

Qualifications for Key Account Managers

Why should you qualify as a key account manager?

AKAM recognises that the position of key account manager requires a broad range of competencies, many of them at a high level. Currently, the scope and level of this position is poorly recognised by businesses, so although you may have been working as a key account manager for years, the level and importance of your expertise is often not acknowledged. The existence of a professional qualification in Key Account Management (KAM) helps to demonstrate to companies that this is an established discipline to be ranked alongside other professional roles. The range of knowledge and competencies that make up these qualifications also helps to demonstrate the value of these positions, and of those who hold them.

If you can demonstrate to your employer that you have a professional qualification in KAM, you will have backing for the competencies you claim. That could support your career with your company and, at the same time, help to achieve a suitable job classification for the role, or will put you in an advantageous position relative to other candidates for a position. It may be a long time since you undertook any extended formal training, but these qualifications are worth your investment of time because they are entirely relevant to your career and enable you to demonstrate that you are up-to-date and multi-skilled.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is becoming increasingly important and is supported by the Erasmus+ Sector skills alliance programme, which is delivered by collaborating educational institutions, training organisations and in-house providers within a pan-European context.

What qualifications are available?

AKAM has so far defined two levels of qualifications in Key Account Management: the Diploma and the Advanced Diploma. Both are designed for key account managers in post rather than those who are promoting and managing KAM programs. At a later date, AKAM plans to establish a Master's programme for KAM Program Directors which will be developed in partnership with universities and business schools within the framework of the pan-European ERASMUS+ funding programme, and delivered by them.

The qualifications are competency based and acquired through credit accumulation via a range of learning options. The last section in this document describes the activities in which you need to demonstrate proficiency: please refer to it for details of the specific nature and scope of competencies required. You gain 10 credits for each competency demonstrated at a level acceptable to AKAM. 120 credits are required for the Diploma, and a further 120 required to achieve the Advanced Diploma, or a total of 240 credits for the Advanced Diploma.

- **Diploma in Key Account Management (120 credits)**
The Diploma is designed for those who have been working as a key account manager and covers the essential competencies required by any key account manager. To gain a

Diploma the candidate must demonstrate sufficient ability in 12 competences across a range of activities:

1. Market and customer understanding
2. Sales and business development
3. General management and business acumen
4. Organisational effectiveness
5. Relationships and interaction

See pages 5 and 6 for the list of competencies expected at Diploma level.

- **Advanced Diploma in Key Account Management** (240 credits or Diploma plus 120 credits)

The Advanced Diploma is aimed at key account managers in roles with greater responsibilities, requiring more experience. The overall range of activities is the same as those required at Diploma level, but the specific competences at this level are more challenging and require greater depth and understanding.

To gain the Advanced Diploma the candidate must demonstrate ability in 24 of the competencies listed. If a candidate has already gained the Diploma in KAM, it will count as 12 of the required competences for the Advanced Diploma, and the candidate will need to pass 12 additional and different competencies to gain an Advanced Diploma.

AKAM will work in partnership with participating Business Schools and Universities to ensure that these credits are equivalent to standard European Higher Education credits. Students may gain credits if they have a prior relevant qualification or can demonstrate competency gained through experience in a portfolio of evidence (see below).

What kind of study is involved?

AKAM recognises that understanding and competency can be gained in more than one way, through 'learning by doing' while fulfilling the role of key account manager; by observing and exchanging experience with peers and managers in KAM; by formal learning opportunities like courses and conferences; and by self-study and research. The AKAM qualifications scheme also allows students to draw on formal training from different sources, different participating Universities, in-house programmes or other training providers.

Therefore, the means of study is less important to AKAM than the actual acquisition of knowledge and competency. However, candidates will have to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of theory relevant to each of the subject areas, as well as learning through practice.

In order to align with European guidelines, each 10 credit points represent 100 hours of study: whether through practice, formal study, attendance at a course, writing, analysis, planning or other developmental activity.

How will my knowledge/competency be assessed?

You will be asked to submit evidence of your understanding of theory and experience of practice and to demonstrate what you have learned and implemented, normally in a written portfolio of performance. Where you offer practice of KAM as part of the evidence of your learning, you will

need to get the signature of your line manager or other senior manager in the organisation to confirm that your account of what you have done is true.

