

Notes from the Future of IAML Plenary Session in Montréal, 24 July 2012

The Strategy Committee was set up at the 2011 IAML Conference in Dublin with an initial task of examining IAML's structure and functions. A preliminary report was presented to the Board during its mid-year meeting in March 2012 after which the Board directed the Committee to focus on matters of actual structure in the remaining time before the Montréal conference.

The Committee's Chair, Antony Gordon (British Library, London), presented the main conclusions of the Strategy Committee (available [here](#) as PDF). Following this a question and answer session took place. These notes represent some of the points raised during the discussion. Names of those participating are indicated where possible. Any misrepresentation of views stated is accidental.

Maria Calderisi (Canada) asked how national branches can promote international issues to their members prior to voting. This would be essential if the membership as a whole has the right to overrule decisions made by the Board. Antony Gordon replied that there is no existing mechanism for this, but a summary of decisions taken could perhaps be sent to Council members after each Board meeting has taken place. Another alternative might be to send a digest to all members prior to the Conference. The minutes of Board meetings are not made generally available because of the sensitive nature of some items.

A question was asked on how national branches can report their activities throughout year — more regular communication is needed, perhaps through the new IAML website.

A question was asked about what mechanism might allow an individual member to contact the Council with proposals for consideration? Antony Gordon replied that there were two potential routes at present: through their National Branches or by contacting Chairs of relevant Subject Commissions or Professional Branches.

Anne Mees (Belgium) asked about IAML's legal framework; is IAML established under US legislation or European? Almut Boehme (United Kingdom) replied that it follows the law of the country where the main office of IAML is situated which can vary from year to year.

Martie Severt, (Netherlands) noted that according to IAML's Constitution 'The headquarters shall be established at the office of the Secretary General' — Article I: Name and Headquarters. IAML is not registered anywhere and is only governed by its Constitution.

Richard Chesser (United Kingdom, Chair of the Constitution Committee) noted that the Strategy Committee had proposed some major changes which would have implications for the Constitution. If the Council was to become a purely advisory body such work must be perceived as meaningful. Antony Gordon replied that the Council clearly needs to be energized in some way. Clarification is required on who are actually members of Council when it meets. From the point of view of clarity of representation the Strategy Committee had considered the possibility of Council meetings being held as closed sessions or at least for any observers present to be seated separately.

Richard Chesser (United Kingdom). Had the Strategy Committee investigated the ways that comparable associations are organized? Antony Gordon said not formally, but some loose comparisons had been made with IASA and IAMIC.

Moving from a three-tiered to a two-tiered structure would reflect the way that IAML currently functions; Council is not an effective body in current practice

Jerry McBride (USA, President of MLA) suggested that perhaps a Branch might be established to represent non-affiliated members. [These might include those from countries lacking a national branch and those who have preferred to join IAML directly rather than through their national branch.]

Julie Schnepel (USA, RILM US Committee) asked why it would be necessary to keep the General Assembly if it might only play an intermediary role? Antony Gordon tended to agree but said that it had seemed too radical to the Committee to propose its abolition.

Martie Severt (Netherlands, Past President) had an opposing view, that the General Assembly gives all members a chance to meet. Even if all members have the opportunity to vote electronically many will not do so, especially the institutional members. The conference brings together people with some knowledge of the Association. Antony Gordon replied that electronic voting had only been considered as a final back-stop in such cases as the Board having exceeded its powers. There was no intention to use it often.

What is the role of the General Assembly? Maybe we should just put questions to the entire membership, but the risk of that approach is of participation in decision-making based only on partial information.

Almut Boehme (United Kingdom) noted that it is important to be aware of which people at General Assembly are actual members of IAML, not just conference delegates.

Ann Mees (Belgium) doubted that members in general would be sufficiently well-informed that they should be allowed to overrule the Board's decisions. The Board is elected and can be dismissed if the members are not satisfied with its decisions. It should instead consult the membership before decisions are made. Antony Gordon noted that this is the way that most democratic governments work.

Federica Riva (Italy) suggested there is no need to change the structure. It would be better to work within the structure we have. She suggested:

- Use just two sets of initials: IAML, and AIBM which works better for Latin-based languages. Abolish IVMB [since the German Branch itself uses AIBM].
- That electronic voting should be used to elect those who make the decisions but not for other purposes.
- In countries where there is no National Branch the Constitution allows for a national representative present to be recognized as such at a Council meeting. Everybody then has the opportunity to be represented in Council except for those individuals who are not comfortable in their own national branch.

- Democracy needs structure. It is important to establish within which legal framework IAML is operating. The USA and Europe have completely different legal frameworks.
- Don't look to IASA when it comes to structure — it is not a good example. IFLA and IMS work better. Our reference point should be IFLA.
- The Strategy Committee has done a wonderful job, but has arrived at the wrong conclusion. The correct conclusion is the opposite of the one suggested!

