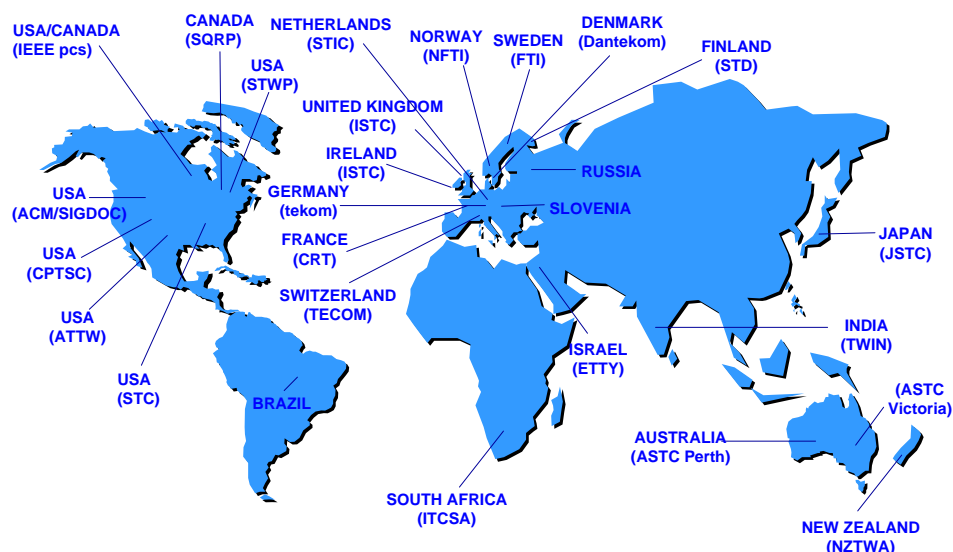


Horace Hockley Award - 2001

Upon his acceptance of this year's award, Gerry Gentle enlightened the audience with his knowledge of other bodies representing Technical Communicators (TCs) worldwide and their differing constitutions and membership certification schemes (where appropriate).



Drawing upon his extensive experience on ISTC Council, some 15 years – four as Treasurer and 2½ years as President – he then reviewed recent ISTC activities and achievements and prophesied on the future of the Institute as summarised below:

Membership today is possibly as high as it has ever been. No evidence exists to show paid-up membership has been higher.

We should not go looking for increased membership. Rather, strengthen the professionalism of the Institute and promote the profession to industry, so that applications for membership will grow. When the ISTC was formed in 1972, the membership grades were established to give accreditation to members and provide status within Industry; unfortunately those within the industry appear slow to understand this.

Education: In 1998 we set about creating an environment for a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Technical Communication. Apart from the obvious benefit to members, NVQs are recognised by Industry and would assist TCs in raising their profile. Unfortunately with current DfEE priorities NVQs are out of vogue. City & Guilds, possibly the largest education body outside government, also felt NVQs had no future. They have introduced in their structure a Progressive Award scheme and believe it a good substitute for NVQs, allowing entry Level 2 through Level 3 to Level 4 degree equivalent. Initial work has begun on the Level 2 curriculum; we must continue with this, and once approved, progress it. This will provide the ISTC with a much superior qualification than at present.

We have at last published *Professional Communication and Information Design* – a book to guide those at entry level to our profession. Council needs someone to continually review this book for publication of further additions as new technology supersedes current chapters.

Finally, on education, the ISTC should be more involved with Universities and providers of higher education. Assisting the Editor to produce the *Communicator* was once an optional module at Coventry University but sadly lacked take-up; we should seek similar links.

Seminars/Meetings: Area Groups have had mixed success over the years and monies budgeted by Council were never exhausted. With today's technology, we should now move towards SIGs (Special Interest Groups) run by members, with the technology and guidance provided by the Institute. As this is optional for members to join, a small levy can be charged for membership. The IASIG has proved most active; Council should be looking to grow on this success.

In the distant past (some 18 years), Council organised informal meetings, one with Agencies and one with Publication Managers within Industrial companies to learn what industry saw as our role. At this present time we should repeat this – a great publicity opportunity.

Amalgamation with other similar bodies has always been an open invitation, but is long term. Similar organisations such as IDA and IDN have come and gone in recent times. Those who were active in these organisations have seen hard work and long hours not proved fruitful. A pity they could not see the potential to work within our structure; an opportunity missed. Those involved within STC (UK) Chapter should take note; the ISTC has stood the test of time.

www: Our Website has kept pace with technology over the years, and has proved excellent PR for the Institute. A few years ago we introduced membership cards giving each member a unique identity number. One of the benefits was to use this membership number as access to the members-only section of our Website, with the Administration Office controlling only paid-up members having access. This should become a priority; at present all persons visiting the site can have access to the members-only section.

Council: In 1987 I was invited to apply for Council membership and was elected unopposed, as have been all Council members since. Have we ever had a contested election? On amalgamation in 1972, three bodies had to be accommodated and a Council of thirty members was set in our Arts. and Mems. This is far too many. It should be reduced to twelve, making elections more likely and a more manageable Council to run. Those becoming elected would then be truly democratically representative of the wishes of the Institute as a whole.

Co-operation: As General Secretary/Treasurer of INTECOM, one of my roles was to review the Constitutions of all member societies to ensure they complied with INTECOM's constitution. Although they all represent TCs, the membership criteria was not consistent, some have strict certification, others none. For instance, SQRP of Quebec, Canada, hold entrance examinations; members are Certified Technical Writers. Others – e.g. STC of USA and tekomp of Germany - have no certification and entry is by fee only.

When the ISTC was formed in 1972, a graded membership operated by a membership committee was pivotal to the Constitution. This is still strictly operated today; our by-laws detail the membership grades extensively.

We are currently exploring closer links with other European bodies in TC. Council should continually respect our professional membership as detailed in our Constitution and not allow dilution through too deep a co-operation with societies who have no certification programme.

Technical Communications has a strong future. Modern technology and information delivery requires the disciplines we TCs practice daily. The government, through accepting the Occupational Standards for Technical Communicators, recognises our profession. It is now the responsibility of the ISTC to promote this.