

Guest Editorial

IUPS OUTREACH STRATEGY STAGE 1: OUTREACH TO MEMBER SOCIETIES

“The role of IUPS should be a global one. While its congresses, meetings and organisation are naturally dominated by those regions of the world where our science is well-developed, they represent only 10-15% of the world’s population. IUPS has an obligation to the 85-90% in the developing world, the under-developed world and what are called the ‘war zones’. It should be a world beacon. We strongly recommend that its four year cycle of Congresses should be continued as one of the most visible parts of that beacon. Ways should be found to increase participation from poor and developing countries.”
(From *Report of Long-Range Planning Committee of IUPS*)¹

““What on earth does IUPS exist for?” We need to give back to you, to the young and upcoming physiologists the conviction that we are creating the environment in which our subject can flourish, and flourish effectively. What we are going to do with regard to the activities of IUPS is to greatly expand the outreach to the community, not only to our fellow physiologists but also to the general public, and for that reason, we have taken decisions at Council meetings here to see how we can expand our membership.”
(From *IUPS President’s speech at Closing Ceremony, Kyoto 2009*)¹

At its meeting in May/June 2010, the Executive Committee and Council of IUPS will be considering proposals regarding the relations between IUPS and its member societies in order to implement the ideas expressed in the above quotations.

The problem

The problem is a perception, particularly amongst the larger society members, but not exclusively so, that IUPS sometimes seems remote and that it does not consult enough with the member societies. Strictly speaking, this is a perception (albeit a real one) more than a necessary feature of the way in which IUPS is organized since, constitutionally, the General Assembly (GA) holds real power. Only the GA can approve bids for hosting Congresses, only the GA can approve the election of Officers and Council members, and only the GA can approve changes to the Constitution. The reality, however, is that it is extremely rare for the GA and member societies who nominate the delegates to the GA to challenge slates for Council membership or election

¹Full texts of the Long Range Planning Report and the President’s speech can be found on the IUPS website, www.iups.org. The speech is also included in one of the documentary videos from the Kyoto Congress.

of Officers, or changes to the Constitution. The GA can therefore feel like a rubber stamp on decisions already made. There is also a natural feeling that, by the time the GA meets just before a Congress, it is far too late to make meaningful proposals. Moreover, distinguished and busy people have to be persuaded to put themselves forward as Officers or members of Council long before their names are put up formally for approval. The real process has to begin well before the GA, in fact at least a year before.

A related problem is the outreach of IUPS towards the areas of the world (estimated as 85% in the Long Range Report) where strong physiological societies either do not exist or are very different from the large societies in countries where the physiological sciences are well-established. We are not succeeding as well as we should in this kind of outreach. To achieve this, we need to offer genuine incentives to feel involved. We suspect that this lack of involvement may have led some smaller societies to let their membership of IUPS lapse, or have discouraged others from joining. We suspect that this is a problem common to the biological science international unions, so we intend to explore possible co-operation with them.

Finally, we think that IUPS could do more to promote interest in the World Congress via the member societies. A strong liaison between IUPS and the member societies is required to achieve that. Even some of the larger societies do not send very many scientists to the Congress. Those who were present in Kyoto, amongst the 4000 or so who took part, will know what a great meeting it was, and how much people benefit from taking part. There is a great message here, but it needs communicating. (In later

outreach strategy documents, we will be addressing the questions of publicity and finance).

Possible solutions

Ideally, IUPS should be the servant of its member societies, operating more like a Federation, with the member societies having a real say in the way in which IUPS is organized and how it develops policy. An extreme solution would be to have a Council member from every society. In practice, this is impossible. A Council of more than 50 members would be unwieldy, and also prohibitively expensive. Moreover, that solution would not pay sufficient attention to the very different natures of the adhering bodies, which range from strong and highly-active societies that organize meetings attracting 1000 or more participants to societies that consist of little more than a couple of officers and a few members. IUPS needs to cater for the whole range of its membership. That membership is very varied, with quite different needs, and perceptions of what they want from IUPS.

Federal organizations have several solutions to this kind of problem. Usually, they consist in having a bi-cameral system, one in which all members have an equal, or at least more equal, say, and another that represents the distribution of effective influence. In the present constitution of IUPS, the GA is supposed to serve the first role (albeit approximately since larger societies can send more delegates), while Council serves the second to some degree, again only approximately since even some very large societies do not currently have a member on Council. If they always did, the smaller societies would never have a Council member.