You may submit other documents, e.g. key account plans, internal reports, other material used in a key account relationship, as part of your evidence. If you have attended a course and are claiming that your attendance and consequent activities required as part of the coursework are part of your evidence, you should submit course documentation (e.g. presentations, handouts, assignment briefings) together with the signature of the course tutor or your line manager to confirm that you attended the course and successfully completed the required tasks.

The evidence you are submitting will be presented to the AKAM Qualifications Board who will agree whether or not your evidence fulfils the requirements for passing each subject area. If the evidence of the level of knowledge is judged insufficient, the candidate will receive an indication of what is lacking and will be allowed to resubmit at a later date, though not more than two further times.

You will receive 10 credits for each specific competency passed, and you will need 120 credits to gain the AKAM Diploma and 240 credits for the AKAM Advanced Diploma. AKAM intends to gain recognition from Erasmus universities and colleges for these qualifications and in that case, your credits could be used to shorten the study period for further degree-level qualifications in other subjects that you choose.

Students will also participate in an oral examination, which may cover any of the competencies they have submitted before the qualification is finally awarded, and will particularly focus on establishing that you are the originator of the evidence you have offered. Oral examinations will normally be conducted by two members of the AKAM Academic Board over the Internet.

What kind of support is available?

This document should tell you a lot of what you need to know. In addition, when you register as a student, an AKAM member, normally a member of the AKAM Qualifications Board, will be made available to answer your queries and provide any clarification that you need. If you will be working with a tutor or mentor, they are welcome to join that conversation. AKAM will deal with queries in principle, but generally not about specific or individual issues.

AKAM will compile a list of experts with appropriate qualifications and/or experience who may be willing to help you if you would like some support through the process. AKAM will recommend an appropriate rate for this work, but the arrangement will be made direct between you and the tutor, and neither of you are bound by the recommended rate.

How do students graduate?

You submit your portfolio of evidence of proficiency separately but simultaneously for each competency. If you wish, you may submit your evidences in two tranches, but the first must consist of material for at least half of the areas (i.e. a minimum of 6 for a Diploma and 12 for an Advanced Diploma).

The AKAM Qualifications Board will review your evidence and must accept it as being of sufficient standard in 12 of the competencies eligible for a Diploma or 24 of those eligible for an Advanced Diploma (or a further 12 for a key account manager already holding the Diploma), and you must also pass the viva. Neither qualification will be graded: you are only required to 'pass'.

Your name will then be entered into the AKAM register of qualified key account managers at the appropriate level, and you will receive a certificate with a list of the competencies you have passed, signed by the President of AKAM and the Chair of the Qualifications Board.

Are there any fixed timescales?

The Qualifications Board will meet to consider submissions every quarter. You must submit all your evidence and have it judged by the Board as being of a satisfactory level within five years of registering with AKAM for your chosen qualification. If you have a specific reason for not being able to fulfil this requirement, you may apply to AKAM for a waiver, which will not be unreasonably withheld.

How do you register and what fees are involved?

When you register as a student, which currently costs €300, you will also receive one year's AKAM membership as an individual. Employees of corporate members will receive a discounted rate to register as a student, which may or may not be covered by your employer. You will also need to be an AKAM member (cost €300) when you submit material to the Qualifications Board: there will be an additional examination fee of €50 per competency that you submit. If you have to resubmit any competency at a later date, a further examination fee of €50 per competency will be incurred.

You do not need to be a member in every year that you are studying and working on collecting your evidence of proficiency. However, as an AKAM member you will be able to access useful elements in the members-only section of the AKAM website and general advice on your studies, so keeping up your membership is a good idea.

If you require a tutor or mentor, AKAM will try to help you find one. While there will be a recommended fee rate, your arrangements will be made directly with the tutor.

To register as a student, email Dr Kevin Wilson at kevin.wilson@kedgebs.com or write to the address below, stating whether you wish to register for a Diploma or Advanced Diploma and giving your full contact details.

Association for Key Account Management - L'Association de Gestion des Comptes Clés

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