

CM & ISAAC

CM is a Chapter member of ISAAC, and as such we are all members of ISAAC. Over the years, many members and leaders within Communication Matters have been leaders in the actions and activities of ISAAC. ISAAC exists to enable people from around the globe to support each other, collaborate, inform, lobby and give AAC a louder and more far-reaching voice than would ever be possible within a single country location such as the UK. ISAAC supports emerging AAC nations, drives research agendas, owns the leading peer reviewed journal publication, organises a biennial conference and research symposium, provides access to several on-line resources and facilities, keeps a directory of membership, awards Fellowships, lifetime achievement awards, offers a consumer travel award and has Consultative status with the United Nations.

CM's history and input to ISAAC:

Clive Thursfield's articles in the very early editions of the newsletter explained the then ISAAC structure and how it worked. Janet Scott later provided an updated description of the ISAAC structure and the UK role in ISAAC in the November 2002 CM Journal.

The main focus of debate regularly raised at CM AGM's was about the percentage of our membership fee being paid to ISAAC, whether it was well spent and whether these funds would be better spent in the UK. This dialogue is on-going. Over the years the structure and names for ISAAC managerial committees have changed. Previously, the USA was over-represented on the ISAAC Board (approximately eight people); in the late 1990's this arrangement altered, despite much objection from the USA. The change to Board structure stipulated that regardless of the number of members of any chapter, the delegates to the ISAAC Board were restricted to two per chapter and one or two per region where there were no chapters. This led to a more inclusive debate and perspective on AAC activity around the world, although the USA-style meetings can be quite challenging for those whose English is not their first language. The difficulties of non-first-language-English-speaking-delegates attending ISAAC Board meetings were regularly raised. ISAAC introduced Plain English for all of its documents in an attempt to minimise some of these problems. When Janet Larcher was Chair of the Board she tried to get information for the Board meeting written in plain English and sent out to the board members in advance of the meeting, and she tried to explain procedures or jargon language as they arose in the meeting. The ISAAC Board changed its name to the ISAAC Council during a review of governance processes and procedures. The Chair of Council represents all Council members on the ISAAC Executive Board, ensuring that nothing can be approved by the Board unless it has had approval from Council. Janice Murray is the current Chair of ISAAC Council. She has been working on an updated protocol to support the use of plain English in all of ISAAC's documentation and communications. This is being presented to Council in August 2016.

Council members are invited to attend the Council meeting, which is always the day before the conference and therefore involves members paying for an extra day's accommodation and subsistence expenses, which for the financially healthy

Chapters can be supported. A number of Council representatives continue, however, to pay for their own additional expenses, which restrict representation but is a testament to their motivations to be connected through the ISAAC family.

Previously, objections were raised to alternate ISAAC conferences being located in the USA. It was clarified that conferences in the USA make more money than those in Europe, and it is money from the conferences which is largely responsible for keeping the ISAAC organisation operational.

An earlier related bone of contention was that in order to be selected to host an ISAAC conference the country had to agree to provide ISAAC with a considerable amount of money. Many countries (including the UK) felt that this was not possible since they probably could not run their own conference in the year of the International one and therefore the funds to run their own organisation would be compromised. The cost of running an international conference would be high, and many were concerned whether they could attract enough delegates to cover these costs.

In 2014, the ISAAC conference funding and primary organisational demand were changed and moved to be the responsibility of the ISAAC International Office (Toronto, Canada). Chapters are no longer required to learn all things about an international conference, instead the international office leads and supports the host country/chapter in conference set-up. The first time this happened was in Lisbon. Income generated should go back to ISAAC although there was no profit from Lisbon. The USA/Canada conferences still generate the largest profits, and these can then offset any break-even conferences in Europe or elsewhere. This change in responsibility and risk has meant that many more countries, including the UK, have expressed an interest in hosting an ISAAC conference.

ISAAC became a victim of its own success in generating membership across 24 countries. Consequently, it became obvious that it would be increasingly difficult to make enough money to survive and run the organisation, by depending solely on volunteers. ISAAC appointed an Executive Director in the 1990's whose job specification stated that they had to raise funds for their own salary as well as enough to run the organisation. This was not achieved. They did not even raise their own salary. A second foray into appointing an Executive Director has been much more successful. Franklin Smith was appointed in 2012, and since his appointment he has streamlined the expenses associated with the international office, and Executive Board meetings and increased the uptake of ISAAC conference opportunities.

ISAAC has become less US centric over the years. This is demonstrated by the example of the complaints received in the 1990's about how long it took to get articles published in the AAC Journal if you were not from the USA. The editorial board was widened to include representatives from more countries. Since then the journal editors have come from the UK, Australia and Canada. The editorship of the Journal cycles over a two-year period and is international in perspective. The current editor is Dr Martine Smith, Trinity College Dublin. The AAC Journal has in the last

three years increased its Impact Factor to 2.5 (this is very positive for AAC research credentials) and means that publications in this journal are used as key citations and reference points in other publications.

Prior to 2004, ISAAC produced a paper-based newsletter called the ISAAC Bulletin. The last editor of this version was Janice Murray. Now the equivalent is produced out of the ISAAC office as an electronic newsletter. This is supported by Heather Stonehouse.

Whilst ISAAC continues to evolve and develop, and be challenged to demonstrate what it offers its international membership; there are some regular highlights that remain constant. These include:

- The 5+5 membership scheme is still in existence and has been supported by CM, ISAAC Australia and USAAC. This supports emerging AAC chapters/ regions to have five memberships paid for if they can identify a further five people who will pay for membership = 10 members in a specific location.
- BUILD still operates and is probably the healthiest of ISAAC's initiatives – supporting emerging AAC nations. Lots of activity in Russia, China, Malaysia and South Africa. Current Chair: Sarah Yong, Singapore. The ISAAC role here in supporting emerging AAC nations such as by sharing books & journals, scholarships, for example, has largely been driven by individuals within the ISAAC community.
- LEAD to support leadership skill development and experience has been struggling for a few years and is currently not very active. Current Chair: Vic Valentic.
- Scholarships/Awards: There are two travel awards (i) emerging researchers (ii) PwuAAC. People submit an application and they are rated by an independent panel.
- Other awards include: Fellowship, lifetime achievement, consumer lecture, AAC journal: best student article, best article. These are all a nominated and rated process.

Any member of CM, and therefore ISAAC, can volunteer to support these working groups and committees. Committees/working groups currently include: Nominations, BUILD, LEAD, Publications, Research, Family Engagement Group, Bylaws/Governance, Finance, Plain English language working group. Most groups have on-line meetings and follow up paperwork or action based activities. You can do volunteer by approaching the Chair of CM and offering your services to ISAAC.