



EVALUATION OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING MEDIUM AND TRANCE CHANNELER CERTIFICATIONS

BY JULIETTE GALLO, HELANÉ WAHBEH, SIRI ZEMEL, & LEO RUICKBIE

ABSTRACT

We evaluated English-speaking medium/trance channeler certification programs. Certifications were descriptively outlined, and a comprehensive scoring matrix emerged for certification comparisons. Six certifications met the study inclusion criteria. Final scoring was intended to measure the extent to which certification status ensures practitioner competence and public safety through five core elements: skills assessment, protocol transparency, grief training, ethics training, and personal interviews. There were vast differences in the quality of descriptive data available for certifications. Future work is needed to standardize medium/trance channeler certifications to ensure public protection, most notably grief training, ethics training, and transparency of skills assessment protocols.

INTRODUCTION

Growing from ancient global roots (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015; Bourguignon, 1973; Guttierrez, 2015; Hunter & Luke, 2014), the mediumship and trance channeling¹ field is gaining both economic momentum (IBIS World, 2021) and societal popularity (Held, 2019). Mediumship and trance channeling represent essentially the same phenomenon—communication with non-physical entities—though they have emerged as distinct terms in different historical contexts. Mediumship, as Beischel (2007, p. 43) defines it, involves “individuals who report experiencing regular communication with the deceased” where practitioners typically interpret or translate information (also known as ‘mental mediumship’). Trance channeling evolved later, with practitioners believing they “use their body as a ‘vehicle’ for the purported disincarnate ‘being’ to incorporate into and to communicate directly via speaking, writing, or movement” (Wahbeh et al., 2019, p. 3). Rather than simply receiving and relaying messages, trance channelers reportedly allow entities to communicate directly through them. Despite these procedural distinctions, both practices

1. For the purpose of this study, the term ‘trance channeling’ is used where: “The channeler goes into an altered state of consciousness at will (i.e., trance state (the depth of the trance may vary), and the disincarnate entity/spirit uses the channeler’s body with permission to communicate directly through the channeler’s voice, body movements, etc. (rather than the channeler receiving information mentally or otherwise and then relaying what is being received)” (Wahbeh et al., 2019, p. 5).

represent fundamentally similar altered states of consciousness that facilitate access to transpersonal information. Their differences reflect evolving cultural contexts rather than substantive distinctions in the underlying phenomenon: mediumship emerged during the 19th-century Spiritualist movement focusing on deceased humans, while trance channeling gained prominence during the late 20th-century New Age movement, expanding to include various non-physical intelligences. Today, practitioners may use these terms interchangeably, recognizing them as variations of the same essential practice.

Growing research over the past two decades has shaped scientific understanding of individuals reporting mediumship or trance channeling abilities, including studies examining psychological and personality characteristics (Alvarado, 2010; Rock et al., 2008) as well as genetic attributes (Gattaz et al., 2025). Evidence suggests that mediums score higher for psychological well-being when compared with non-mediums (Roxburgh & Roe, 2011), refuting a common perception that mediumship/trance channeling abilities might be associated with psychopathology (Roxburgh, 2010; Roxburgh & Roe, 2011; Spindola-Rodrigues et al., 2022). Despite the growth in research, public interest, and economic impact, the field of mediumship/trance channeling is young in its professionalization journey.

In a study by Zemel and Wahbeh (2023), professional mediums/trance channelers voiced the importance of consumer ethics and a responsibility to do no harm. However, without universal or generally accepted certification protocols and standards, it is challenging to discern the quality, competency, and ethical preparedness of a professional medium or trance channeler. This absence of formalized training and oversight has significant implications for both consumers and practitioners. Individuals often seek the services of spiritual mediums during periods of grief (Beischel et al., 2014), a time marked by heightened emotional vulnerability. Research indicates that while some bereaved individuals report perceived comfort, engagement with mediumship occurs within a psychologically sensitive context that necessitates ethical boundaries, practitioner competence, and awareness of potential psychological harm, misinterpretation, or dependency (Osborne & Bacon, 2015; Testoni et al., 2022). From a professional standpoint, the absence of standardized training and regulation in mediumship and trance channeling leaves practitioners without consistent guidance on ethical decision-making, informed consent, scope of practice boundaries, or the recognition of mental health contraindications. Research shows that this lack of guidance creates difficulties not only for consumers but also for mediums themselves, who report uncertainty, emotional strain, and ethical challenges when working with psychologically vulnerable clients in the absence of consistent formal training, supervision, or referral frameworks (Wilde et al., 2019). Moreover, the absence of formal certification and recognized professional standards in mediumship and trance channeling undermines public trust and complicates efforts toward professional legitimacy.

Legal analyses have shown that the lack of coherent regulatory frameworks governing spiritualist and mediumship practice leaves the field vulnerable to ongoing criticism, consumer protection concerns, and legal uncertainty, thereby contributing to increased reputational risk for practitioners and organizations alike (Greenfield et al., 2012).

