



IFSW President's Report 2018

Introduction

This report reviews the past four years of substantial progress in IFSW, reflects on what we still have to do and concludes with some questions for members to consider before taking part in the General Meeting, either by being in Dublin or through live streaming of the whole meeting. Please remember that each country member with fees paid can vote - and if you cannot be there in person you can send in your votes by Proxy, either with another member or through the Secretariat.

The General Meeting is the ultimate decision-making body in IFSW. It is the time when all members vote for the policies and the pathway for this international federation and choose the people that they want to be the guardians of the Federation over the next two years, until the next General Meeting. It is the General Meeting that approves the strategy and the budget. To be involved in all this decision making please make use of your vote by proxy if you are not able to be there.

Celebrating our 90th Anniversary

In Dublin IASSW, ICSW and IFSW will celebrate their joint 90th Anniversaries. In Paris in 1928 the International Permanent Secretariat of Social Workers was founded, which became IFSW in 1956. Of course, social work has much deeper roots that go back through centuries and our recognition of the importance of indigenous knowledge in our social work training and the development of charities are all part of the profession's development.

Two other committees were also set up, at that 1928 conference, to develop specific areas for helping the profession become what it is today. Social Work Education (which became IASSW) and Social Service and Social Policy development (which became ICSW). As we come to celebrate these anniversaries it offers us an opportunity to reflect on how the three organisations work together in supporting the development of social work and our role in the world, to look ahead in creating a wider vision, how we can strengthen our role in our joint work building inclusive, sustainable communities where we all can experience well-being and peace.

What we have achieved

Membership:

The development of the profession was interrupted by the turmoil of World War 2. It wrecked so many lives and so many communities that after the war social workers were primarily working with post conflict resolution, and through this work were accorded special consultative status at the UN.

- In 1956 the IPSSW resumed and became the IFSW, with 7 national member associations from around the world.
- By the year 2000 there were 70 members.
- In the next 10 years there were 10 new members
- Since 2012 we have grown to 128 members in 6 years
- Many of the 48 new members had to establish national associations or upgrade their standards to meet the requirements for membership.

Elected in 2014 the President's vision included

- Building an effective Global Executive team to develop and implement the IFSW vision, the critical role of social work in sustainable community development.
- Taking that vision into wider civil society at global, regional and national level
- Increasing membership, for example India as one of the largest potential members of IFSW
- Securing the financial future of IFSW
- Building a small but effective secretariat to support Regional Development.
- Re-evaluating and developing our working relationships, particularly with practitioners, people who are experienced in the use of social work services, policy makers and social work educators.

Evaluating progress on the vision on each of those aspirations

- Building an effective Executive Team has many challenges as we learn to work across regions and think globally. Constructing and delivering a consistent message of strong leadership in the regions and globally, as spokespeople for the profession, has been greatly helped by the Global Agenda.
- Critical to our working partnerships has been the inheritance of the Tripartite Agreement with IASSW and ICSW which began with the 2010 conference in Hong Kong and largely has its reality in the Global Agenda. In its current form continuing until the final report in 2020, just before the world conferences. As IFSW has developed over the past few years it has wanted to widen the partnership and working agreements to include, for example, people who are experienced in the use of social work services. In the future this could develop to providers of services, policy makers and educators.
- The Global Agenda and the visibility of the profession have brought 48 new members into the Federation, including India within the first 6 months of this presidency. This success has brought with it a greater workload at both regional and global level; particularly helping new members find their way into feeling at home as members of IFSW.
- Securing the financial future has been a more difficult task. Recent experience has crystallised the debate about the role of the treasurer in our organisation. This role is not that of an accountant; that task we have contracted to an accountant to do very effectively for us over many years. This has been confirmed by each of our Treasurers in reports to the Executive. The issue is about building our financial resources to support our aims and objectives. We need to consider how best we engage with a suitably qualified person who can help us with this task. This has

raised the issue about whether the Treasurer should be elected from the membership or appointed by the Executive. An alternative strategy is to strengthen the staffing structure to include these skills in the Secretariat. At the present time we have no resources for this last option.

