

FIT Secretariat – Before, Now and in Future

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to review the activities of the Secretariat and identify potential changes that can be discussed by EC/Council in order to optimize the time used by the Secretariat and in particular to liberate resources for activities directly focusing on members.

Background/Previous discussions

Below are the work items for the Secretariat as listed in the ED contract.

Strategic insight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert the FIT executive to possible actions, projects or topics of interest to the needs of the FIT membership Participate in strategic planning and the implementation of such plans
Support to FIT Executive and Council members:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist the President and Secretary General on a regular basis Monitor, with the relevant office-bearers, the performance of paid consultants, contractors and volunteers who assist in the work of FIT Keep in close contact with the President, the Secretary General, the Treasurer, and appropriate others on all relevant issues Assist in maintaining links with UNESCO and other international partners
Communication:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive mail and reply or forward to persons concerned Answer calls and emails Draft correspondence, emails, public notices Perform mass emailings to members as necessary Prepare information bulletins and news items for members Give assistance with FIT publications as necessary Liaise with translators, printers, editors and advertisers as necessary Liaise with the FIT Webmaster Post documents on the FIT website Liaise with FIT Committees
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make deposits and payments Liaise with the bookkeeper Record and prepare accounting data as necessary for the bookkeeper Work with the bookkeeper to prepare for the annual audit and liaise with the auditor Work closely with the Treasurer of FIT to monitor the financial affairs of FIT and to prepare required reports and budgets in a timely manner
Meetings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare agenda, collate and forward documents required for EC and Council meetings Attend the annual Council meetings (travel expenses reimbursed by FIT) Attend EC meetings, if the EC so decides, both virtual and physical Prepare the minutes of Council and EC meetings where requested Follow up on decisions taken at meetings Organize e-votes on issues between meetings
FIT World Congress (Statutory and Open):	Note: Statutory congresses are held every three years and preparations start 12 months in advance.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with the Congress organisers and assist as necessary with tasks related to the Open Congress • Prepare the invitations to the Statutory Congress • Manage the registration list • Collate the reports and all the material for the Statutory Congress • Manage the logistics of the FIT prizes (invitation, communication with jury members, communications with recipients, ceremony, etc.) • Manage the registration desk on site • Attend the Statutory Congress
--	--

The official working time for the secretariat is 20 hours a week.

The secretariat was discussed in Council in connection with the submission of the annual report for the past twelve-month period. Below two decisions, as recorded in the minutes of the respective Council meetings.

Johannesburg March 2014

The executive director's report had been made available prior to the meeting and was taken as read. ***The report was unanimously accepted with thanks.***

Some discussion ensued on the breakdown of activities in the secretariat and the fact that the time and budget allocated are not really adequate for the work that is needed. In the previous two or three years, **FIT had widened its range of activities, e.g. holding monthly EC meetings and other changes that has increased the load on the secretariat.** The time had come to redesign the ED's job description – either the budget must be increased to cover additional activities or the workload must be more tightly defined and restricted to correspond with the time budgeted for. An analysis was essential prior to the congress, as there would be financial consequences to the decisions that would need to be considered in setting dues for the coming period. ***Members agreed that such an analysis should be done and taken into account in the proposals to be submitted to Congress.***

Berlin August 2014

Secretariat restructuring was discussed briefly. MB reminded the members that although the last meeting had decided to look at the matter prior to Congress, it had subsequently been agreed that JOE would do so in detail after the Congress, as the matter was too complicated to finalise in the limited time available. She also pointed out that although it would be useful to look at tasks that can be contracted out or delegated outside the secretariat, it should be borne in mind that the decision to use a secretariat/ED meant that the internal systems had to change and the work must be lodged in the secretariat. ***Council members agreed with this, as well as the need for proper job descriptions and technology to make administration more efficient.*** More services were being provided and costs of services had gone up in the past three years. The relative cost of the secretariat was high because FIT's income is small; increasing the income would help. JOE also reminded Council that new projects are needed but all involve extra administration and this must be considered when they are set up. RH asked what type of tasks could be outsourced. JOE responded that the most suitable were those where the entire task, from start to finish, could be taken over by someone else. Some possibilities were the administration of the FIT prizes, registration for the Statutory Congress, the formatting of large documents and possibly the maintenance of FIT e-mail addresses. She also recommended that a system to make FIT documents available to more office-bearers be considered.

