

Creating new user experiences?

Via user interfaces, user journeys and narrative



Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Summer 2017

localisation e-learning
technical API
content CSS UX personas
ethics Email project UI
editing system
writer compliance user
XML DITA ISTC single-source
translation PDF UA
communicator CCMS software

Discover ST4 and
Paligo software

Promote yourself by
creating a portfolio

Tailor your documentation
for the European market

Read all about it!
From hot-metal to digital

Snapshot of the ISTC Survey 2017

Our annual survey was run at the beginning of the year, and **Alison Peck** highlights some interesting details.

Back in *Communicator*, Winter 2016, I promised that if you took the time to complete the ISTC survey, I would take the time to publish the results — and I try to keep my promises. Before we get into the results, I want to say a big “Thank you!” to the 203 people who took the time to complete the survey – without you, we’d have nothing to report, and would be relying on anecdotal information even more than we have to now when making decisions in Council.

Disclaimer: I’m not a statistician — I’m showing these results as a snapshot in time and am taking the view that if, for example, 20 people state that they work in a particular sector, we can say that at least 20 people work in that sector but not necessarily that we can extrapolate this to a percentage of technical communicators generally. I have also not analysed the results to demonstrate a degree of confidence that the results are statistically significant. As is often the case, the numbers don’t always add up to 203 – sometimes people have selected more than one option, and sometimes they have chosen not to answer a question (both of which are fine).

Who are we?

As I’ve already said, 203 people responded to the survey and of those, 164 were members. In addition to the information in Table 1, two Members in the 50-59 age bracket did not specify a gender and one Member specified neither age nor gender.

Table 1. Who are we?

	Age		20-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		50-59		70+	
	Gender		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Grade of membership	Student			1		1		1						
	Junior		2	2	1		1	3				1		
	Member		1	4	5	6	14	23	18	23	2	15		
	Fellow						4	6	2	8	2	8		1
	Associate						1	1		2	2			
	Not a member		4		3	2	7	5	3	11	1	2		
	Not answered								1					

Age and experience of those working outside traditional employment

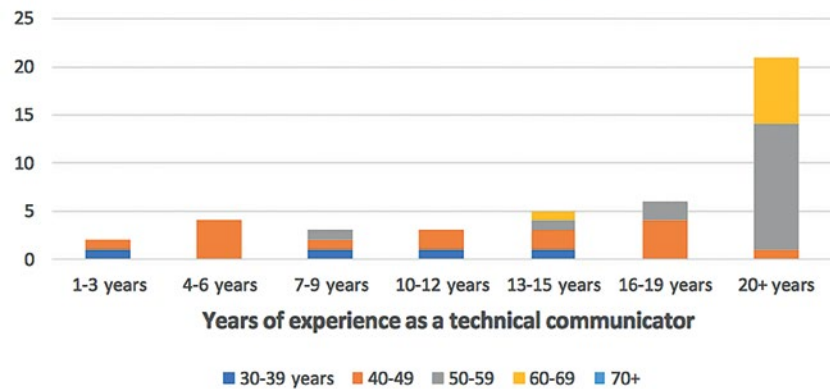


Figure 1. Who are we?

Most of those who are not members heard about the survey from the ISTC (either the newsletter — *InfoPlus+* — or email).

The majority of us are in full-time employment (137), with smaller numbers working as part-time employees (20), self-employed/freelance (29), contractors (19) or are retired (3). We allow people to select more than one option in the employment sections as we’re aware that people may be working part-time (or even full-time) for an employer or retired while having a small part-time freelance business as well. This distinction between self-employed and contracting is always a difficult question to word — and I know from experience, a difficult one to answer.

We’re not concerned about your legal/tax status. What we’re interested in is the different work patterns: do you work for clients directly (and that includes those whose one-person companies work for clients directly, as I do) or whether you work through an agency (whether that’s as a sole trader or a limited company). I think we may try wording this question slightly differently next time, as I’m wondering if one or two are answering ‘employee’ because they are employees of their own limited companies (as I am). For example, people have selected that they work mainly for clients directly *and* that they work mainly through an agency or company. Maybe the distinction is irrelevant and we need to consider another aspect, such as whether working outside of traditional employment for one organisation at a time, moving on when a project is completed, or working for multiple organisations simultaneously. That aside, five people indicated that they are both employees and work in other ways.

As you might expect, those working outside the traditional ‘employee’ model tend to have more experience as a technical communicator, or be older, or both! No-one under the age of 30 stated that they worked in this way, but the surprise to me was the number of people with little experience as technical communicators in this

