



THE INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

---

# 2000 PLUS

## The Institution in the Next Millennium

---

*Dear Member:*

*The Institution continually reviews its approach and working arrangements to try and ensure it remains relevant to your needs and those of the communities in which you operate.*

*With these thoughts in mind, the Management Committee, in collaboration with the International Affairs Committee, has produced this consultative document. The International Council has approved its circulation worldwide to seek the views of all of the members, and you are invited to comment.*

*The issues raised will be presented at the forthcoming 1999 Annual General Meeting. Further comments and views may be made, however, up to 30 November 1999.*

*Please let us know what you believe should be the mission and organisational approach and structure of your Institution after the year 2000. Questions and responses may be made direct to the General Secretary.*

Institution of Fire Engineers  
148 Upper New Walk  
Leicester LE1 7QB, UK  
Tel. +44 (0)116 255 3654  
Fax. +44 (0)116 247 1231  
E-mail. [info@ife.org.uk](mailto:info@ife.org.uk)

# DISCUSSION PAPER

## 2000 PLUS THE INSTITUTION IN THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

International Council in 1996 considered that all professionals are under greater pressure to:

- Improve the standards of quality of service.
- Be accountable for their professional standards.
- Maintain their professional competence.
- Be more flexible in the way they work and the service they offer.

This promoted debate concerning the future strategy of the Institution, as it sought to meet members expectations. It has also questioned the Institution's role in the education and training of professionals including how to encourage closer links between educationalists and practitioners.

Similar pressures had been identified in a report on UK Professional Associations published by the Bristol University and Cheltenham's Strategic Publications. Table 1 summarises their findings.

<b>TABLE 1 - TRENDS SUMMARY : PRESSURES ON PROFESSIONALS</b>	
<b>FROM</b>	<b>TO</b>
Small, elite and distinct groups	Dominant, diverse occupational groups
Service providers	Wealth creation based on innovation
Professional privilege and self-regulation of conduct	Pressures for reform and external control.
Little competition and predictable, secure jobs.	Increased competition, changing roles and uncertain futures.

The report's author identified that professionals are under greater pressure from Government, consumers and employers to contribute to wealth creation, to improve standards and quality of service, to maintain their professional competence and to become more flexible in the way they work and the services they offer. This required new support needs from professional associations which in turn impacted upon the type of organisation needed. Table 2 indicates the new requirements.

<b>TABLE 2 - TRENDS SUMMARY : RUNNING A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION</b>	
<b>FROM</b>	<b>TO</b>
Focus on administration	Strategic Planning
Bureaucratic organisation	Professionally run and managed organisation
Heavy dependence on members' subscription	Diversification of income generation
Adhoc range of services	Provision of focused service
Adhoc promotion of services	Professional marketing
Centralised Management operating from one head office	Decentralised regional offices and revival of the branch networks

These trends in turn suggested a new strategic direction was needed for professional organisations and Table 3 outlines these conclusions.

<b>TABLE 3 - TRENDS SUMMARY: STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS</b>	
<b>FROM</b>	<b>TO</b>
Go it alone	Collaboration with other professional bodies
Uniformity of members' work and needs	Increasing diversity and specialism
Inward looking	Outward looking with greater awareness of other stakeholders' needs
UK emphasis	Global institution with UK base

In 1997, the International Council accepted this need for strategic change, and subsequently agreed to change the committee structure, consider constitutional change and membership issues, whilst requesting further consideration of the strategic implications.

The International Council also noted that the financial goals of the Institution were changing in recognition of the changing environment and the recently created Engineering Division.

## Strategic Aim

Following further work by the newly created Management Committee, in 1998, it was confirmed there was an urgent need for a strategic plan for the Institution over the next ten years. The Committee considered a long term global strategy should be established, into which a three year rolling business plan would be incorporated, which progressed the Institution's constitutional objectives within the perceived operating environment.

