

INTERVIEW TO DAVE BARTRAM, PRESIDENT OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF THE 6TH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEST COMMISSION

The 6th Conference of the International Test Commission will be held between the 14th-16th of July, 2008, (see <http://www.itc2008.com>), and in this occasion will be titled "The Impact of Testing on People and Society: Enhancing the Value of Test Use".

The ITC was formally established in 1978 and its membership comprises national psychological associations, test commissions, publishers and other organizations, and individuals who are committed to promoting effective testing and assessment. The ITC is dedicated to facilitating the exchange of information internationally on problems related to the construction, distribution, and use of psychological tests and other psychodiagnostic tools.

To help achieve these goals the ITC organises bi-annual conferences on various themes related to important and emerging topics in the area of testing and assessment.

Infocop Online has interviewed **Dave Bartram**, president of the Organizing Committee.

INTERVIEW

In a few words, what are the main goals of the ITC?

The ITC is an association of national psychological associations, test commissions, publishers and other organisations committed to promoting effective testing and assessment policies and to the proper development, evaluation and uses of educational and psychological instruments. Its goals are to facilitate an exchange of information among members and others; to facilitate cooperation toward the solution of problems; and explore issues related to the construction, distribution, and use of tests, scales, and other methods used to assess personal qualities.

It works to achieve these goals, the ITC by producing and disseminating guidelines relating to test development and use, organizing international meetings and in various other ways fostering discussions on test development and use, advancing professional development in reference to test development and use, promoting the publication of relevant information through ITC and other publications, stimulating international cooperation on research and other forms of scholarship in ways that promote scientifically and ethically sound testing practices.

What are the specific goals of the 6th Conference of the International Test Commission?

The main goals of the 6th Conference are to bring together researchers, educators, psychologists, policy experts, testing specialists and those who use tests on a regular basis to discuss the impact of testing on people and society. The conference will address methodological, technical, professional and ethical issues in relation to policy and practice issues within testing, which includes the value and utility of testing, policy and practice issues in testing, advances in testing, the availability and use of tests in small and developing countries and the impact of tests and testing on people and society. The conference will consist of invited lectures, workshops, symposia, paper sessions and posters and will cover the areas of work, health, leisure and education.

What areas would you highlight for psychologists to attend in the Conference?

We will have a number of themes running through the conference. These include:

- Validity issues and practices around enhancing the validity and utility of tests;
- Scientific advances in testing
- The emerging role of computers and the Internet, in particular the use of computer-based and Internet-delivered tests and their impact on the public;
- The consequences of test use and issues of test-taker rights and responsibilities.

What are the most important projects the ITC is currently undertaking?

We have a number of projects underway at the moment. We are working on a revision to the ITC's Test Adaptation Guidelines and are developing a Test Taker's guide to computer-based and internet delivered testing. We also have a project for the development of online readings in topics related to tests and testing (the ORTA project). The particular focus of this is on ensuring the contributions are written in an accessible and non specialist style.

In your opinion, what is the current situation of tests and testing in Europe?

This is a very big question. I suppose it is best characterised as very diverse: there is diversity in terms of which tests are used, diversity in terms of who uses them and diversity in terms of what they are used for. My own field is work and organizational psychology. In that field we find countries within Europe ranging from those where the vast majority of testing is carried out by trained professionals who are not psychologists (for example human resources professionals) to countries where testing is almost wholly under the control of psychologists. For example, we find differences in the degree to which ability tests or personality tests are used in job selection varies from country to country.

What can we, as professional psychologists, do about this? In my view we are most likely to be effective in if we focus on setting standards of good practice and standards for test quality at the European level (through bodies like EFPA). In this way we can move towards a situation where there is a wider acceptance of standards and good practice even if there is diversity in the ways in which this is implemented in different countries.

With this in mind, I am currently working with the Project Committee of International Standards Organization (ISO) on the development of standards for assessment (not just testing) in work and organizational settings because I believe that an ISO standard will have more influence on the organizations that use tests in their recruitment, selection and development assessments.

The Spanish Psychological Association (COP) has always participated in ITC activities. In fact, it happens to be one of the sponsors of the 6th Conference. What is your impression of the situation of tests being used in Spain?

I do not have sufficient knowledge of test use in Spain to answer this, but I am encouraged by the contributions made by Spain to the work of the ITC and also to the work we are doing in EFPA on test user standards and test review criteria. I am also envious of the fact that in Spain, psychometrics appears to be a standard part of the psychology curriculum in universities. When I think of the countries that have strength in this area within Europe I also think of the Netherlands and of Spain. It is now very difficult to find people coming out of university courses in the UK who have sufficient knowledge and understanding of psychometrics to work in the test design and development field.

Do you believe computerized tests will substitute classical pen and paper tests in the near future?

I think this will happen in areas where testing is high volume and in areas where very high degrees of control or precision are needed over administration. Computer administered tests have a lot of advantages in that one can record a great deal more information about test taker behaviour. Indeed we are seeing the development of a whole new field of data forensics that focuses on analysing the data streams coming from the test taker to check aspects of the authenticity of their performance.

We will see computers take on more and more types of assessment as the software becomes more sophisticated and the bandwidth increases. For some tasks, it may be a long time before they are computerised; Imagine for example a virtual 3-D space manipulation environment where you could do tests like Koh's blocks.

What do you think is the future of test application through the Internet?

In the work and organizational field there is not doubt that this is where testing is going. We are seeing high growth rates in the volume of online testing year on year, with no sign of the percentage increases slowing down yet, even though the absolute volume has increased. Technologies are being developed now to manage remote administration in a way that provide degrees of control over test administration that are much greater than we have know with traditional human supervision of paper-and-pencil tests. As these technologies mature, so we will see tests being delivered to people for high stakes assessments (such as job selection) at times and place that are convenient for them and that do not require high costs associated with them travelling to centralised assessment centres.

What would you say to Spanish psychologists to encourage their participation in the 6th Conference in Liverpool?

In addition to the conference having a unique focus, on how our profession impacts on our society, it will, like previous ITC conferences, provide an opportunity to meet and network with like minded people and to hear from the leading experts in the field about the latest developments and issues in tests and testing. We will keep the numbers low (a maximum of 400 delegates) to ensure that the conference has a collegiate climate. We will also be provided interesting events around the main programme for people to enjoy themselves and to socialise. Finally, Liverpool is the European Capital of Culture for 2008 and has a lot more to recommend it than just being the birthplace of the Beatles! It has a wealth of museums, art galleries, theatres and musical events to suit all tastes.

Is there anything else you would like to tell our readers?

We look forward to welcoming you to Liverpool next year. Please check out the website for the conference www.itc2008.com and let us have your paper submissions.