



AITA/IATA asbl

32nd World Forum and General Assembly

Ypres/Ieper & Westouter 2015

Volume III

A Time to Renew

Contents

Suggestions for changes to the Association for consideration
at the 2015 aita/iata Open Forum Page 1

Suggestions for changes to the Association for consideration at the 2015 aita/iata Open Forum

Draft 2.6 of 3 June 2015

This document describes the path taken by the aita/iata Council and the appointed Renewal Committee over the last two years in considering options for the future of the organisation. The document will set out some of the thoughts that have occupied the work of the Renewal Committee and Council and also attempts to take in to account the feedback received from members and other stakeholders.

Council has organised the programme of the 2015 Forum in Ypres to ensure that adequate time is made available to discuss, workshop and gather further thoughts around potential changes for the organisation. This Renewal Document includes some ***consultative proposals*** for consideration by members within the Open Forum. Delegates attending the Open Forum will be given the opportunity to discuss and consider the ideas set out in this document and other ideas that spring from the debate in Ypres. Council will be seeking to establish whether the proposed direction of travel and suggested changes have the general support of members.

Renewal is a process and as such the process for aita/iata remains consultative and ongoing.

Background

Council recognised a need to look introspectively at the organisation: almost unchanged structurally since its inception in 1952 and now trying to operate in a global digital network environment. Council invited former aita/iata Treasurer, Dirk De Corte, (a change management consultant) to assist the Renewal Working Group in investigating the efficiency and efficacy of the organisational structure and to propose changes.

In February 2013, Council agreed to offer members the opportunity to engage in a "change workshop" as part of the 2013 Monaco Congress ("the Monaco Workshop"). This workshop dealt with one basic question: *what are the biggest concerns our members experience in relation to aita/iata?* The workshop, attended by 40 people – mainly aita/iata delegates with a deep knowledge and understanding of aita/iata - from all over the world, identified *networking* as aita/iata's main strength and *cultural diversity* as its biggest opportunity. Major weaknesses were identified as the *heavy structure* of the organisation, an *exclusive, elitist image*, its struggle to function as a *global organisation* and the *flow and exchange of information*, through the network, which was thought of as being *indirect* and *too slow*.

It became clear at the Monaco Workshop that the future of aita/iata depends on it changing from its present closed, hierarchical structure to an organisation that is open to the amateur theatre world in its entirety. This requires the organisation to evolve into an *open, fluid, network-driven* organisation that is by necessity less structured and hierarchical and more accessible and flexible. Structural reform will enable the organisation

to open up to new ideas and partnerships, to meet present-day challenges more nimbly and to respond flexibly to the opportunities of the digital world.

Council established a Renewal Working Group¹ immediately following the Monaco Workshop. Other key individuals were invited to attend meetings and to contribute their expertise.

The Renewal Working Group recognised the willingness and flexibility of the Council to adapt and to be flexible and the commitment of successive Councils and Presidents throughout the history of the organisation to ensure that aita/iata remains current, vital and relevant.

Council have reached a stage in the renewal process where they wish to discuss and consult with the membership on nine (9) proposals for change at the Open Forum in Ypres, Flanders, Belgium in 2015. The intention is to present these proposals and to explain the thinking behind them. In the general interests of transparency and openness, Council wishes to explain the direction of travel that they have taken in their thinking and the stage they have reached. These proposals will not be formally voted upon in the 2015 General Assembly but Council will take them away and consider them in the light of discussion that takes place in the Open Forum in Flanders.

The Proposals

The Renewal Proposals for consultation are the following:

1. *Congress should be split into a formal General Assembly and an "Open Forum", open to everyone with an interest in amateur theatre*
2. *Associates should be granted Membership (with voting rights in GA)*
3. *International Festivals, as well as other institutions with an interest in amateur theatre, should be encouraged to become Associate Members (with voting rights in GA).*
4. *Voting rights in the GA should be changed to ensure equal representation across the membership with 1 vote for all Members*
5. *aita/iata should no longer have 3 "Language Secretaries". Communication in the official aita/iata languages is a joint responsibility of the Council*
6. *The present "three-tier structure" (GA-Council-EB) should be simplified into a "two-tier structure" (GA-Council)*
7. *The number of Councillors (15) should be reduced to 9*
8. *The GA elects 9 Councillors into the Council, whereby*
 - a. *GA continues to elect President –Council to elect Secretary and Treasurer among themselves*
 - or*
 - b. *Councillors elect the President, Secretary and Treasurer among themselves*
9. *The President is no longer elected 2 years ahead of taking office, but takes office immediately after being elected*

¹ Dirk De Corte led the work and Council appointed Aled Rhys-Jones as WG co-ordinator, Merja Laaksovirta, Rob Van Genechten, Willy Dall; Izumi Yoshida and Simon Blaschko.