Antony Gordon replied that it is not easy to compare IAML with IFLA since they are so different. IFLA is a large well-financed organization while IAML is much smaller and relies almost entirely on voluntary work.

Mary Davidson (USA) noted that General Assembly must be able to meet once a year. the iaml-l listserv is also important for information, but General Assembly is the only place where members can meet face to face.

John Roberts (USA, former IAML President) said that everything is strictly defined in the Constitution and Rules of Procedure. He thought that Council has the most problematic structure in that it has become almost inert and simply does what the Board recommends. How would we be able to infuse it with new vitality if we take away its power? He suggested that the Council is vastly oversized so that it is difficult to have a focused discussion. The Council should serve as an advisory 'think-tank'. We would need to find mechanisms to bring matters forward and use various means of communication.

Ruth Hellen (United Kingdom) noted that General Assembly used to be the longest and most tiresome meeting during the Conference week. It should not return to a simple reporting session but rather it should report on decisions taken by Branch and Commission and on work in progress. She was strongly opposed to Council meetings operating as closed sessions.

Jane Gottlieb (USA) said that there is a need to simplify the complicated structure. The elected Board should be trusted to make decisions. She suggested that the size of the Board might perhaps be increased. Antony Gordon responded that an enlarged Board would have cost implications for the Association. It was noted also that elections of Commission and Branch officers are entirely dependent on who happens to be present at that session.

Inger Enquist (Sweden) agreed with Federica Riva that the structure need to be clear and simple. We should be careful not to 'throw out the baby with the bathwater'. We should ask ourselves: what should IAML be and what should IAML do – and for whom?

Roger Flury (New Zealand, IAML President) thought that the main problem is that things move too slowly. IAML is a federation of associations. We need structure, but we have too many levels within the structure. Maybe we should merge General Assembly and Council into a 'General Council'? We need to tidy up the structure we have and make it more efficient. Empowering the Board would help to speed things up. One should not have to wait two years for a decision to be made. The Board cannot act without some form of outside control as a safety net. A new forum had been established at this conference: the roundtable

discussion between national representatives and the Board. National representatives constitute the core of Council and this forum makes it possible for more direct communication between branches and with the Board members.

John Roberts (USA) confirmed that General Assembly used to meet every three years. In that year the conference was designated as a congress. In the intervening years only the Council met. The current position where both Council and General Assembly meet every year is an anachronism.

David Day (USA) thought that we should have started this process by asking ourselves: What is IAML? What is the purpose of our organization? Is our principal aim to promote projects or to share ideas? Antony Gordon suggested that one aim might be to produce technical and other guidance as IASA does.

Barbara Dobbs Mackenzie (USA, RILM Editor in Chief) thought that IAML's principal aims remain relevant and that we should not redefine IAML's purpose. The structure can remain unchanged. We should work with advocacy,

Antony Gordon replied that some of the younger members of the Strategy Committee had been uncomfortable with the aims as currently framed, because they appear to focus entirely on libraries and institutions and make no reference to the people who run them. There was no suggestion that they should be replaced but rather that they might be rephrased and perhaps added to in order to make them more appealing to prospective members.

What is IAML's role today? What will IAML's role be in the future? We need to bring in new members and change the conference structure.

Anne Mees (Belgium) wondered about IAML's current and future roles and suggested that there is a need to should produce a mission statement and a vision — what we are now and where we expect to be in the year 2025. We should only change the structure after we know what it is we want to do. A new structure will not revitalize the organization; a new purpose will do that. She proposed that the literature on management and governance of non-profit organizations should be taken into consideration.

Notes compiled by Antony Gordon with thanks to Pia Shekhter, Jan Guise and Carolyn Dow

Further comments

Subsequent to the meeting further comments were received in writing including the following points.

IAML needs to consider what its vision is for the 21st century. A mission statement is needed which reflects what IAML actually is and does.

IAML should consider its strengths — what has been accomplished, and where has it been influential?

What are IAML's principal weaknesses — what obstacles hinder progress?

What assets can IAML use to achieve its mission? With which external partners might it usefully collaborate to further its goals?

Which external obstacles (economic, cultural, social or legal) might prevent IAML from achieving its objectives?

After considering these questions a strategic planning committee should be appointed whose composition reflects that of IAML's membership and overall structure. Members of the committee need to be focused on the process and should not be volunteers. Individual committee members or small subgroups should gather information in relation to the questions above. The Committee should report on its discoveries at the 2013 Vienna conference with a plan, sets of priorities and target dates for their accomplishment.