A contemporary example highlighting these risks is the ‘Maria Duval’ mail fraud scheme, in which vulnerable consumers, including elderly or financially insecure individuals, were repeatedly solicited for payments for purported psychic guidance and talismans. Investigators estimated that over 1.3 million people were defrauded of more than \$175 million before the scheme was shut down, and no evidence supported the claimed psychic services (US Department of Justice, 2024). This case demonstrates how, without standardized oversight and ethical safeguards, consumers can experience significant financial and emotional harm, underlining the importance of professional standards, training, and certification in the field. Research from comparable unregulated or loosely regulated helping professions, such as complementary and alternative medicine, further demonstrates that the absence of certification and institutional oversight can undermine public confidence, impede professional recognition, and expose practitioners to increased scrutiny and liability (Carè et al., 2021). These findings suggest that without standardized certification structures, mediumship remains susceptible to challenges that hinder its credibility, sustainability, and broader social acceptance. Therefore, the development of evidence-informed training and certification standards is essential to promote consumer protection, ensure practitioner accountability, and support the responsible integration of mediumship and trance channeling into broader societal and professional contexts.

Mediumship and trance channeling certification programs

A small number of field leaders offer evidence-based testing and certifications for mediums. The Windbridge Institute, LLC (now the Windbridge Research Center) developed an extensive certification process for research mediums. Certification was only offered to those who passed blinded, controlled testing for information accuracy and specificity—standards which have raised the levels of professionalism and credibility for both practitioners and researchers in the field (Beischel et al., 2015). However, the Windbridge Research Center discontinued its mediumship certification program after the program’s funding ended, and the organization decided to focus on broader research and educational activities rather than certifying mediums. No plans to reopen the program have been announced (Windbridge Research Center, n.d.). The Forever Family Foundation (n.d.), a non-profit organization that seeks to connect resources to the bereaved, developed a medium certification program grounded in rigorous testing (Ginsberg, 2021). Only about 10% of the mediums that go through the evaluation process at the Forever Family Foundation will

receive certification, primarily due to underdeveloped proficiency (Ginsberg, 2021). Blinded, evidence-based, multi-stage testing is also conducted by Mark Ireland to certify mediums and to approve volunteer mediums to serve in the non-profit program Helping Parents Heal, which is dedicated to assisting bereaved parents (Mark Ireland Certified Mediums, n.d.). As anchors in the field, various Spiritualist organizations offer training programs, including the National Spiritualist Association of Churches in the United States (n.d.), the Spiritualist National Union in the UK (n.d.), and the Arthur Findlay College in the UK, some of which may include certification such as the programs delivered by the National Spiritualist Association of Churches, and the Spiritualist National Union.

Certification programs for trance channelers are less prevalent than programs for mediums. Although a preliminary online search for trance channeler certification programs in the US elicits some results, there is a lack of comparable published material for trance channeling compared with mediumship, including organizational infrastructures, books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed scientific journal articles. This dearth of publications is juxtaposed with the occurrence of trance channeling, which is not entirely rare. Wahbeh and Butzer (2020) reported that trance channeling is more prevalent than most people realize. In a study from Wahbeh et al. (2018), nine hundred English speakers were asked whether they had a non-physical source from a different level or dimension of reality that used their body as an instrument for communication, and experiences were reported by 8.8% of the general population and 30% of exceptional human experience enthusiasts. Although medium and trance channeling certifications may be available, they vary widely and serve different goals. In a recent survey of nearly one hundred and fifty mediums/trance channelers, Zemel and Wahbeh (2023, p. 160) reported the frequently held view that “there are major inconsistencies across certification programs in that some are scientifically rigorous, while others can be obtained by simply paying a fee.” To our knowledge, there has been no formal evaluation of certification programs for mediums/trance channelers in English-speaking countries.

Evaluation of certification programs

Certification represents a large and growing segment of the credentialing sector (Buckendahl, 2017), and certification evaluation traditionally encompasses various methodologies and frameworks to assess effectiveness and impacts. Medium/trance channeler certification is voluntary, and differs dramatically from rigorous, mandatory professional credentialing such as licensures aimed to demonstrate competency before working with the public. According to Fabrey (2017, p. 218), “There is no control over either the use of the word ‘certified’ or the development of certification programs. Any entity can start a program ... and, regardless of the characteristics of a program, participants

can claim to be certified.” To our knowledge, mediumship and trance channeling certification programs have not yet been thoroughly evaluated, nor does an authoritative organization exist to perform such evaluations. This highlights the need for greater public education on program quality, as there can be tension between the “broader goals of public protection and business interests” (Buckendahl, 2017, p. 7). Any evaluation of certifications should be designed to reduce bias, be equitable, and incorporate clear criteria, guidelines, or standards (Fabrey, 2017). To our knowledge, currently no instrument is available to evaluate certification programs for mediums and trance channelers. Therefore, we have chosen to focus on skills assessment, transparency, public protection through grief and ethics training, and personal interviews, as these five key areas address the most salient indicators of certification quality relevant to public safety, particularly for emotionally vulnerable populations, by evaluating practitioner competence, ethical safeguards, transparency, and preparedness to work responsibly with grief. Additional factors, such as organizational reputation or requirements for criminal background checks, were excluded to avoid subjective judgments and jurisdiction-specific variability, thereby preserving fairness, replicability, and methodological consistency across certifications operating in different regions. However, these could be important elements to consider in future work.

We used an evaluation scoring matrix, described below, to operationalize these criteria. Scoring matrices provide a structured framework incorporating multiple criteria relevant to the evaluation context, where each option is rated against these criteria, and the scores are aggregated to derive an overall assessment (Hugh, 2022).

