Examination Rules

Certified Professional for Software Architecture

Advanced Level

International Software Architecture Qualification Board e. V.

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The abbreviation "e. V." is part of the iSAQB's official name and stands for "eingetragener Verein" (registered association), which describes its status as a legal entity according to German law. For the purpose of simplicity, iSAQB e. V. shall hereafter be referred to as iSAQB without the use of said abbreviation.

Examination rules:

This document regulates the examination for the Certified Professional for Software Architecture – Advanced Level (CPSA-A).

Areas of competence and modular concept:

Flexible training pathways

Participants of the CPSA-A certification program can choose their individual training pathway from three areas of competence. As a prerequisite for the examination, examinees must demonstrate at least 70 credit points from three areas of competence, whereby each area of competence must be covered by at least 10 credit points. It is up to the participants to decide which combination of modules is required to achieve these points.

Modular concept

For each of these areas of competence, there are different training modules whose curricula are defined by the iSAQB. For each module, there is a specific number of credit points from the three competence areas. The exact assignment of credit points to the modules can be found on the **Advanced Level web page**.

Three areas of competence

The iSAQB defines curricula for the CPSA-A in the following three areas of competence:

- **Technological competence:** Knowledge and implementation of technology solutions used in design tasks.
- **Methodical competence:** A systematic approach to architectural tasks, regardless of the technologies used.
- **Communicative competence:** Skills for productive cooperation with different stakeholders, communication, presentation, argumentation, and moderation.

Examination requirements

To be certified, the examinee must provide written evidence to the certification body which demonstrates that they meet the following requirements:

Requirement	Evidence to be submitted
Certified Professional for Software Architecture, Foundation Level	iSAQB certificate
A minimum of three years of full-time professional experience in the IT industry, including involvement in the design and development of at least two different IT systems.	Overview, in tabular form, of activities as well as relevant IT systems. List of key features as bullet points (system & project scope, sector, technologies, products used, frameworks, operating systems, methods, patterns).
Participation in CPSA-A-accredited training with a total score of at least 70 credit points gained in all three different areas of competence and at least 10 credit points in each competence area.	Certificates of attendance issued by the accredited training providers
Non-disclosure agreement concerning the examination task and reports (expert opinions) resp. corrections	Personal, written declaration of consent by the examinee not to pass on the examination task they received, any documents, models, papers, and notes created during the task processing as well as the reports (expert opinions) or corrections to other persons or organizations. This is a standard contract that stipulates a penalty for any breach of contract by the examinee. The document can be obtained from the certification body.

The iSAQB reserves the right to verify the fulfillment of these requirements in their entirety or to perform spot checks, in particular regarding the type and duration of involvement in the required IT systems. If applicable, references or persons to be addressed may have to be provided.

Examples:

- Josef E. has completed the modules Architecture Evaluation (20 CPs, methodical), Architecture Documentation (20 CPs, methodical), and Web Architecture (30 CPs, technological). The resulting total score of 70 CPs is not sufficient for CPSA-A certification, as 10 CPs are missing in communicative competence.
- Hannah A. attended the Web Architecture course, for which the iSAQB awards 30 CPs of technical competence. By completing the modules Architecture Evaluation (20 CPs, methodical), Architecture Documentation (20 CPs, methodical), and Soft Skills (30 CPs, communicative), Hannah A. has gained more than the 70 CPs required.

Examination cost

In addition to expenses for individually selected training, the examinee must pay an examination fee to participate in the examination. Currently, the fee is 2,550.00 EUR plus VAT.

Parties involved in the examination process

The following individuals or parties are involved in the CPSA-A examination process:

- The examinee
- The certification body
- The examiners
- The working group Advanced Level within the iSAQB e. V.

Examination preparation

It is recommended that the examinee first roughly plans their examination, attends the necessary training courses, and then registers for the examination.

Stock-check

To begin with, the examinee checks whether they have attended any CPSA-A-accredited training courses (proof of attendance required) and how many of the credit points required for CPSA-A certification they have achieved to date. An up-to-date list of training recognized for CPSA-A certification is available on the **Advanced Level web page**.

Search for CPSA-A-accredited training

To be awarded the credit points required for CPSA-A certification, the examinee must select one or more accredited training courses. Information on curricular modules and their credit points can be found on the **iSAQB website**. Information on accredited training providers can be found on the iSAQB website using the **training calendar**. Detailed information about accredited training is available directly from the accredited training providers.

Attending accredited training courses

The examinee must attend one or more accredited training courses to earn the credit points required for CPSA-A certification.

For training courses they wish to attend (one or more), the examinee must register directly with the accredited training providers. Upon successful completion of training, the training provider will issue the examinee a training certificate specifying the number of credit points awarded. For successful completion of the training, attendance must be at least 75% of the total training duration.