The Proposals in Detail

1. *Congress should be split into a formal General Assembly and an "Open Forum", open to everyone with an interest in amateur theatre*

The purpose of this proposal is to separate the required legal and formal elements of a General Assembly from developmental and creative discussions on matters relating to international amateur theatre; shifting the focus from the very technical, formal business required for the GA, to an open network space allowing fresh ideas to blossom and free discussion to take place. The GA will then concentrate on its main, statutory tasks: approving budgets and accounts, accepting new members, expelling members, electing councillors, dismissing councillors, changes in/to the constitution and dissolution of the association². The aim is for the GA to take *half a day*.

Alongside the GA, a "Forum" will be held, open to everyone *with an interest in international amateur theatre*, to include members as well as potential members of aita/iata. Council wishes to encourage Festival participants to attend and contribute to a wide-ranging debate. Council has previously held successful open space events within the programme of the Congress but this proposal suggests a complete shift in focus and emphasis from the formal business of the General Assembly to that of an inclusive creative forum. The Forum programme will be the responsibility of Council and will be a gathering where ideas can be exchanged; visions about amateur theatre developed; partnerships sought for collaborative projects; and "grass-root idea generation" will be encouraged. The Forum will influence and inform Council when drafting future strategy papers which the GA will be asked to approve, thus tying grass-roots participants into the strategic development of aita/iata.

Participation will be open to everyone, however, for practical reasons, it may be necessary to require advance registration. This event should be open, inclusive and free of charge.

2. *Associates should be granted Membership (with voting rights in GA)*

In 1952 the structure of aita/iata, as a collection of National Centres (NC), made sense in its aim to bring nations together after almost 50 years of global conflict. Before the advent of the Internet, contact between amateur theatre groups interested in international co-operation could only happen through National Centres. The world has changed from one where communication by letter took many days or weeks and telephone communication was prohibitively expensive, to a world where the immediacy of low-cost or free digital communication via SMS, email or Skype facilities is accessible in most homes in the developed world. And where amateur theatre enthusiasts can make immediate contact with each other without leaving their chairs, thus making the world of NC as conduits and gatekeepers of information essentially a thing of the past.

Our current structure limits those with an interest in international amateur theatre in countries without a NC to a relationship without representation or a formal voice. At

² Under the Belgian law of non-profit associations (*associations sans but lucratif, verenigingen zonder winstoogmerk*) these competences have to remain within the GA. aita/iata asbl-vzw is a non-profit organisation registered under Belgian law (5 March 2003)

present, Associates, although paying a fee do not have voting rights in the General Assembly. Council considers that it is time for our organisation to open up to all those interested in international amateur theatre and give them a voice and say in the future of aita/iata. NC will continue to be a keystone of our association and will remain as "knowledge centres" and "centres of expertise". But if our international theatre network is to develop and flourish, it will be through individual theatre groups, individual enthusiasts and new networks who have so far remained outside our association.

The proposal which Council wishes members to consider is to grant Associates formal Membership and voting rights, with the same proxy mechanism as other members. A voting Associate may carry one vote only on behalf of another Associate or Member and proxies can only be carried by Members who attend the General Assembly.

Council accepts that granting voting rights to Associates may be perceived as a threat by some NC. However, the perception expressed strongly in the Monaco Workshop that aita/iata is an exclusive, elitist organisation needs to be addressed. In a move to greater openness and inclusivity, we need to open the doors and demonstrate our willingness to engage and connect with new partners. In addition, by increasing our membership base we may potentially provide a long-term financial solution for our organisation.

By creating a strong Associate membership base it may become necessary to build in mechanisms to protect the rights of different member categories to avoid situations where those in one membership category could potentially expel members from another membership category (eg a number of Associates voting to exclude a National Centre). For instance a 2/3 majority of both the whole GA as well as the member category of the member to be accepted or expelled would be needed. **Council pledges to establish safeguards to protect the rights of different member categories.**

3. *International Festivals, as well as other institutions with an interest in amateur theatre, should be encouraged to become Associate Members (with voting rights in GA)*

Council recognises that International Festivals embody aita/iata's mission statement by connecting people internationally through theatre. It should be noted that International festivals of amateur theatre may already apply for Associate status within aita/iata. Council wishes to promote and encourage relationships with international festivals globally and to offer Associate Membership *with voting rights* as in proposal two above. In a new, revived, network-based organisation these Festivals would become vital network platforms for exchange of creative ideas, knowledge and good practice. At the Monaco Workshop, "Networking" was identified as a key strength establishing and reinforcing the organisation's mission.