Skills assessment

A simple certification program may only require payment or confirmation of attendance to receive a certificate, while an assessment-based certification program requires education, training, and/or a passing test score demonstrating adequate knowledge and/or skills application (Fabrey, 2017). This is a nuanced area in the field of mediumship/trance channeling, where there is a discrepancy between practitioners who believe in innate ability versus those who emphasize learned skills (Zemel & Wahbeh, 2023). An assessment-based certificate uses formal measurement to rate professional competence. In dentistry, for example, test scores are meant to provide confidence to the public that entry-level dentists have demonstrated the necessary judgments and skills for safe practice. The design of such tests requires an understanding of measurement development and testing validation methods (Kane et al., 2017), which may sometimes be lacking among credentialing programs within newer occupations or professions (Buckendahl, 2017). Fabrey (2017, p. 222) details the need for “criterion- referenced passing points, verified with documented evidence to confirm the competence of the candidate,” and “validity of the pass/fail decision.”

Many professional certificate programs also require maintenance assessments, such as continuing education or recertification exams, after a period of time (Buckendahl, 2017), ensuring the continuation of a high standard of care and public protection (Peri & Eisenberg, 2024). Other professions are moving to longitudinal assessment, which repeatedly administers shorter evaluations over time to support lifelong learning and address emergent ethical topics (Giron et al., 2021).

Transparency

Transparency, including the willingness to be openly evaluated by accrediting bodies, is the gold standard among credentialing programs across a wide variety of professions (Friedrich et al., 2024; Kolsoom et al., 2023; Pelsner et al., 2019). Beyond the deep and thorough type of transparency that accreditation demands, a more basic type of transparency includes the processes and decision points required to achieve certification, which can provide both candidates and the public with an understanding of program objectives and quality. The type of transparency measured in this study is that of the certification program's processes and decision points.

Public protection through grief and ethics training

Testing and/or skills assessment only partially addresses public protection, and even if mediums/trance channelers operated from an innate skills versus learned abilities perspective, the sensitive knowledge of skillfully navigating grief and ethics is paramount to practitioner efficacy and consumer safety. A commitment to public protection is a recognition that members of the public may not be able to distinguish qualified versus unqualified occupational performance (Buckendahl, 2017). It is well documented that mediums/trance channelers work with the bereaved, an emotionally vulnerable population steeped in grief (Beischel et al., 2014; Mikles, 2023; Testoni et al., 2022), which demands special ethical considerations (Osborne & Bacon, 2015). For professions involving a heightened risk to the public, "an incompetent practitioner can produce lasting, negative consequences" (Buckendahl, 2017, p. 2), and surveyed practicing mediums/trance channelers in the US express the wish to 'do no harm' (Zemel & Wahbeh, 2023). Ethics are critical to professional competency and can include both consumer and general professional ethics. Nuanced ethical considerations may command specialized certificate programs in and of themselves for specific professions or sub-specialties (Thomas et al., 2021). There is currently no governing body, professional association, or established ethical standards for the mediumship and trance channeling fields. While an aspirational code of ethics was published by Zemel and Wahbeh (2025), integrating ethical training in mediumship/trance channeling, certification programs may be even more critical than in other fields that have well-defined ethical guidelines and training opportunities outside of the certification program.

Personal interviews

While personal interviews are not common practice for other professional certifications, they may be considered an extra layer of verification for evaluating mediums/trance channelers, particularly for certification programs that do not require any form of testing or skills assessment. Although unstructured personal interviews lack objective measurement of abilities, they can provide the opportunity for evaluators to assess candidates based on their perception of self-reported competencies, qualifications, experiences, and fitness for work with the public. This criterion represents a minimal but meaningful distinction from certifications awarded solely on the basis of payment.

Specific aims

Despite the growing visibility and utilization of mediumship and trance channeling, there has been little systematic examination of how practitioners are trained, evaluated, or certified to work with the public. The lack of evaluation of certification programs impedes the maturation of the field by limiting the ability to compare practitioner competencies, establish best practices, and integrate mediumship and trance channeling responsibly within broader research, clinical, and educational contexts. Systematic evaluation of certification programs therefore represents a critical step toward professional accountability, consumer safety, and the development of evidence-informed standards that can support both scholarly inquiry and ethical practice in this emerging domain.

Given the needed research around the standards of these certification programs, our objective was to comprehensively evaluate medium and trance channeler certification programs in English-speaking countries. The specific aims were to (1) identify certification programs available to English-speaking mediums and channelers, (2) identify specific certification program criteria, and (3) evaluate the certification programs using a rating system intended to mitigate individual rater bias through independent scoring.

METHODS

This cross-sectional evaluative study examined English-speaking medium and trance channeler certification programs using systematic document review and a structured scoring framework to compare program characteristics relevant to practitioner competence and public protection. The certifications were independently and quantitatively rated by three independent reviewers using the developed scoring matrix, with an aim to protect against researcher bias. No *a priori* goal or limit was placed on the number of certifications identified, with the search ending upon saturation. This study was not classified as research requiring institutional review board oversight because it relied solely on publicly available information and verifications from program administrators for any missing data. No private or sensitive information was collected, ensuring compliance with ethical standards.

Study inclusion / exclusion criteria

The study included companies or programs that provided certification for English-speaking mediums/trance channelers. We excluded programs that: (1) were no longer accepting candidates; (2) offering to train mediums and trance channelers without skills assessment or evidence-based testing; and (3) certified all applicants upon simply signing up and paying a fee.

