

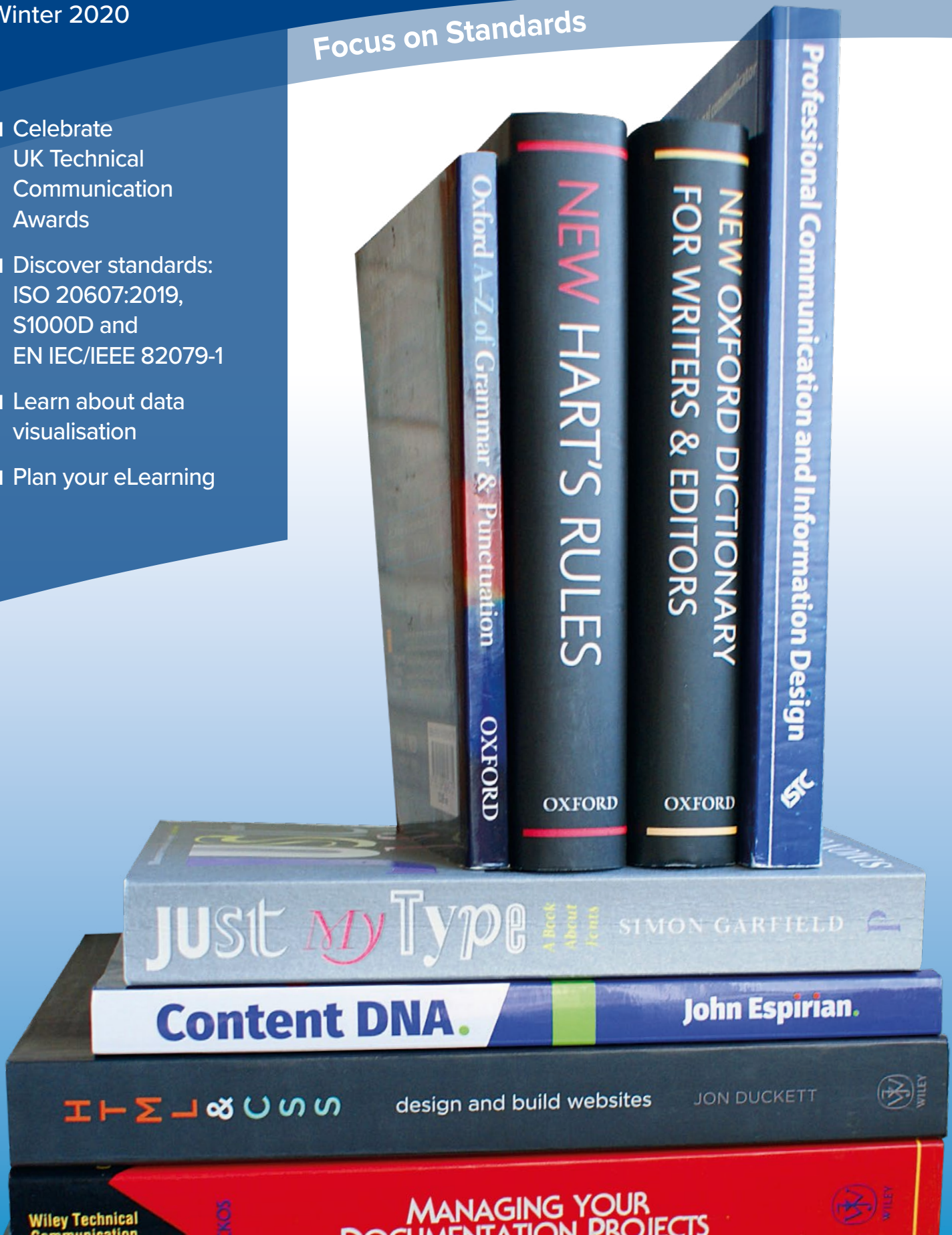
Communicator

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Winter 2020

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Horace Hockley Award 2020

The ISTC presented this award to GOV.UK team at the Government Digital Service for their Coronavirus (COVID-19) content. Ben Hazell and Helen Nickols explain.

The GOV.UK team at the Government Digital Service accepted this year's award (over Zoom, naturally) on behalf of content designers working on COVID-19 guidance on GOV.UK. Ben Hazell and Helen Nickols write about their work.

GOV.UK is the website for the UK government, designed and run by the Government Digital Service (GDS). Since it launched in 2012, it's always aimed to make government information easy to find and understand. This mission has been critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Content designers and policy experts from many government departments and agencies have worked hard to craft complex and fast-moving policy into clear guidance.

