

Examining testing

The British Computer Society's [Victoria Reinthal](#) tells us about the thinking behind, current status of, and future plans for the ISEB qualifications for testers

In 1990, the Information Systems Examination Board (ISEB) was formed and became fully owned by the British Computer Society after 23 years of successful partnership between the National Computing Centre (NCC) and ISEB's predecessor, the Systems Analysis Examination Board. The BCS's mission was to make ISEB qualifications add value to professional careers by providing both the means and the platform for recognition and enhanced career development. It is a mission which has seen candidate numbers grow from 3,000 in 1990 to 100,000 today.

ISEB's success has not been in its candidate numbers alone but also in the diversification of examination subjects. Almost 50 qualifications are available covering essential subjects such as Service Management, Data Protection, Information Security and Project Management, which have seen interest grow at a phenomenal rate in recent years. Software testing certification was the brainchild of a particularly proactive BCS Specialist Interest Group in Software Testing; the same group defined the standard that later became the British Standard on Software Component Testing (BS 7925) and that underpinned the certification programme. Initially envisaged as a three-level progressive qualification, the Software Testing Certificate was launched at the Foundation level in 1998. Since then 15,000 certificates have been awarded, making this a spectacularly successful certificate.

The Foundation level certificate, with a syllabus requiring two and a half days of tuition, fits neatly into three days of training at a broad but theoretical and relatively superficial level. This has made it accessible, both for

training providers and trainees, and the number of accredited providers has risen to over 30.

The Practitioner Certificate, by contrast, requires 56 hours of tuition and around half of this is expected to be at a practical level. Most training providers have opted for a 10 day package of training, with a few packaging the delivery into 8 days. The significant increase in training time and cost of the Practitioner Certificate has naturally led to a slower start, and Practitioner candidate numbers have grown fairly steadily, reaching 390 by September 2003. With around 170 candidates expected to take the December 2003 examination, it seems the Practitioner Certificate is settling into a steady growth pattern.

The Practitioner Diploma is currently being worked upon by ISEB's dedicated product development section and it is expected that the first syllabus will be delivered in 2004. *[No details of content or format were available when this issue went to press - Ed]*

One of the biggest challenges ISEB currently faces is coping with demand. At Practitioner level, creating a pool of examination questions has taken enormous effort; so far production of questions has just kept pace with the demands of a quarterly examination and there are no 'unused' questions available for future exams. In the 18 months since the Practitioner exam was first offered the world of software testing has moved on and syllabus updates will be required to keep the qualification in line with current practice. Input and feedback from ISEB candidates is always welcomed.

In fact most of the inspiration for new qualifications originates outside ISEB! An

individual, a group of like-minded people or a BCS Specialist Group, for example, may have an idea and approach ISEB. The proposal will be considered and if accepted will be subject to rigorous scrutiny with a detailed business case produced to prove the market for and viability of the qualification. If this proves satisfactory a BCS Product 'Gateway' Board will approve and support the case and the BCS will fund the development of the qualification.

The individuals involved in the design and development of ISEB qualifications are always specialists and recognised professionals in the specific field and will be drawn from a wide cross section of the IT community to represent commerce, industry, academia, government, training organisations, BCS Specialist Groups and other relevant professional bodies or institutions. These people will form the initial working party who will usually become the core members of the resultant examination board and who set the examinations and manage the qualification once it has been launched.

Another area which ISEB is considering is the provision of qualifications for the continuous professional career development of IT professionals and looking at topic areas which cut (horizontally) through all the existing subjects, for example, soft skills, team motivation and financial management.

Fundamental to all of the work of ISEB, at strategy, operational and development levels, is the essential need to monitor the market, not only to check that the current qualifications still satisfy the original requirement but to detect new trends within the subject area and the changes in technology that will present new opportunities. **PT**



information systems examinations board

ISEB Software Testing Certificates

These qualifications provide visible and objective evidence of an individuals knowledge and ability to perform software testing.

It incorporates the following:

- **The Foundation Certificate*** – is for anyone with an interest in testing. It provides visible evidence that the individual understands the basics of software testing.
- **The New Practitioner Certificate** – is for experienced testing practitioners. This certificate demonstrates a depth of knowledge of testing topics and the ability to perform testing activities in practice.

www.iseb.org.uk/pt

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