Search strategy

We searched for certifications through online search queries, obtaining information from publicly accessible sources (including websites, program listings, and publications) and field notes (email correspondence). We began by searching for programs within the US using the terms ‘medium [trance channeling] certification’ and ‘certified [trance channeling] mediums.’ For the broader search across English-speaking countries worldwide, we used the queries ‘medium [trance channeling] certification in English-speaking countries,’ ‘medium [trance channeling] certification worldwide,’ and ‘mediumship [trance channeling] certification worldwide.’ The search strategy was intentionally restricted to programs explicitly using the term ‘certification,’ as it denotes a specific form of voluntary credentialing intended to signal practitioner competence and public protection within the credentialing literature. Alternative terms such as ‘registration,’ ‘accreditation,’ or ‘award’ are used inconsistently across organizations and jurisdictions, and often reflect substantively different purposes, which would have reduced conceptual clarity, comparability, and replicability of the evaluation framework.

Data collection

Data collection occurred from January 2024 through December 2025. We independently identified the certification programs ($n = 35$; thirty-two mediumship and three trance channeling results). Three researchers manually extracted the data from the qualifying programs ($n = 6$) and reported the information in a spreadsheet containing ten outcomes of interest. The outcomes of interest were specified prior to analysis as descriptive variables to capture certification structure and practices, while synthesis of these features informed development of the evaluative scoring framework. To address missing or unclear data, email and/or telephone requests for clarifying information were sent to the certifying organization.

Data abstraction

We screened results generated from online searches to exclude closed programs (no longer accepting candidates) and those programs that offer training without evidence-based testing. Programs that did not fulfil the inclusion criteria were omitted from the analysis.

Outcomes of interest

The outcomes used for initial descriptive data collection were: What is the specific testing process? Does certification include completion of a course? Are certification protocols published? Is grief training provided? Is ethics training provided? Is a personal interview required? Is testing in-person or remote? What is the pass rate? What is the certification cost? What is the business structure of the certifying agency? Three researchers entered descriptive details for each outcome of interest into a shared master spreadsheet.

Data analysis

Program elements were outlined, and a comprehensive scoring matrix emerged for certification comparisons. Five core components were used in the scoring matrix as described in the Introduction: skills assessment, protocol transparency, grief training, ethics training, and personal interview. The final score was intended to measure the extent to which certification status ensures ‘practitioner competence and public safety.’ Highlighting the rigor with which a medium’s accuracy is tested throughout the certification process, the matrix was weighted, with higher scoring for skills assessment than any other outcome category. Assessment was scored as 2 (lowest) to 4 (highest), while all other categories were scored from 0 (lowest) to 2 (highest). The maximum total score was 12 (Table 1). These scores were then aggregated across judges. An *a priori* goal of independent evaluations by at least three researchers from our team aimed to protect against researcher bias. Each of the three researchers rated the certification programs on the five components using the data collected about the programs.

RESULTS

We identified thirty-two medium certification programs and three trance channeling certification programs (Figure 1).

Twenty-six medium certification programs were excluded because they were closed or offered training without evidence-based testing, and all three trance channeling certification programs were excluded because they offered training without testing. A total of six qualifying certification programs were identified in this study. Five medium certification programs were identified in the US: the Forever Family Foundation (FFF) (n.d.), the Mark Ireland Certified Mediums Program (MICMP) (Olson Media, n.d.), Bob Olson’s Best Psychic Directory (BOBPD) (n.d.), Shay Parker’s Best American Psychics (SPBAP) (n.d.), and the National Spiritualist Association of Churches (NSAC) (n.d.). One medium certification program was identified in the UK, which was offered by the Spiritualists’ National Union (SNU) (n.d.). No trance channeling programs were identified that met the study inclusion criteria. The outcomes of interest for all qualifying certifications (listed in alphabetical order) are displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 1

Individual judge's scoring matrix to evaluate certification programs

Skills assessment	2	3	4
A test or skills assessment is required for certification	Testing or skills assessment required for certification, but not clearly documented	Testing or skills assessment required for certification is clearly documented (preferably validated)	Practitioner accuracy is rigorously tested, and the testing or skills assessment required for certification is documented (preferably validated)
Protocol transparency	0	1	2
Certification protocols are published	Certification protocols not publicly accessible, and not made available upon request	Certification protocols not publicly accessible, but made available upon request	Certification protocols published and publicly accessible
Grief training	0	1	2
Grief training is required for certification	No grief training required or provided for certification	Some grief training available through the organization to work with the bereaved, but is not required for certification	Comprehensive grief training for working with the bereaved is required and provided by the organization for certification
Ethics training	0	1	2
Ethical training is not required for certification	Ethics training required or provided for certification	Some ethics training provided, but is not required for certification	Comprehensive ethics training required and provided for certification
Personal Interview	0	1	2
Personal interview is required for certification	No personal interview required for certification	Personal interview may be required if decision-makers deem it necessary during the certification process	Personal interview required for certification
TOTAL SCORE	0–2	3–7	8–12
Sum all scores together for total score	Certification program may be insufficient to ensure practitioner competence and public protection	Certification program improvements may be recommended to enhance practitioner competence and public protection	Certification program has sufficient structure for practitioner competence and public protection