Alongside International Festivals, theatre schools, educational institutions, universities and other institutions with a particular interest in amateur theatre will also be encouraged to join and enlarge our network-organisation.

Granting Membership status to international festivals should not be confused with granting international festivals the label of *Official aita/iata Festival*. All Official aita/iata Festivals would be eligible to apply for Associate Membership.

4. *Voting rights in the GA should be changed to ensure equal representation across the membership with 1 vote for all Members.*

At present, National Centres carry 6 votes. Affiliate members are seeking ratification as a NC and have 2 votes³. Associates currently have no voting rights.

On the assumption that the membership will support the thinking behind proposal 2 and 3 above to give Associates (and International Festivals *as well as other institutions with an interest in amateur theatre*) voting rights, Council would like to consider giving all Associates one vote. This would create a situation where NC have 6 votes, Affiliates have 2 votes and Associate Members have one vote. Council recognises, therefore, that in order to move towards a truly egalitarian organisation, it would become logical and necessary to move to a simple one Membership one vote system.

The allocation of 6 votes to a NC dates from the very beginning of the association when, in some countries it was necessary to address geopolitical issues and some NC were represented by more than one organisation / culture / language. Although Belgium, Switzerland and Canada, retain organisations based on language / cultural divisions, most philosophically and politically organised groups have ceased to exist.

Council would like to introduce an egalitarian Simple Voting system where each member carries one vote. This option would encourage the involvement of Associate Members and fully endorse a new commitment from the organisation to open up to a wide range of international amateur theatre practitioners and supporters. It will also enable the organisation to be transformed quickly into an open network organisation making us less hierarchical and bringing us closer to the grass-roots.

5. *aita/iata should remove the elected posts of the 3 "Language Secretaries". Communication in the official aita/iata languages is an operational matter and therefore the internal responsibility of the Council.*

At present, the EB has three elected secretaries dealing with the three official working languages, French, English and Spanish. The secretaries are currently members of EB and Council, and form 3/7 of the EB (President, Vice President, Treasurer and Co-ordinator for Children and Youth being the other members). In no way does the Council question the need for the three official languages. Communication is fundamental for the effective functioning of the organisation and is a joint operational responsibility of Council. Council is responsible for the correct preparation and translation of documents equally in all three languages. Council would like to suggest that the posts of the three language secretaries are removed and that the responsibility for communication in whatever language is placed at the heart of the operation of the organisation. Council will remain responsible for ensuring that all Information and communication will continue to be presented and

³ Apart from Aruba and the Faeroe Islands who have permanent Affiliate status.

available in all three official working languages.

6. *The present "three-tier structure" (GA-Council-EB) should be simplified into a "two-tier structure" (GA-Council).*

The GA is the ultimate decision making body of the Association. The Council is currently made up of the Board of Representatives and the Executive Board (EB). At the moment the agendas of EB and Council meetings often overlap. It is often the impression that there is double handling of work. Although the Council is formally taking decisions, the "translation" between *taking* those decisions (Council) and *executing* them (EB) is often confusing. That is why the creation of one entity, alongside the GA, is suggested. By law (Belgian Law on non-profit organisations) a Council is mandatory, an EB optional. Therefore Council suggests abolishing the EB and transforming the present three-tier structure into a much simpler two-tier structure. This positive step forward will reduce travel costs for Council members and streamline the decision-making process.

7. *The number of Councillors (15) should be reduced to 9*

The current Council is made up of the Board of Representatives and the EB. The Regions elect representatives to the Board of Representatives. The GA formally ratifies these appointments. The Executive Board is made up of individuals elected by the GA for specific responsibilities / posts: President; Vice-President; Treasurer; Co-ordinator for Children and Youth; English, French and Spanish Speaking Secretaries.

This structure of the Council is, therefore, based on *representation* from the Regions. Over a number of years Council has recognised the weaknesses of the Regional structure which in reality numbers five functioning Regions and focuses the organisation firmly on Europe with input from the Asian Regional Centre and the US.

