

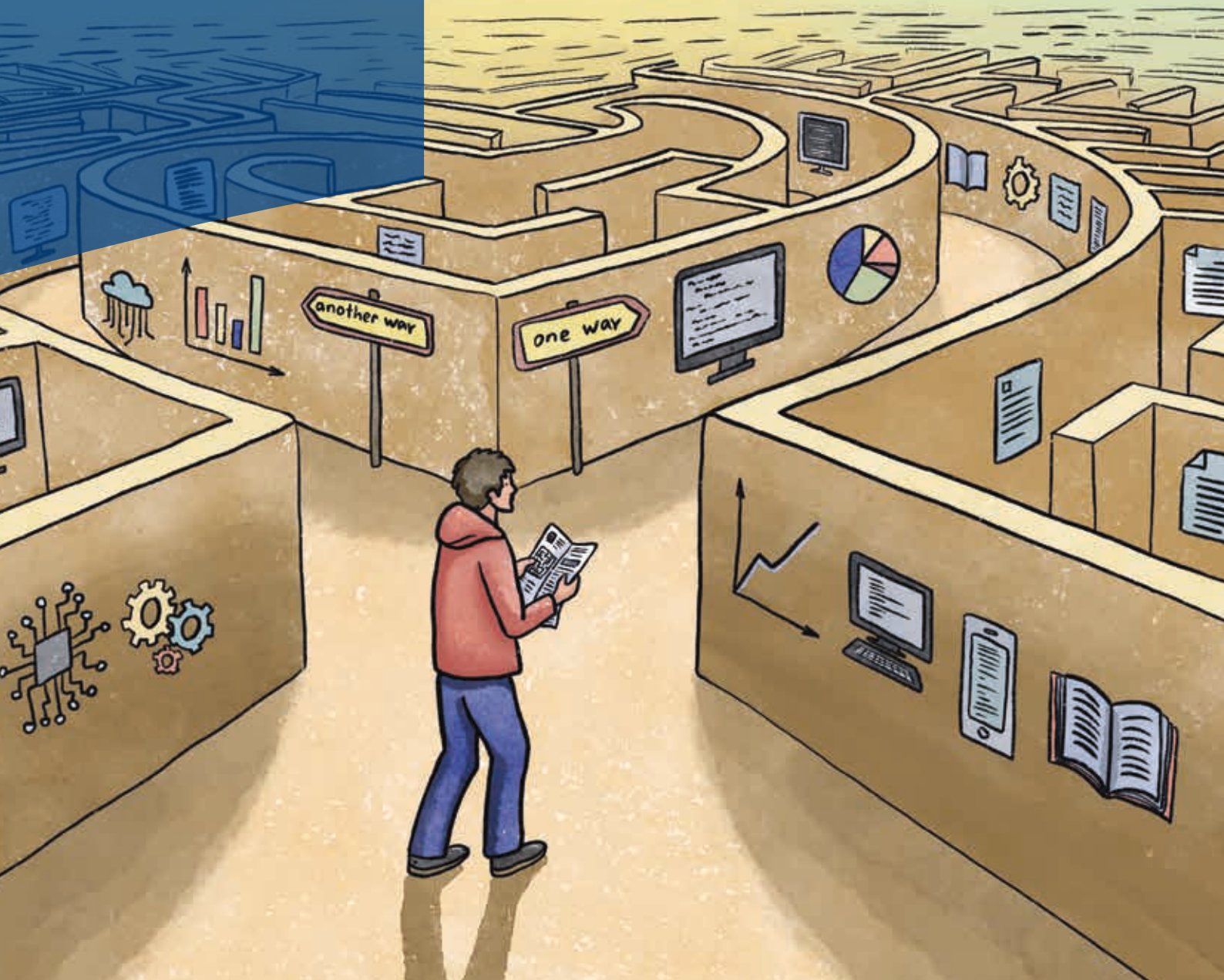
Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Winter 2025

Open Theme

- Writing from multiple sources
- Publishing in XML
- Career path reflections



President's View

What next for the ISTC?



1 Communicator in 2026

As detailed in the President's Report (sent out by email to all members with the AGM notice), 2025 saw the ISTC taking stock of its situation, and moving into 2026 we are faced with the need to make changes to the organisation to be ready to face the future. This means that we need to let you know about those changes.

The most evident change coming in 2026 relates to Communicator. We are no longer able to financially support the printing of our journal. The costs involved in even a reduced print run are unworkable, and we have had to make the sad decision to provide Communicator in only a digital form for the foreseeable future. For 2026, we will be keeping the same PDF format as before, fitting all of our content into a reduced run of 3 issues across the year. This will enable us to continue to provide the same quality of information in a recognisable format while making the necessary changes to cut costs.

We are seeking the involvement of ISTC members who are interested in the on-going quality of our journal to support it through this change – volunteer roles we are seeking to fill run the full gamut from seeking or submitting contributions and editing articles, through to steering the future of the journal from an editorial or technical perspective.

Why volunteer with Communicator?

