The HPC Certification Forum in 2021

Julian Kunkel (+ HPC Certification Forum)

Annual HPC CF meeting during ISC HPC
Outline

1. The Forum
2. Skills
3. Certification Process
4. Conclusions
Challenges for HPC (and Open Source) Training

- Not all users possess the right level of training
  - Inefficient usage of systems, frustration, lost potential
  - Good training saves compute time and costs!

- Diverse user background and goals
  - Science is the goal, HPC is the vehicle
  - Need to run an application to complete the PhD

- Learning is not easy
  - Users need to understand beneficial knowledge for tasks
  - There exist various different training material
  - Teaching of different data centers is hard to compare

- Data center have difficulties to verify the skills of users
The HPC Certification Forum

Goals

■ Fine-grained standardizing HPC knowledge representation
  ► What competences exist, how are they defined?
  ► Puzzle of competences for everyone (practitioners, students, admins)
  ► Supporting navigation and role-specific knowledge maps

■ Establishing international certificates attesting knowledge

■ Supporting an ecosystem around the HPC competences

Scope of the forum

■ Central authority for competence representation, certification, and support

■ Purposeful limitations of the forum:
  ► We do not compete with content providers
  ► We do not create a curriculum (university/centers responsibility)
The **HPC Certification Forum**

**Organization Details**
- An independent international body
- Organized into
  - Steering board (elected)
  - Full members (with voting rights)
    - Contributors to the project (e.g., 1-2 hours per month)
  - Associate members (anyone and any institution)
  - Collaboration with e.g., SIGHPC Education Chapter

**Responsibilities**
- Curating and maintaining the **Competence Standard**
- Providing tools and ecosystem around the competences
Governance

Various processes are documented here.

Steering Board

- General chair: Julian Kunkel (University of Göttingen / GWDG)
- Skill-tree curator: Kai Himstedt (University of Hamburg)
- Other topics are jointly managed by the board

  - Topic curators:
    - HPC Knowledge: Lev Lafayette (University of Melbourne)
    - Performance Engineering: Anja Gerbes (University of Dresden)
    - Software Development: Roberto Villegas-Diaz (South Dakota State University)
    - Administration: Sudeep Narayan Banerjee (Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar)

- Examination curator: Christian Meesters (University of Mainz)
- Publicity chair: Weronika Filinger
Organization

Organization of the members

- Webpage is the central hub (https://www.hpc-certification.org)
- Mailinglists (news, members, board)
- Monthly public meetings on our Slack channel
- Annual general assembly (form of a BoF at ISC or workshop)

Data handling

- Everything* is developed/available in the open GitHub (https://github.com/HPC-certification-forum)
- Exception are examination questions
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Classification of Competences == Skills

- **A skill** defines background, objectives, learning outcomes
- **The skill tree** organizes the competences as hierarchical skills
- **Certificates bundle several skills into attestable unit**

**Figure**: Top-levels of the skill tree (Initial ADM and BDA branches)
Example High-Level Skill (Excerpt)

- **Name:** Command Line Interface
- **Id:** USE1.1-B
- **Background:** HPC systems are usually accessed via a Linux-based Command Line Interface (CLI) that is provided by a shell. At its core, a shell is ...
- **Aim:**
  - describe the key principles of a shell
  - execute basic programs to query system information and manipulate...

**Learning outcomes (these must be examinable)**

- Utilize the bash shell to execute individual programs with arguments
- Describe the meaning of the exit code of a program
- Run multiple programs after another depending on the exit code ;;, &&, ||
- List the set of basic programs and their tasks:
  - `pwd`
Classification of HPC Competences

■ Granularity of skill descriptions
  ▶ Too fine ⇒ content of a skill is predefined at leaf level
  ▶ Too coarse ⇒ no help for structuring the material
  ▶ Guiding principle: leaf node should be coverable in 1-4 hour lecture/workshop

■ Organization of HPC skills
  ▶ Skills are typically depending on sub-skills ⇒ tree structure
  ▶ References to skills are possible; still skills are building blocks for various tasks
  ▶ One skill can have multiple instances for different skill levels (basic, ..., expert)

■ Verification of skill tree and certification approach
  ▶ Feedback by the HPC community/practitioners justify the approaches
Further Considerations

Certificate definition
- Bundles a set of useful skills together
- A users’ HPC qualification is certified by successful exams
- Testing a single (fine-grained) skill may be too easy with a cheat sheet