- In order to effectively manage the administrative/business side of our Federation efficiently we have to have a strategy at both Global and Regional level. Objectives 4 & 5 are dependent on each other and we are currently functioning far short of our potential because we have not yet developed our infrastructure to meet our current needs.
- Our aspirations will only be achieved when we are working together across strategic partnerships. As we have developed the Global Agenda, focussed on the role of social work in social development. The question has been raised about whether we have outgrown the tripartite agreement as we have identified additional potential partners. We need to evaluate and renegotiate these and other strategic partnerships to achieve the vision we have at IFSW for sustainable, inclusive communities. This will take us into critical debates about how this is achieved from the status quo to the achievement of a peaceful, caring world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The Constitution:

For some years prior to 2014 we had talked about the need to update our constitution, to simplify the text so it was easier to understand – but primarily to revisit our aims and objectives which we had not done since 1956. At that time, the seven-member countries were a group of professional associations with a common interest in developing the profession internationally. It was a network of common interest. As the Federation has grown our expectations of the Federation have also grown and we have now included a role for setting standards and expectations globally for those who practice the profession. Interestingly this has taken us back to our roots in the Charities Commissions, set up in many countries in the nineteenth century, which came into being to set standards for the asylums and orphanages of those times. Today it has led us into more political activity in working with governments and policy makers in developing social work laws, social policy and implementing those policies to the highest ethical standards. This is now reflected in our constitution.

The tension between operations and governance:

In the review of the constitution 2014-2016 we have not yet found the answer to how we develop a healthy balance between operations and governance. This is partly constitutional, partly resourcing and partly training. We did not anticipate sufficiently the impact of the very rapid growth in membership and the issues that this would bring to the infrastructure of the Federation. Whilst we had some discussion about governance and operations in 2016 the challenges seemed to be manageable. In the last two years it has become clear to the Steering Group and the Global Executive that we now have a serious capacity problem that needs discussion and decision about finding a way forward.

The lack of capacity to support the operational (secretariat) side of IFSW has resulted in problems of unclear boundaries between the operation and governance responsibilities of the office bearers at regional and global level. This has come from the necessity of meeting

the needs of the members without adequate resources to support the growth we have made in the past 6 years. Whilst we have a balanced budget each year the toll is being paid by the staff and active volunteers committed to building the profile of IFSW.

In a report to the Executive in December 2017 the President recorded

The current structure of our Federation suggests that the person coming into the role as President needs not only to have a depth and integrity in their practice as a social worker, they need to have management skills and knowledge and experience about how membership organisations work, but there is also a current need to supplement the shortfall of an inadequate staffing situation, dictated by our financial situation. I hereby record that I could not have fulfilled any of this if I had also been employed fulltime and did not have the flexibility of part-time independent work that I can control outside of this position.

Staff have not been able to take their annual leave entitlement because of the demands of the Federation. Even during periods of leave it is often interrupted because we have no back-up staff who can cover. This is very poor employment practice and should not continue.

The dilemma carried by the Executive is that they are being asked to do many functions, often in 2nd or 3rd languages without professional language interpreters. At the Regional level their roles are primarily operational – facilitating meetings, representation and campaigns.

At global level the constitution requires that regional representatives take on the role of a Board of Directors which is a governance role; working with the Secretariat on the administrative and financial affairs of the Federation, rather than the more familiar territory of policy and practice.

The reality is that switching from one role to the other is difficult, particularly when working across different cultures and languages. Hearing and listening to each other takes time as we try and find that common space to understand each other. All this is compounded by only meeting face to face at the most once a year. The default position is that people see themselves, in coming to the Executive Meetings, representing the interests of their Regions more willingly than addressing their global responsibility. Reflecting on how this happens, as suggested earlier, may be a function of the way we have developed our constitution, resources and the training and support for those involved in the daily functioning of IFSW including the elected members and commissioners.