The reasons for volunteering are numerous and unique to each individual, but here are a few key ways you can gain from getting involved:

- Have your name associated with an award-winning professional journal with a history spanning over 50 years
- Gain content-related skills outside your current role to help develop your career
- Join a team of fellow professionals contributing great value to our colleagues
- Refine your technical communication skills by using them in new contexts
- Expand your portfolio by generating well-designed examples not hidden by confidentiality clauses

This change also presents an opportunity to look at our journal and find ways to make it better, now that it is not tied to a specific format. 2026 will be a year of re-shaping our offering, and we will be dependent on your involvement to make that happen. Communicator's future is in your hands. Get involved by sending your name to istc@istc.org.uk. You can also optionally include any information about areas of interest or relevant experience.

2 Bringing the profession together – TCUK conference

This year sees the return of our in-person conference for technical communication professionals. With a line-up including three keynote speakers, and a great selection of workshops and presentations, it's sure to be the usual combination of an informative, inspiring, and enlivening event.

I'm looking forward to meeting members and fellow professionals from across the wide range of domains that our profession operates in, as well as hosting the UK Technical Communication Awards ceremony during our celebration dinner.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team of volunteers who have come together in the planning of our conference. Whether it be arranging printing, selecting the programme, or liaising with speakers, keynotes, and sponsors, there is so much work that

goes in over many months to make TCUK happen, and it is only possible due to the involvement of volunteer ISTC members. It is a testament to the dedication of our colleagues.

Of particular note is that, following the break of 2020-2022, the event has been organised without the support of a paid event organiser. In order to keep the financial burden on both attendees and the organisation as low as possible, the team of volunteers took on all aspects and has risen to the challenge. The teams from both 2023 and 2025 can be truly proud of their achievements and their continuation of the legacy of previous organisers.

With many lessons learnt from the last two conferences, I look forward to seeing how TCUK develops in future years.

3 Dealing with uncertainty

As demonstrated by the previous two sections, the ISTC is going through a lot of changes as a professional body, as we adapt to the changing financial and professional landscapes. 2026 is set to be a year of further reflection and adjustment for all of us.

We have recently seen the sad closure of the Society for Technical Communication and other professional bodies across all sectors and countries are facing challenges as members face pressure on their time and finances, and the priorities of professional development and the growth of the profession are challenged by more immediate or urgent concerns. Rising living costs, unstable employment, the growth of GenAI and wider economic uncertainty – these all weigh on us in our daily lives.

It would be understandable to look at the world and be hesitant, to be cautious and focus on securing our own position. Yet, if we take a moment to consider what security really is, perhaps we see a different route emerge, one that recognises the strength of relationships, networks, and community.

Change is unsettling by definition, and the past several years have seen waves of change affecting us as individuals and professionals. Yet, it is precisely in these conditions that the

bonds we have formed are the most valuable. Reaching out to colleagues, friends, family, and our wider network, helps us to keep a clearer perspective on the threats we see around us, to learn about opportunities and advantages available to us, and to be bolstered by the reminder that we are not alone in our struggles.

Furthermore, the way we work today can easily leave us feeling isolated. Technical communicators often work as a team of one or in teams that are spread out across the globe. Remote working has many benefits, but it also challenges these connections that sustain us. Contracting sees us moving from one company to another, without setting down roots. There are many benefits to these ways of working too, and not all of these will apply to all of us of course, but we can be realistic about the impact it has on us.

There are many ways to reach out, and in the hyper-connected world of the internet and social media, it may feel strange to talk of isolation. Yet, the internet is not what it once was. Social media has moved from a way to connect to a way to sell, promote, and persuade. When everyone is focused on presenting their best face, and every post lives forever online, how can we reach out in vulnerability and honesty? It's possible, but it's not what these platforms are designed for and not what they encourage.

I do believe however, that there are ways to build sustaining relationships available to us. I have seen this in action in the past few years, as colleagues have come together and supported each other through employment struggles, financial hardship, and

personal difficulties. These same people have also celebrated successes, and shared resources and networks.

As part of a range of social circles, including friends, family, and acquaintances, a professional support network can play an important role with unique benefits. Spending time with people who understand the context we are wrestling with and have transferable insights or experiences brings a dimension that isn't available elsewhere.

Pairing that with a sense of purpose, a shared task or challenge that provides a focal point for discussion and activity, is a powerful combination. Like a social nucleation point, it provides a framework for safe and open interaction, and can build real connection – sometimes more easily than open-ended discussion or undirected socialisation.

Examples of this outside of the workplace come easily to mind; joining a hobby group, going to a dance class, learning a language – these are all ways to collaborate on a project together and be refreshed by mutual support. In a professional context however, such opportunities may seem rare. How do we find a team outside our office we can vent to? Where can we get access to willing mentors and peer support? How can we share what we're experiencing to an audience that aren't just politely nodding along?

Perhaps by now, where I am heading with this will be obvious to you, and certainly it will not feel unbiased. Yet, the privilege I have in writing this column comes directly from receiving support from fellow ISTC volunteers across the range of

projects I have had the privilege to be involved in and I have been genuinely moved to see the support shared between ISTC colleagues.

If you are feeling uncertain, perhaps volunteering with the ISTC will be something that can also support you, and the range of options available within our organisation is surprisingly diverse. All levels of experience are welcome, and there is a real need for more people to get involved.

Reach out to the office or send me an email. Let's hold together. ■

James Bartley

ISTC President
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