

High attendance reflects developing specialist community in Ireland

Software quality and testing conference

THE SECOND annual software and quality testing conference took place in Croke Park, Dublin in March.

Run by **SQS**, the event took place over two days with both practical instruction and expert presentations. Attendance was high, reflecting the growing community of software quality and testing professionals in Ireland.

“The research performed by the Irish Computer Society indicates a high level of awareness and commitment to quality in Ireland,” said Bob Bartlett, CIO of conference organisers, **SQS**. “The PAC research that I compared this to also showed the awareness to quality to be higher than the rest of Europe. I would say testing and quality in Ireland is well understood and well respected.”

“I guess this is due to the high level of software related work that is done in Ireland and shows the overall maturity of the software development market in Ireland. Even in the current economic climate, Irish companies rated quality more important than cost savings and have a high level of understanding of the business case for quality,” said Bartlett.

Bartlett said that the numbers reflected a continued need for quality, despite the impact of the economic situation, and this was prompting the search for increased efficiencies and centralised test teams. Bartlett also advocated a move towards Agile development methods to further increase both the quality and value for software development resources.

“There seems to have been a lot of interest in establishing central testing teams and a centrally managed

approach to testing,” said Bartlett. “This contrasts with testing teams that are created for each project or programme or business application area. Presentations on a testing centre of excellence were well attended and I think this too is driven by the need for more efficiencies from testing teams and a consistent approach to quality management.”

Barry O’Leary, CEO of the IDA, gave a presentation that indicated the importance of the ICT sector in Ireland and its importance to the economy. O’Leary said that there were 1,022 companies, 220 of which represented foreign direct investment. These companies employ 90,700 people with exports of EUR*50 billion. Seven of the world’s top 10 ICT companies have EMEA operations in Ireland. A reputation for quality served as a foundation for further development on this sector in Ireland, said O’Leary and “leading technology companies with best technology products build and maintain dedicated quality and test teams”. These companies, asserts O’Leary, “accepted and encouraged an emphasis on quality within the software development lifecycle with a recognition of QA and test as specific stand alone skills and capability.”

Craig Thomas of Pioneer Investments presented on the topic of testing and quality and the focus on these priorities. He told *ComputerScope*, “I feel you cannot truly separate quality and testing – you can feasibly choose which to focus on but both go hand in hand”.

“Let’s take quality as the goal most software development companies want or need – without mentioning

or referencing quality in their marketing materials and sales presentations they will not attract much. If I attended a sales pitch,” argues Thomas, “and all I heard was how well it was tested against how well our internal quality controls and testing practices are – I’d go with the quality and testing.”

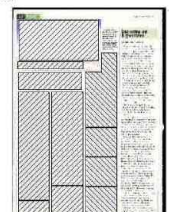
Thomas said that the balance between quality and testing can be established with a general

rule of thumb as 60% quality assurance and 40% testing but this must then be refined by the needs of the organisation,

the specific application and of course by the customer.

Other presenters included Tara Simpson of Instil Software, who outlined the importance of good behaviour in test-driven development, Patrick McAliskey of Novosoft on assuring quality management in outsourcing, and Dave Espley of Progressive Media, who described the management of Agile testing.

The keynote presentation came from Richard Noble, the driving force behind the Thrust SCC team that broke the sound barrier on land to set a new world record. Noble is also involved in the Bloodhound SSC project. This is another record breaking car but also a major educational project designed to encourage engagement and adoption of science and mathematics in



schools.

Noble said that through these various attempts to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges, quality and testing were key to both safety and success as everything from the ride height of the car to telemetry and control units were software monitored and controlled.

“The ThrustSSC supersonic car had an active ride suspension and 126 data channels measuring everything

from local air pressure to determine shockwave position through to structural loading,” said Noble. “The overall concept was to use existing and proven technology wherever possible since the systems were safety critical.”

Noble said that the speeds involved meant that the car could not be run “open loop”, that is, each increment in performance was programmed into the control systems, always with

stringent checks and highly focused testing. “So as the car performance was developed with incremental Mach number increases, so the software had to be programmed with each increase – thus enabling it to follow the curve.”

“The system worked so well that the car was always able to run with a constant 1G wheel loading from standstill right up to Mach 1.03,” said Noble.

<< Richard Noble of the Bloodhound SCC land speed record team presented on the nature of supersonic testing at the SQS software and quality testing conference in Croke Park last month