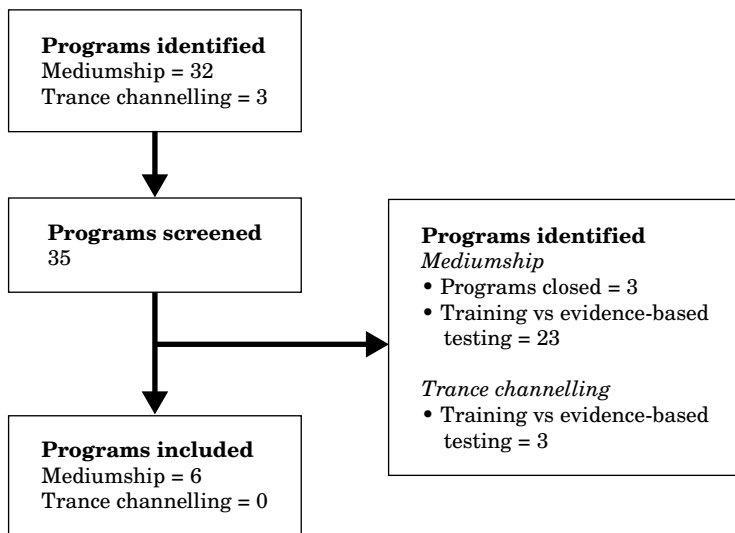


Figure 1. Flow chart of the screening process.

Testing process

Five organizations (83%) followed a specific process for testing candidate mediums, with no data provided by one organization (17%).

Course completion

Two organizations (33%) included mandatory training or course completion as part of the certification process, while four (66%) did not require course completion or training.

Transparency

Certification protocols were published for five of the six (83%) organizations, and one organization's protocols were not publicly accessible but were provided upon request (the NSAC).

Grief training

Grief training was not provided as part of the certification process for four organizations (66%), while two organizations did not provide this information to our research team (33%). Although formal grief training was not included, the SNU specified that trainee mediums are expected to act according to the needs of the bereaved when working with this vulnerable group. Similarly, the FFF stated that they "encourage prospective mediums to pursue that (grief training) on their own and cautioned all mediums to never represent themselves as grief professionals unless they also happen to hold such credentials."

TABLE 2
Outcomes of interest

Organization providing the certification	Specific testing process	Course	Protocol transparency	Grief training	Ethics training	Personal interview required	Type of testing	Pass rate (%)	Cost (\$)	Business structure
Bob Olson's Best Psychic Directory (BOBPD)	*	No	Yes	*	*	*	*	*	*	Private
Forever Family Foundation (FFF)	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Remote	10	0	Non-profit
Mark Ireland Certified Mediums (MICMP)	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Remote	15–20	0	Non-profit
National Spiritualist Association of Churches (NSAC)	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	In-person and remote	80–85	100	Non-profit
Shay Parker's Best American Psychics (SPBAP)	Yes	No	Yes	*	*	Yes	Remote	*	0	Private
Spiritualists' National Union (SNU)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	In-person and remote	0–100	30–220	Non-profit

*Data not provided by the certification organization.

Ethics training

Four organizations (66%) did not provide or require formal ethics training to obtain certification. When asked this question, the NSAC shared that “ethics are principles that are conveyed throughout the various courses rather than specific components of the curriculum,” and the FFF shared that “the ethics of candidates for certification were assessed during the application and interview stages.” SPBAP provided a basic class on being a professional psychic; however, specific information was not provided regarding the content of this class, or whether this class included ethics training.

Personal interview

Three of the organizations (50%) required candidates to undergo a personal interview prior to sitting for certification, while two organizations (33%) did not, and one organization (17%) did not respond to queries from our research team.

Test location

Three organizations (50%) tested mediums remotely, either via video call software (the FFF and the MICMP) or via telephone (SPBAP). Two organizations (the NSAC and the SNU) offered testing both in person and remotely, and no data was provided by BOBPD.

Pass rate

Four (66%) of the certifying organizations provided the pass rate. The FFF reported the most competitive pass rate as 10% of the mediums who embarked on their certification process since 2005. The MICMP certified between 15% and 20% of the mediums sitting for certification. For those seeking certification through the NSAC, 85% successfully completed the open essay, and 80% passed the written examination. For the SNU, the Teachings and Practice of Spiritualism 1 (TPS1, intermediate level) and 2 (TPS2, intermediate level) mandatory written courses have a 100% pass rate. Its Platform Accreditation Scheme (PAS) carries a 60% pass rate for first-time candidates and 100% for second attempts. The SNU could not provide an accurate pass rate for the Certificate in Speaking for the National Spiritualist Union (CSNU) private sittings, mentioning that few individuals sit this examination, with only one person tested in the last two years and failing twice. The ‘CSNU demonstrating’ pass rate is 75% for the first attempt, with no second attempts. For the Diploma in Speaking for the National Spiritualist Union (DSNU) private sittings, the pass rate is 0%, with only one person sitting this examination in the last three years. Finally, the pass rate for ‘DSNU demonstrating’ is 50% for first-time candidates and 90% for the second attempt.

