REPORT ON DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES -
IATEFL ASSOCIATES' WORKING PARTY

Data Collected by Sara Hannam, Associates' Coordinator

Report Compiled and Written by Les Kirkham, TESOL Arabia

Final Report: September 2008

Purpose of Working Party

The Coordinating Committee felt it would be useful for IATEFL to have a broader overview of the kinds of operational structures to be found across a wide spectrum of its Associates. A number of Associates also expressed an interest in being given a deeper insight into the way their fellow associates function and what kinds of measures are being taken to ensure wider access. This research was carried out from January 2007 until September 2008. Those involved are in some cases no longer on the governing boards of their Association, so the responses should be read with that in mind.

Participants
The following participants initially expressed an interest in becoming part of the Working Party. Not all actually responded to the questions.

Sara Hannam, IATEFL
Associates' Coordinator, WP Convener, Participant hannam@city.academic.gr
*Responding on behalf of IATEFL in a personal capacity

Silvija Andernovics,
Deputy Associates' Coordinator, Participant [local level: LATE, Latvia]
andys@latnet.lv

Ann Ingutia –
Participant [local level: BETA-SAIYA Kenya] anningutia@yahoo.com

Ellie Boyadzhieva –
Participant [local level: BETA, Bulgaria] alek@bcci.bg

Les Kirkham –
Participant [local level: TESOL Arabia] leskirkham@gmail.com

Elmira Ilizarova –
Participant [local level: AzETA, Azerbaijan] e_ilizarova@yahoo.com

Ragsana Mammadova –
Participant [local level: AzETA, Azerbaijan] ragsana.mammodova@fco.gov.uk

Ana Falcao –
Participant [local level: SALT, Brazil] anacik@gmail.com

Maria Sachpazian –
Participant [local level: TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece sachpazian@yahoo.com

Zoltan Poor –
Participant [local level: IATEFL Hungary] poor.zoltan@freemail.hu

Tatiana Ivanova –
Participant [local level: SPELTA Russia] Tatiana-szelinger@yandex.ru

PROCESS
- **QUESTIONS ASKED**
  Contributions were solicited in two stages. The first stage consisted of the following direct questions:
  a) **What kinds of structures exist to ensure that democratic principles are in place?**
  b) **Is this written down in a document? (And if so would you be happy to let us all see a copy?)**

    c) **What areas need working on to make the TA fairer and more accessible? What work is being done at the local level to this end?**
    d) **How is the Executive Council chosen? (i.e., by election or not, who votes and how this is arranged)**
    e) **How often is the Executive changed?**
    f) **How often are meetings held for i) the Executive Council, ii) the general membership,**
    g) **How do the Special Interest Groups operate?**

In the second stage, participants were invited to comment on their views on the following:
The word 'Democracy' – do you think it is still acceptable to use it?
1. **Ensuring more volunteers**
2. **Increasing the accountability of volunteers**
3. **Increasing the amount of local volunteers in TAs that have chapters or branches outside the capital city or other central place**
4. **Overcoming the lack of email access for some of the members**
5. **Making sure information gets through to members**
6. **Making sure that committee positions rotate regularly, especially President**
7. **Making sure members see things from all perspectives, not just their own.**
8. **Making sure there is a balance of native/non-native speakers at management level**
9. **Making sure there is a fair mix of gender at management level.**
10. **Anything else you would like to comment on that has to do with fairness or democracy in your TA.**

RESPONSES

Six TAs responded to the stage one questions. Three of these six TAs contributed views at stage two. IATEFL contributed answers to both stages in a personal capacity via Sara Hannam. Several contributors emphasized that views presented were their own, and should not necessarily be regarded as "official" views of the Association they represent. Some questions were not answered directly, in which case neither a positive nor a negative response has been assumed, unless the question was answered in a different context.

Complete TA responses can be found in files <democracyresponses1.doc> and <democracyresponses2.doc>. The IATEFL responses is in <IATEFLdemocracyresponse> and a collated summary of responses in <DemocracyResponsesCollated.doc>.