Despite over twenty years of considerable effort to try and establish a global network of Regions, successive Councils have failed in their efforts. The current situation is an incomplete picture of Regions based on Cultural or Geographical links. It has proved impossible to make huge areas of the world fit into the current aita/iata representational structure and therefore much of the world has tenuous connections with aita/iata whilst other areas have no connection at all. Areas for the Caribbean, Central America and South America have all been active for short periods but have largely relied on the input of one active individual, group or NC and have rarely constituted vibrant, active, Regional organisations. Oceania has from time to time been represented within the Asian Regional Committee but the federal nature of Australia has proved difficult to work with within the current structure of aita/iata. As a continent, Africa has many, many issues with a myriad of complexities and for a small under resourced organisation like aita/iata and our members, relationships have by necessity been targeted and opportunistic in nature; where an active contact appears then NC's grasp the opportunity to collaborate and build partnerships. Some North African countries find Regional representation through CIFTA through former colonial links of language. The NARA Region is in reality the US as Canada no longer has an active NC and the Federation Quebecois works within CIFTA.

However, the current system of Regional representation ensures the continuity of the reasonably robust (but in most cases not fully-functioning), Regional organisations in parts of the world, whilst frustrating work with those areas of the world where creating a Regional association is not a practical or viable option and prevents these areas from full involvement in the Association.

The nature of this system currently requires that Regional representatives to the Council represent their Regional agenda's whilst addressing aita/iata organisational issues at the same time, and can place representatives in positions of potential conflict of interest. The current structure stresses *representation* before *solidarity* and the best interests of aita/iata. Council wishes to move to a system where Council members focus on the strategic priorities of aita/iata regardless of any personal or Regional agendas.

The dilemma that presents itself is that the functioning Regional associations will, in all likelihood, vote against the move from a system based on Regional representation in order to ensure the continuation of the status quo, under the misconception that their role within the organisation will cease. The role of the Regional Associations is to develop and encourage opportunities for international amateur theatre within their Regions and to network with other Regions for the same purpose. The Board of Representatives was added to the function of Council in 1969 - in a pre-Internet world - to ensure the free-flow of information on Regional events and projects and to encourage greater inter-Regional cooperation. In a digital world other opportunities exist for communication and collaboration and whilst Council does not wish to challenge the existence of the Regional Associations and will support them where they exist, it acknowledges that representation on Council of a small number of Regions prevents the organisation from fully developing as a global association and needs reviewing.

It is, at this stage, important to stress that under Belgian law people elected as Councillors of a non profit organisation are *not personally liable*, but act as a *single body collectively responsible for all decisions taken*,. This, again, stresses the *team-aspect* of the Council.

Council's suggestion is to abolish the Board of Representatives and Executive Board in favour of a Council of 9 Councillors elected directly by the GA. Those 9 Councillors will jointly form the Council. The Council members will elect a (President⁴), Secretary and Treasurer and, although not required legally, could choose to elect a Vice-President⁵. So under this proposal, the GA no longer elects individual posts⁶ but a group of 9 competent individuals as Councillors.

Under this proposal, Councillors can come from all membership categories (Associate Members also) and no longer need to belong to a National Centre or a Region, neither do they have to be supported by a National Centre nor by a Region to put forward their candidacy. Any member of the association can indeed be a candidate for any post. This

⁴ See Proposal 8

⁵ Alternatively, in case of absence of the President, chairing the meeting can be done by the oldest (or youngest) member of the Council

⁶ with the possible exception of the President: see Proposal 8

clearly meets the request of *openness* and *inclusivity* that came out of the Monaco Workshop. Members may still vote for an individual based on their cultural, Regional, or language background if that is important for them but Council would encourage that the emphasis be moved to creating a committed, efficient, effective leadership team.

Council have noted some sensitivity around this issue and would like to suggest that a new Strategic Plan and Supporting Business Plan be developed for the Association embedding the work of the Committee for Children and Youth intrinsically within the development of all future planning of policy and development of the Association. Any future Council should also look to establish new links and avenues of communication with those existing Regional Associations and to investigate new ways of working with areas of the world where aita/iata is under-represented or unknown.

The Renewal Proposals fundamentally differ from the present situation in three ways:

1. Whereas under the present situation, the EB cannot have more than one citizen from the same country⁷, in theory in the new structure all 9 Councillors could potentially come from the same country. In practice though it will be extremely unlikely that 9 people from one country would actually stand as well as those 9 getting a majority of votes in the GA, as the resident country of these candidates would only have a limited number of votes anyway.
2. As a result of the reduction of council members, Regions would no longer have a *guaranteed presence* in the Council whereas some Regions could in theory be "over-represented". In practice, the latter is already the case under the present situation, as all 7 EB members could, theoretically speaking, come from one Region; the current EB has only one non-European member. But here again, the GA has autonomous power to decide whatever it feels proper.
3. The current system allows for one representative of the Committee for Children and Youth to have a guaranteed seat in the Council. Council's Proposal to remove this guarantee is not to be interpreted as seeking to diminish the status of the committee. Quite the contrary. Council celebrates and promotes the work of the Committee for Children and Youth. Indeed, under the new system, *more than one* member of the Committee of Children and Youth can put themselves forward for Council election. If the success of this Committee is clear to all Members, the chance that one of its committee members are elected, should they wish to stand, is more than likely. In a renewed aita/iata, Council envisages the creation of other sub-committees for specific areas of work such as Senior's Theatre, Disability Theatre or Student Theatre the suggested changes will make this development easier to implement.

