

# International relations step up a level

Examinations leading to ISEB Practitioner Certificates are soon to be withdrawn. What does that mean for testers holding and/or seeking qualifications?



**Michiel van der Voort** explains the reasoning behind the decision and his view of the future

*BCS recently announced the withdrawal of its ISEB Practitioner Certificates in Test Analysis and Test Management and that it will offer examinations leading to the International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB) Certified Tester Advanced Level Test Analyst, Technical Test Analyst and Test Manager qualifications.*

**ISEB Practitioner exams will cease in March 2011.**

Michiel van der Voort, Executive Director of BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, answers our questions.

**Professional Tester:** To help place the recent announcement in context, please tell us how many people so far have been awarded the:

- ISEB Practitioner Certificate in Test Analysis
- ISEB Practitioner Certificate in Test Management
- ISTQB Certified Tester Advanced Level Test Manager qualification
- ISTQB Certified Tester Advanced Level Test Analyst qualification
- ISTQB Certified Tester Advanced Level Technical Test Analyst qualification.

— Michiel van der Voort: As of 19th April 2010: 158, 195, 2,996, 2,285 and 1,110 respectively.

*Why are the Practitioner Certificates being withdrawn?*

— We realised that two different certification tracks were developing for software testing professionals depending on whether or not they lived in the UK. Even though we are incredibly proud of our ISEB Practitioner Certificates, our decision to withdraw them is because we feel it is not in the best interest of the software testing community to have disparate competing paths and that the global standing of ISTQB needed to be acknowledged.

Withdrawing two of your best exams is not something to be undertaken lightly, but we have done it for the good of the international IT profession.

*Since the ISEB Intermediate Certificate in Software Testing is not a prerequisite for ISTQB Advanced Level, do you expect continued demand for it?*

— Yes. It covers the testing fundamentals to help newly qualified

## Testing qualifications

testers learn the skills needed to take them to the next level, is a natural progression from the ISTQB Foundation Certificate, and provides broad coverage of the whole discipline of software testing.

The ISTQB Advanced Level qualifications suit candidates who wish to gain a much more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the separate software testing disciplines at a practical level and are aimed at people who have achieved an advanced point in their careers in software testing. I believe the Intermediate Certificate has great value also as preparation for them.

*How do holders of ISEB Practitioner Certificates stand regarding ISTQB qualifications?*

— The Practitioner Certificates, including those awarded against the old-style all-in-one syllabus before it was split into Test Analysis and Test Management, will count as some of the necessary prerequisites for the ISTQB Expert level when it becomes available.

*ISTQB examinations are entirely multiple-choice. How do you respond to the criticism that passing such an exam is not sufficient demonstration of practical ability for a person to be designated, for example, “Advanced Level Test Manager”?*

— All examinations are a snapshot of a person's abilities, by definition. ISTQB prefers multiple-choice exams because they eliminate subjectivity in marking. BCS will be monitoring the examinations to make sure they are rigorous and valid as we do our own examinations.

*Will ISTQB Expert Level also be examined by multiple-choice?*

— This is yet to be decided. This agreement places BCS in a stronger position to work with ISTQB on the specification of the Expert Level, and it is likely that the experience that ISEB

has gained from the Practitioner Certificates examinations will be helpful to ISTQB as that specification matures.

*Is it still intended to launch the ISEB Diploma in Software Testing?*

— Yes. The ISEB Diploma will be a wider qualification than the Practitioner Certificates and ISTQB Advanced qualifications, encompassing a different set of focus points for software testing professionals looking to widen their horizons.

*What about training providers which are accredited or seeking accreditation to present Practitioner Certificate courses?*

— We are in ongoing discussions on a case-by-case basis with all organisations involved, who we contacted as soon as agreement was reached.

*Opinions differ on the relative merits of the ISEB and ISTQB syllabuses. Obviously the BCS believes the ISEB Software Testing qualifications are/were good. Is there any regret at their loss?*

— In any agreement between different organisations serving similar markets, some compromise has to be made. BCS has accepted that whereas its Practitioner Certificate examinations were particularly relevant to a more mature software testing market such as that in the UK, the rest of the world and a large and growing number of UK based international organisations were moving to a single international standard. BCS hopes now to work more closely with ISTQB to develop a qualification portfolio for the benefit of the overall market.

*What guarantees can you give to potential candidates, training buyers and training providers about future changes?*

— Qualifications are always under development and brought up to date with development undertaken in close co-operation with the market, both the training providers and the industry. BCS is determined to be seen as a global player in IT and the ICT profession. Our Transformation programme is part of this same globalisation. We will endeavour to engage with all partners closely ■

---

*Michiel van der Voort is Executive Director of BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT (see <http://bcs.org/qualifications>). Interview by Edward Bishop.*

---

