Origins of the BCS SIGIST

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Contents

• how the SIGIST started – 35 years ago
• what testing was like then and now
• what about the next 35 years?
The SIGIST

- London, 27 Jan 1989, Imperial College
- started by Geoff Quentin, around 30 people
- I joined the committee as “speaker finder”
- we joined BCS later on
- 4 full-day meetings year
  - small expo, vendor talks
- printed booklets
- I had quite a collection!
  - donated to the BCS in 2018 – now lost?
What was testing like 35 years ago?

- seen as “a [necessary] evil”
  - if thought of at all!
- few training courses
  - by individuals
- no qualifications
  - “anyone can test”
- few conferences
  - SIGIST, Unicom (UK)
  - USPDI, STAR

- few commercial tools, expensive
  - at an expo of dev tools:
    - “if you buy this [development] tool, you won’t need to test”!
- waterfall development
  - testing mostly manual, ad hoc, squeezed in at the end
- systems less complex
Never mind my specs, look at the computer!
Technology

• my new computer (89)
  – Apple Macintosh SE/30 HD 2/40
    • Motorola 68030 processor - 16 Mhz
    • 40 MB disc, 2MB RAM
    • black & white screen
• cost: £2223 (nearly £6000 today)
• no connection to outside world
  – no internet, no email, no mobile phones!

what's in your mobile phone?
How to find out about things?

• then
  – buy (and read) books
  – subscribe to journals, weekly computing mags
  – go to the library
    • read other journals
    • request “reprints” of articles
      – pick up or sent by post
  – phone calls, printed docs
  – go on a training course
  – attend a conference
    • in person

• now
  – internet / google
    • podcasts, blogs, videos
    • social media
  – go on a training course
    • in person or online
  – attend a conference
    • in person or online
  – read a book?
How did the SIGIST help testers?

– most common reaction for new people: “I’m not alone!” [No web, no social media]
– focus for sharing stories, tips, knowledge
– networking with other testers
– a model for European testing groups
– major initiatives in the 90s:
  • the first European software testing conference
  • a standard for software testing
The first EuroSTAR, 1993

- BCS SIGiST was the “host organisation”
  - committee appointed me Programme Chair
- SQE’s support enabled it to go ahead
  - UK people to do bookings, marketing etc
- we came up with name before the train!

What’s missing?
Testing then and now

– seen as “a [necessary] evil”
  • if thought of at all!
– few training courses
  • by individuals
– no qualifications
  • “anyone can test”
– few conferences
  • SIGIST, Unicom (UK)
  • USPDI, STAR

– recognised as necessary, respected
  • a good career choice
– lots of training
  • live, online, books
– qualifications
  • ISTQB, BBST, MOT, others
– many conferences on testing
  • international, local, web-based
Testing then and now

– few commercial tools, expensive
  • “if you buy this [development] tool, you won’t need to test”!
– waterfall development
  • testing mostly manual, ad hoc, squeezed out at the end
– systems less complex

– commercial tools, lots of open source tools

– agile development
  • testers part of teams, more testing knowledge, lots of automated testing
  • still need human testing

– systems interconnected & very complex
  • The Internet!
  • Mobile, IoT, ML, LLMs, AI
What has changed?

• a growing profession
  – from a few books to lots
  – from “[un]necessary evil” to a respected profession
  – from none to international qualifications for testers
  – from “tester” to specialisms within testing

• technical change
  – from mainframes to mobile apps, cloud, IoT, ChatGPT/AI
  – from homegrown utilities to commercial & free tools
  – from KB to GB to TB
  – from books, post & phone, to blogs, videos, social media
  – from “turnarounds” to continuous integration
What hasn’t changed?

– tester’s greatest asset: the “tester mindset”
– testing is still testing; people are still people
  • relationships are critical
– new technology, constant change
  • testing follows the technology
– managers don’t understand testing (exceptions)?
– testing seldom taught at university?
– tools are seen as a panacea/silver bullet syndrome
– people new to testing don’t know much
– lots of people are new to testing
The future of testing?

• testing will always be needed
  – but in different forms (collaborative not confrontational, monitoring, analytics, A/B, partial oracles for AI)
  – earlier detection, defect prevention? or ship then fix/back out?

• the essence of testing
  – what could go wrong? what if it isn’t? have you thought of…

• automation is necessary but not sufficient
  – structure is needed even with open source tools
  – automated chaos is still chaos
  – tools only run stuff, they don’t do testing
The future of testers?

– out of a job?
  • because developers now test so well…?
  • because AI has taken over everything?
    – AI is on the Hype curve – significant danger here

– tester role
  • quality advisors, not quality police
  • collaborative, in agile teams (but with tester skills)
  • more technical, write (automation) code
  • **DANGER**: tester skills are different to development skills!
    Don’t under-value or lose those skills!
Conclusion: past, present and future

– congratulations to the SIGIST for 35 years!
– support and community of testers is important
– technology always changes
– testing (by humans!) will always be needed
– testing is a great career – all the best to all of you
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Questions?

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