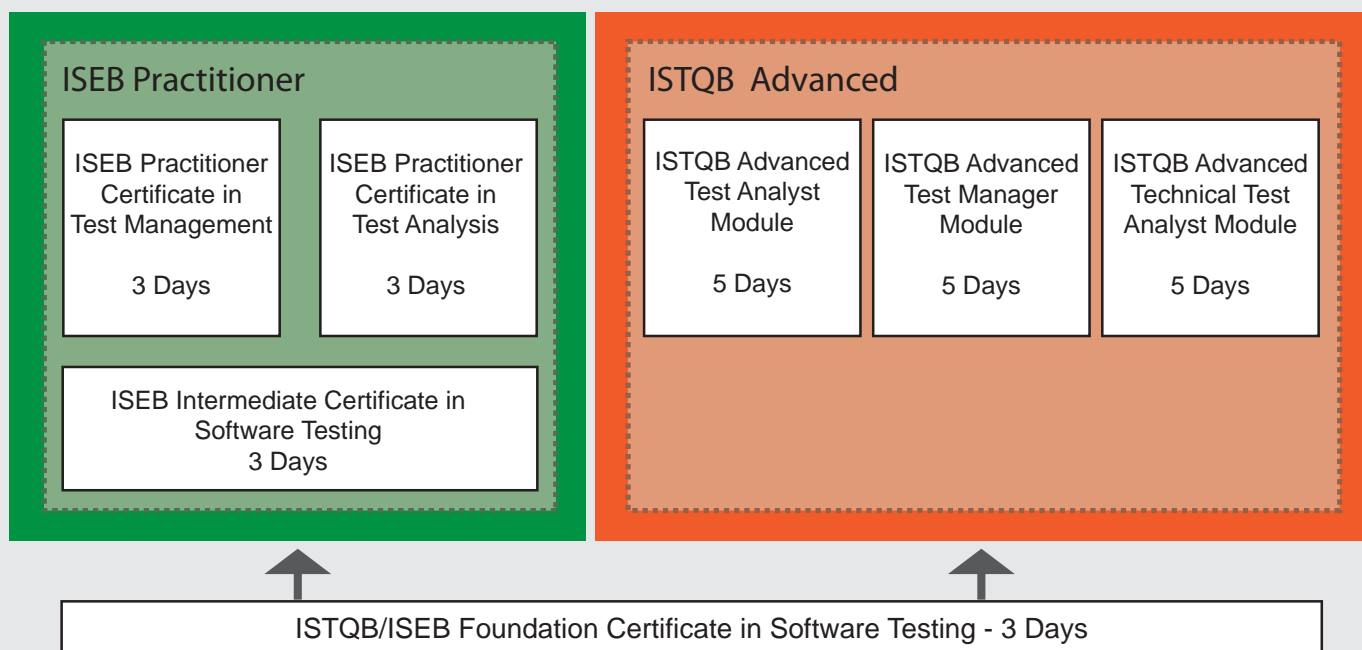
Exam format is about what you prefer. Like the brand of petrol you use. I will fill my car up at any petrol station, I cannot feel any difference. Yet I know people that only fill up with a particular brand or even only at one station. They swear they can tell the difference. The format of examination that appeals to you may sway your decision.



The diagram above shows the exam type, duration and pass mark. There is some minor variation in the ISTQB Advanced exam format for some national boards. Check with the training provider if the price includes the examination.