Cost

Three certifications (50%) were free of charge, and the FFF and MICMP list certified practitioners on their websites at no charge. SPBAP features a list of certified mediums on their website for an annual fee ranging from \$299 to \$2,500. However, specific details about how the exact fee is determined were not provided. Two organizations (33%) charged candidates for certification (the NSAC and the SNU). The NSAC applied a testing fee of \$100 with a yearly renewal fee of \$35, while charging only 50% of the standard renewal fees for those aged 60 and older holding credentials for 20 years, and for those aged 65 and older holding credentials for more than 25 years, with no fee for those aged 70 and older holding credentials. The SNU fees are as follows: (1) the TPS1 course for members is £40.00 (with printed notes) and £25.00 (with PDF notes) and for non-members it is £50.00 (with printed notes) and £35.00 (with PDF notes); (2) the TPS2 course has identical fees to TPS1; (3) PAS (speaking) registration is £110 and the final assessment is £36.00; (4) the PAS (speaking and demonstrating) registration is £180 and the final assessment is £72; (5) the CSNU(ps) private sittings registration is £50.00 and the final assessment is £40.00; and (6) the CSNU(d) demonstrating registration is £50.00 and the final assessment is £40.00.

Business structure

Among the six qualifying medium certification organizations identified, four (66.6%) were non-profit organizations and two (33.3%) were for-profit organizations. One (17%) was classified as a limited liability company (BOBPD), and one (17%) as a privately owned company (SPBAP).

Detailed certification criteria and testing process

A summary of the certification criteria and testing processes captured in this study is listed in alphabetical order for each of the six certifying agencies. Note that publicly accessible information was not available for all organizations, nor did all organizations respond to our research queries for clarifying information. Finally, the information provided for each program below reflects the details available at the time of data collection; note that program offerings may change over time.

Bob Olson's Best Psychic Directory (BOBPD)

Candidates must be listed in the directory first by completing an online form. To be certified, candidates must pass a fifteen-point test and prove to Bob Olson that they are legitimate enough to be added to a 'tested as legitimate' online listing, which features psychics and mediums who have successfully passed the testing phase. No further information was provided to our research team regarding the fifteen-point test and the criteria for 'proving' whether the medium was 'legitimate.'

Forever Family Foundation (FFF)

To apply for certification, mediums must first be members of the FFF for at least three months. This period allows them to familiarize themselves with the organization's goals, mission, and work. Following this, candidates must complete an in-depth eight-page application and attend a personal interview. If the Medium Evaluation Certification Committee approves their application, candidates are invited to participate in a certification session. The testing process consists of five 15-minute readings conducted under controlled conditions, each with a different sitter (the living person who attends the reading and receives the information given by the medium). Four sessions involve both the medium and sitter seeing each other via a video platform, while one session is audio only. These readings are scored by the sitters, and the scores are combined to form a composite score. To earn certification, the candidate must exceed the established threshold for minimum proficiency. Sitter selection is carefully managed to ensure that mediums have no prior knowledge of or access to them. Sessions are anonymous, using only first names to ensure privacy. Sitters are selected based on their familiarity with someone who has passed, though there is no requirement regarding the time since the person's passing. Typically, the deceased person is closely related to the sitter, but this is not mandatory. Before joining the sitter list, individuals receive extensive training on the mediumistic process and specific scoring procedures, focusing on what constitutes valid evidence. During evaluations, specific and obscure information is rated more highly than general facts. All sessions remain confidential; results are only shared between the sitter and the medium, and sessions are not recorded for privacy reasons. General messages from deceased persons that do not provide specific information regarding their physical life, such as their name, profession, etc., are not scored since they cannot be verified for accuracy. Similarly, psychic information not directly linked to a discarnate entity is excluded from scoring. Mediums are prohibited from asking leading questions or inquiring about whom the sitter wishes to contact.

Mark Ireland Certified Mediums Program (MICMP)

Applications for both mediums and sitters are submitted online. Only experienced and currently practicing mediums with consistently positive feedback and a returning clientele are eligible to apply. These mediums must conduct four blinded test readings for four different sitters whom they do not know. Sitters must meet specific criteria: they should have had a close relationship with someone who has passed, be open-minded, and be willing to transcribe and grade the recorded session. The passing must have occurred at least three months before the test readings. Sitters should be balanced individuals capable of discernment and not currently experiencing deep grief. They receive an eight-page document detailing protocols and scoring methods. Mediums seeking certification must perform four blinded test readings for four different sitters via a video call, each lasting 45–60

minutes. During readings, mediums should refrain from asking many questions or posing statements as questions. Introductions are limited to first names, and the reading is to start with no video. The medium spends approximately 5 minutes sharing initial information. If they connect successfully, this part of the process continues without interruption. If the medium is not able to connect with an identifiable deceased loved one, the sitter may ask the medium to attempt to connect with a specific deceased person. Only the first name of the intended deceased person is to be shared.

Each reading is recorded and transcribed for grading accuracy and specificity. Correct statements are calculated against the total, excluding indeterminable ones. If indeterminable statements exceed 33%, a scoring adjustment is made by deducting one point per percentage point over 33%. To pass, a medium must score a minimum average of 75 points across the following three criteria: accuracy, meaningful evidence, and summary subjective grade from the sitter. Each of these categories is given one-third weighting of the total scoring, with bonus points available for the quality/quantity of the evidence provided. The accuracy criteria encompass general information about a deceased person, while meaningful evidence captures in-depth information, and the summary subjective grade from the sitter is an overall assessment of the quality of the reading by the sitter. A medium must pass the first reading in order to continue to the next three test readings.

National Spiritualist Association of Churches (NSAC)

The NSAC offers official credentials to candidates who wish to become certified mediums, as well as training, through the NSAC's educational body, the Morris Pratt Institute (MPI). Those seeking credentials with the NSAC for Certified Medium must successfully pass the related lessons provided by the MPI. Candidates must be members of the NSAC for at least 2 years at the time of the application.