The decision from Berlin was for Council in co-operation with JOE to consider restructuring the secretariat.

Below is a detailed description of the individual items listed in the contract.

Strategic insight and support to Fit Executive and Council members, including communication.

Support and strategic advice for President, Council and EC was estimated in the RFP to be about 15%. This activity is based on the ED's regular interaction with individual members of the Council and individual members as well as on the ED's extensive knowledge of and experience from the translation industry. This percentage comes out slightly higher, as it also includes hands-on preparation, drafting and editing of documents in connection with meetings for Council and the EC. This includes preparing agendas for EC meetings and ensuring the follow-up. With the high frequency of EC meetings in 2011-2014 the number of decisions to implement increased.

Mails received in the inbox of a more strategic nature are sent on to the President/EC - if appropriate with a recommendation for action and analysis or with supporting documentation. It goes without saying that this also involves filtering out irrelevant requests. Some requests go directly to the President's inbox, but not always, because the secretariat inbox is the public/general inbox of the federation. **Examples:** requests to participate in EU-projects, requests from the European Union, original request from Translators without Borders and requests based on contacts established at conferences, seminars or at other networking activities where FIT members have been present.

The Executive Director participates in all EC and Council meetings, which is important and invaluable for the running of the Secretariat and the involvement in all matters of the federation.

Communication may be the most important activity for the federation and to a certain extent pervades all activities. Email is the key tool for the Secretariat's communication with the President, the Secretary General, EC, Council and members (existing as well as potential). Requests for information and communication from external partners and the world at large also go through the inbox. About one third of the time of the Secretariat is used for handling incoming mail. The annual average number of emails going through the inbox is probably more than 10,000. Although action is far from always required, it is imperative to keep up-to-date on the contents and assign the emails to the proper folders and/or save them when needed.

In 2011, 2012 and 2013 FIT INFO was sent out on a regular basis, but in 2014 communication with members has mainly been via email about the Statutory Congress. FIT INFO amounted to 5-6 hours of work on an average.

Posting on the FIT website is mainly done by the webmaster(s) (Sabine/Eva) whereas the Secretariat often posts to FACEBOOK. In the previous mandate the Secretariat was not involved in the production of TRANSLATIO.

Administering the FIT Committees is largely a seasonal task connected with the appointment and election of committee members. The administrative work connected with setting up committees is also run from the secretariat, but only occurs once in the life-cycle after the first Council meeting. To a limited extent there is regular contact about various questions and requests for reports etc. in connection with Council meetings. Committees are largely self-sustaining, apart from occasional help with SurveyMonkey or GoToMeeting.

FIT does not have much contact with UNESCO, but another special task of the secretariat to be undertaken before the end of 2014 would be to look into the relevance and the future of the FIT/UNESCO connection.

In line with the Federation's wish to be transparent, a number of initiatives have been implemented in order

to give members a chance to be more involved and make communication more interactive. The poster competition for ITD and the competition for postcards/posters for the anniversary and the involvement through surveys are examples of this. The Secretariat has been closely involved in these activities, setting up the surveys and contributing to the conclusions and the incorporation in the strategic planning in FIT.

New membership applications are processed by the Secretariat in collaboration with the Membership Task Force. This involves the first contact, asking additional questions, control of payment of administrative fee, that all documents are available, etc. etc.

Financial administration

The financial work in the Secretariat comprises invoicing, expense approval, accounting (shared with external accountant) and payments. The data are logged in Excel files and not in a billing/bookkeeping system making financial control time consuming for both the treasurer and the secretariat.

Invoices are individualized according to the number of members (except for members above the size limit and associate members, where the charge is the same for all). Add to this that members have the option to pay their dues into different banks and the fact that we quote our dues in several currencies.

Liaising with the treasurer and the bookkeeper is highly efficient. All payments are done by the secretariat, they are given a NL (account number) and sent electronically with bank statements to the bookkeeper who does the actual bookkeeping. Incoming payments are identified (membership no) and sent to the bookkeeper. She does not have the detailed knowledge of the membership and membership movements (new, terminated members) as does the secretariat.