FINDINGS
First Stage (Seven respondents)
    a) **What kinds of structures exist to ensure that democratic principles are in place?**
All respondents have a written constitution, though descriptions of these range from "brief" to "detailed".
Five of the seven respondents mentioned elections, four have AGMs and three have a newsletter or a website.
Only one has its accounts properly audited, though three more publicise their accounts to the membership.
Only one has a publicised complaints procedure.
Just three out of seven mention recording minutes of face-to-face leadership meetings.

    b) **Is this written down in a document?**
All respondents have a written constitution and/or articles of association, though descriptions of these varied between "detailed" and "brief".
Only IATEFL has legal status as a charity, and IATEFL and one other have the status of a limited company.
(And if so would you be happy to let us all see a copy?)
Four associations stated the availability of copies for inspection.

c) What areas need working on to make the TA fairer and more accessible? What work is being done at the local level to this end?
Three refer to needing a broader decision-making base. This has been done by creating more local committee positions in one, and holding local information sessions and seminars in another.
No associations other than IATEFL mention seeing gender or nationality as a significant factor in this.
Three are making efforts to rotate positions, and three have made some provision to allow for financial hardship amongst members by selected reduction of fees. All but one have individual membership, and the remaining one is planning on introducing it.
Four mention distance from potential members as a concern, with local groups and/or reduced fees being established to overcome this.
Lack of management experience is a concern for two.
There is some reluctance to enter into competitive elections in two TAs, though one does not see this as a problem.

d) How is the Executive Council chosen? (i.e., by election or not, who votes and how this is arranged)
All respondents have elections where all members may vote, though two also have some appointed positions.
Four hold elections at the AGM or conference. Of the other three, who hold postal or online ballots, two have electoral committees, and IATEFL has 3rd party supervision.
One elects a Board, where individual responsibilities are then chosen for those elected.

e)   How often is the Executive changed?
Five TAs change each position in the Council every two years, though not necessarily all at the same time. The other changes every three years.

f)   How often are meetings held for
i) the Executive Council,
This ranges from 3 to more than 12 a year.
ii) the general membership,
All respondents have an AGM once a year except one, which has its AGM every two years.

g) How do the Special Interest Groups operate?
Three TAs either have no SIGs or none currently operating.
One has just started with two SIGs.
Two have six operational SIGs each. These operate as sub-groups and have their own committees reporting to the Council.
The tendency seems to be for SIG officers to be appointed rather than elected. Joint events, either with other SIGs or with branches are common.

Second Stage (Four respondents)
The word 'Democracy' – do you think it is still acceptable to use it?
All respondents felt the word must be used as only the word 'democracy' subsumes all the characteristics (fairness, transparency, equality, access, the interests of the members, etc) that we need to demonstrate.

1.   Ensuring more volunteers
The three TAs mentioned a similar range of measures, including training, PD benefits, recognition of work, perks, travel and splitting tasks into manageable workloads (e.g. by having joint position holders)

2.   Increasing the accountability of volunteers
Three mentioned having regular meetings and requiring feedback to keep channels and awareness open.
Careful training and preparation, and continued awareness of the principles of the association, was emphasised by two

IATEFL publicise their expenditure.

One lamented a lack of initiative amongst volunteers so they only do what they are told to do.

3. Increasing the amount of local volunteers in TAs that have chapters or branches outside the capital city or other central place

Two mention perks.

Two mention wide publicity when positions fall vacant.

One mentions skill benefits that can be acquired.

One established more positions at the local level.

IATEFL has reduced fee schemes for territories affected by financial hardship.

4. Overcoming the lack of email access for some of the members

Generally, TAs have retained paper while moving towards e-communication. It seems that in many cases, members and the TAs are acquiring e-facilities together at a similar rate. In the meantime as many media as possible are being used.

5. Making sure information gets through to members

As with the previous issue, a high frequency of information and a wide range of methods are used.

Updating databases constantly is prioritized by three.

Use of outside agencies' communication channels (institutions and government depts.) are mentioned by two.

6. Making sure that committee positions rotate regularly, especially President

Three mention fixed terms of office, with one of these having a waiting period before standing for the same office again.

Two have rotation of offices so, e.g., the President is not constantly in office.

One doubts whether this principle is always appropriate.

7. Making sure members see things from all perspectives, not just their own.

Two respondents mention having a wide range of positions with representation from all sections of membership.

Two highlight open and timely information-sharing.

However, it is acknowledged as a continuing problem.

8. Making sure there is a balance of native/non-native speakers at management level.

Only IATEFL sees this as an issue.

The three TAs see the management mix as representing their membership mix.

9. Making sure there is a fair mix of gender at management level.

Again, the three TAs do not see this as a problem as the management mix reflects the membership mix, even if the membership is mostly female. (Males don't seem to be raising this as an issue.)

IATEFL sees the need for more women of different ethnicities at management level.

10. Anything else you would like to comment on that has to do with fairness or democracy in your TA.

International recognition is seen to be helpful.

One TA stated most of its members join because they are interested in the product of the TA (PD events & publications etc) rather than the process of administration (i.e. the democracy or otherwise of its administration).