The application must be accompanied by at least six evidential affidavits from the applicant's church or any other NSAC church that the candidate serves, church board approval and a letter, and the application fee. Once received and approved by the Director of the Department of Education, the candidate completes an essay within 45 days, and must find a proctor for the written examination, which entails questions on spiritualism and knowledge of the NSAC. Testing can be done at the applicant's church or any other NSAC-approved location, and the proctor must have the NSAC credential they are testing for, or above. No further information was provided on the scoring criteria or how the final determination for credentialing was made.

Shay Parker's Best American Psychics

Candidates must complete an online member application to join the directory, must undergo an interview, and then wait to be contacted with

testing times and dates. To achieve certification status, candidates undergo two test readings. Both readings are conducted over the telephone for 30 minutes each. One test reading is done with a staff tester and one with a volunteer sitter. No further information was provided regarding testing sessions or scoring criteria.

Spiritualists' National Union (SNU)

Prior to completing full certification (CSNU), candidates must hold TPS1, TPS2, and the PAS in speaking and demonstrating. TPS1 is the accreditation-level academic element of the PAS, and is the starting point for all speaker and demonstrator exponents. The course has eight sections and includes a written examination to confirm testing/skills assessment. TPS2 is the certificate-level academic element of the CSNU and the SNU International (SNUi) Certificate of Recognition (CSNUi). It is the second level for all speaker and demonstrator exponents. The course has eight sections and includes a written examination to confirm testing/skills assessment.

The PAS is a continuous assessment scheme whereby the candidate must complete twenty-five church or online services, and nine sections covering nineteen subjects. The candidate must complete these subjects by gathering evidence of competence against the assigned criteria. Before applying for the final assessment, a candidate must have completed TPS1. For both the speaking and demonstrating assessments, a candidate must complete a private interview and an oral test of ten questions based on the content of TPS1 and knowledge of the SNU, give an address of not less than 10 minutes or a demonstration of evidential mediumistic communication consisting of two separate sitters, and give a prayer suitable for a Spiritualist service.

The CSNU includes a private sittings (CSNU(ps)) designation and a demonstrating (CSNU(d)) designation, and each requires a separate testing process. For the CSNU(ps), candidates are issued with a logbook that contains the information and training sessions required that must be met to the satisfaction of the trainer. For the final assessment, the candidate must complete a private interview and an oral test of ten questions based on courses studied and knowledge of the SNU, and give a separate evidential private sitting to two sitters unknown to the candidate, each of 20 minutes duration. CSNU(d) candidates are also be issued a logbook that contains the information required for the award, including training sessions over seven subjects. To complete the test for the demonstrating designation, candidates must complete a private interview, an oral test of ten questions based on TPS2 and knowledge of the SNU, and are required to participate in a role-play scenario answering a question based on a typical misunderstanding of mediumship. In addition, the candidate will demonstrate mediumship consisting of two separate evidential communications to two sitters within 15 minutes and give a prayer suitable for a Spiritualist service.

TABLE 3

Scored evaluation results

Certification	Aggregate scores across judges					
	Skills assessment	Protocol transparency	Grief training	Ethics training	Personal interview	Total score
BOBPD	6	6	0	0	0	12
FFF	12	6	0	0	6	24
MICMP	12	6	0	0	0	18
NSAC	10	3	0	2	1	16
SPBAP	8	6	0	0	6	20
SNU	11	6	2	0	6	25

The Diploma of the SNU (DSNU) is the highest award. Prior to applying for these awards in a designation, a candidate must hold the CSNU. The in-depth training and testing to achieve a DSNU go beyond certification status and, thus, are not reported in this study.

Scored evaluations

Three researchers independently rated the certification programs using the emergent scoring matrix. The aggregate results of the scoring matrix are presented in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

The growing public interest in mediumship and trance channeling services has corresponded with the emergence of various certifications. Since research on medium/trance channeler certification is novel, we needed to lay the basis for possible future evaluations. Therefore, we developed a five-component scoring matrix to compare the certification programs against clear outcome criteria. This scoring matrix was designed to reduce bias and protect against researcher influence. Study limitations included a small sample size, incomplete data for some evaluation categories, and vast differences in the quality and breadth of data available for comparisons. Only six medium certifications met the study inclusion criteria, and no trance channeling certifications were included.

A further limitation of this study is that the search strategy was restricted to programs explicitly using the term ‘certification,’ which may have excluded organizations employing alternative terminology such as ‘registration’ or ‘accreditation.’ While this restriction was intentional to preserve conceptual clarity and comparability, future research could examine a broader range of credentialing labels using distinct evaluative frameworks. Additionally, there

was an absence of reliable data on the total number of certified mediums, trance channelers, and trainees across organizations, as such information was not consistently tracked or publicly available, limiting our ability to contextualize the scale of practice.

