

The DG's Forum



Over the past few months of teleworking, you have asked me questions both directly and indirectly, notably on issues concerning lockdown and reopening, and the various consequences of our working models and ongoing activities. I will, therefore, attempt to address your questions in this forum. Should you have further questions, please feel free to send them to me: m.eloit@oie.int.

Will there be training and support for staff on virtual collaboration and virtual meetings to help us adapt to new working modalities?

A good understanding of the tools and their functionalities is very important, especially in view of the fundamental changes to our working modalities over the past two months, changes that look set to continue. The need for information and training has therefore not been forgotten.

The Digital Transformation and Information Systems Department has regularly shared useful tips with staff on using these new tools more effectively. I hope that everyone has been reading them carefully as they serve as a form of continuous education that should not be neglected. Moreover, on Monday, 25 May, the Department sent a message to all staff regarding the new stage of the IT Master Plan and the new tools available, in which colleagues were requested to respond to a survey designed to better identify their needs. The message explicitly stated that the deployment of these tools will take place during the summer at headquarters, and training in the new tools and their use will be provided in September; in the regions, this will take place at the end of 2020/beginning of 2021.

I should also like to add that this technological transformation must inevitably lead us to reflect on our activities according to other approaches. Thus, for example, it is not simply a matter of replacing face-to-face workshops with webinars, we also need to reconsider how we share our information and knowledge, and to look at other ways of maintaining relationships with Members, experts, etc. This is the challenge of digital transformation, one of the priorities of the 7th Strategic Plan. The COVID-19 crisis will have served to raise awareness of this necessary change as well as the urgency with which we must tackle the task.

How will further updates to the OIE's deconfinement approach be made and communicated to staff?

At the meeting I held on 6 May with all staff, a detailed document was distributed explaining the different phases of progressive 'deconfinement'. The situation at present is that significant changes have been made at headquarters (communal areas, meeting rooms), the hygiene products and masks that were on order have been delivered, and an analysis of office working areas has been carried out. This information will first be presented to the newly elected staff representatives (4 June), before it is shared with the heads of departments and units at the next meeting of the Management Committee (5 June) to enable them to organise the return of their respective teams. For several weeks, the voluntary principle will remain the rule, and those wishing to carry on working from home will be able to do so. Indeed, I would like various constraints to be taken into account, such as lack of schools or the anxiety that some may have about using public transport.

For our colleagues in the RRs and SRRs, each Representative will adapt these provisions according to the local health situation.

How will we ensure internal coordination across OIE teams while working from home?

As I have said on previous occasions, the OIE is not just an organisation that conducts programmes: it is a community. We must therefore preserve our team spirit, which is not easy to do when the opportunities for working together, sharing a coffee or saying hello in the corridors are increasingly rare. Once again, I would like to thank the Heads of Department who organise regular team meetings, staff members who run the knitting group and yoga, those who contribute to the OIE *In-house Times*, etc. Yet, this can never completely replace meeting colleagues face to face, and that is why it is so important for everyone to be able to come back to the office without delay. We must learn to find the right balance between working from home and working at the office.

How will the OIE maintain contact with Members in the absence of the General Session and regional conferences?

Maintaining contact with Members is also a matter of concern, especially as our conferences and workshops for the coming months have been cancelled, and of course the General Session, the major annual event, could not take place. I will therefore be encouraging the organisation of virtual meetings on topical issues or subjects of special relevance to countries, such as COVID-19, but also the presentation of our strategy on topics such as aquatic animal health and the launch of the global initiative for the control of African swine fever. These meetings will be shorter and more targeted, but also more frequent. Similar initiatives will be launched at regional/sub-regional level on more technical issues.

What incentives to participate in OIE meetings (Specialist Commissions, Working Groups, ad hoc Groups) will the OIE provide under the new virtual modalities?

This is an interesting question given that the principle that has prevailed since the creation of the OIE is that experts who have applied to be a member of a Commission or have agreed to be a member of a group provide their expertise free of charge. This principle will no doubt have to be reviewed, in light of the practices of other organisations.

Are there expected actions of teams regarding managing and forecasting expenditure during the rest of the year, with disruption or delays to many project activities?

First of all, the Budget team will be evaluating stricter budgets (particularly within the regular budget) to determine what funds are available to invest in the equipment and skills required to use new technologies, and thereby accelerate the organisation's digital transformation. In the case of projects financed through the World Fund, before analysing their financial management, we will need to explore the possibility and feasibility of postponing activities currently on hold, to avoid creating an overload in the coming months while also taking into account any new constraints that beneficiary countries may have. This will therefore mean reprogramming the year 2020–2021. We will then see if we need to ask donors to agree to programme extensions and/or revision of activities.

Is the GS88 'cancelled' or 'postponed' until 2021? What do we call the reporting we will do in 2020 (Presidents, Chairs, etc.)? i.e. we need to standardise our terminology.

The 2020 General Session has been cancelled; the next Session will be held in 2021 and will therefore be the 88th General Session. We must nevertheless continue to inform our Members and partners about the activities carried out, just as we would normally have done during the General Session. Consequently, we shall be publishing on the OIE website the same activity reports of the Presidents of the Specialist Commissions and the Chairs of the Working Groups, the report on the animal health situation worldwide, and the annual report of the OIE, together with video recordings. The only visible difference is that the documents will not bear the logo of the General Session.

We wish to thank Monique Éloit for submitting this article to the OIE News Team.