All of this is compounded by changing membership of the Executive, due in the main to change in the personal lives of people who originally committed to four-year terms of office that they were then not able to complete. In the last four years of the 10 regional and 2 global members, 4 regional members and 1 global member will see through their four years. One member has done 8. Currently we have a co-opted Treasurer, our third in four years. That is less than 50% of the Executive completing their terms of office. There is no fault in

how this happened, people's circumstances change but it does affect the continuity and potentially the stability of the Federation.

This raises a serious question for the members to consider at the General Meeting about the effective governance of the Federation. For example, how do members select their nominations for the various posts that we elect at the General Meeting? What information do nominating members need to share with the Nominations Committee? How do members ensure that people have the qualifications and attributes for the roles for which they are being nominated? These and many more questions may be helpful in considering how you as members undertake your responsibilities to ensure the integrity of IFSW.

Progress on our Aims and Objectives

There is some good news! As the Federation has grown so has our vision and activity in all the regions and globally. World Social Work Day is celebrated all over the world and the activities are shown on a special page on the website. It is from the sharing of what is happening locally that we are able to demonstrate globally that we probably have the largest social justice movement in the world where our 128 members, representing 3 million social workers come together in one cause. The question for the General Meeting is to ask how we develop this energy and activism into helping people and their communities achieve transformational change?

Some of the success we can see through the progress we have made on our aims and objectives:

Partnerships, Action, Policy and Advocacy:

In each of our conferences we have been promoting partnerships working with an increasing number of individuals and more formal groups to strengthen co-determination and co-production of positive change. This increasingly involves working with people who are experts by experience. This has helped us understand that there are some real obstacles to people with lived experience being part of the policy making and decision making, with too much tokenism and not enough respect for their contribution to the tasks we all face in achieving change. This has led to some strategic thinking about how we create room at the table that will be worked on so that by 2020 people with lived experience will be partners in the Global Agenda and beyond, with equal inclusion in the Calgary conference.

With IASSW and ICSW we have continued to build the Global Agenda using the joint conferences that we have held since 2010 to contribute to that work, which finishes in 2020 with the publication of the final report. David Jones and Meredith Powers have jointly edited the third report that will be launched in Dublin and rapporteurs will be working through the conference to help start the development of the next theme on Human Relationships, leading into the post 2020 developments which will launch in Rimini and Calgary in 2020. Now is the time to start thinking about the next phase of the Agenda. What do your members want to see in this next phase?

Our other working agreement with IASSW and ICSW is on joint ownership of the journal *International Social Work* published by Sage. This has been growing in content and readership and is about to have a change of editor. We have been very fortunate to see the journal grow following the successful period of development through a series of editors from Durham University, Peter Hackett, Lena Dominelli and latterly Vasilios Iokamedes. During the last four years we have seen a successful inclusion of evidence from practice as well as the more research based articles from universities. This change resulted in the ISW book reviews now being hosted on the IFSW website. We are looking forward to the development of this journal bringing research and practice closer together for the benefit of IFSW members.

With IASSW we have not been able to progress a joint proposal for the review of the Statement of Ethical Principles and the IFSW proposal will be circulated before the General Meeting. However, both organisations are involved in a Review of the Joint Global Standards for Social Work Education and IASSW has a representative on the IFSW Interim Education Commission, information on this development is in the report from the Interim Commission. It is important to note from the IFSW perspective that this initiative stems from concerns raised by members at General Meetings and seminars about a perceived gap between social work education and practice. The Executive considered a paper at their meeting in July 2017 which evidenced concern at the numbers of qualified social workers around the world who left the profession within five years of qualification, raising issues about the loss of investment in some social work training. The decision of the Executive was to set up an interim commission to report to this General Meeting.

The review of the Tripartite Global Agenda partnership was due to begin in 2015 but has been delayed by changes in personnel in our sister organisations and will fall to the next Executive of IFSW to progress. This will contribute to the preparation of post 2020 and the Global Agenda work which will start through the conference in Dublin and progress through the Regional conferences and the two world conferences in 2020.

Members will have seen on the website that at Social Work Day in the UN in New York the Secretary General asked the question about whether we have reached the point in the development of the profession that we (IASSW, ICSW and IFSW) should consider working more closely together, bringing our skills, knowledge and expertise into one space to maximise our effectiveness.

