



**Enhancing Written Skills  
for Technical Reporting**

## Defence Science and Technology Laboratory

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) is an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) employing approximately 3000 specialist staff. Its purpose is to maximise the impact of science and technology on UK defence and security through the provision of impartial scientific advice to the MoD and other government departments on all aspects of defence.

Due to changes in the MoD customer environment and the reduction in Armed Forces staff following the Strategic Defence Review, Dstl underwent an organisational review in 2012. This has resulted in Dstl creating a commercially focused Technical Consultancy tasked to provide timely advice to the government, industry and academia. Communication challenges among technical staff were identified as part of the review with many subject matter experts requiring assistance to understand their customer and to communicate clearly with non-technical audiences.

## Communicaid

Communicaid is a global culture and communication skills consultancy that assists the world's leading organisations to mitigate the risks and maximise the opportunities of working in a complex and ever-changing international environment.

We work with international organisations such as the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory to provide a complete suite of consultancy services as well as targeted intercultural, language and communication skills training.

# Translating Dstl's Technical Expertise into High Impact Reports

A common challenge many organisations face is how to produce written communication that conveys technical information to non-expert audiences. The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory employees encountered this problem as they struggled to adapt their writing style and content to match their readers' interest and level of expertise. In response to this, Dstl identified the need for a high impact writing training solution for all staff that would provide them with the tools and techniques to produce reader-focused, impactful written communication.

Following a successful tender process, the Leadership Capability Lead at Dstl commissioned Communicaid to design a targeted training programme to develop Dstl employees' ability to write compelling messages to a diverse range of military and civilian audiences.

## Training Objectives

The core aims of the programme were to:

- Develop employees to translate complex technical information into reader-focused communication
- Stimulate an awareness of the customer mind-set and requirements
- Improve delegates' ability to write clear, concise and well-structured reports
- Increase the impact and accessibility of delegates' reports and briefs

## Training Approach

Communicaid worked closely with the Leadership

Capability Lead and other key stakeholders at Dstl to gain a thorough insight into the organisational structure, client and decision maker expectations, defence writing guidelines (JSP IO1) and current writing challenges. This enabled Communicaid's Communication Skills team to design a programme that was tailored to both organisational and individual requirements allowing discussion of best practice and review of authentic examples.

Communicaid selected an experienced trainer with a background in scientific and technical writing who was then security-cleared to allow him access to authentic documentation

produced by delegates. Before attending the programmes delegates are required to complete a pre-training questionnaire highlighting their individual objectives and challenges and to submit an authentic example of their own professional writing. This enables the trainer to adapt his delivery of the course according to each specific audience.

Communicaid's understanding of the military context underpinned the course design and we ensured that the training was interactive with opportunities to apply delegates' learning to workplace scenarios.

## Our Solution

We designed a two stage training solution enabling delegates to work collaboratively with their peers and to receive personalised feedback from the trainer.

Stage One: Groups of up to eight delegates attend a one day High Impact Writing training workshop focusing on:

- A clear process for producing reader focused written communication from audience analysis through to final proof-reading
- Practical techniques for writing clearly and concisely
- A framework for writing within Dstl guidelines and templates
- Techniques for structuring technical/scientific writing and how to use annexes, summaries and visuals

Stage Two: Six weeks after the workshop delegates receive a one hour individual telephone coaching session to discuss feedback on their own writing samples as well as any individual concerns. Delegates also develop their Personal Action Plan with key learning points and goals for further

improvement of their writing skills.

## Results

Since the pilot programme in October 2012, over 70 Dstl employees have attended the programme and it is still regularly oversubscribed. The training is now also to be made mandatory to the annual intake of 100 plus graduates.

The success of this training means that Dstl's Military Advisors and Senior Technical Authorities now spend significantly less time editing and correcting reports provided to them for technical reviewing and benchmarking. This in turn has led to increased confidence from reviewers who have now reduced the number of reviews required. This training investment is now delivering tangible

time and financial savings to the organisation.

The course was full of self-contained ideas and advice which I found easy to digest and have quickly implemented into my writing style. The trainer made the material interesting, interactive and sprinkled with excellent examples from his own significant background in the field. I took a lot more away than I usually would from a one-day course. I would definitely recommend this to others looking to 'tweak' the way they write to improve its impact.

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