

Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

2026 Volume 2

- User journeys
- Career reflections
- Staying up-to-date and relevant in the profession



President's View

Looking back, looking forward



My first year in office

When I think about a key memory from the last year, it is the AGM that comes to mind. Standing at the podium during TCUK25 was pretty nerve-wracking and I'm so grateful for the laughs I got from those present. It let me feel how we are in this together.

While the AGM stands out as reassuring, I did have some lessons to learn from this last year, and they came from my time working with Council and our administration team. This year has helped me to correct some assumptions about the role of President within the ISTC, both in terms of what I needed to do, and what I could do.

As a volunteer-led organisation, the roles we ask our members to take on are much looser than in a business. As someone who favours clear structure and process, this did leave me a bit unsettled at first. However, I soon learnt that this is intentional and part of how member-led organisations function. The framework I sought exists, just in a form I wasn't expecting: through the people I was working with.

The other side of being a volunteer-led organisation, is the limits individuals will have in terms of time and energy that can be given, and how that can wax and wane over the course of a year. I have been struck by the need for everything to be about the team, rather than any one individual. The analogy that comes

to mind is that of a chorus, where any one singer can pause to breathe, while the whole carries the tune.

Keeping the organisation sustainable

My main focus when I first became President was to learn about the areas of the ISTC that I hadn't previously interacted with, either as a member or Council member. In particular, this meant grappling with our financial reporting and budgets. Thank you to both our admin team and outgoing Treasurer for all their support in this.

During this time, we saw sister organisations go through significant changes. Most notably, the closure of the STC came as quite a shock to the profession, and it prompted a lot of reflection within the ISTC as well.

As a result of both of these things, my focus soon became ensuring that our members continue to have a professional body to support them into the future. It may be less visible than launching new projects, but aiming for the right combination of adaptability and stability feels like something that many people can relate to in our current world.

There have been a lot of changes behind the scenes, with everyone involved remaining positive and committed to the organisation. We had to cut about a third of our spending, yet the result of this was the production of a balanced budget for the following two years. So far this year, we have met our financial targets while continuing to offer our services to members. It's something I feel everyone involved with can feel very proud of.

Keeping our identity

All of this change, which reaches deep into the way the organisation runs itself, could have had an adverse result on the way we operate. The key challenge has been to change the Institute in a way that made it sustainable but didn't destroy the legacy of what came before.

What that has looked like so far, has been to move from a more traditional model of operation, with established structures, to a more adaptable, responsive organisation that is better

suited to the world we face today. Doing this, while continuing to deliver services to members has been a challenge that all of our teams have stepped up to. Communicator itself serves as an example of this.

A key question facing Council has been 'how do you modernise a professional body while retaining the things that made it valuable in the first place?' Having greater diversity represented in that discussion would only benefit us all and, with places on Council available, now is the perfect time for you to play a role in that.

What is the ISTC of today?

As well as changing my view of the role of President, this past year has also changed my view of the ISTC. It seems both larger and smaller than I previously thought. The range of people I have met is even wider than what I had expected, though we remain connected by a professional focus on helping people to understand and achieve. And seeing the results from small groups of volunteers working on different projects within the organisation, even though they are somewhat isolated from each other, has proven the impact that even just a few people working together can have, to the benefit of the whole organisation.

I want to highlight the work that goes on by both volunteers and contractors to support the running of the organisation. There are so many ways people are involved that other members may not be aware of.

From our Awards judges and our membership committee (who review membership applications), we benefit from the professionalism and discernment of people committed to uplifting our profession. From our journal, newsletter, and website, we all receive the wisdom, experience, and sharing offered by members at all levels. From our area group leads and conference organisers, we gain access to opportunities to connect to, share with, and learn from each other. Every aspect of what the ISTC does is underpinned by its members, and this is by no means an exhaustive list.

As President, I also want to acknowledge the on-going support and professionalism of our administration team. As an external service provider, our organisation benefits from their wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as their day-to-day running of our professional body. When you call our phone number, it is they who ensure that someone is there to speak with you and that your query gets dealt with promptly and professionally. But what you might not know about, is the support they provide to our volunteers. At a governance level, their advice and services are crucial to the good running of the organisation, providing stability, compliance, expertise, and guidance. If you've ever worried that getting involved would be too daunting, know that this team, as well as fellow volunteers, are there to help.

My own experience of being part of the website team has provided further surprises over the year. I could never have predicted the ways in which I have been supported by, and grown from, working with the team. I remain very grateful to each of them for this, as well as for the resulting and on-going work on the website, and wish I could better communicate the intangible benefits of volunteering within a professional body.

I hope that the ISTC will continue to develop as a setting that offers support to members not only as a source of authority and information, but also as a supportive place for members to reach out and build relationships between each other. We've already taken steps to build on this with our Slack workspace, and the collaboration tools we use with

volunteers, but success in this is dependent on members being able to see how the benefits of getting involved outweigh the costs of doing so.

From the membership

I mentioned earlier our AGM, which is one way in which we hear formally from our members. More direct feedback also came from the wider event of TCUK. At last year's event, I enjoyed a number of different conversations with, and presentations from, members, learning what they are currently thinking about and working on.

One of the most common topics has been the use of large language models (LLMs) and generative AI. While it has been ubiquitous due to its wide-ranging impact, it also feels like simply 'one more thing' that technical communicators are asked to adapt to and take in our stride. Members need information and support around this, so how does the ISTC respond to this need?

One approach is direct: we offer news and information about relevant tools and developments via InfoPlus, and talks aimed at supporting professionals through both TCUK and ISTC Meets. But information alone isn't enough. We also need to focus on being an organisation that helps members navigate change and connect with each other. When authenticity and trust are in question, having a community of like-minded people who are invested in the profession is invaluable. I have seen first-hand the care in our profession, the people within wanting things to be done well.

Looking ahead

After reflecting on my first year in office, I turn to look forward at the year to come. My main goal as President is quite clear, in one word: stability. So much change is already necessary for our profession and our organisation, that my aim now is to ensure the organisation continues to support members, without falling foul of the same struggles that have taken others away.

When working to make something more stable, one of the things that comes to mind is the interconnectedness of its parts. This is something that I want to keep improving on at all levels of the organisation. However, as President my ability to control this is limited. A community is built by its members, not its leaders. My parting words here then are:

"Reach out more to each other." ■

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