Of the certifications available for evaluation, several outcomes of interest lacked information, which may have impacted equitable scoring. Scoring may also have been impacted due to the vast differences and lack of standardization in skills testing. Mediumship is a nuanced practice, and both the certification of mediums and the evaluation of certification programs are correspondingly complex. The FFF and the MICMP scored the highest in the skills assessment category. Both programs tested mediums through remote readings, including an off-video step, with sitters unbeknownst to them, using composite scores, weights, and/or bonus points in scoring mediums. Additionally, these programs provided instructions/training to the sitters on specific scoring processes, while neither offered to train mediums before the testing phase. The use of a base score, weights, and bonus points to assess a medium's ability to relay accurate information about the deceased person is consistent with the literature on the need for "criterion-referenced passing points," "verified with documented evidence to confirm the competence of the candidate," and "validity of the pass/fail decision" (Fabrey, 2017, p. 222). In addition, it is to be expected that the accuracy of a reading can reinforce the positive healing effect of a mediumship reading on the bereaved (Beischel et al., 2014). Nearly all programs scored the maximum score in transparency. However, there were vastly varying degrees of depth and detail regarding the full transparency of certification protocols. In hindsight, this category may have benefited from being weighted in the scoring matrix. For instance, even programs that produced a high score in transparency did not publicize full transparency for all the decision points along the certification process. Zemel and Wahbeh (2023) reported that many practicing mediums/trance channelers believe that grief and ethics training should be mandatory for consumer protection. However, based on the available data in this study, no English-speaking certifications currently include formal grief and/or ethics training as part of their certification process. This evaluation category may have benefited from agency interviews to fully explore the possible incorporation of grief sensitivity and ethical considerations (such as discussions, program/membership materials, group communications, etc.), but these did not constitute formal training.

Impact of paid certifications on pass rates and the certification strategy

Notably, paid training and/or paid certifications may impact candidates' pass rates. In this study, organizations with mandatory course completion and paid certifications associated with a higher pass rate included the NSAC and the SNU, while agencies with non-mandatory course completion and

certifications free of charge associated with a lower pass rate included the FFF and the MICM. This pattern could reflect several dynamics. First, paid training programs may better prepare candidates through structured education, thereby increasing competency and pass rates. Second, financial investment may create self-selection effects, where only more committed or experienced candidates pursue certification, or, alternatively, where organizations feel pressure to certify those who have paid for training. Thirdly, differences may reflect fundamentally different certification philosophies: some organizations prioritize rigorous filtering of natural ability (producing lower pass rates), while others emphasize skill development through education (producing higher pass rates after training). Understanding these dynamics is essential for determining whether high pass rates indicate effective training or potentially lowered standards, and conversely whether low pass rates reflect appropriate rigor or inadequate candidate preparation. Future research should examine the relationship between training models, financial structures, pass rates, and, ultimately, the competency and ethical preparedness of certified practitioners in real-world practice.

Establishing collaborative oversight

Any future development of universal certification guidelines and oversight would require some sort of officiating body, and this in turn would require cooperation among existing certifying organizations with diverse histories, philosophies, and stakeholder communities. Potential strategies include forming voluntary consortia or working groups, developing tiered or modular standards to ensure core competencies while allowing flexibility, and maintaining publicly accessible registries of organizations meeting evidence-based criteria. Neutral third-party evaluators could provide ongoing assessment, and piloting standardization within specific domains (e.g., grief support or ethical guidelines) may build trust before comprehensive reform. This could be a major organizational and administrative hurdle in addition to the methodological one addressed in this paper of testing certification practices. The alternative could be to simply supply recommendations to the existing bodies and keep an online record of those in compliance as a guide for the consumer. Standardization may be important, but without adoption by certifying bodies such efforts would have limited practical impact.

Standardizing certification across organizations with differing goals

Religious organizations (e.g., the NSAC and the SNU) integrate certification with theological education, denominational practices, and the testing of mediums, while secular organizations (e.g., the FFF and the MICMP) focus on validated mediumistic skills, and public service. These differences shape program design, with religious programs emphasizing philosophy, liturgical competencies, and mediumship testing, and secular programs largely

emphasizing mediumship testing. Reconciling these priorities is essential: universal standards must respect religious education while ensuring demonstrable skills, ethical practice, and grief-informed care without imposing uniformity or fragmenting the field.

Although research on consumer perspectives regarding certification of mediums/trance channelers is limited, studies of related helping professions suggest that the paying public generally supports regulation and oversight to ensure quality and safety. A systematic review of stakeholder attitudes on the regulation of traditional and complementary medicine practices found that a large majority of consumers in multiple countries support regulation of such practices to protect the public from unqualified or unethical practitioners, with reported consumer support frequently above 60% (Carè et al., 2021). Surveys of psychic service users focus primarily on motivations for seeking services and perceived benefits, rather than attitudes toward certification or oversight (Farhall et al., 2022). These sources indicate that while there is some evidence that consumers value professional standards in broadly analogous domains, no peer-reviewed empirical research has directly surveyed or analyzed how the paying public perceives certification of spiritual medium practitioners. This represents a clear gap in the literature and a useful area for future research.

While scholarly or professional organizations could, in principle, facilitate evaluative or coordinating roles, many such bodies in this field operate on volunteer labor with limited financial and administrative capacity, highlighting the need for dedicated resources if sustainable oversight mechanisms are to be developed.

CONCLUSIONS

Our attempt to identify and evaluate English-speaking medium/trance channeler certifications covered six medium certifications, evaluated over five core components. The highest total aggregate score was given to the SNU, followed by the FFF. There was variety in the quality of descriptive data available for each certification, making it difficult to score in a way that was equitable and reduced bias. Much future work is needed in standardizing medium/trance channeler certifications to ensure public protection, most notably grief training, ethics training, and transparency of more uniform skills assessment protocols.

Corresponding author

JULIETTE GALLO

*Institute of Noetic Sciences
Novato, CA, USA*

Email: juliettegallo14@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0699-7756>

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