



### **Paul Ballard, the new ISTC President**

In my opening address, I take this opportunity to introduce myself and outline what I hope to achieve with my fellow volunteers on the ISTC Council.

### **Get involved**

A growing number of ISTC members have been volunteering their time and energy in recent years. All the members, and many in the wider community, have had the opportunity to benefit from this effort. Those of us who have been actively involved want to do more and new volunteers want to start contributing.

### **Council provides a framework**

It's an exciting time to be in our industry and there is plenty that the ISTC can and should be doing. However, it is hard to get volunteers and paid specialists contributing in a cohesive and effective way that is satisfying both for them and for the ISTC. I see the challenge of President: to keep the ISTC building on its recent progress with a well-organised Council and a committed and enthusiastic network of members.

### **How I can help?**

At the recent AGM, many of you supported my nomination for President – thanks! Here's a summary of my experience which includes:

- Five years on the ISTC Council
- Eight years building up and running 3di, a technical communication and localisation company
- Fifteen years of selling, consulting on, and managing technical communication projects.

Above all, I bring my belief that if you already think your annual membership fee is good value for money, you will

## **Presidential address**

benefit so much more if you contribute even a little of your own time and energy to making the ISTC the home of technical communication excellence in the UK.

### **Aiming high**

Defined earlier in the year, the key strategic theme for the ISTC is to be the home of technical communication excellence in the UK. However, in several important areas, we are not reaching our goal. Going into 2011, we need to have a clear plan for achieving this, and be able to demonstrate it through everything that we do.

### **What does the ISTC offer?**

We have worked hard in the last year to ask ISTC members and the wider industry what the ISTC is for and what benefits members appreciate. In summary, what we offer can be grouped as follows:

- Community
- *Communicator* journal
- Professional development and recognition
- Resources
- Technical Communication UK conference.

### **Supporting what the ISTC offers**

The structure and responsibilities in Council have not been reviewed for many years. They need to reflect what our priorities are now. So, at our recent November Council meeting we agreed a new structure of five teams to deliver what we offer and six supporting functions (see the panel of Council contacts). Some of the team leaders and their team members may be paid, but most are volunteers.

### **Agree strategy, objectives, resource plans and budgets for each**

By the end of 2010, these will all be in place for each team. I expect you to notice the improvements we are working hard to achieve and I hope you take the opportunity to tell us when you do.

We all want the ISTC to reflect well on us as members, and I hope you feel you have the opportunity to make the Institute what you want it to be. If there is anything more the ISTC can do for you or if there is anything more you can do for the ISTC, just contact me

## **The Institute**

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators is the largest UK body for people engaged in technical communication. The ISTC encourages professional development and standards, provides research resources and networking opportunities, and promotes technical communication as a profession.

To join the ISTC, change your grade, or get involved in what we do, contact the ISTC office on 020 8253 4506 or [istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk).

### **The Council and its supporting team**

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# Technical Communication UK 2010

**Paul Ballard and Rachel Potts** review this year's event – from the inside – with supporting comments from attendees.

## New, this year!

- All sessions started on the hour
- All the exhibitors were in one big space
- Shorter sessions made more time for thinking and networking
- The raffle was not held
- The venue did not change at the last minute
- It was easier to order and pay online
- A template letter was provided to persuade delegate's bosses to pay
- An open 'Questions and Rants' session was introduced
- The event made a profit for the ISTC
- Delegates learnt how to salsa
- A live Twitter feed was provided
- A comic magician provided entertainment after dinner
- Published videos of selected sessions were made
- Sponsors were given shiny balloons to match their status
- 'September' was misspelt on the Welcome page of the programme
- We learnt that the French are unable to say 'Haynes'

After last year's successful re-launch of the annual ISTC Conference, we were under pressure to build on this, and deliver the goal of creating a sustainable event that meets the needs of technical communicators, and their managers and clients, from every corner of the industry.

## A strong team and a plan

As with much of the ISTC, the Technical Communication UK 2010 (TCUK10) team included both volunteers and paid specialists. The core team of Paul, Rachel, Alison Peck and Sue Fraser was supported by more than 20 others, each with specific jobs to do, either during the spring and summer months of preparation or at the event itself.

By last Christmas, Sue had researched and recommended the venue, we already had the website set up, and we had decided on the third stream theme of e-learning. We just needed some speakers, sponsors, and delegates.

## Speakers with stories to tell

We established that three keynote speakers; opening and closing Wednesday, and then closing Thursday, would help us to provide a solid framework for the rest of the content. Above all these three needed to have stories to tell and distinct ideas to convey. From David Black of Nokia to Julian Murfitt of Mekon, and J Haynes of the eponymous manuals, we had the very satisfying mix of the 'global industry pioneer', the 'industry insider' and the 'high achieving technical communicator who didn't know he was one'.

## A place where 'community' feels real

We think that being able to meet and discuss what you do with fellow professionals, in an environment designed specifically for that purpose, is crucial for balancing the growing opportunities of online communities. The ISTC can, and has a responsibility to, provide both.

Over three days, TCUK10 attracted more than 180 delegates, sponsors and speakers and you will see from the comments below (mostly given at the event), many felt that by attending they had the opportunity to benefit from and contribute to the UK's technical communication community.

## The 'reluctant' ISTC attendee – Adelaide Nxumalo

"Thanks for a fantastic conference. After being a member for eight years, it's about time/long overdue that I attended."