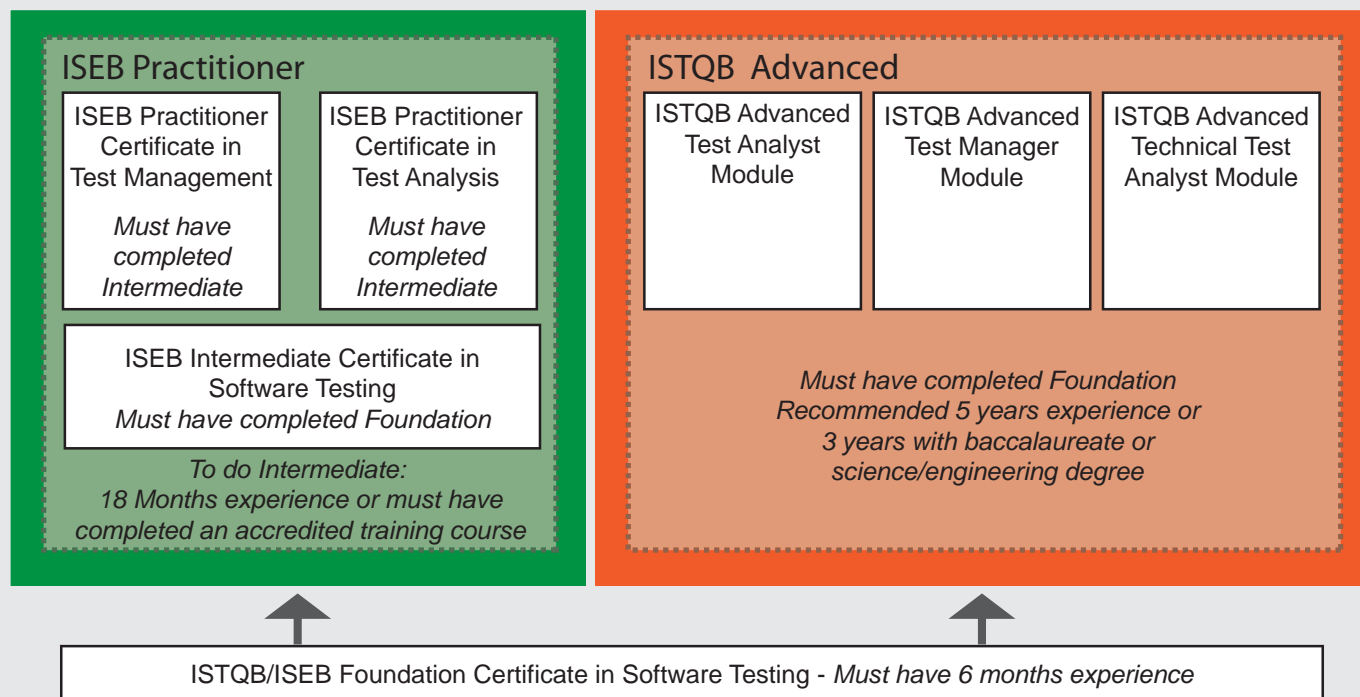
## Training Course Duration

The diagram below shows the training course durations according to the syllabi. The inclusion of the examination within the training course period indicated does vary per training provider. Some providers insert it at the end of the course and some have it after the course on an extra morning/afternoon.



## Entry Requirements for Certification

Below are the recommended time lines and entry requirements for taking the examinations. These recommendations are to improve the candidate's chances of success. The candidates are also expected to abide by the code of ethics within the syllabi.



## Prices

The lowest cost method is to get the syllabus for free on the Internet, borrow the referenced books from a library, and only pay for the examination, if available at a testing centre (Foundation only), or at a public exam often hosted by a training provider. If you have the discipline of a Shaolin monk and the spare time of a desert shepherd, this may work for you. This self-study accessibility has been considered by the two organisations. I guarantee it is possible.

My recommendation would be to attend a formally accredited training course. You will gain much more from the experience. You must compare **prices** and **what you get** from the training provider for your money.

For example:

- Accreditation status (duration of accreditation, organisation, trainers and course material). This is very important as this identifies a professional standard and guarantees commitment.