Examination registration

The examinee must register for the examination in writing with a recognized certification body.
The examinee must submit the following information and certificates during registration:

- Contact details (name, address, telephone number, e-mail address)
- Evidence of projects
- CPSA-F certificate
- Certificates of attendance at accredited training (including CPs)
- Non-disclosure agreement
- The type of the system to be used in the examination task (e.g., information system, web system, or embedded system)
- Desired examination period

The certification body checks the completeness of the registration and requests any missing information.

Examiner appointment & examination period determination

The iSAQB will provide the certifying bodies with a list of examiners. The list will also indicate the system types for which each examiner can be used. The certification body will then verify whether two appropriate examiners are available during the examination period desired by the examinee. If they are not, the certification body will agree on a different examination period with the examinee. The certification body will confirm the chosen examination period for the examinee. At a later stage, the examinee will be able to apply for a postponement of the examination period if exceptional circumstances prevent them from completing the examination within the proposed period. The certification body will then agree on a new examination period with the examinee and the examiners. The examinee may postpone the examination only once.

Payment of fees

Once all requirements for examination registration have been met, the certification body will issue the examinee with an invoice for the examination fee. No further steps will be taken until the examinee has paid the examination fee to the certification body. Part of this payment will then be used by the certification body to pay a fee to the iSAQB, and another part for the examiner’s remuneration.

Delivery of the examination task

The certification body selects two tasks from two different system types for the examinee, who has previously signed a non-disclosure agreement for each task, and sends the tasks according to the examinee's preference, as

- a personalized letter containing the task to the examinee by recorded delivery or
- an e-mail containing the task as a personalized, protected PDF document to the examinee.

After receiving the tasks, the examinee has three days to decide which of the two tasks they would like to work on for the examination and to inform the certification body of their decision.

Examination structure

The examination consists of two parts:
Part 1: Assignment (paper)
Part 2: Oral examination/Defense of the assignment

Part 1 of the examination: The assignment (paper)

As part of the assignment, the examinee must prepare a paper on predefined topics and issues. The paper must be prepared independently.

Delivery of the assignment

Upon submission of evidence of positive certification requirements, the certification body will issue an examination task.

Sample Task

To learn what to expect, the examinee can find a **sample task** here. This is a task that is currently no longer in use – but is and was subject to the same rules and criteria as the current tasks.

Development requirements

The certification exam is carried out by independently working on an architecture task. The task is to design and document a professionally and technically appropriate IT system based on an existing requirements description.

The paper must be written independently. The literature and aids used for the assignment must be listed in full.
Text passages generated with the aid of generative AI models must be identified as such. If generative AI models are used, all communication with the generative AI model must be archived and attached to the assignment as an annex.
It is prohibited to process the examination task or the reports, in whole or in part, using a generative AI model or to disclose them to third parties. Failure to comply with this instruction constitutes a breach of the iSAQB non-disclosure agreement and may result in exclusion from the certification program.

A violation of these examination regulations may be considered cheating and may result in failure of the examination. Depending on the severity of the offense, this can lead to a ban from taking another exam for several years.

Completing the task

Completing a CPSA-A task usually requires at least 40 hours; however, depending on the task and the examinee's level of knowledge, 60 hours or more may be necessary. The examinee typically has three months to complete the task from the date on which it is issued.

Comprehension questions

If the examinee has comprehension questions about the examination task, they can send them via e-mail to the certification body. The certification body forwards the questions to the examiners, who will answer them within 14 days.
This does not include clarifying unavoidable open issues in the examination task. The examinee must handle these as described in the examination task (usually by making a reasonable assumption and providing justification for it).

Anonymization and confidentiality of content

All individuals and institutions involved in the examination are required to treat the content of the assignment and the examination task confidentially and to refrain from passing it on to third parties. The examinee, however, has final responsibility for the content of the assignment and its transfer. From the moment they start preparing the assignment, they must ensure they do not breach any non-disclosure agreements with their employer, line manager, or client. The examinee receives two separate reports (expert opinions) or one joint report on their examination from the examiners. These reports must also be treated confidentially by the examinee and must not be passed on to uninvolved third parties.
Neither the iSAQB e. V. nor any individuals or institutions involved in the examination shall assume any liability for any damages or claims that may result from a non-disclosure agreement breach. Should the examinee be unsure whether they may be in breach of any applicable non-disclosure agreements based on the content of their assignment, they should contact their employer, line manager, or client before submitting their assignment.
The certification bodies pass the assignments on to the examiners anonymously.

Contact details

The examinee is required to submit a cover page with their contact details as a separate PDF. This includes a postal address, an e-mail address, and, if possible, a telephone number at which they can be reached at the times they specify.

Completion time and submission deadline

The assignment must be completed and returned to the certification body within three months of receipt of the task. When issuing the assignment, the certification body will inform the examinee of the submission deadline; earlier submission is permitted. If the assignment is not returned by the deadline, this part of the examination shall be deemed failed. Apart from the maximum time allowed of three months, the total time allowed for completing all examinations, twelve months, must also be considered. If these twelve months are exceeded, the entire examination shall be deemed failed — regardless of whether the three-month deadline has been adhered to or not.

