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Winter 2016



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President's view

You may have noticed a bit of a theme in my recent communications. I'm interested in finding out who we are, what we're interested in and what the ISTC needs to do to both meet the needs of its existing members and attract more.

Following technical communication 'best practice', the ISTC does ask. We carry out an annual survey of our members, and encourage technical communicators who aren't members to fill it in too, so we have a clearer picture of what's going on in the industry as a whole. The results of the surveys are published to the ISTC website but are only available to members unless we're contacted and asked to provide some figures. It dawned on me that some members may not know that the survey results are available (it's easy to miss the announcement) and non-members may have no idea. As I'm trying to encourage as many people as possible to complete the annual survey, perhaps a snapshot of last year's results would be interesting. I'm not going to do a statistical analysis, just highlight some figures.

So, who are we?

A total of 261 people completed the survey (which, for an organisation of our size, is a good number). Of those, 106 stated they were not members of the ISTC.

More of us are male than female, and more of us (who completed the survey) are aged over 50 than under. Maybe those of us who are a little longer in the tooth are more likely to complete surveys? I don't know.

Rather than just looking at the bald figures, though, I decided to correlate ages with how long people have been in the profession, which gives me the results in Figure 1. While it's

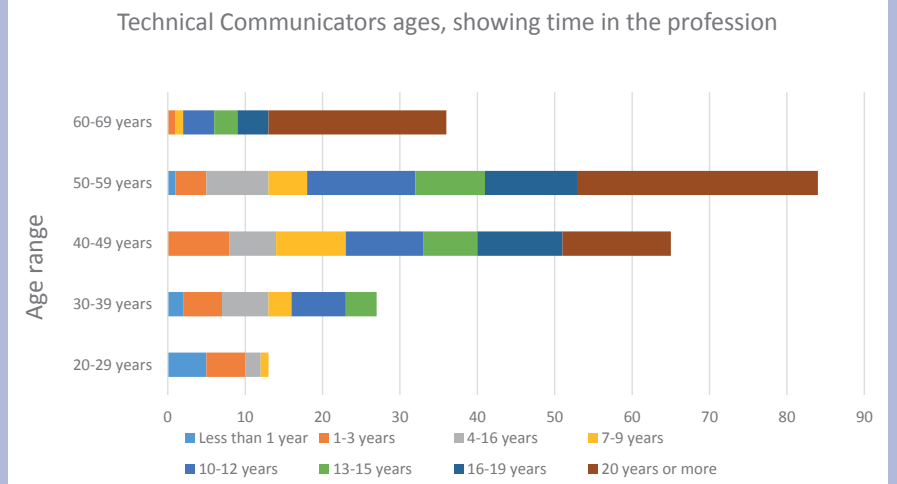


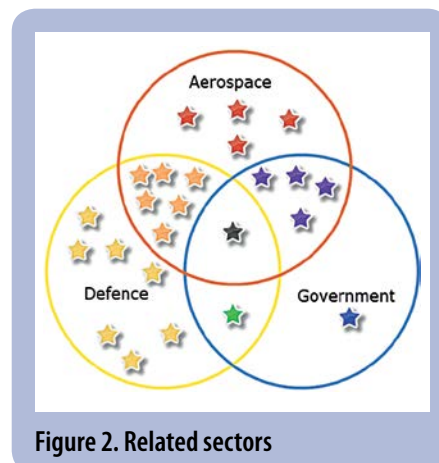
Figure 1. Annual survey results January 2016

obvious that we wouldn't have any 20-year-olds who have been in the profession for more than 20 years, I did wonder how many of people my age (and older) have been technical communicators for a relatively short period of time. The results appear to bear out the anecdotal evidence that many of us moved into this profession in our mid-30s or later. If you look closely, there is someone in the 50-59 age-bracket who has been a technical communicator for less than a year.

At first sight, we appear to be an ageing group, and as the President of the ISTC, I find that worrying. However, I took a quick look at the surveys for the previous few years and the numbers for age ranges are much the same. In 2011, for example, 40.8% of the respondents were in age range of 50-59 years. Maybe we're not an *ageing* group but a *slightly older* group, which is not the same thing at all.

What do we do?

Looking at the basic figures from the survey, we work across a number of



industries and sectors. However, with access to the raw data it's possible to see when people have picked more than one category and to see how they fit together. Just one example of this is in Figure 2, which shows members across three related sectors, with some working in more than one of them. These may relate to other areas as well: a number of people selected Government who also selected other categories.

The ISTC is occasionally criticised for focusing too much on the documentation of software. I took a look at the survey figures to find out if a high proportion of our members work with software, but I am unable to tell. We ask which sectors people work in, which is great, and what they produce (nearly 65% still produce some paper-based documentation) but not in what context. For example, I work in IT, Defence, Education, Energy, Medicine/Health, plus a few more not listed, and I document software used within those industries. Someone else could pick exactly the same sectors but be involved in microprocessors, aerospace, science and pharmaceuticals, nuclear fuel and pharmaceuticals, nothing to do with software at all.

What does this mean?

We can't make sensible decisions without the data to base them on, so I have a proposition for you. If you take a few minutes to fill out the next survey, I'll take some time to produce a more comprehensive report looking at the results. Deal?

Alison Peck FISTC

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