Separation of skill, certificates and content provider
- Similar to the concept of a high school graduation exam
- Learning material can be provided by different institutions
- Teachers can put badges on material: this "trains skills X, Y, Z"

External information can be linked to the skills providing different views
- Suitability for a user role (Tester, Builder, Developer)
- Suitability for a scientific domain (Chemistry, Physics, ...)
- View: purpose-specific representation / coloring / content
  - Groups/institutions can derive a new skill tree with their own emphasis
  - What should people know to effectively work in your environment?
Status / Previous Activities

- Development version of the Competence Standard is online
  - Git managed Markdown files
  - Files are also available in a Wiki (for interaction)
- Developed various processes

2021 News

- Experts Adopting Skills
  - Enable experts to curate skills that are in their field of expertise
  - Similar to code maintainer
- Working on sponsoring
- Developed first (but limited exam!)

All our developments are under open licenses (except the exam questions)
Wiki for Skills

K-B HPC Knowledge

Background

The theoretical knowledge of HPC provides the background to understand how supercomputers and HPC environments operate. This enables practitioners to effectively use such environments.

Aims

- To provide background knowledge that is relevant for all other branches.
- To provide theoretical background to judge the behavior and efficiency of systems.
- To provide technical understanding of HPC systems.

Outcomes

- Explain the hardware, software, and operation of HPC systems.
- Construct and judge simple performance models for systems and applications.
- Understand that there are performance frontiers.
- Explain why it is a special challenge to achieve good speedups and good efficiencies if the number of processing elements is steadily increased.
- Compare different paradigms for the parallelization of applications.
- Construct and execute an HPC workflow on an HPC system.
- Comprehend job scheduling principles.
- Apply a cost model to compute the costs for running a workflow on an HPC system.
Contribution to the Skill-Tree High-Level Editing

How can members contribute?

- Webpage with Markdown version controlled in Git
  - GitHub: [https://github.com/HPC-certification-forum/skill-tree](https://github.com/HPC-certification-forum/skill-tree)
    - Pull requests, reviews, comments, ...

- Editing a MindMap, the structure of Skills
  - Synchronized with the skill tree in Git
  - Uses the OpenSource tool Freemind

- Discussion on our Slack

- Documented in our processes section

- See our videos on YouTube
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Certification: Assessment

1. User registers to test, receives email
2. User takes test online (any time!), consists of
   - Scenario
   - Multiple choice exam
     - System selects number of questions (and responses) randomly from a pool
3. Results are submitted to the web server
4. Automatic approval of response
5. Automatic creation of certificate and returned by email
   - Permanent computer-verifiable proof that skill is created
     - Return a text version with GPG signature
     - Return a link that can be verified on hpc-certification.org

- Privacy: minimize information stored on servers, keep some for statistics
- Includes some measure to prevent cheating and brute forcing (e.g., delay)
The Forum
Skills
Certification Process
Conclusions

Certification: Certificate

-----BEGIN PGP SIGNED MESSAGE-----
Hash: SHA512
HPC Certification Forum Certificate
This text confirms that "Jane Doe" has successfully obtained the certificate "HPC driving license" (id: 1) at 02/2019.
Verification URL: https://hpc-certification.org/ [...] 
-----BEGIN PGP SIGNATURE-----
[...]
-----END PGP SIGNATURE-----
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Outlook and Expected Benefits

HPC practitioners

- Increase motivation to participate as the certificates are recognized in a CV
- Validate knowledge via tests
- Browse relevant competences
- Identify recommended and required skills related to certain tasks
- Understand and compare teaching offers across sites

Data centers

- Increase sharing of teaching materials
- Simplifies documentation of taught skills
- Identify missing teaching activities
- Tailor skill-representation specifically to users
- Correlate lack of skills with efficient use
Summary

HPC Certification Program

- Effort to standardize representation/certification of relevant HPC skills
  - Hierarchical definition of skills for practitioners
  - Building blocks that can be cherry-picked for different tasks
  - It’s goal is **NOT** to provide content or a linear curriculum

- Perspective for data centers
  - Use statistics and machine learning to direct users to right skills
  - Make certain skills a mandatory requirement?

- Customizable representation and navigation for data centers/domains
  - Interactive viewer to browse skills and related content
  - We will use the viewer to link good content to the skills, too!

- Visit us and join our Slack/mailing lists: https://hpc-certification.org