Form of assignment submission

The assignment must be submitted to the certification body in electronic form as a PDF file. The PDF document of the assignment must be machine-readable and unencrypted, as it will be subjected to an electronic plagiarism check. If the PDF document of the assignment is completely or partially illegible, the exam part is considered failed. In addition to the assignment, the cover sheet containing a declaration on independent completion of the assignment must be signed and submitted as a separate PDF file.

The PDF document of the assignment must meet the following formal criteria:

1. Font: 11pt
2. Margin: 2,5cm
3. Single line spacing
4. Indication of page numbers
5. At least a table of contents and a list of references
6. Numbered headings
7. Numbered and labeled figures
8. Numbered and labeled tables
9. A navigable table of contents
10. Legends or notations regarding figures
11. Guaranteed searchability (no password protection, copy protection, etc.)
12. Graphics and especially texts within the graphics are readable without zooming
13. Personal data are to be indicated in the examination sheet only; in the assignment (paper), merely the examination number

14. 30 to 40 pages of content, plus a maximum of 10 additional pages (title page, indexes, references, glossary)
15. The structure of the assignment must clearly follow the subtasks of the examination task. Architecture documentation according to arc42 or similar templates is explicitly rejected.
16. In the event of revision, the modified sections must be clearly marked.

Extension of the assignment completion time upon request in exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances, where this can be justified on an individual basis, the completion time for the assignment may be extended once for up to 3 months.

- This request must be submitted in writing to the certification body within the predefined completion time and justified accordingly. The certification body shall be entitled to verify this information. If it is shown that the examinee has made false declarations, they will be excluded from the examination, and any certificate that has already been issued will become void.
- In case the maximum time allowed for the entire examination of twelve months (see section “Completion time and submission deadline”) is exceeded because of such an extension, the maximum total time allowed shall also be extended to the time the extension expires.

Assessment of the assignment

The certification body sends the written assignment prepared by the examinee to two examiners appointed by the iSAQB for assessment.
The examiners assess the assignment within a maximum of four weeks. During this period, they may contact the examinee through the certification body to ask further questions. The assignment assessment determines whether the examinee is admitted to the oral examination. If the two examiners disagree (according to one assessment, the examinee is admitted to the oral examination; according to the other, they are not), the certification body will call in a third examiner, who will prepare a third, decisive assessment report independently of the first two examiners.
The examinee is obliged to answer the examiners' questions. If the examinee refuses to reply or fails to meet the deadline for a reply (when they are contacted in writing, a deadline for responding will be indicated), this part of the examination shall be deemed failed.
The examinee always receives the examiners' reports, which must be treated as confidential, regardless of whether they have passed or failed.

Repeat assignment

If the examiners determine that the solution contains severe errors, there will be a one-off possibility to improve the assignment within two months from the date the examinee receives the information about the failed exam. In this case, the certification body will charge a fee for the repeat examination.

Objection

The examinee may object to the assessment within four weeks. The objection must be justified in writing.
For the objection procedure, two new examiners are drawn by lot and provided with documentation of the entire examination process. The objection examiners confirm the assessment or issue a new evaluation.
The result of the objection procedure cannot be contested.
The objection procedure is subject to a fee. The fee of EUR 1500.00 plus VAT is to be paid by the examinee.

Part 2 of the examination: Defense of the assignment

In the second step, both examiners conduct an oral examination with the examinee. The examinee must explain the design and the design decisions made and defend them in response to questions from the examiners. The result of the oral examination determines whether the Advanced Level examination has been passed.
The oral examination normally lasts 60 minutes. The examiners are entitled to extend the examination duration at their discretion to assess whether the examinee has sufficient understanding to obtain Advanced Level certification.
After the oral examination, the two examiners decide whether the examination has been passed. The certification body will inform the examinee of the result within two days.

Requirements for passing the examination

The examination shall be deemed passed if both examination parts have been passed, i.e., each examination part must be passed individually and independently from the other part. Passing part 1 is a prerequisite for progressing to part 2. Both parts of the examination must be completed within 12 months of the first examination; failing that, the examination result shall be a fail. This twelve-month deadline shall apply in all conceivable cases, including the repetition of individual parts.

Notification of results and potential repeat examination

Just as certification documents, notification letters containing the results of examination parts shall be sent in writing by the certification body to the address specified by the examinee. If the examiners identify serious shortcomings in the assignment or in the oral examination that fail that part of the examination, there is a one-off opportunity for revision within two months from the date on which the examinee is notified of the failed examination part. In this case, the certification body will charge a fee of 750 euros plus VAT for the repeat examination. There are also examination reports for the written part of any repeat examination; these do not have to be completely new but may be based on the original reports ("delta reports") or may address only the particularly criticized parts.

If the repeat examination is also deemed a failure by at least two examiners, the examinee will have to wait at least one year before requesting a new examination.