

Qualification vs. Certification

Making the distinction between these two concepts is critical for the inspection practitioner

BY LYNDSEY DECKARD

This column is intended to be a forum for discussing the workings of the Examination Bank Subcommittee of the American Welding Society Certification Committee. We solicit your questions and comments about certification, examination questions, challenges, protocol, or other related certification subjects. They can be mailed to AWS, 550 NW LeJeune Rd., Miami, FL 33126, or e-mailed to mjohnsen@aws.org.

In my experience with the American Welding Society, one of the most misunderstood concepts is the difference between qualification and certification. The Certification Committee frequently receives questions on this subject. I will attempt to explain the differences and what they mean to welding inspectors by means of responding to a couple of recently received questions.

Q: I have just read your “Exam Bank” column in *Inspection Trends* magazine (Fall 2002) and came up with the following question: Is it allowable or acceptable for a CAWI who has an engineering degree and more than 15 years of relevant experience to perform welding inspections as a CWI or even as a SCWI? Please clarify this question for me because the information contained on page 173, paragraph 6.1.4.1 of AWS D1.1:2000 leads me to believe that it is possible.

A: Verification for the response to your question can be found in AWS D1.1:2000, paragraph 1.1 titled “Scope.” Subparagraph 1.16, “Inspection,” explains that D1.1, Section 6, contains the “...criteria for the qualifications and responsibilities of inspectors...”

Qualification and certification of inspectors are two different things. Qualification of a welding inspector may be determined by the employer or customer in accordance with his or her own documented requirements or the documented standards of others. Certification of a welding inspector by the American Welding Society attests to and certifies the appropriate experience and successful completion of an examination on the subjects included in the specified body of knowledge.

The specific contract documents, in accordance with which one must conduct each job, may, or may not, include requirements for use of AWS Certified Welding inspectors. If the applicable welding codes and standards for a contract are AWS, API, or Canadian Standards Association (CSA), the inspector will logically be expected to be knowledgeable in the structure and content of each of those codes and standards and be able to accurately apply the respective requirements. Although not a code requirement, a CWI would seem the obvious choice for this work since his or her qualifications have been verified by AWS standardized testing.

You are correct in your observation that D1.1 paragraph 6.1.4 states acceptable qualification bases include, in subparagraph 3, “An engineer or technician who, by training or experience, or both, in metals fabrication, inspection, and testing, is competent to perform inspection of the work.”

However, it is not allowable for a CAWI or other person with the qualifications stated in 6.1.4(3) to perform welding inspections “as a CWI or even as a SCWI.” AWS QC1 specifically limits the scope of each level of AWS as a Certified Welding Inspector. Paragraph 4.1.3 states: “The CAWI shall be able to perform inspections, under the direct supervision of a SCWI or CWI within visible and audible range.” As defined in 4.2, it is the SCWI or CWI, however, who has the responsibility for determining if welded assemblies conform to workmanship and acceptance criteria. This means that while experience and education may qualify an individual as an inspector for a specific contract under the terms of that contract, that person may not determine acceptance of welded assemblies while acting or signing/stamping documentation, or by presenting oneself as an AWS CAWI or CWI. To do so, or to direct a CAWI to do so, would place his/her certification in jeopardy.

Some time after responding to this question, I had a conversation with a former CWI who said he didn’t see why he had to retest after being notified his certification had expired. He also quoted D1.1 Section 6.1.4.2, which states: “The qualification of an inspector shall remain in effect indefinitely, provided the inspector remains active in inspection of welded steel fabrication, unless there is specific reason to question the inspector’s ability.”

Again, the subjects of qualification and certification have been confused. This is, unfortunately, a relatively common occurrence. The analogy I used in conversation with this person was one of driving an automobile.

Assume your father or mother taught you to drive; you studied the driver’s manual, took driver training in school, and have driven without an accident or ticket for several years. No one would challenge the fact you are qualified to drive. If a local farmer wants to hire you to drive his truck or tractor on his property only, he has every right to accept your qualifications as adequate for his job. But until you are tested for those skills by the proper agency and certified as meeting the minimum standards of that agency, you are not a licensed (certified) truck or tractor driver.

There are many qualified welding inspectors out there. But unless you are certified by the American Welding Society, you may find it difficult to accept contract work as a welding inspector and your company may also find it cannot comply with the requirements of some potential customers.

To get the qualification and certification requirements to become an AWS Certified Welding Inspector, contact the AWS Certification Department at (800) 443-9353, ext. 273.

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