The Management Committee identified that the key strategic aim of the Institution should be:

*“To seek to influence, facilitate, support, and create a global awareness and understanding for those operating within the fire environment and those requiring protection from the hazards of fire”.*

The process of assessing and advising on a modern non-prescriptive fire engineering approach it was noted should result in the Institution being involved in the setting of standards - standards of conduct, and standards of specification and performance - through the Institution's network and interpretation of standards, with and promotion of best practice, both internationally and locally.

The concept identified was of a global community which sought to be fire safe for the benefit of all human and animal life, the earth's environment and the subsequent prosperity and development of human conditions.

Articulating the Institution's strategic aim and the concept of a global fire safe community required effective publication of information worldwide whilst recognising local environments required local solutions.

In considering this aim a strengths analysis was conducted, which is summarised in Table 4.

<b>TABLE 4 – INSTITUTION STRENGTHS</b>
• Substantial fire service base
• Strong engineering foundation
• Established track record
• UK established assets and global links
• Skilled international membership of considerable size and diversity which continues to grow
• Recognised worldwide
• Professional integrity and independence
• Proven history and track record

## Resources

Resourcing the Institution was seen as a key issue for the years ahead. These views prompted the International Council to call upon the Management Committee to again review personnel and general expenditure options.

## Culture

International Council suggested there was a need to embrace a new culture which reinforced its position as being a truly international, open, accessible, competent, authoritative, robust, relevant, professional, visionary, multi-lingual and sustainable within the various perceived operating environments.

## Activities

The activities in future years would continue the Institution's 'developed world perspective' of protecting communities and would aim to promote focused debate on global problems and solutions to create fire safe communities. These activities would add value to the membership whilst providing an audit system for the Institution's Business Plan, process, systems, and constitutional position.

They would further ensure communication existed throughout the world offering academic and training experiences which demonstrated credibility, were delivered on time and were focused on ensuring continued growth of the organisation and recognition of the Institution and its objectives.

# 2000 PLUS

With these views in mind and with the strategic aim and corporate environment identified it is suggested the following significant changes require detailed consideration by all Institution members.

## **Partnerships**

The Institution seriously needs to consider whether it goes on alone or forms cohesive alliances with organisations having like aims or purpose.

Within the United Kingdom, for example, the opportunity for closer working is already being examined in publications. The organisation involved, the Loss Prevention Council, through its fire safety organisation the Fire Protection Association, has established a business relationship. Bodies like the FPA are themselves affiliated to other wider international groups, in the FPA case to the European Body the Confederation of Fire Protection Associations. Similar working partnerships utilising joint strengths [the example organisation has a very strong publication and training emphasis] would aid global development by matching operations in Branches throughout the world in a similar way. In the United States of America, for example, the Branch would then be able to recognise and work with State organisations involved in training or building code standard setting. Pursuing policies with other learned bodies in science, engineering and management, should be pursued as should understanding with the United Nations, World Health Organisation, etc.

## **An Independent Assessment Organisation**

The Institution, whilst heavily engaged with specification-standard organisations, is not in itself a standard-setting body.

Quality assurance, external auditing and the current general approach of having independent quantifiable examination organisation suggests a fire based organisation, with appropriate technical capacity, would be welcome. This could be the Institution.

A recent example, the qualification of various fire engineering computer models, illustrates this need. Operating in this area could have fundamental benefits although other serious questions of investments remain.

In a similar manner the contracting of professionally competent persons, from the register of members, is an opportunity yet to be explored with some vigour.

## **Training and Education**

The Institution has begun the process of validation and accreditation of other organisations delivering fire engineering courses and awards. This process is further enhanced by the Engineering Division.

The overall objective of the Institution's policy in this area would benefit from further debate. It is suggested that the Institution's direct involvement in the examination process in some countries should be reduced and, if practical, relinquished to other accredited organisations. The responsibility for delivering the examination or training and examining the outcomes would rest with the deliverer, leaving the Institution to make awards and operate the certification process by acting as a qualification board. This would move the Institution towards becoming the leader in worldwide fire engineering accreditation and reinforce its approach to Continuing Professional Development.