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is clear that the Associates demonstrate an enormous variety of structures and organisation. Some have only schools as members, others only individuals; some have fewer than 30 members, others have thousands. Some open membership to all, others only to licensed teachers. Some are highly centralized and others operate a number of local branches. However, the associations also demonstrate an interesting range of similarities which are brought our in the responses to this survey.

2. There is a very clear preference for the use of the term "democracy" in order to encompass all rather than just some of the characteristics represented by the term, and most questioned felt use of this term was still valid despite contemporary misuses in other political contexts. Fairness and transparency are seen as high priorities. As many members need to be involved in decision-making and access to management positions as possible in order to ensure that we are striving to live up to the implications of the idea of "democracy" in our respective organizations

3. All respondents have elections, though the organisation of these varies. Some hold elections at AGMs or annual conferences; others have postal or online ballots. Only IATEFL has third party supervision in the form or external auditors. Management positions are rotated every two or three years in every association.

4. Although many do not have an official legal status as either a company or a charity, all have a written constitution of some kind.

5. There is also more to be done with regard to the official treatment of accounts and minutes. Although many publicise their accounts to members, few have an official audit [we did not establish if this is required by law in all countries questioned]. Minutes of meetings are published in just under half of the respondent's associations

6. All respondents are aware of the need to broaden their decision-making base in line with democratic principles, but none share IATEFL's concern as far as gender or non-native speaker issues are concerned. Most respondents point out that their management reflects the composition of their membership.

7. The encouragement of volunteers is a general concern, with a number of strategies adopted, including specialist training, the provision of perks, and recognition for good service. However there is a feeling that the absence of an abundance of volunteers is a fact of life. In addition, many concede that most people join an association for the professional development of their teaching rather than administrative skills.

8. Regular meetings and requirement of feedback, as well as careful training, is thought to ensure good accountability amongst volunteers.

9. The operation of Special Interest Groups seems patchy. Only a minority are operating them successfully. Most SIG positions seem to be appointed rather than elected.

10. Communication with members is a high priority, with most associations using as many channels as they can rather than relying on just online or paper communication. This includes a variety of e-communications such as Internet lists, SMS, email, websites. For the moment most are retaining paper communications as they and their members move towards increasing use of electronic means.

11. In general, associations believe that many benefits flow from having as good communication as possible with members, with a good supply of accurate information flowing in both directions. This benefits the democratic operation, even-handed fairness and overall efficiency of the association.

DEMOCRACY WORKING PARTY RESPONSES COLLATED:

a) What kind of structures already exist to ensure that democratic principles are in place?

Elections

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
Elections	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	
AGM	Yes	Possible	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Newsletter/Website	Yes		Yes			Yes	
Audited accounts	Yes	Budget publicised	Budget publicised; summary accounts reported at AGM			Planned	Accounts reported to membership
Publicised Complaints Procedure	Yes		No			Planned	
Face-to-face minuted meetings	Yes	Possible	Yes		Yes		

b) Is this written down in a document (and if so would you be happy to let us all see a copy)?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
Charitable status	Yes		Expired				
Legal status as a limited company	Yes		No	As NGO			
Articles of Association/Constitution	Yes	Yes	Constitution, plus by-laws & standing rules	Yes – required legally	Yes	Yes – not yet in English	Yes
Copies available?	Yes		Yes – on website	Yes	Detailed minutes & records kept		

c) What areas need working on to make the TA fairer and more accessible? What work is being done at the local level to this end?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
Need broader decision-	Yes – TAs voices		Yes – more local c'ttee positions		Great efforts made to distribute		

making base			created		information – seminars held locally		
Need all positions in c'ttees to rotate regularly	Yes - SIGs		As above	Yes. IATEFL-like structure introduced			
Fair access to all nationalities	Yes						
Fair mix & access by gender	Yes						
Fair access for special needs	Yes						
Overcome financial hardship	Yes		Yes – school teachers and student teachers have reduced fees				Members outside capital have reduced fees
Offer individual m'ship		Yes – plan to extend m'ship to individuals					
Form SIGs		Yes					
Publish resource materials		Yes					
Face competition for time & resources at weekend events from publishers etc					Yes		
Distance from potential members			Yes – open local Chapters where feasible		Yes	Yes – plan to start local groups	Aim to encourage more members from outside capital, and pre-service teachers too, by reduced fees
Lack of management experience			Yes – leadership programmes for executive				Yes
Reluctance to oppose			Yes – not a worry				Yes – encourage