Invoicing is highly individual as it is based on the number of members in each association, except for associate members and observers where the amount is fixed. The personalized approach is also carried into different payment options, where some members prefer our Luxemburg bank, quite understandably, to avoid bank charges. However, tracking payments has at times been difficult and a lot of time spent. Invoicing was done manually last year, but a mail merge will be set up for 2015.

FIT Congress

For the Berlin Congress a new electronic registration system via Event Brite was set up to reduce the workload. The investment (time-wise) will definitely prove valuable for next time. All-in-all the electronic registration was a time-saving measure and resulted in better information and more efficient managing of the process.

Just after Congress adjustments will be made to the new Council, new groups, addresses and other follow-up to the SC. New Congress preparations start at least 18 months before the next Congress

The FIT Prizes. Right after San Francisco the ED set up a timeline based on the experience from San Francisco and all files were made available to the Committee to use in their preparations for the prize procedures for Berlin. If the procedure starts as early as 18 months before, the time pressure can be reduced and a PR process can be launched ahead of the Congress. This activity can be done by the Awards committee, with limited support from the Secretariat.

Ad hoc projects

Ad hoc projects are to be agreed upon between EC and the secretariat. From time to time, the Secretariat gets involved in ad hoc projects, e.g.:

- The secretariat worked with Changqi Huang from TAC to analyse the ID card scheme. The findings and a report were submitted to Council.
- Organising activities connected with the FIT 60th Anniversary required special attention and was undertaken by the Secretariat.

The total amount of tasks in the secretariat ensure a core in the administration of the federation and ensures the institutional memory in addition to electronic archives.

Administrative infrastructure

We have a complex and in some cases relatively weak administrative infrastructure in FIT. Below is a list of the existing programmes in use:

- A Yahoo-discussion group for Council
- Some council members have FIT addresses, some don't
- Member discussions in a google-group (Set up recently, pending finalizing the guidelines)
- Doodle for meeting planning and yes/no voting
- Survey Monkey for complex surveys and votes.
- GoToMeeting for meetings
- Website transferred to Wordpress in spring (used also for archiving)
- The collaborative tools are: access to the website via login to Council area and the Dropbox system.
- Word – various versions
- PowerPoint – various versions
- Excel
- Dropbox
- An outdated database (Access is no longer supported and the database could not be changed to a new currency without a considerable cost that did not seem worthwhile as it was an old version).

The list shows that our infrastructure is a patchwork of different solutions that are not interconnected. Furthermore it must be taken into account that Council members work with different operating systems and different versions of software (Office versions) and finally the bandwidth for the internet is not equally strong in all countries.

Using different systems is to some extent inevitable as there will always be a need for different tools/different software. Furthermore the federation does not provide “a software package” for all Council members to ensure that all are using the same versions. Work for the federation is based on the use of the individual's own programmes and hardware.

To use many different applications makes it possible to outsource different tasks, but it also requires a clear overview of access and passwords, not to mention the maintenance of email addresses in the different systems, which can be shared between different people. Nevertheless, it must be co-ordinated, as must all activities in distributed organizations.

It is likely that access via the website and Dropbox corresponds to the needs of the Council members for consulting archives and working documents. Automatic version control is not possible in these systems.

For the secretariat as such however, it is necessary to maintain a separate system in order to keep track of the complexity of the tasks. To support the virtual office administrative procedures have been developed to make sure that the secretariat has an infrastructure that supports the federation and ensures that documents can be saved, searched and retrieved. (In the preparations for Statutory

Congress and the Open Congress, several thousand files were generated).

Below examples of how to set up a more integrated and stable infrastructure:

- A common disk (an internet based hosted disk) with access for all Council members, EC and ED, even the bookkeeper. To be managed on different levels with roles and distributed rights of access. This can be rented from many different providers, but doesn't seem to be available from our present provider Hetzner.
- A financial structure, giving the possibility of generating reports, sending out invoices and reminders from a database. More or less automatic.
- Sharepoint is an internet based solution with possible access from anywhere with possibilities for storage and sharing of files. It is a Windows product and could give problems with remote access from MAC environments. It is available in a free version, but it would take some development and assistance from professional developers to adapt it to the needs of the federation.