Adopting this approach would place the Institution firmly in the professional assessment arena releasing valuable internal resource whilst offering new financial income from accredited and validated courses and organisations.

## **Research and Development**

The Institution retains an extremely keen and direct interest in ensuring that research and development occurs across the spectrum of fire related subjects. The approach of each country, and indeed the individual research organisation within each country, is extremely varied, requiring national and local involvement to be effective. The involvement of the Institution, as a non-governmental organisation can be an essential ingredient in promoting an active fire research and development programme. The Institution's role in this activity can encompass, as an NGO, a range of activities from identification of the subjects for consideration to management of agreed programme elements.

The ongoing world pressure on finance has direct influence on this work, and again the Institution needs to promote the importance of research and development in fire related matters to all those agencies, bodies and commercial interests who could help stimulate and widen the funds available. How the Institution conducts this promotion and involvement requires future consideration.

## **Internationalism**

The Institution's current arrangements place emphasis within the United Kingdom for many of the approaches and culture adopted in the various activities undertaken. This is understandable given the historical foundation of the organisation, and the fact that the majority of members reside in the UK.

That situation is however changing, and will change still further in the near future. More members now join from outside the UK than within, and the growing local recognition of the Institution within national, and sometimes regional, areas. There is also the need to address the challenges of the next millennium.

Meeting this change is an important part of the change process for the future. To stand still is to assume that one country's perspective should remain dominant. Internationalism demands a wide perspective. It is believed the Institution's membership would be served better by an international organisation which safeguards the integrity, equivalency and professional parity of its members within defined standards of personal behaviour and performance. Such an international organisation would then facilitate and enable local activities and practices to occur which meet the needs and laws within the local working environment.

These objectives can be provided in many ways. Options, for example, might be:-

An extended and developed form of an International Branch Forum to which every Branch would be invited.

A broad business model where Branches are similar to the Branch Office or subsidiary company, with Head Office or the Parent Company being a revised form of the International Council, with the Annual General Meeting being similar to the shareholders meeting directing a Board of Directors.

A Senate. Here Senators, one at least for every Branch with perhaps additional Senators based on thresholds of the number of members in the Branch, would meet annually to guide and advise an Executive of elected members, possibly much smaller than the current International Council, on important strategic aims.

A further alternative may be a Federation. Again, each Branch would affiliate itself into the International Federation so influencing the overall cohesive needs of fire engineers globally, but acting essentially very locally.

The United Kingdom, in particular, has a key role in this process as already mentioned. The UK could form its own co-ordinated Branch with its own UK Council; it might continue its current arrangements. It is important that the UK members are the only members currently who by direct local elections, place representatives on the International Council. These arrangements do require some form of mirroring for other groups of members.

Similarly, it is predominantly the UK members who are the only members who remit their whole subscription to the International Council. Non-UK Branch members retain 50% of their subscriptions for local use. The UK member usually pays a Branch subscription in addition to the membership subscription. Gaining some equity to Gross Domestic Product values could be an important part of the entire subscription process.

These issues and many others require the most careful thinking if they are to be developed. Funding the movement of senators or representatives, to meetings of the international body are costs which not every Branch can afford. Managing the strategic business process or ensuring the effectiveness of global professional competence and equivalency are not simple low cost items. Influencing, at a global level, the achievement of fire safe communities cannot be done at no cost.

If a change in direction is sought, then the establishment of a reform group would be needed to take these issues forward and ultimately propose the constitutional organisation and financial frameworks required for ultimate adoption by the membership at large.

## **Publications**

The greatest asset and one of the largest use of resources is the publication process of the Institution. The Fire Engineers Journal offers opportunities and tremendous quality.

It is the one tangible benefit to all members worldwide. Since November 1995, this benefit was increased by 50% when the Fire Engineers Journal went bi-monthly. Additionally, members have benefited by an increased size of Journal, since more often than not, an Educational Supplement has been included.

