Request for greater transparency in the Emoji Subcommittee

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The workings of the Emoji Subcommittee (ESC) are opaque, and the decisions it makes regarding Emoji seem arbitrary and inconsistent to outsiders, even to those of us who are familiar with the normal process for encoding characters in the Unicode Standard. It is particularly problematic that rejected submissions to the ESC and working documents of the ESC are not made public, with the result that people who are considering making an emoji proposal may not know whether similar proposals have already been submitted to the ESC and rejected, and whether the ESC may already hold a position on a particular emoji. This lack of visibility means that people may waste their time and effort preparing a proposal for an emoji that the ESC has already secretly rejected.

We note that the predecessor of the Emoji Subcommittee, the Subcommittee on Encoding of Symbols, was much more transparent than the current subcommittee, and provided extensive documentation on its activities on the websites http://sites.google.com/site/unicodesymbols/Home/emoji-symbols and https://github.com/googlei18n/emoji4unicode (originally hosted at Google Code). In contrast, the ESC has no public web portal, and it is not clear to outsiders who the Emoji Subcommittee are and why they have a mandate to choose and reject Emoji. Given the high public profile of Emoji, we believe there should be greater transparency and accountability in the ESC.

L2/16-337R ("Emoji Subcommittee Terminology and Process") lays out the processes followed by the ESC, but we consider these processes to be woefully inadequate. As indicated in this document, only those emoji proposals that have been vetted by the ESC and accepted for further action are passed on for consideration by the UTC, and are then registered in the public Unicode document register. Emoji proposals that are rejected by the ESC are not made publicly available, no public record of them being received by the ESC is published, and no reason for their rejection is documented publicly. Christoph Päper already provided feedback on the lack of documentation about failed Emoji proposals (see http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2017/17018-pubrev.html#Encoding_Feedback). This resulted in Action Item 113 (http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2017/17016.htm#150-A113), which is still open.

In order to increase the transparency and accountability of the ESC, and to help submitters of Emoji proposals, we suggest that the following improvements to the working practices of the Emoji Subcommittee are implemented:

1. The ESC maintains a public document register for all external submissions, as well as for all internal working documents of the ESC.

2. In its quarterly report to the UTC the ESC lists all emoji proposals received, and the ESC decision relating to each of them, with reasons for rejection if appropriate.

3. The ESC membership and the affiliation of ESC members is made publicly available.