Cast your mind back to March this year. As the government ramped up its response to COVID-19 and lockdown began, there was a clear user need for people to have simple and unambiguous information available on GOV.UK.

This meant explaining unfamiliar concepts like 'social distancing' or 'self-isolation', being clear on changing restrictions, and helping people find information relevant to their needs.

Clear guidance

A huge amount of content design work has been undertaken at speed, to create services and guidance that are easy to find and to understand.

This work aimed to let people know what they must do, to encourage them to do what they should — and to give people the best chance of getting the help they were eligible for.

The GOV.UK coronavirus content team has worked closely with subject experts and content designers across government. We have shared data to help identify unmet user needs, advised on content design and strategy, and supported content teams with pair writing and content reviews.

Navigational pages

We knew we needed to help our users browse for information. So,

we designed and built a series of navigational pages.

We created the landing page gov.uk/coronavirus using accordion patterns (expandable lists of links) to make it simple to browse but able to hold a lot of detailed guidance. It took less than 5 days to go from initial design to launch, and in the first 24 hours of going live there were more than 750,000 views of the page (from users who consented to cookies).

We also created hub pages on topics like education and work.

We made sure all our layouts and content were accessible and designed for mobile screens.

Over time we've improved the content and layouts of these pages to make sure people get what they're looking for. We've reviewed user journeys and feedback to continuously reshape things based on the evidence of how well we're meeting user needs.

Checkers and lookups

Making lists of content was not enough. We knew we needed to help people discover guidance and support. To do this we have designed a series of checkers, also known as 'smart answers'. Users answer questions about their circumstances to see personalised information. These tools help people understand how COVID-19 affects them and what support is available.

They had to be built quickly, and be secure, robust and accessible. We were able to use existing design patterns and components to put things together quickly. Maintaining them with the latest information is challenging but we work closely with policy experts in the relevant departments to ensure information and signposting is accurate.

For example, the Find Support tool has been used by more than 365,000 people. It was developed to help anyone facing vulnerability, such as needing help paying bills, or knowing what to do if they were feeling unsafe.

As the government response changed, we created new services. For example, when Local COVID Alert



Recent and upcoming changes

6 November
Everyone who lives or works in Liverpool will be offered coronavirus tests, whether or not they have symptoms.

5 November
National restrictions now apply to England:

- you cannot meet socially with anyone indoors unless they're in your support bubble
- there are changes to how many people you can meet outside
- you must not travel to the UK or overseas unless for a specific reason, like

GOV.UK Coronavirus (COVID-19) content, November 2020.

Levels (frequently called 'tiers') were launched, a team worked around the clock to rapidly build a postcode checker. Ahead of the national restrictions being introduced it was used 13.7 million times to look up local rules.

The people behind the website

This was only possible through the hardworking team at GOV.UK, working with people across government and the NHS.

Our content designers work alongside product managers, performance analysts, developers and user researchers to scope user needs, deliver products and constantly improve. Our team delivery manager keeps an overview of the team's work. We test one another's assumptions and peer working has been essential.

In the face of this rapidly changing situation, we've strived to work sustainably, focusing on resilience and wellbeing. We have a culture of openness and honesty, and take time out to talk about challenging subjects that impact us.

Looking forward

Working on COVID-19 content means working on one of the most pressing issues facing the government.

Good content during a pandemic isn't about neat paragraphs. It means giving people the means to find the support they need — to pay their staff, have food delivered or know how to volunteer or work safely — as well as knowing the rules on meeting friends and family.

Our work is still not done. We don't know what lies ahead in the pandemic. In the coming months, we'll be getting to grips with new communication challenges that overlap with the end of the transition period from the EU, and perhaps a vaccine rollout.

But we've developed our ability to be much more responsive and pragmatic to fast-changing needs and situations.

We've been proud to be a part of it. ■

References

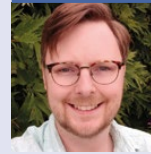
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Horace Hockley Award
istc.org.uk/homepage/professional-development-and-recognition/horace-hockley-award (accessed 19 November 2020).

Ben Hazell



Ben is the content product lead for the GOV.UK coronavirus content team at the Government Digital Service. This team

of 10 content designers has been working to support the management of clear guidance since the start of the pandemic. Ben has also worked on the government EU transition campaign, and on publishing workflow design for GOV.UK. Previously he was digital publishing editor for Telegraph.co.uk.

Helen Nickols

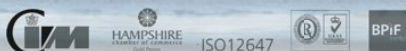


Helen is a senior content designer on GOV.UK, which she has worked for over 6 years. She has developed content on topics ranging

from income tax, health and voting, to benefits.

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