One possible solution is therefore to ensure that representatives of member

societies can interact with IUPS even between congresses. This could be achieved if, instead of waiting for a Congress to ask Societies to nominate delegates to the GA, Societies would have the right to appoint an IUPS Liaison Officer (or IUPS Representative – we have played with various possible names) who will have input to IUPS activity even between Congresses.

The roles of such IUPS Officer/Representatives would be :

1. To communicate to IUPS relevant decisions and proposals of the member societies, and to provide news items for the IUPS website.
2. In order to implement this, they should have the right to propose items for the agendas of IUPS Executive Committee or Council, and to present a paper if relevant (IUPS is investigating ways of including teleconferencing in its meetings).
3. They could form an advisory group through which and from which a proportion of the Nominating Committee should be chosen. (The Nominating Committee is a relatively small body, usually about 5 people chaired by the Secretary-General or another Officer, charged with making proposals for Officers and members of Council - this is the body that effectively determines the proposed new Council put to the GA for approval).
4. Whether members of the Nominating Committee or not, they would be expected to make proposals to that Committee for possible Officers and Council members. In this way, future Officers and Council members would emerge from a bottom-up process starting with the member societies and with, hopefully, a much larger field of proposals than we have under the present system. This should be particularly attractive to member societies that may feel they have been neglected by the Nominating Committee in the past.
5. They should be the means through which IUPS can effectively communicate with member societies. They would be the first point of call for reactions to proposals by IUPS and expected to put relevant items to their society councils.
6. They would be listed on the IUPS website, in addition to the relevant administrative information on the member societies.
7. They would play a role in promoting the IUPS Congress and Regional meetings within their own societies.
8. They would normally be the leading delegate to the General Assembly.
9. They might also meet independently on a regular basis via teleconference or Skype. It is important that the Representatives should develop a pattern of interacting with each other and with IUPS Council so that they get to know what IUPS is doing and can judge better who could be good candidates as Officers and Council Members.

There are various ways in which such a scheme could be implemented by member societies. Some already have an International Secretary or similar person on their Councils. This is the kind of person who would most naturally be the IUPS Representative. In any case, we envisage that the IUPS Representative should normally be a senior academic, not an administrative officer of the member society. We would welcome views from member societies on how this could best be implemented in their case, as well as views on any aspect of the

proposal, including the question of balance between ensuring institutional memory (requiring minimal terms) and ensuring grass-roots input (requiring significant turnover).

Who could nominate IUPS representatives?

The society and regional members of IUPS are very different in size, extent and activity. This is reflected in the number of delegates that members may send to the General Assembly. A possible way to express the relative weight of different societies would be to give member societies sending more than 3 delegates to the Assembly the right to nominate their own IUPS Representative, while allowing member societies sending fewer delegates to nominate through their Regional Association. If all national societies with 4 or more delegates nominated 1 IUPS Representative and other societies contribute to the nomination of a Representative through their regional association, the total number of Representatives would be 15.

Possible consequences for the General Assembly

If such a scheme could be made to work, some of the routine matters dealt with at the General Assembly could be dealt with by the IUPS Representatives interacting with Council before the General Assembly (email makes this possible in a way that was inconceivable when the IUPS Constitution was drawn up). The General Assembly itself could then be freed of some of the routine items and have time to debate more general issues of importance to the community of physiological science. At present, we have little time to do this. The agenda is usually fully occupied with the routine items. There is always a rush to finish in time. We suggest that the routine business should be

completed in roughly half to two thirds of the time currently devoted to these items, leaving at least an hour for more general discussion.

Constitution

Consequences for the IUPS Constitution would need to be explored and, if necessary, proposals brought to the General Assembly in 2013. We suspect, however, that much of what is being proposed could be implemented without changing the Constitution since the GA could still be asked formally to approve any items agreed in advance. The scheme could therefore be introduced initially as a trial, with any constitutional changes being made subsequently to formalize and fine-tune the procedure if the trial works.

Feedback

It would be helpful if member societies could react to this consultation before May 2010, but later reactions are also welcome. We understand, of course, that your society's council may not meet before May.

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