
Regarding TUG and UK-TUG

Jonathan Fine

1 Background

About 30 years ago I joined TUG and UK-TUG, the \TeX users group in the United Kingdom. Sadly, UK-TUG is now dissolved. Former members include Sebastian Rahtz (founder of \TeX Live), Jonathan Kew (author of $\text{X}_{\text{q}}\text{\TeX}$ and \TeX works) and Robin Fairbairns (editor of \TeX FAQ and CTAN maintainer). Its 80 former members are now dispersed, without an effective online forum.

At this year's \TeX conference I gave a personal history of UK-TUG. I am most grateful to organisers, speakers and audience for these online conferences. They are a shining star in TUG's recent history.

This article is about the relationship between TUG and UK-TUG during the process that ended with the dissolution of UK-TUG. It was not pleasant and shows weakness of character in several of us, including myself. Don Knuth teaches us to learn from our errors and failures.

My starting point is this year's TUG AGM. Our Secretary Klaus H\"oppner wrote in his report: *TUG was not involved [in] and has no knowledge about discussion within UK-TUG about how to distribute the money [arising from the dissolution of UK-TUG].*

2 Arthur Rosendahl, TUG and UK-TUG

The relevance and truth of Klaus's statement depends on what it means. It is true that TUG Vice President Arthur Rosendahl (formerly Reutenauer) has a deep knowledge of this discussion.

As a Committee Member Arthur wrote to the UK-TUG members:

Our organisation serves no useful purpose. The benefits of membership are already available elsewhere:

- technical: Stack Exchange, Learn LaTeX, ...
- social+technical: Facebook (UK \TeX Users Forum).
- \TeX Live DVDs: existing channels will continue.

It has assets that it cannot usefully spend to support \TeX in the United Kingdom, and is almost entirely disconnected from the UK's \TeX community. It has failed to attract new members. Its committee lacks the energy that would be necessary for a renewal.

Its main agenda item for the last few years has been disbanding. How might any prolongation be of any benefit?

We urge you to vote for motion DS1 by David Saunders, which offers the only way out of the current impasse.

Signed: all but one current committee members: Arthur Reutenauer, Chris Rowley, Jay Hammond, Jonathan Webley, Simon Dales.

3 Lessons for TUG

Note well that the signatories state that the Committee, of which they are members, *lacks the energy that would be necessary for a renewal*. They also state that dissolution is *the only way out of the current impasse*. There are questions here for TUG, most important of which is: How did UK-TUG get to this situation? Will TUG share the same fate?

These are important questions. I feel a duty to the community to share my experience, hence this article. Although it has flaws, it is the best I can do.

4 UK-TUG negotiations with TUG

Arthur said he negotiated with TUG on behalf of UK-TUG. He wrote to UK-TUG members:

I can also say that UK-TUG has essentially lost all credibility with our sister organisations, as is demonstrated by the fact that I couldn't negotiate better conditions for TUG to receive a donation from UK-TUG, and that I didn't get any official answer from DANTE when I contacted them.

In this context 'conditions' meant that the donation must go to TUG's General Fund. Such funds can be applied to office expenses, which are just over 70% of TUG's total income.

5 The Development Fund

I expressed concern at this and stated my intent to contact the TUG Board for clarification. The next day Arthur wrote *Any donation to TUG can, of course, be directed according to the many categories listed on <https://tug.org/donate.html>*.

I understood this reversal to mean that any dissolution donation would go to the TUG Development Fund or the like. Such donations are ring-fenced for that purpose. Such is, I believe, required by the UK-TUG Constitution.

I warmly welcomed Arthur's reversal of his previous statement. I fully expected the donation to go to the Development Fund. I now bitterly regret not then pressing the point and obtaining assurances.

6 The donation to DANTE

By the way, Arthur also wrote: *DANTE has finally and officially agreed to receiving a donation from UK-TUG upon dissolution, if it happens*.

The TUG Secretary is also a Board member of DANTE. It is likely that he knew of this offer made on behalf of UK-TUG by a person who is also Vice President of TUG.

