



# Participation of Non-Native English Speakers and New Delegates in the Work of the IAA

When attending IAA meetings for the first time, delegates usually find it difficult to understand how the IAA works, which committees are most suitable for them to attend, and what kind of participation is expected from them.

It is therefore important to offer support to first-time attendees, especially if their first language is not English.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage and assist the participation of non-native English (NNE) speakers in meetings and to help both NNE speakers and new delegates to engage fully with the work of the IAA.

## Reasons why non-native English speakers do not play a more active part in the IAA

There are a number of reasons why NNE speakers do not play a more active part in the IAA. To mention a few:

### 1. Cultural

There are differences in working styles and many members must be given enough time to consider the issues in question, and perhaps discuss them with colleagues in advance, in order to formulate their reply in an actual meeting.

### 2. Organizational

Large associations typically have a larger staff and can afford sending one or more representatives to each committee. In addition, it is not uncommon for employers to support activities for the benefit of their employees' profession.

On the other hand, small and medium-sized associations typically have no staff and/or very limited resources. Consequently, they can only send one or two delegates to IAA meetings who are not able to participate in all meetings. In addition, they normally have to prepare for these meetings without employer support.

### 3. Language barrier

This is an evident problem. The knowledge of the English language varies significantly from fluent to barely understandable.

The **written** language barrier is usually lower and easier to remedy. For example, when receiving an email there is usually enough time to think about what word to use and/or look it up in a dictionary. Also, technical texts use technical language which is easier to understand than colloquial language.

The oral language barrier is the most important one and the IAA has developed some concrete measures in order to lower it in the short term.

## Steps to encourage participation

### General

The IAA is an international organization and, as such, all delegates representing its various organizations/countries should be able to participate under acceptable conditions. Everything possible should be done to ensure that delegates' ideas will be listened to and commented on based on their own merit, even if they are not delivered in flawless English.

The use of interpretation services has been ruled out as being too expensive, as well as impractical.

The IAA offers a session in conjunction with each cycle of Council and committee meetings to provide an introduction to the IAA and its operations, as well as to give an overview of recent key activities. All delegates, whether first-time attendees or not, are encouraged to attend this session. The latest [presentation](#) is always available on the website.

Committee leadership play a central role in encouraging the participation of NNE speakers and of new delegates in the work of the IAA. In this respect, the IAA has developed a role paper for committee chairs and vice-chairs to guide them in their roles, which is available on the website. The same paper provides guidance to committee members as well.

### Member associations

Probably for financial reasons, many associations send only enough participants to cover the committee meetings that are of special interest to them. These member associations should be encouraged to send a larger number of representatives if possible. This could be achieved using some financial support from the IAA Special Assistance Fund set up for this purpose. Another way would be to encourage employers of actuaries to assist by paying for travel and accommodation expenses of delegates.

Furthermore, member associations should encourage their representatives to take a more active role in their respective committee's work between the actual committee meetings. This could be done, for example, by providing help in understanding the finer points of distributed material that is usually written in English. A well-prepared participant will have a lower threshold to pass even as regards to making oral interventions during any session. In this context, it is noted that the IAA website provides a translation tool that is continuously improved and developed.

## Delegates

### General

Social events like get-togethers, coffee breaks, luncheons and/or dinners are very useful to provide a valuable opportunity to exercise English both with native English speakers and NNEs. The IAA schedules simultaneous 30-minute coffee breaks in order to offer ample opportunity to network.

The tendency to cling together in mutual language groups is natural but can be avoided, e.g., by seating arrangements at dinner parties that mix people from different lingual backgrounds and experience.

### Native English speakers could:

- Speak slowly, clearly and loudly enough;
- Use simple words; and
- When possible try to provide, at least beforehand, a written summary of what the speaker intends to say.

### Non-native English speakers could:

- Read the IAA Statutes in order to better understand how the IAA operates;
- Read the documents carefully before the meetings;
- Decide which documents are of interest and identify the topics they intend to discuss/present in the meeting;
- If necessary, prepare notes to organize their thoughts on a particular issue;
- Seek feedback from other members of their association;
- Rehearse, if possible;
- Write down keywords they anticipate will be used;
- Ask questions when an issue is not understood (there are likely others who do not understand what is being discussed); and
- Mingle and exchange with delegates from other countries.