The FEJ would benefit from publication close to the point of distribution, so offering local advertisement opportunities for Branches and avoiding high postal costs. Publication using information technology offers feasible alternatives worthy of exploration with non UK Branches.

There is also the possibility of combining circulation with other journals providing an improved member service of a monthly magazine, lower costs, and a wider possible readership [the FEJ is already the widest circulating fire publication outside the US]. Combining in this way would require review of the professional engineering peer reviewed papers which might sensibly be reported in a special "quarterly" series of combined papers.

In addition to the above possibility the combining of publication capacity with similar organisations worldwide offers the potential to produce timely and much needed educational documentation for student and professional like. The "book market" is vast, competitive and demanding. It is also lucrative, informing and adds greatly to organisational awareness.

## **Resources**

The subscription base of the Institution could be expanded to help meet some of the needs identified. However, the concerns of members, many of whom find it hard at present to meet costs, would have to be kept in mind. Equally, the large UK output of the Institution's work requires consideration in terms of contribution and spending.

It is recognised that to increase costs without offering improvement in services has a tendency to dampen enthusiasm.

This is not to say that perhaps well explained selective increases should not be considered. As noted above, all members have received very definite increases in tangible benefits over the last three to four years without any increase in subscriptions other than those relative to inflation.

It would therefore appear necessary to both re-examine current costs and to develop new income opportunities. Releasing the burden of non UK FEJ distribution costs, for example, would justify non UK Branches retaining all their capitation fees and so funding a representative to attend the Institution's annual meeting.

Similarly the costs of meeting technical and educational requirements, primarily in the UK, could be better targeted. Headquarters is already seeking to satisfy the overall Institution aims by constructing professional global networks of committed Institution members operating in their relevant fields of expertise.

The overall organisational management process also needs to ensure it is relevant to the new culture and direction. The lack of a permanent Chief Executive Officer, operating with a corporate style to the 'Board' of the Institution with delegated powers given by the full authority of International Council, is a weakness in any organisation which needs to act decisively and remain flexible. Part time directors contribute skills gained from their unique operating environment. Those environments may not be the same context in which the Institution delivers its services and it is necessary that the Institution has its own cultural environment. This needs to recognise the executive's function, in relationship to the strategic and democratic process.

Liberating the organisation from its past is probably the key to its whole future.

## **STAFFING AND OTHER RESOURCES – A NEW APPROACH**

There is no doubt that the Institution is expanding in terms of its aspirations, membership, influence and perception with a consequential increase in the expectations of the membership and outside agencies. The potential for growth in these areas, in the short, medium and long term is high. However, without the necessary physical resources to service current levels of work, to provide adequate consideration and discussion of important matters and to meet an ever growing volume, the Institution runs the risk of raising expectations beyond its capabilities. Physical resources, mean personnel, IT systems, and accommodation. Meeting these additional resource needs could be achieved through a re-examination of the relationship between Headquarters and the Institution's worldwide operations and by re-examining the commercial and idealistic philosophy that underpins the overall approach to resourcing the Institution.

There is also the need to re-address the matter of how business is managed. The present system places a burden upon Headquarters staff and needs to ensure it is an effective use of personnel resources.

