
Reports on Past SIG Events

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Index

◆ [Summary](#)

- ◆ [Plenary Speakers:](#)
- ◆ [Glenn Fulcher](#)
- ◆ [Barry O'Sullivan](#)
- ◆ [For Glenn and Barry](#)

- ◆ [ETS / TOEIC](#)
- ◆ [UCLES](#)
- ◆ [For ETS/TOEIC and UCLES](#)

- ◆ [Venue and catering](#)
- ◆ [Administration](#)

- ◆ [Overall comment on the day](#)
- ◆ [Suggestions for future events](#)
- ◆ [Other comments](#)

"The Use of Computers in Assessing and Testing Language Learning"

IATEFL Computer SIG / Testing, Evaluation and Assessment (TEA) SIG Joint Pre-Conference Event (PCE), April 22nd 2003, at the IATEFL Annual Conference 2003 in Brighton, UK

Feedback Report Summary

Compiled by [Tilly Harrison](#), IATEFL Computer SIG Co-ordinator

Summary

There were about 60 participants on the day as well as 9 organisers, speakers and helpers. 22 feedback forms were received at the end of the day (unfortunately many left early without filling in the form) representing the views of about a third of the participants. Overall there was agreement that the speakers, venue, catering and administration were very good. The lack of hands-on experience in one of the afternoon sessions was commented on by many as a source of disappointment. Other negative comments related to aspects of the plenary speakers' approaches although the overall response was that they both gave knowledgeable and thought-provoking presentations.

[Some photographs from the event \(by Tilly Harrison\)](#)



Hands-on experience of a language test in the computer labs

The venue, catering and administration were overwhelmingly well received confirming our impression that the University of Brighton

was an excellent place to hold an event. As organisers we were very grateful for the universal helpfulness and support we received from those with whom we were liaising, not just on the day but in the months leading up to the event. It was heartening that none of the comments related to any difficulty in reaching the venue even though some participants did arrive late due to problems in this area. From the suggestions for future events it seems that there is scope for more cooperation between [TEA](#) and Computer SIG and if it is as fruitful as this event it is to be heartily welcomed.



Plenary Speakers

Glenn Fulcher

- V. Knowledgeable. Good summary of state-of-the-art CBT
- Good / interesting
- A good overview of CBT – although not a defense [sic] as was billed
- A little too technical. Far from classroom reality. Testing can be a lot more than that.
- Very good.
- A good overview to begin with.
- Seemed a bit negative for someone arguing the advantages – agreed with him, but had hoped to gain more optimism for the future.
- Good presentation.
- Informative, detailed, well-organised.
- Interesting.
- Very good! Note: he might use larger letters (for presentation) in future; some were difficult to read.
- Informative, but a bit theoretical as well. Stimulating.
- He gave us some practical insights of the use of CALL.
- Very informative. Took a very balanced stance.
- Interesting.
- Excellent.
- Interesting, useful general information.
- Very informative and useful, particularly part about construct definition.
- Very informative and well-prepared.



Barry O'Sullivan

- Good comment on interpretation of CBT
- Good / interesting.
- Same comment as for the above [A good overview of CBT – although not a defense [sic] as was billed] although it did pertinently question a number of fundamentals re CBT.
- Interesting and useful, left a lot of room for thought.
- A bit difficult to follow.
- Solid arguments. Well presented. Repeated some of Glenn's

negative parts.

- Interesting
- Well planned. Pinpointed some points unfamiliar to me.
- Presentation style could have been better – would have preferred getting to the point first then the jokes.
- Humorous; good speaker
- Interesting; also his ideas were well supported by examples.
- Interesting; convincing
- We got some negative sides of the CALL so we should be conservative in our use of CALL.
- Very persuasive. I particularly agreed with the point about “structuralist” regression.
- Great speaker, content debatable.
- Rather disappointing
- Difficult to appreciate disadvantages of CBT from someone who professes to know little about computers.
- Entertaining and appreciated comments about test-takers and lack of research into test impact.
- I specially liked this one because it emphasized the fact that students are central to testing.



For Glenn and Barry

- Both interesting. Brief reminders (handouts) would help non-native speakers to get even more out of it.



ETS / TOEIC

- Good/ interesting.
- Interesting but a pity about the technology not allowing for a hands-on experience. Somewhat 'sales' oriented.
- In spite of the presenter's enthusiasm related to the new software – which didn't leave room for questioning – I found the session uninteresting and the software presented useless – where does oral interaction go?
- A bit chaotic at the beginning, because we couldn't see well. We didn't need a computer pool for this presentation.
- Shame about the technical problems – no hands-on. “Discourse” software looks interesting, TOEIC couldn't be demonstrated.
- OK
- Interesting program, but needs more time to grasp.
- Seeing new products illuminating – both very good.
- Enjoyed the Criterion and DISCOURSE demo.
- I expected more practical work. They didn't make use of the computer lab because they only used 2 computers for their presentations. So the same presentation could have been given in any environment.
- OK (more or less)
- Not bad.