## Committee chairpersons

The chairperson of a meeting should:

- Before the start of the meeting, ask NNE speakers whether there are any particular areas to which they would like to contribute. Include an introduction session at the start of the meeting to learn the name and association of each participant.
- Show the agenda on a slide—it will be easier for NNE speakers and newcomers to follow the discussion and know exactly which topic is being discussed.
- Include in the agenda the name of the chairperson and vice chairs of the committee/working group/task force. Although this may be obvious to the majority of members, it is not to everybody.
- Use written slides for discussion of technical subjects. In advance of the meeting, distribute a list, which can also be shown in a slide, of the important technical terms/abbreviations that will be used during the meeting.

- Ensure that all documents are identified with a date and, if the same document is used for more than one meeting, the identification should indicate this (for example, if the same document is being used for Education and Accreditation, it should have EduC n+1/AcdC n/July 2001)—this will reduce the number of copies a delegate attending more than one committee meeting needs to bring and allow them to understand the liaison between these committees.
- Ensure that all documents have page numbers—it will be easier for the chairperson to identify the point of the discussion and for the delegate to orientate himself/herself and have a view of some particular wording used in this context.
- On moving to a new topic of the agenda, present a brief summary in a slide.
- Whenever the discussion is expected to give rise to controversial points, summarize them in a slide—this is particularly relevant when a vote is asked to ensure NNE speakers do not lose the objective of the discussion.
- Remind all present (especially native English speakers) to speak slowly, clearly and loudly enough (without shouting).
- Discourage dialogues between only two people; remind them that the discussion is open to everybody who wants to contribute.
- Give any NNE speaker ample time to speak.
- Actively encourage the NNE speakers and new delegates to participate in the discussions.
- Give positive feedback (help the NNE speaker find the right word and/or summarize the statement in a few words to be certain that the true meaning of what the speaker really wanted to say has been understood).

## IAA Secretariat

### Before each cycle of meetings

- Remind committee chairs of their role;
- Identify delegates that are attending their first meeting, and invite them to the introduction to the IAA presentation; and
- Remind delegates to make allowances for NNE speakers.
- Make sure that the seating arrangement for each committee meeting is well adapted for the number of expected participants.

### At Council

As Council is attended by many delegates that are not well acquainted with the IAA Statutes, there should always be a slide presentation for Council to:

- Introduce the Officers (President, President-Elect and Immediate Past President) including their country;
- Show the names of the members of the Executive Committee and their country;
- Show the number of associations, distributed by size (small/medium/large), continent and language;
- Explain the voting process; and
- Present all motions.

## **At the IAA Dinner**

The tables should ideally have people from different backgrounds and languages—this can only be achieved by mixing people in advance, taking into account continent, country, and language.

The IAA Secretariat plays an important role in helping committee leadership and IAA Delegates implement many of these recommendations.

*Modified to reflect abolishment of the office of the Secretary General: February 1, 2014*

# Acronyms

ADB Asian Development Bank  
AfDB African Development Bank  
AFIR/ERM Actuarial Approach for Financial Risks and Enterprise Risk Management (Section)  
AM Associate Member  
ASTIN Actuarial Studies in Non-Life Insurance (Section)  
AWB Actuaries Without Borders  
BAS Board for Actuarial Standards  
BIS Bank for International Settlement  
EC Executive Committee  
EIOPA European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority  
FM Full Member  
FQA Fully Qualified Actuary  
FTP Fast Track Procedure  
GC Groupe Consultatif Actuariel Européen  
IAA International Actuarial Association  
IAAHS IAA Health Section IAALS IAA Life Section  
IACA International Association of Consulting Actuaries (Section)  
IADB Inter-American Development Bank  
IAIS International Association of Insurance Supervisors  
IAS International Accounting Standard  
IASB International Accounting Standards Board  
IAASB International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board  
ICC International Chamber of Commerce  
IFAC International Federation of Accountants  
IFRS International Financial Reporting Standards  
ILO International Labour Organization  
IMF International Monetary Fund  
IOPS International Organisation of Pension Supervisors  
IOSCO International Organization of Securities Commissions  
ISSA International Social Security Association  
NAIC National Association of Insurance Commissioners  
OECD Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development  
PBSS Pensions, Benefits, Social Security Section  
TOR Terms of reference  
WB World Bank  
WHO World Health Organization  
WTO World Trade Organization