



IMCA Assistant Life Support Technician (ALST)

Life Support Technicians (LSTs) carry out a range of important support duties. Divers living in decompression chambers need to be closely monitored, as does the chamber's environmental conditions – this is the role of the LST. From the chamber panel, the LST will control factors, such as oxygen content of breathing gas, concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, temperature and humidity to ensure all are at optimum levels.

An LST can operate high pressure equipment, mix heliox diving mixtures, monitor the decompression chamber environment, carry out pressurisation and decompression, identify and treat decompression illness and other pressure related injuries and is competent to deal with a variety of emergency situations. LSTs also spend time tending the divers to make sure there is adequate water supply to the chamber, organise food and maintain chamber hygiene, for example.

Training for LSTs begins with the IMCA (International Marine Contractors Association) Assistant Life Support Technician qualification. After gaining sufficient experience, an ALST will sit the LST exam, after which they can progress to Life Support Supervisor (LSS).

Initially an ALST will build panel experience under the guidance of the Life Support Supervisor (LSS). After gaining sufficient experience, an ALST can sit the IMCA LST theory exam. Progressing to the position of LST and finally to LSS involves an increasing amount of responsibility in vital tasks, such as maintaining the optimum chamber environment.

To qualify for work as an ALST you need to complete the IMCA ALST course. This qualifies you for work around the globe and is an internationally recognised qualification.

The course lasts two weeks and includes classroom based lectures and practical experience working with a real saturation system on our barge, Talon, with closed bell divers also in training*. Whilst some training centres are entirely classroom based and use simulators, The Underwater Centre is the only establishment in the UK where you can work on a real Closed Bell diving system, handling gases used in diving. This makes our training second to none.

The classroom work includes topics such as physics, physiology, legislation and dive system requirements, covering the important aspects required by the IMCA regulations for this vital top-side role. You will get the chance to complete practical exercises onboard Talon, including routine operating procedures such as transferring gas, charging cylinders and bailouts, pre-dive system checks and compressing and decompressing the chamber. The course content includes diving techniques; legislation and regulations; physics of gas; mixing gases; anatomy and physiology; decompression chambers and systems; emergency procedures; diving physiology and illnesses; gas toxicity and handling gasses. There are no specific entry requirements for the course but competence at basic mathematics is essential and an understanding of some physics would be useful.

Once you have completed the ALST Course, you will need 2400 panel hours on a live diving complex to sit the IMCA exam in order to qualify as a full LST. As a newly qualified ALST, you can expect to earn from £130 to £180 per day, which will increase to £200 to £300 per day for an LST, and up to £500 per day for an LSS.

The offshore industry is where the majority of ALSTs will work; as with any new career, it can be tricky getting your first role as an ALST because many contractors prefer more experienced personnel. However, we will provide you with contact details for international diving contractors, as well as provide help and advice with your CV and covering letter.

In addition to this, and thanks to the way in which we run our ALST course, you can choose to stay at the Centre following successful completion of your course*. You can gain experience by assisting on our HSE Closed Bell Course and increase your panel hours, providing you with more hours to add to your CV.

*Subject to availability