- Pity the demonstration didn't work, but this only served to underline the problems of relying on web-based solutions.
- Bit of a disaster – firewalls etc.
- Not TOEIC at all – too commercial
- I didn't expect to come to a 'demo' of software – no hands-on whatsoever.
- Not hands-on and too much salesmanship.
- Interesting.
- Too commercial and sometimes contradictory in concepts.



UCLES

- Good / interesting
- Good and clear with enough time for hands-on experience.
- Useful since it was a hands-on experience. Well-planned and presented.
- Very good.
- Interesting to take a CAT.
- OK
- Couldn't find anything unusual about it.
- Hands-on good.
- Interesting experience – appreciated the hands-on.
- Something went wrong with loading the English for testing which was a pity because everyone would probably have wanted to use that one.
- Practical; informative, useful.
- Not bad
- Not enough time to ask questions. The product looks good but is not particularly “businessy”. Pity too that the English version wasn't working
- Fine.
- Excellent
- Interesting but something that could be done at home / work (given a password of course)
- Interesting to try out test, but could have been done at home with demo.
- Interesting.
- Unfortunately because of the network problem I could not work with the software, therefore I cannot give comments.



For ETS/TOEIC and UCLES

- Both informative, useful but both suffered from technology let-downs!
- Both very interesting and challenging
- Interesting and informative but in both cases technology let the presenters down which was somewhat off-putting for the less technologically advanced!



Venue and catering

- OK; Food OK – coffee too weak!
- Fine
- Good
- Very good, beautiful premises, easy access. The food in the students' restaurant was not very good though. I should have had sandwiches instead.
- Very good. I was very glad to come here.
- Fine
- Good but a little far from the centre. Catering was rather slow.
- OK
- Fine
- Very good
- Fine
- All the best
- OK
- Good
- Good
- Excellent
- Good
- Fine
- Good
- Very good
- Very good, though a little far from the city center



Administration

- Very well organised
- Fine
- Good
- Very good, too. Nice and organised staff who catered for all our needs and requests in a nice way.
- Very good.
- Fine
- Very friendly and helpful
- OK
- Well-organised.
- Good
- Fine
- OK
- OK
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent
- Good
- Good
- Good
- Very good
- Could not be better!



Overall comment on the day

- Good. Not directly relevant to myself but interesting.
- Good
- Good
- It was a fine day. I would give it a 'B' since we've been talking about testing and assessing.
- Very interesting.
- A bit disappointing – didn't really learn anything new, could have found out about the software free either at their stands or on the web. But final plenary discussion was the best part – should have been longer!
- Good.
- OK
- Fruitful
- Very good.
- Good
- Almost all presentations have met my requirements.
- OK
- Good
- Great
- Great
- Worthwhile
- Good.
- Good
- Very good.
- Very good, inspiring and well organised.



Suggestions for future events

TEA SIG

- Individual teachers / institutions compare best practices; share testing techniques.
- Self-assessment
- The Council of Europe framework and developments in the portfolio
- Something a bit more 'meaty' with more participation eg. Take a particular testing issue (eg. CB tests of listening) and discuss theoretical issues, research basis, practical solutions.
- Nothing in particular but would like more on computers / assessment and testing
- Future joint SIGs of TEA and Computers.

Computer SIG

- Computers for classroom use please. We've had too much of testing and individual use. Can't publishers go a little further and think of ways to make teachers' lives easier in the classroom and help them with lesson preparation?

- Nothing in particular but would like more on computers / assessment and testing.
- Make it a little more “interactive” e.g. audience participation.
- Activate the computers!
- More time for discussion – also after plenary speakers.
- Discussion earlier on – larger.
- Would you put summaries and web addresses on the web site? It would be nice.



Other comments

- Informal meetings in breaks also valuable? Organise dinner / pub evening for future conferences
- ETS people tried to convince the audience that “testing” is “the” way to learn about how much students know – in order to “sell” their product. We've been trying to get the testing out of the learning environment for we think teachers spend too much time testing rather than teaching. Maybe that medicine student wouldn't have killed his patient had he been taught that adrenaline is so harmful.
- I knew very little about computer testing. Now I feel I know much more.
- I don't think we should have to pay extra to attend commercial demonstrations – would have been better to spend the time on more discussion.
- I had hoped the hands-on session had been “bigger” (more companies presenting their stuff)
- Being a Computer SIG member I found videoconferencing of 2002 is more interesting.
- Need clear signposting from car park to building.
- Thank you! I appreciate the work of the volunteers – we're all so busy these days aren't we?
- All in all, you have managed to gather good experts and interesting participants and I would like to congratulate you for this. Keep up the good work!
- A good range of speakers, but the problems with getting the technology to work undermined the claims of some of the presenters. Perhaps more care needs to be given to ensuring that the programs being demonstrated actually work.
- Printouts with websites. Continue with on-line debate.
- Discussion / debate best part of day!
- Thank you for such a nice event!



MENU

[Home page](#) | [CALL Review](#) | [Committee members](#) | [Discussion forum](#) | [Future events](#) | [Past events](#)
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[Top of page](#)

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