This follows approaches made over the past four years to explore in the Tripartite meetings if we could be more strategic for the profession. Throughout the period of the current Presidency, recognising that we lacked capacity in our secretariat, a problem also acknowledged by ICSW and IASSW in their own organisations, we have tried to discuss the possibility of sharing some administrative functions. The President of IASSW as recently as April this year reaffirmed that the IASSW Board had discussed this and that they continued unanimously to decline further discussion.

There is a question that the Executive will need guidance from the General Meeting about how to take the issue of future cooperation forward. A reflection on the current functions of the three global bodies suggests that the aims, objectives and members of each organisation will help us clarify better working relationships in the future.

IASSW are a network of 255 people and 467 Schools in 67 countries, mainly in Japan (82), China (54) and USA (54) concerned with research and education, where, from the perspective of the profession, the demands of the universities and colleges sometimes takes precedence over the needs of the profession. Additionally, issues have been raised in the profession about some of the relevance of the research to practice.

ICSW has membership from mainly NGO's of varying sizes, some very small, some international, but it is not visible in some regions and like Canada where there are no members, which in turn raises issues about the location of where we can hold a joint world conference.

IFSW has a growing membership and has set requirements for membership that set standards for the profession internationally. IFSW has an equitable voting structure that seeks to achieve equality of representation in an unequal world. All these assets place us as the international professional body for the profession. Strategic partnerships are a key component of our aims and objectives and it is now time to review these within IFSW.

In the UN, Regional and Global Conferences we have increased our partnership agreements with people with expertise through experience and this has strengthened our knowledge and depth of understanding about the positive and negative aspects of our work. This has been at times challenging for people within and outside the profession and has been the more difficult because there is currently no global equivalent of IFSW, ICSW or IASSW. It is growing more essential that we create space at the table for all those involved in building our communities.

A proposal will be coming to the General Meeting to set up a UN Commission, to join the Human Rights Commission and Ethics Commission and perhaps the Education Commission. The UN Commission is proposed to enable all our representatives in all the UN sites to work together more effectively and strategically. The past practice has been that each representative has developed a work plan based on what seems to be relevant in that particular part of the UN. It has at times been difficult to link that work directly with the expectations of the policy aims set by the General Meeting. By linking all the UN teams together, it is anticipated that issues raised by members through their regions will be more strategically taken forward by our hardworking volunteers who are our representatives at the UN.

In the last four years we have had a number of policy papers adopted and in 2015 pulled those that were available into a book that you can purchase from the website. Perhaps the most challenging however has been the 2016 policy and the one that is most discussed is *The Role of Social Work in Social Protection*. It is beginning to be used in national and international policy development. The message that social protection is not just about meeting immediate need but is about helping people making changes in their lives, so that they can build their ability to contribute to community capacity building, rather than remain in the oppressive and depressive dependency mode, is the key to future social work developments.

Further policy papers will be presented to the General Meeting for discussion and possible approval, including *Inter Country Assessment* and *Age Assessment of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children*

Communication with members and beyond:

The website has been overhauled and re-designed. It can be read in many different languages and there are key pages for regional and global exchange of information. The new book-site, the incorporation of the membership fees and Friends administration has streamlined some of our administrative tasks. It has been designed for computer, tablet and phone use.

We still do need to remember that the web is not yet a truly universally accessible medium for communication, for reasons of poverty or political constraint, and that we still need to consider other forms of communication with our members and civil society.

New books are being written and our new publishing capacity is ready to be developed by our members with those unwritten stories, manuals, textbooks, and policy guidelines. Why not use IFSW to talk about your practice and publish your research? IFSW can produce e-books and printed versions to suit your needs in any language.

Conclusion

There is much, much more that could be written about the development of the IFSW in the last few years. IFSW has been transformed over the last 6 years by the dedication and commitment of the staff, contractors and volunteers.

To the members of the Executive who have been building the regional structures and the members of the Commissions who have promoted our thinking and integrity of the profession IFSW says thank you. It is not easy doing any of these tasks on top of regular employment and having a balance in family life.