Time usage and efficiency

The table below gives an overview of the time usage per main activity in the secretariat as presented to SC and shows the development from 2011 to 2013.

	2011	2012	2013
Congress	15%	1%	10%
Support for EC/Council/ President/Sec.Gen. incl. co- ordination of committees	15%	27%	20%
Membership (incl. inbox)	31%	32%	25%
Finance (incl. invoicing)	16%	9%	12%
Administration (updating contacts, archiving, etc)	2%	5%	7%
Others (Publications, mailings, ITD)	21%	26%	26%
Total	100	100	100

As mentioned the secretariat is budgeted for 20 hours a week. With the overtime in the past few years, the **actual AVERAGE time budget adds up to 25 hours a week**. Working efficiently and reducing time and cost was my goal from the outset and all procedures have been set up to achieve this. However, the administrative procedures for a number of activities are the same whether there are a few or many members.

FIT is based on a personalized and very individualized service to its members, this is part of the FIT DNA and the FIT approach, but it comes at a price: spending time. Examples: we offer membership dues based on the exact number of members in the association (except for associate members and observers where the amount is fixed). We offer different bank connections to help members reduce their bank charges and we quote the dues in several currencies.

Working efficiently and reducing time and cost is a constant aim for the ED. However, a basic infrastructure is the same for few members and for many, so it is also a question of having critical mass to reach the balance between spending time and money and having the optimal number of members. To achieve growth in the membership, FIT may need more visible activities, but more activities generate more work. Much of the work can surely be carried out by voluntary officers, but there is always the need for anchoring and co-ordination, keeping track of deadlines, payments and alerts for action.

Can the time spent in the secretariat be reduced from the average 25 hours and maintained at 20 hours?

Possibly. FIT's reaction time to external/internal requests and actions is often being pointed out as being relatively long. One way of dealing with this in the past few years was for the secretariat to work more hours and set up efficient procedures. Continuing with the same time budget within a different setting, such as set up for the new council would ensure the same level of service. However, I believe that a stronger emphasis of project planning and project management including a quality assurance element for all projects would be beneficial and result in a higher degree of efficiency.

Furthermore it must be kept in mind that in the present contract there is a provision for special projects to be negotiated between Council and the ED, if needed.

If FIT was to consider scaling up the secretariat to a 40 hour service several potential projects could be allocated more time, always in co-operation with Council.

- Enhance the active support for Council in its endeavour to develop a value proposition for FIT members.
- Research support for the Intelligence Unit Task force
- Continued development of efficient tools and techniques for the secretariat to the benefit of Council and members
- Support for Regional centres. And for helping the creation of new regional centres.
- Support for member associations in difficulties (financial or otherwise)
- Support for groups who want to create member associations
- More time for support to committees who would like to develop for instance surveys.
- Contact with authorities. Support and advice to national associations that try to get a dialogue with authorities in their respective countries.
- Contact and follow-up with international institutions where FIT is a partner/member (Translators Without Borders, EU-projects)
- Co-ordination of marketing activities, membership campaigns
- Support for activities re. ITD. More intense follow-up with the associations
- Develop the scheme and the co-operation model for Associate members

Maintaining the current level of hours doesn't mean that these projects cannot be launched, but the implementation time will most probably be longer.

Summary and conclusions

At this point, FIT is a few months into a new mandate and new procedures for EC and Council have already been implemented. So far only one EC/Council meeting was organized, considerably limiting the time spent on the preparation of agendas and minutes. Work has been distributed differently among Council members, potentially reducing the need for support. There are also proposals to streamline the communication effort to avoid sending out redundant information.

My preliminary conclusion is that as far as redesigning the ED's job description the urgency has been reduced

due to recent changes, but looking forward there are some tasks that can be considered reorganised/outsourced. Overall, I believe that we will know more in 3-6 months when the recent adjustments have been in place for some time and I recommend that further adjustments are carefully planned in close co-operation between the Secretariat and Council in order to be sustainable for a future development of the federation. .

Basel, November 2014

Jeannette Ørsted

Executive Director

