

A request to the AILA Executive Board and International Committee for change to AILA Bylaw §7 no.2 (regarding Research Network longevity)

AILA currently has a bylaw (§ 7 no. 2) regarding Research Networks (ReNs) which reads as follows:

ReNs exist for three years and can be renewed. At any point in time, there will be no more than 15 ReNs in existence. The life of a ReN is not expected to be longer than six years.

(<http://www.aila.info/about/statutes-and-bylaws/bylaws.html#art7>)

For reasons given below, we would like to request removal of the last sentence of this bylaw, so that there is no longer a restriction on the longevity of individual ReNs.

A separate bylaw (§ 7 no. 4) already requires evidence of productive activity to be submitted to the Research Network coordinator in order for a ReN to be renewed beyond three years. Maintenance of this bylaw will ensure that ReNs seeking renewal beyond six years are still active and continue to deserve AILA recognition:

For continuation, the ReN organizer must submit a proposal to the ReN Coordinator no more than two months following the World Congress. The proposal should consist of:

1. evidence of past activities including a description of the session at the most recent AILA World Congress.
2. a plan for ReN activities for the upcoming three years
3. a list of the participants of the ReN and their affiliation
4. a commitment to fill their ReN slot at the AILA Congress three years hence

(<http://www.aila.info/about/statutes-and-bylaws/bylaws.html#art7>)

We are fully in favour of the idea that a Research Network which has not been active and which does not have plans for upcoming activities should not be allowed to continue, to avoid the difficulty of terminating inactive groups that may have occurred in the days of Scientific Commissions. This problem is already sufficiently addressed by the stipulation that 'ReNs exist for three years and can be renewed' (Bylaw no. 2) and by the list of requirements for renewal listed in Bylaw no. 4.

However, we do not think that concerns regarding ReN inactivity are served at all by the stipulation that 'the life of a ReN is not expected to be longer than six years'. Instead, this stipulation serves as a disincentive to increase membership – and appears to penalize rather than reward ReNs which have been active enough to be renewed once already. There may also be negative reputational implications for AILA in being seen to withdraw support from a research network which has been formed under the AILA umbrella.

On the other hand, we suggest that there are many positive reasons for enabling active ReNs to retain their status within AILA beyond six years, for example:

- ReN activity helps ensure that AILA is (seen to be) active as an organization during the years between Congresses. This, we understand, is one rationale for the current focus on regionalization – we suggest that nurturing rather than terminating ReN activity between Congresses can be seen in the same light, that is, as a second strategy to enhance ongoing networking and to raise AILA's profile;
- Active ReNs help with publicity for AILA Congresses, and attract participation in them; an active ReN which is required to become independent after six years would not have the same commitment to AILA.
- Active ReNs provide material for AILA publications (*AILA Review*, Benjamins AILA Applied Linguistics series) and for the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*;
- ReNs which are expanding their membership offer a way for applied linguists in countries which do not have an affiliate to engage with AILA; they also support new researchers and can enable them to take on active research leadership roles; however, the six-year rule acts as a disincentive to ReNs to increase membership and fulfil these roles.
- Successful ReNs can (potentially) provide support to newer Research Networks, and an example of what these could become.

In sum, ReNs enhance AILA, and should be welcomed, helped and encouraged, as long as they remain active, and provided that AILA's own resources are not overstretched. With regard to this last point it should be noted that AILA Research Networks do not currently receive financial support from AILA, so our proposal has no resourcing implications. If funding were to be made available, this could perhaps be targeted at 'forming Research Networks' (those in their first three years of existence).

One question that may be asked is why a vital Research Network which is expanding its membership could not become a separate, self-supporting association. We would prefer to turn the question around and ask why AILA would *not* want to be associated with a vital Research Network which is expanding its membership when there are clear benefits to AILA (as listed above). Some Research Networks may indeed choose to become independent associations, but others may feel that there are advantages in terms of 'legitimacy', focus (as provided by the AILA Congress) and organizational support (as offered by AILA's guidelines on ReN affairs) in remaining under the AILA umbrella. In such circumstances we would

suggest that there are no compelling reasons to deny the full status of 'Research Network' to active ReNs beyond six years.

In sum, if a Research Network remains active according to the criteria laid down by AILA, we suggest that its 'life' should not be expected to be curtailed after six years – instead, AILA recognition should continue until such time as the ReN in question does become inactive – and that this change of expectation should be reflected in the bylaws.

Yours faithfully

Garold Murray and Richard Smith, co-convenors of the AILA ReN on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning

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Hayo Reinders and Glenn Stockwell, co-convenors of the AILA ReN on Computer-Assisted Language Learning and the Learner

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