

Cat A Hydro or Cat A Carto

For many years we have been familiar with the term 'Cat A' or 'Cat B', referring respectively to International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) and International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) Advisory Board on Standards on Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors Category A and Category B courses. The Standards of Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors known as M-5 is now in its ninth edition and the content can be downloaded free from the IHO website at www.iho.shom.fr/.

Since 2001 the International Advisory Board has been working on Standards of Competence for Nautical Cartographers. The Board now includes representatives from the International Cartographic Association (ICA). Similar to the Hydrographic courses, Cartographic courses also comprise Category A and Category B. The first edition of the Standards, known as M-8, is also available for free download from the IHO website. Hydrographic communities are encouraged to look at both these Standards. Any suggestions and comments are most welcome. The draft version of Cartographic courses is published on the IHO website in advance of the Board's decision to publish it in first-edition copy. Among the first Nautical Cartographic courses recognised as either Category A or B courses are those organised by the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office, the International Maritime Academy of Trieste in Italy, and Dalian Naval Academy of China.

The establishment of Nautical Cartographic courses has made the 'Cat A' and 'Cat B' courses more specific. Successful graduates from these courses will now be referred to gain qualification as either 'Cat A Hydro' or 'Cat A Carto'. The Category A course is of a higher level than the Category B course. Most academic institutes accredited to run the Category A course offer a master's or bachelor's degree programme. On the other hand, a naval institution usually has an option in offering either Category A or B courses. However, both types of institute, whether academic or naval, usually demand strict entry requirements. Options are limited for those with experience but without proper qualification wanting to apply for Category A or B courses. Some countries now demand Category A and B qualifications in order to submit a hydrographic tender. For these people to gain Cat A Hydro they usually have to go through the Category B course and, if they succeed, are likely to proceed to the Category A course. The Board is now looking at the possibility of offering a Category C course for those assistant surveyors, such as technicians, who will not qualify to apply for a Category B course.

These courses are available worldwide in order to provide a formal training for hydrographers or nautical carto-graphers. Some courses are run in the native language of the country offering them, but most courses are offered in English. Since it is important that the accredited courses reflect new technology and current trends, both Standards are continually updated. Whether it is a 'Cat A Hydro' or a 'Cat A Carto', both courses have a contribution to make towards producing qualified hydrographic surveyors and nautical cartographers.