

William Daniel Hesser
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One Birdcage Walk | Institution of Mechanical Engineers
International Young Members Committee Papers
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The IMechE International Young Members Committee (IYMC) is made up of the 7 Young Member Representatives (YMR) from each region around the world. It exists to advise the International Strategy Board (ISB) on matters affecting young members outside of the United Kingdom.

When the committee was formed in 2016 there were a number of subjects on which the Institution requested input specifically from the Young Members' perspective. One such subject was the issue of IMechE student chapters, the metrics by which they are evaluated, and how the criteria for establishing them might be reformed. A paper addressing this topic was drafted early in 2017 and was circulated many times for feedback and revision. In October 2018 an opportunity arose for me to share the findings from that paper directly with the International Strategy Board; a committee made up of the 7 international regional chairs who stand to advise the IMechE Trustee Board on matters relating to all international members, young and old alike.

Additionally, a paper was also presented addressing the high cost of Associate membership dues relative to those in comparable learned societies. It was drafted in early 2018 following numerous discussions on what might be done to address the relatively low affiliate-to-associate conversion rates.

With the exception of the very first IYMC meeting, only the chair of the International Young Members Committee is invited to attend the ISB meetings regularly. The regional YMRs depend on the IYMC chair to attend these meetings and liaise with the International Strategy Board. This fall's ISB meeting was unusual in that I was invited to attend the meeting to present these papers in person. Both topics received a mixed reception, resulting in open and lively discussions. The outcomes that were agreed upon are to be passed upwards to the Trustee Board or investigated further and revisited at a later date.

Both papers address the growing need to revisit what it means to be an international young member of the institution. Now that over 25% of the total membership base is international, it is necessary to address the needs of those members with equal priority to those living in the UK. A notable challenge in this pursuit is addressing each of these unique overseas regions based on their individual needs, circumstances, and historical context. We are finding that while some areas have a strong need for the IMechE, other areas exist in which our Institution is far less relevant. This is especially true in countries that have their own professional engineering licensing bodies, university accreditation schemes, and learned societies.

Although the IMechE has a rich heritage with its own library, archive, and over 150 years of engineering greatness to draw from, the methods by which this UK-based society expended to nearly every corner of the world is largely unknown and undocumented. This was the basis for a number of other one-on-one meetings I arranged prior to the visit. The absence of any international history brings an undue challenge to volunteers tasked with educating potential new members of an organization they have no prior awareness of whatsoever.

While numerous IMechE staff agreed that these historical accounts should indeed exist, few were able to provide much actionable information on the subject. It became abundantly clear that if this information is to be eventually collected and collated it would first need to come from the international volunteer committees themselves. This was the third topic raised to the ISB and was warmly received. Surveys for those volunteers and articles on the history of their respective regions are to follow.

From these discussions arose the need to also document which areas, regions, and countries face the challenges mentioned above: separate licensing bodies, accreditation schemes, and competing learned societies. Because the international leadership base is largely volunteer-driven, there also exists countless IMechE social media profiles with different names, varying degrees of engagement, admin support, and brand guideline adherence. All of these details pertaining to IMechE presence across the world are justifiably different. However, until all of these differences are noted and listed in one place for analysis and revision, a unified and adequate approach to growing international membership is unlikely.

As elected representatives of this international institution, it is our responsibility to make sense of this myriad of information. However, none of us should be left to do it alone. It will require the cooperation of both IMechE staff, leadership, and volunteers alike. Only when we understand the unique challenges facing all of our fellow members can we begin to effectively and thoroughly tackle the challenges we face moving forward.