Mandates for all Councillors are 4 years, renewable once with a term of 4 years. As the

⁷ Under the present situation, it is theoretically possible, though, to have 3 Council members from the same country. This would be the case if one citizen of a multi-lingual country (say, Canada, Belgium or Switzerland) would be elected for the EB and one citizen of that same country were to be Regional representatives of NARA and one representative of CIFTA in the case of Canada; of CEC and CIFTA in the case of Belgium and Switzerland

Council is partially renewed every two years, election of individual posts President⁸, Treasurer, Secretary, and (if Council thinks proper) Vice-President, will be for 2 years, renewable as long as the Council Member holds their seat in the Council (8 consecutive years maximum).

8. *The GA elects 9 Councillors into the Council, whereby*

a. *GA continues to elect President – Council to elect Secretary and Treasurer among themselves*

or

b. *Councillors elect the President, Secretary and Treasurer among themselves*

For the election of a President, the Council proposes two possible options.

We either keep the current system where the President is elected directly by the GA, leaving 8 other Councillor posts up for election (“the 8+1 Variant”). Or, alternatively, the 9 Councillors elect the President amongst them (“the 9 Variant”).

Supporting Proposal 8a. allows for the GA to elect a “representative” of its organisation. In that case, the “prestigious” election campaigns for a President will continue.

By supporting Proposal 8b. the nine Councillors, once elected by the GA, select a person from their number to represent the organisation as President. This system stresses an egalitarian ethos of representation and equanimity of responsibility within a team of Council members where all members share responsibility equally but the selected President is the spokesperson and front-person. This shifts the focus within the Council to one of solidarity, joint effort and labour and removes the current perception of a prestigious elite with a ‘crowned’ leader.

9. *The President is no longer elected 2 years ahead of taking office, but takes office immediately after being elected*

Whatever the decision of Proposal 8, the President will no longer be elected two years in advance. The President will take up post immediately⁹ following election. This proposal serves to remove the requirement to elect a President-Elect.

At the 2015 GA in Ypres members will be asked to vote on a proposal to reduce membership fees to more affordable levels with fee categories continuing to mirror the four Categories of the UN HDI list. In doing this Council wishes to address the general criticism from members regarding the affordability of the membership fee. This reduction in income will have to be addressed in order for the association to remain financially viable. In order for the organisation to afford this reduction in income from membership fees it will become necessary to both increase the number of paying members, potentially through increasing the number of Associates and possibly by identifying other sources of income.

⁸ See Proposal 8

⁹ “immediately” meaning the meeting immediately following the GA or Council-meeting where the election is held.

Next Steps

- Present version 2.6 to Open Forum in Ypres 2015
- Seek Mandate from General Assembly in Ypres to continue Renewal Process and Working Group
- Council to take into account feedback from Open Forum

Drafted by Dirk De Corte, 23 November 2014

Amended and Edited by Aled Rhys-Jones and Anne Gilmour 2nd + 5th December 2014

Amended and Edited by Aled Rhys-Jones, Rob Van Genechten and Dirk De Corte 22nd March 2015

Amended and Edited by Aled Rhys-Jones 3rd June 2015

Exhibit 1: Present Structure

Exhibit 2: Proposed Structure

Versions of the Document

- Version 1.1 of 26 June 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 1.2 of 29 June 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 1.3 of 30 June 2014 (***final version 1 – disclosed and distributed***)
- Version 1.4 of 7 July 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 2.1 of 22 November 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 2.2 of 23 November 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 2.3 of 5 December 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 2.4 of 7 December 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 2.5 of 22 March 2015 (*working version*)
- *Version 2.6 of 3 June 2015 (current version)*

The Renewal Working Group met on the following occasions:

- Ghent (November 2013)
- Rødekro (January 2014)
- Monaco (March 2014) – together with EB
- Venice, Florida (June 2014) – together with Council
- Lingen (July 2014) – together with Council
- Peligros (November 2014) – together with Council
- Vienna (February 2015) – together with Council
- Ghent (April 2015)