- Reputation of the training provider in the industry and years in business – speak to peers.
- Knowledge of training provider's public face. Can they recommend if and when you take a certification? Do they sign you up for a "Professorship in Testing" before you start your first job? Do they ask about you when you call them?
- Experience of trainers. How do they alleviate the anxiety of an examination? How do they layer the learning?
- Delivery methods (what is the audio-visual experience like?)
- Portfolios of the training provider – what other services do they offer?
- Follow up support of training provider. Do they offer career path advice?
- How do you feel about your experience with the training provider? How do they treat you on the phone or interact with you? These people are going to be the ones guiding you through a pressure point in your life. Do they make you feel like they care?
- Do they encourage and motivate you when you call them?
- Facilities. Parking, refreshments and location.
- Bonus material. You must receive the course material to keep, but what else? Software tools, interaction with other testers, extra-syllabus information, URLs, magazines, merchandise.
- Price. Do they give package discounts? Loyalty discounts? Check with your company's training department to see if your organisation has a preferred supplier relationship that would come with discounts and VIP service.

The decision comes down to "Do I trust them?" Ultimately, it is yes or no. Much like when choosing a restaurant.

Most training providers will require payment up-front.



## Career Portfolio

For item 14 on the checklist, create a Career Portfolio which will differentiate you from the other incumbents once you are invited for an interview. Here is some advice on how to create a career portfolio:

1. Get a folder you can insert sleeves into that will last 10 years
2. Your Curriculum Vitae / Resumé
3. A history of your career
4. Complimentary e-mails
5. Certificates and marks of courses
6. Copies of top reports you have done
7. Do not insert Intellectual Property of clients
8. Proof of presentations you did at client / employer / Specialist Interest Groups
9. Skills Gap Analysis results
10. Performance appraisals
11. Evidence and proof of your testing activities
12. Articles you wrote for industry magazines
13. Team builds you led
14. Copies of disciplinary meetings (honesty!)
15. Lessons learnt in your career

You should append artifacts to add to your career portfolio every month. This will help you focus on continually developing professionally. The career portfolio distinguishes you from other incumbents, so you may make it personal. If you live, breath and sometimes feel like you are dying in testing, show this in your career portfolio. This is your flagship.

## Special Interest Groups

### SIGiST Gauteng

[http://www.cssa.org.za/page.php?p\\_id=194](http://www.cssa.org.za/page.php?p_id=194)

### Testing Interest Group (TIG) Cape Town

<http://www.testdata.co.za/events.htm>

## References

BCS ISEB	<a href="http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.5732">www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.5732</a>
ISTQB	<a href="http://www.istqb.org/">www.istqb.org/</a>
SASTQB	<a href="http://www.sastqb.org.za/">www.sastqb.org.za/</a>
QAI	<a href="http://www.qaiworldwide.org">www.qaiworldwide.org</a>
IIST	<a href="http://www.testinginstitute.com/">www.testinginstitute.com/</a>
ASQ	<a href="http://www.asq.org">www.asq.org</a>
SAIF	<a href="http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.7852">www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.7852</a>
SAIFplus	<a href="http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.7852">www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.7852</a>

- ISTQB Certified Tester: Foundation Level Syllabus, Version 2007, Copyright
- ISEB Intermediate Certificate in Software Testing, Version 1.3 June 2008, Copyright
- ISEB Practitioner Certificate in Software Test Analysis, Version 2 Jan 2008, Copyright
- ISEB Practitioner Certificate in Software Test Management, Version 2 Jan 2008, Copyright
- ISTQB Certified Tester: Advanced Level Syllabus, Version 2007, Copyright

Please see syllabi for the names of the authors who own the copyright. They have done sterling work.

## Conclusion

Choose a certification route that fits your requirements. Whichever you choose, prepare for the course to give yourself the best chance of success (i.e. read the syllabus two or more times before attending the course). They are very challenging!

I have an alliance with both tribes in the camp (as they do with each other), being British and starting my certification with BCS ISEB, and now also representing SASTQB. I assure you they are both worthwhile. If you have started on the ISEB path, or wish to aspire to Chartered IT Professional, you should continue with ISEB. If you are entering the certification world you should utilise SASTQB (ISQTB), which has a growing international presence. Whichever you choose, the value is in applying what you learn, otherwise the whole exercise becomes a fairy tale.