## The accidental attendee – Alan Forsyth

"I discovered this conference accidentally on the web 2 weeks ago, having never heard of the ISTC. I'm very glad I came – the sessions, one-to-one with sponsors and delegates are invaluable to help me in improving and defining my approach to documentation."

## The team author – Helena Duong

"...a great way to network with others in the industry and find out about their processes - what works, and what issues they face on a day-to-day basis as technical writers."

## The lone author – Marjorie Jones

"As a lone Technical Author I've found lots to

## Tom Smith blogged about the Content Strategy themed sessions.

These sessions were Roger Hart's 'The spork / platypus average: content strategy at Red Gate Software', David Farbey's 'Content strategy for everyone', and the Wednesday closing keynote by Julian Murfitt 'The yellow brick road to effective content strategy'.

Everyone was talking about 'Content Strategy'. It raised the bar in terms of the quality of presentations, discussions and ideas that emerged from the conference. It was a far cry from 'This is how to create a DITA map in XMetaL Author Enterprise' and more about 'What business benefits do my company and my customers get from structured content? And how do I convince management to invest in my content strategy?'. For those attending the conference who really want to effect change in their organisation with regards to technical content, they most definitely departed armed with ideas and initiatives they could get to work on.

See Tom's blog at <http://blog.sdl.com/blog/2010/09/24/>

## Colum McAndrew blogged about the new Questions and Rants session, run by Rachel Potts

For the first time at a TCUK Conference we were given the opportunity to resort to type and rant like there was no tomorrow. And boy did we? I never knew there was so much angst out there. Whether it was the use of controlled language, interfering Marketing departments or flat pack greenhouse instructions, each ranter gave it their all in a highly amusing and interactive manner. The apple cart was upset once or twice when an infidel delivered an e-learning rave instead and another delivered a 'mini-rant' of their own in response, but other than that the session delivered exactly what it said on the tin.

See Colum's blog at <http://notcolin.wordpress.com/2010/09/23/>



motivate and inspire and re-energise me and send me back to work with new vision and enthusiasm.”

*The manager – Gordon McLean*

“As ever, the conversations with fellow professionals make the difference, and I think it’s telling that TCUK10 attracted a lot of people who are interested in ‘doing’ as well as theorising.”

*The overseas delegate – Kai Weber*

“Great sessions, engaging workshops, relevant topics – I think this well-run conference is well worth attending for any technical communicator in Europe.”



**Kai Weber** – see his article on page 22.

*The tools vendor, sponsor and exhibitor – Martin Winzer*

“Congratulations on the perfect organisation of TCUK in Oxford to you and your team. It was a pleasure to attend as sponsor for this event.”

*The academic – Chris Atherton*

“Love the diversity of sessions and the 40 minutes but really one hour format – works great, really ... but also permits flexibility. I think the quality of presentations was even higher this year. My only complaint is that many great sessions were scheduled against each other so choosing was really hard!”

**Perspectives that bring it all together**

*Rachel Potts reflects on the opposing views that came across about how technical we are all going to have to be in future.* David Black’s highly entertaining opening keynote kicked off the conference by portraying what some saw as a bleak picture of the future for technical communications – technical communicators must get technical or become obsolete. A challenging start, and one that sparked much debate! As Wednesday’s sessions progressed, the opposite picture emerged. Roger Hart’s content strategy presentation showed concrete ways in which technical communicators are using their skills on the marketing side of businesses, the e-learning stream highlighted an involvement in training and learning aspects, and David Potts’ talk about engaging people via heritage

**Resources**

*Technical Communication UK 2009 Programme* – contains links to slides and blogs of the speakers <http://www.technicalcommunicationuk.com/index.php?/general/programme.html>



**Mingling at the Drinks Reception** – Martin Block Peter Li, Katherine Judge, Juliet Durdle, Richard Pineger



**Speakers:**

**Back:** Paul Ballard, Mike Unwalla, J Haynes, Glyn Turk

**Middle:** Karen Mardahl, Linda Urban, Chris Atherton, Greg Urban, Graham Wignall, Ankur Jain, Rachel Potts, Alison Peck. Tina Hoffman. David Farbey, Audrey Philbrooks, Galyna Key

**Front:** Colum McAndrew, Zoe Rose, Amanda Caley, Martin Block



**Delegates** – Glyn Turk, Darren Jones, David Jones

Thanks to Ken Hosie for providing the photographs.

interpretation (for example, leaflets and information boards about the countryside) suggested an entirely new direction for us. The conference closed with a return to a technical theme – in a context where technical communications outputs are highly regarded, and successful: Haynes manuals. This accidental thematic full-circle had us all talking, ranting and thinking hard.

#### Building on 2010 for 2011

If you were there this year, thank you for coming. If you would like to take part in 2011, the team and plans are now taking shape. As with this year, we hope the attendees leave with more useful information, more ideas to develop, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be part of the UK's technical communication community. **C**

#### DIARY DATE

Technical  
Communication  
UK 2011

20–22  
September 2011

Oxford Belfry  
Thame, Oxford

[www.technical  
communicationuk.com](http://www.technicalcommunicationuk.com)

**Paul Ballard MISTC** and **Rachel Potts MISTC** are both volunteer members on the ISTC Council and have been part of the team organising the new Technical Communication UK conference  
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