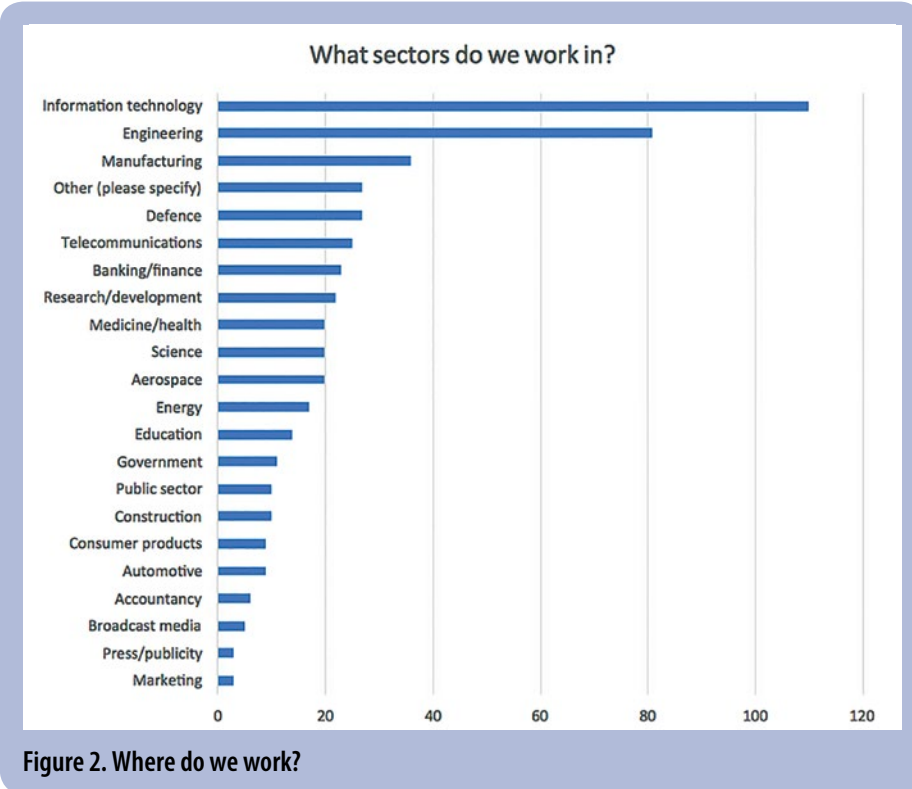


Figure 2. Where do we work?

category (see Figure 1). It made me wonder whether these people either had other relevant experience that gave them the confidence to 'go it alone', or that they were working as part of a larger group, so were getting feedback and guidance from someone with more experience in that way. If neither of these apply, they are braver than I would be in the same situation.

So now I know *how* we work, I want to know *where* (what industries or sectors) we work- and what we actually do.

Where do we work?

Geographically speaking, most of us work in London and the south-east

of England (a single category in the survey). This is followed by south-west England (a change from last year, which had north-west England in second place) and the east of England.

In terms of the sectors in which we work, these are shown in Figure 2. Quite a few people selected more than one sector, and my initial theory was that these would be the self-employed or contractors - but no, a lot were employees. I wonder - but don't know - whether like me these people primarily document software but that the software is used in various industries, or work for an engineering organisation that provides input to aerospace, R&D, defence... It's not

possible to tell. Again, maybe this is something to consider asking slightly differently next year. It was great, however, to see a significant number selecting 'science'.

What do we do?

We do a lot, according to the survey results. The 'Other' category was selected by 35 people, and the things specified included setting the strategic direction of technical communication, product labelling and packaging, interactive electronic manuals, videos, technical illustration, editing and design of the company newsletter, development of macros for Microsoft Office, and training delivery. At recent TCUK conferences, we've been exhorted to diversify if we want to survive as a profession - and I was surprised (and pleased) by such a wide range of activities.

I've shown the categories in Figure 3 - and noticed that paper-based documentation has slipped from second place down to third from last year.

When sorting and collating these results, I wondered whether we could relate what we do (the types of things we produce, particularly) to where we work. For example, do people working in defence produce more paper-based documentation than those working in telecommunications? And which sector delivers most of their material online? Unfortunately, because people selected both multiple sectors and multiple output types, it wasn't possible to make that correlation. It would be an interesting nugget, though - if only we could extract it.

What about the rest?

There were far more questions on the survey than I've reported here. ISTC members can get the statistical results on each question from the ISTC website, and anyone else is free to email the ISTC office and ask for a copy. **C**

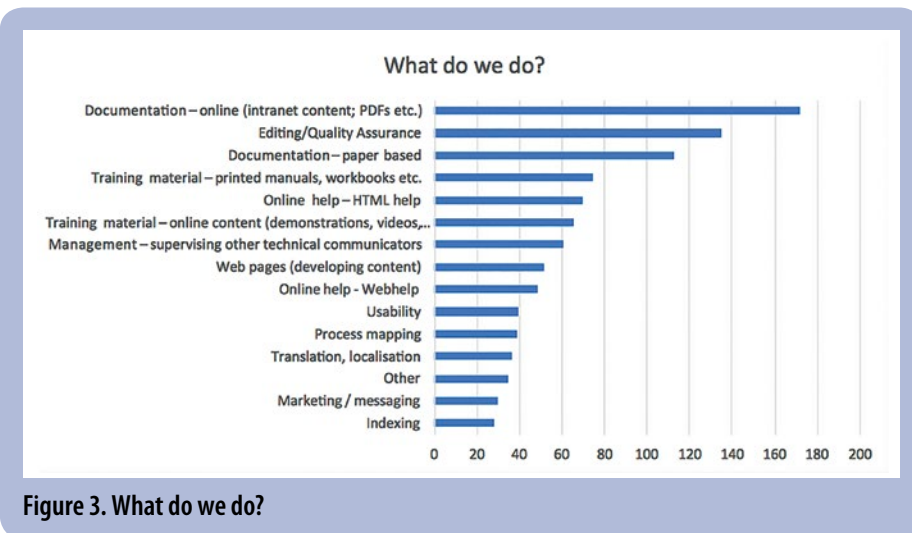


Figure 3. What do we do?



Alison Peck FISTC is the current president of the ISTC and manages her own small technical communication company: Clearly Stated.

E: alison@clearly-stated.co.uk
 W: www.clearly-stated.co.uk
www.istc.org.uk