Steve Farrand MBCS CITP

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Turn to the backpage to see how  
Test and Data Services can save you time and  
money with the new ISTQB Courses

# Test and Data Services - Training

Comprehensive and Innovative

## ISEB

### Accredited ISEB Training Providers

Test and Data Services is fully accredited as an ISEB Training provider, as are our experienced trainers to train any of the following:

- ISTQB/ISEB Foundation Certificate in Software Testing
- ISEB Intermediate Certificate in Software Testing
- ISEB Practitioner Certificate in Test Management
- ISEB Practitioner Certificate in Test Analysis

Advanced (UKTB) course material are fully accredited

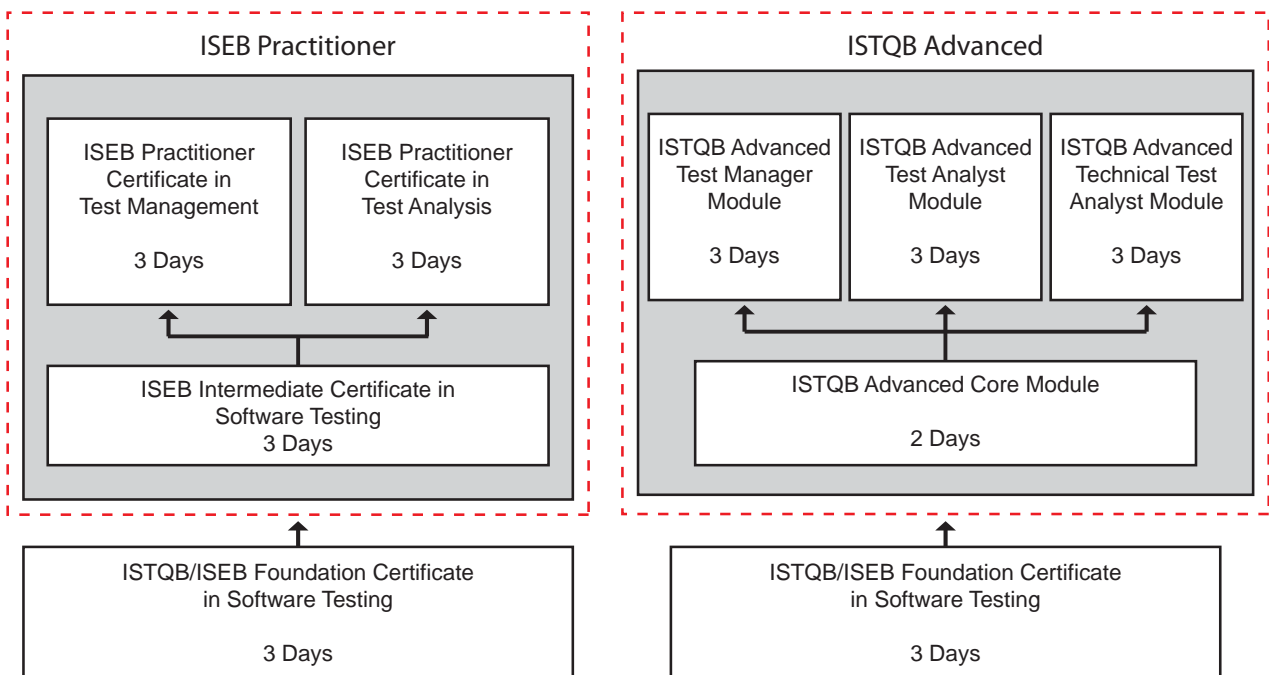
## ISTQB

### Save 4 Days Training with Test And Data Services

Test and Data Services has received SASTQB Accreditation and is therefore fully accredited to train the ISTQB Advanced Courses. The structure of the ISTQB Advanced course contains a common Core Module of 2 days which can be followed by any of the following modules:

- ISTQB Advanced Test Manager Module
- ISTQB Advanced Test Analyst Module
- ISTQB Advanced Technical Test Analyst Module

This saves the candidate 4 days of training (and cost) to become an “Full ISTQB Advanced Certified Tester”. This full certification takes 11 days with Test and Data Services, rather than the 15 it typically requires.



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