Pascal Rudin has helped all of us at one time or another with those administrative tasks that seem so complicated to us but he, Lola Casals and Alba Rosen all seem to take in their stride. Together with Marlies Schneider, our accountant who tracks all our income and expenditure – sifting through and matching our crumpled receipts, patiently answering our questions, another big thank you.

Finally it is time to acknowledge the leadership of the Secretary General. He has had hard acts to follow including Andrew Mouravieff Apostol and then Tom Johanssen who formed the building blocks on which the Federation now stands. However, the increase in membership, activity and visibility would not have happened without his dedication to the profession and a strong belief in what we can all contribute to building inclusive, sustainable communities which has nurtured our growth and will be the basis of the consolidation that is now needed. He has challenged us to think about our roles and how we conduct our business, he has challenged us to speak out about our experiences of what works and he has offered constructive criticism when we need it!

On a personal note I would like to thank each and every one of you for the privilege you have given me, entrusting me with position of President for the past four years. It has been a wonderful experience, as well as hard work! The meetings, the visits, the emails, the facebook exchanges have all contributed to a rich experience. There have been challenges

to which we have tried to find solutions, some tasks remain undone. You have taught me a great deal about how social work in many different forms can strengthen individual and collective well-being, adding to our knowledge that social health is as critical to economic health and the development of inclusive, sustainable communities. You have developed a global social justice movement which you, as the members of IFSW, now need to build on. I will be using the strength of that movement, continuing to take that learning forward into the next phase of my life, continuing particularly my work as a practitioner. Thank you for all your welcomes, exchanges and work together. There is still much to be done and I will continue to support in whatever way I can the vision set by IFSW to help build a better world.

Suggested questions that members may wish to include in their preparation for the General Meeting:

Let us remind ourselves that all this activity has been achieved with 1.4 permanent staff and some contracts and honorariums to people who work with us on specific tasks. On a regular basis this includes our highly professional accountant, a social worker supported by an Honorarium from BASW for the period of the current Presidency. On an ad hoc basis eg in preparation for the General Meeting we have recruited additional translation and administration support.

Operational and governance issues:

1. Is there a role for a special group to examine the governance issues and how best they can be provided?
2. Does IFSW need a financially qualified treasurer to focus on capacity building?
3. How do we build the capacity of the IFSW infrastructure to meet the needs of members?

Electing the right people for the roles and tasks:

4. How do members nominate suitably qualified and experienced people for the tasks at regional and global level?
5. What are the skills you are looking for when you come to place your vote?
6. How do you want to see the election managed, recognising the increased use of social media, where it is possible, recognising that in some areas of the world it is impossible through geographical poverty or political constraint?
7. What guidance would be helpful from the General Meeting to the nominations committee?
8. How do you support your elected officers to do the different roles required of them by the constitution?

Future Partnerships:

9. Which partnerships should be developed, and why?
10. What partnerships should be continued, and why?
11. In answering 8 & 9 what are the joint workstreams you want developed?

Vision:

- 11 What is your vision of the role of social work and what will practise be like in 2030?
- 12 How do you want to see the Global agenda develop?

Post Script

Ellen Mouravieff Apostol was a wonderful mentor in my early days in IFSW and then when I became involved with the IFSW Human Rights Commission. Ellen, Terry Bamford and myself wrote the IFSW Training Manual on the UNCRC published in 2002, one of the most successful, practical books published by the Federation in many languages by our staunch band of volunteers! In helping me understand how the various parts of IFSW worked she gave me the following guidance on the respective roles of the players at the General Meeting, I am profoundly grateful for her advice and support from that day to this

The General Meeting is the governing body of the IFSW. It is the meeting where the Executive Members report to the members on the progress made since the last General Meeting. It is the members place to discuss the information, ask questions and to debate how they want IFSW to move forward. It is the place of the Executive and the Representatives to listen and to note the decisions of the meeting so that they can take that work forward in the coming two years until the next General Meeting.

Ruth Stark MSc, CQSW, MBE
President

9 May 2018