7 What happened, my TUG AGM motion

That was in October 2021. In April this year, after the payment to TUG has been made, I was told it was sent to the General Fund (and so could be applied to the 70% of income Office Expenses).

To change this, for this year's TUG AGM I submitted the motion:

This TUG General Meeting asks that the dissolution donation made by UK-TUG to TUG's General Fund be transferred to TUG's T_EX Development Fund. For clarity, this motion is advisory and is not binding on the TUG Board.

together with a supporting statement. I took care to avoid the difficult issues I've previously mentioned.

8 Norbert Preining's contribution

I also sent the motion and supporting statement to the TUG members list. In the resulting discussion Board member Norbert Preining wrote to that list:

I consider this ill will versus the very association you are a member of, which in my opinion can carry consequences for you.

If it would be my call — for example in other associations where I am board member — your continuous passive aggressive behaviour, unfounded insinuations, and spreading of fud would have been a reason for taking the membership from you.

This message was directed at me. I read it as a threat to have me expelled as a member of TUG if I continued my present course of action. I am ashamed to say that this threat was successful.

9 At the TUG AGM

We have now returned to the starting point. Because of Norbert's message, and Klaus not circulating my motion to the members, at the AGM I found that I lacked the courage to insist that my motion be discussed and voted upon. I feared that if I did so then I would be expelled or otherwise punished.

10 Summary

Arthur had a dual role. He was a Board/Committee member of two organisations. In the one he promoted a motion that gave a substantial donation to the other.

Klaus did not bring my motion to the attention of members, and made a statement that obscured Arthur's dual role.

Norbert in so many words threatened me with expulsion from TUG.

11 Looking forward

Although UK-TUG has slipped away, I am still a member of TUG. Sometimes loyalty to our goals and purpose requires dissent from the majority and opposition to the Board. To understand better me and my background, and the sources of my strength of feeling, please watch my talk, *A personal history of UK-TUG*: <https://youtu.be/215yVb97I7A>.

In that talk I took as my theme John Donne's poem *For whom the bell tolls*. The demise of UK-TUG diminishes the whole T_EX community.

To rephrase Donne: Do not ask for whom the UK-TUG funeral bell tolls, dear TUG member. It tolls for our organisation.

I fear for the worst. I hope for the best. I hope that I will live long enough to see T_EX (including related software) and its users flourishing in 2042, twenty years from today and 50 years after my first encounters with TUG and UK-TUG.

When we sincerely work together for goals that contribute to human welfare and happiness, interpersonal difficulties become less important and can dissolve. This is how TUG was when and before I joined the organisation.

12 Added in proof

Editorial constraints prevent more from this email I sent to Arthur being published in this issue of *TUGboat*. Therefore I will publish the whole message on my website (see URL below), once this issue is published. I am willing to discuss matters relating to TUG and UK-TUG with those who are interested, either privately or in public as is wished and appropriate. From time to time I will write on these matters on my website.

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Rebuttal

Arthur Rosendahl

Τί δὲ βλέπεις τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου, τὴν δὲ ἐν τῷ σῶ ὀφθαλμῷ δοκὸν οὐ κατανοεῖς;
Matthew 7:3

Jonathan can't have it both ways: either I didn't use my position as a link between TUG and UK-TUG efficiently enough, or I abused it. Obviously, I reject both assertions. I tried to help in a difficult debate, I had a fine line to walk, and it's always easy to find aspects to criticise one year after the fact. I never claimed to be perfect. Most important, I was extremely clear about what Jonathan calls my "dual role"; which he should know, since he quotes from an email by me where I explained exactly that. He conveniently omits the parts where I said that I was aware that I was formally in a conflict of interest, and how I planned to mitigate it.

Perhaps Jonathan would like to be reminded of his own conduct and quoted out of context too; but the predictable outcome of his actions is probably punishment enough. His nauseating insistence that UK-TUG never, never, never should be dissolved gained him no supporters, and quite a few opponents. In a way, I should be grateful.

In the end, UK-TUG was dissolved by the clearly expressed will of its members, who passed a dissolution motion 26 to 7. Two other motions, proposed by Jonathan and mutually contradictory, received 0 votes.

◇ Arthur Rosendahl
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