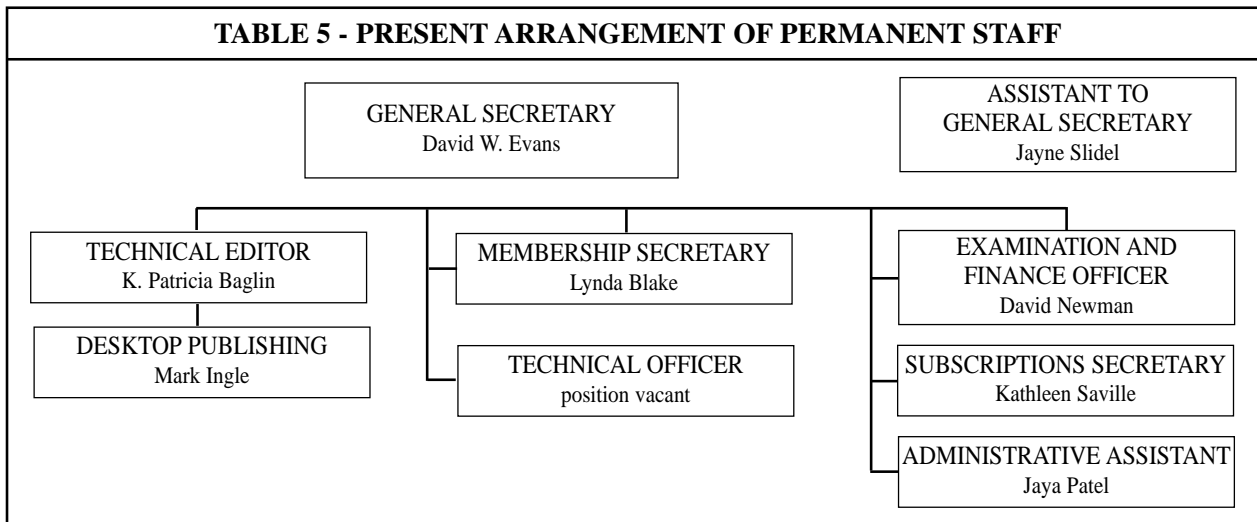
### **Accommodation**

The Institution owns and will continue to have its Headquarters at New Walk for the foreseeable future, since a move to provide better quality or expanded accommodation would involve the use of valuable resources both physical and monetary.

### **Staffing Requirements**

The present arrangement of permanent staff is the following:

**TABLE 5 - PRESENT ARRANGEMENT OF PERMANENT STAFF**



### Future Staff Requirements

The amount of detailed work required of the General Secretary hinders the development of the Institution with further work required in connection with the Engineering Council Division.

Apart from the question of the ever increasing volume of work, there is also the question of succession. It is important to have at least one internal candidate and someone who could fulfill the post on a temporary basis to cover issues of ill health etc.

There is a definite need for at least one further person to provide secretarial and administrative assistance to officers within Headquarters and to assist in the servicing of committees and to act as cover in times of holidays and sickness.

Marketing the Institution to achieve recognition of its values and contribution worldwide and to engender a commercially successful environment for the services offered to members also requires positive action, and engaging a person to undertake this work is a key staff component of the future.

This suggests, given the earlier comments regarding the role of a Chief Executive Officer, that current employees should adapt to new roles to reflect the changing environment. In addition, there should be scope to provide a better hierarchical framework of effectiveness and leadership together with some new skills in marketing.

### Information Technology

It is important for the Institution to secure for the members the means to be able to communicate with each other and with HQ. Some members already have e-mail capability. E-mail links to the International Council members need to be developed to ensure an integrated management process exists as a matter of priority.

There are other potential requirements, such as video conferencing equipment but this is not considered of immediate necessity as a capital acquisition. Video conferencing would most likely require the use of outside agencies which would probably be the most suitable solution in the short term.

### Business Meetings

International Council now meets after Committees, covering matters that are some three months old. To meet the volume of work, some Committees have found it necessary to meet on additional days in order to get the work done.

It seems that the cycle of meetings needs to be re-addressed to ensure business can be effectively handled and so that all International Council members can be involved, and staff able to support the members.

The interaction between members at large at the business process is an important part of the democratic function which holds the institution together. How the process is developed therefore needs careful consideration.

### Timetable

It is proposed that a workshop be held concurrent with the 1999 Annual General Meeting to enable the future direction of the Institution to receive the widest debate. The International Affairs Committee has been tasked with taking this matter forward.

The Management Committee has likewise been tasked with ensuring that, subsequent to the 1999 AGM, a financial and resource plan be developed which seeks to create the opportunities and resources for any constitutional change or Institution development identified.