office-holders in elections							bottom-up decision-making

d) How is the Executive Council chosen (i.e. by election or not, who votes and how is this arranged)?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
Elections?	Yes – some elected, some appointed	Yes	Yes, annually for half of Executive positions each year – elections for all but 'technical' positions (newsletter editor, webmaster); local committee members appointed locally & SIG Chairs appointed by Executive	Yes	Yes, at AGM. Elected to Board, not actual positions.	Yes	Yes
Voters?	All members, TAs, SIGs, depending on position	All members school teachers	All current members are eligible. Low numbers	Current members attending AGM. Good numbers	All members at Convention can vote for 9 people.	Current members who hold Min of ed teaching qualifications	Members at Conferen
Process?	3rd party supervision		Standing Ballot Committee stipulated by By-Laws; nomination & seconding by current members	Nominations at AGM; nominations from floor or executive	Electoral c'ttee. Legal procedure followed beforehand to establish legal quorum at AGM; nomination & seconding by current members	At AGM	At Conferen
Medium	Paper		Electronic: email, or on website	In person	Paper		

e) How often is the Executive Council changed?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
		Every 2 years. 4-year maximum	Every 2 years (President changes	Every 2 years	Every two years	Every 3 years	Every two years

		in each office.	every year)				

f) How often are meetings held for:

i) the Executive Council?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
	CoCo 4 or ExComs 3 times a year; AdvCouncil 1	6 a year	4 a year	3 or 4 times a year	No set number, but more than 6 a year	12+ a year	

ii) the general membership?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA
	AGM once a year	AGM once a year	AGM once a year	AGM once a year	AGM once a year	AGM once a year	Every 2 years?

g) How do the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) operate?

	IATEFL	BETA-SIAYA	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T	SALT	AzETA

Further Questions
Please comment on the following issues:
The Word 'democracy': do you think it is still acceptable to use it?

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Need to live up to it. Means transparency, equality & fairness	Fairness & openness OK, but also need to show members are ultimately in control	Includes openness & fairness. Otherwise dumbing down.	People and their best interest rule.

1. Ensuring more volunteers

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	----	Emphasise PD benefits, give training where possible, recognise good work (in org & to employers), some perks.	Benefit for CV, PD, travel, courses, influence & give back to the profession.	Be friendly, give tasks to pairs, perks, recognition.

2. Increasing the Accountability of Volunteers

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Regular meetings		Few take any initiative	Need for careful preparation and training of volunteers
	Requiring feedback	Require regular reports to Co or Treasurer		
	Open record of expenditure			
	Asking CoCos to consider conflicts of interest	Emphasis on all activities being for benefit of members		
	Need o develop trust with volunteers			

3. Increasing the amount of local volunteers in TAs that have chapters or branches outside the capital city or other central place

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Reduce fees for people in poorer areas	publicity	Few regional activities	Reward
		Emphasise skill benefits	People need to see they can shape	Publicity

		organisation		
		Establishing more local positions in committees		Recognition
		Providing perks		

4. Overcoming lack of email access for some of the members

5. Making sure information gets through to members

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Constant updating of member database	Update database & send updates out to branches & SIGs	Mail, email, website, SMS, regional centres, ministry & govt databases, advertising	Mailed bulletin, answer machine message, SMS
		Use institutions e-lists, website, journal, meetings newsletters		

6. Making sure that committee positions rotate regularly, especially President

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Fixed terms of office	Fixed terms, rota of elections	Doubts about whether rotation always appropriate	Fixed terms, have to wait fixed term before re-applying
		Because of rota, President in office only one year in three, even if elected again.		
		Often see same [people take different positions		

7. Making sure members see things from all perspectives, not just their own

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Try to have representation of all sections of profession	Open and timely information-sharing, but still can be a problem	Can't control this, even if all info provided	Fair & open announcements
		Wide range of positions to represent m'ship		

8. Making sure there is a balance of native/non-native speakers at management level

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Key	Not an issue -	Not an issue – most members NNS	Fair balance now
	Work for diversity of nationalities			

9. Making sure there is a fair mix of gender at management level

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Good number of women	Not an issue – reflects membership	Not an issue – mostly female	Mostly women – reflects membership
	Need for more women of different ethnicities			

10. Making sure people with special needs are represented at management level

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
	Done work for eg website, conf book, disabled access	Nothing specifically done by TA	Hasn't arisen yet	Has not yet arisen
	Work still needed			

11. Anything else you would like to comment on that has to do with fairness or democracy in your TA

	IATEFL	TESOL Arabia	LATE	TESOL M-T
International recognition helpful		Members mostly interested in the product of the TA rather than the process of running it. As such, democracy only an issue when they are not heard	Always make efforts to be fair and even-handed	