

**Australian Computer Society  
Constitutional Reform Working Group (CRWG)  
Report Back to Members re the Round 1 Consultation**

**Annex 4: The Story-Lines from the Analysis Files**

After the content of the Consolidated Tag-Files had been examined, the results were captured into 38 Analysis Files, which are reproduced in Annex 3.

The Tags were then allocated into 5 Chapter groups.

From each Analysis, a Story-Line was developed for each of the relevant Tags.

This Annex 4 contains the resulting 38 Story-Lines, grouped by Chapter.

The final step in the process was to rationalise the multiple Story-Lines per Chapter, resulting in a single segment of text for each of the Chapters.

The results of that final step are contained in the Report file.

**CRWG ANALYSIS**  
**Story-Lines from Tag-Files**  
Version of 30 November 2021

## 1. ACS as a Professional Society

### #Nature

Respondents had been provided a copy of the Australian Council of Professional definition of a professional society – and with this background, there was strong for ACS being and continuing to be a professional society.

"ACS is a professional society, and needs to stay that way"

In describing what that actually meant in operation, responses fell into 3 categories

- *Criteria for membership (or membership levels).*  
Comments are included below in regard to criteria for individual members and involvement of industry associations
- *Benefits to members*  
Several comments referenced and supported ethics, code of conduct, professional excellence of members.  
Although much was said about role of members and their involvement in the society, only a few comments referred to actual benefits to members. Some commented that tangible and demonstrable benefits seemed to be missing to members at present.
- *Contribution to society – to public good*  
Many comments referred to and supported benefits to society, for example:  
Mentoring students or others in the profession  
Contributing to technical standards  
Setting professional standards and accreditation  
Providing a public good by offering public advice, or denouncing failures in ICT development

### #Professional-Society

#### **Professional Society**

A professional society is an organisation that comprises and is governed by members of a particular profession with a well defined vision and mission

ACS must be more strongly committed to playing a part in solving the big problems facing humanity such climate change, sustainability and mental health etc., and making the world a better place for the next generation

#### **Professional Members**

We should make it clear to all whom ACS has verified as being a member of the ICT profession, and who is just an interested and supportive member

But how should people working in emerging tech be classified (i.e. roles that do not qualify for professional status for example someone working on blockchain development may not have any qualifications and have limited years of experience but are still a professional in the industry)?

We should have criteria allowing for different ICT professions/specialities

ICT Professionals play a role in shaping the future of the country and they need a strong ethical perspective which emphasises that technology is used to improve people's lives at personal, organisational and societal levels

#### **Technical Members**

I would also like to see a 'grade' for pc techs, esp in rural australia

Not only for PC techs, but the whole gamut of hardware service and support.

## **Associates and 'Practitioner' Members**

We need to understand the multiple profiles of people in the Associate grade. Membership data needs to be again published to members so we can help it grow substantially. We need to encourage professional membership much more energetically than Associates.

A person who has met the threshold for MACS, but never demonstrated that they've achieved the requirements of CP, could be designated a 'Practitioner' grade, and a voting member, but (future joiners) at the low-threshold level of Associate would not get the vote

## **'Cadet' Members**

A 'Cadet' grade (or similar) should be considered to encourage young people in K-12, but particularly 10, 11, 12, when they are commencing study related to our body of knowledge

We'd need to ascertain exactly what ACS can do for them, and in what way this membership might nurture their interests

## #Q01 - Prof'l Society

ACS should be seen as a voice in the ethical and positive use of computers and information technology.

But before ACS can make any public commentary or undertake any lobbying, they need to be able to formulate a policy position that is representative of the society – and generally acceptable to the membership. This is difficult to achieve – particularly for time critical issues. The endorsement of the expensive and highly ineffective COVIDSAFE app was references as inappropriate.

The involvement in Australian and international standards committees was endorsed, but with several comments that such involvement had declined.

Several people considered that the website and ICT systems were well below prevailing professional standards – and reflected poorly on the ACS. They should set a high standard!

Declining membership at the professional level was mentioned with strong concern along with dismissal of the claimed >40k members boosted by associate and "guest" members.

There were few substantial offerings as to address declining membership numbers other than:

- embrace pathways to upgrade skills for subprofessional members.
- Need to do more to attract graduates to become members
- Society needs to appeal to younger people with diversity of backgrounds
- Need greater activism to look after members' interests

## #P00 – Meta-Principle

### **Industry Associations**

A dominant view was that ACS should host members and not Industry associations. "Industry associations are incompatible with a professional society"

It was viewed that ownership of industry associations was not consistent with member ethos and not-for-profit status.

Whilst there was a strong view to not add any more such bodies, suggestions included:

- Sell them ASAP. Do not be constrained by acquired mistakes.
- Find a way to maintain "arms-length relationship", perhaps with an umbrella subsidiary arrangement
- A central matter of governance within the new constitution.

One responder also would like to see these entities benefit members and advertise these possibilities to members. "Business-lines can assist Member upskilling". Our "constitution/structure should have the capacity to address this" and adhere to our values by future amalgamations. "As a principle, I think we should have the capability to do this and look to successful integration in other societies constitutions"

Whilst a few others expressed that ACS should be able to work with such bodies as a trusted voice or in some collaborations. “Industry associations are very different from a professional society. The functions need to be separated – and then work together as and when appropriate”

### **Membership Grades**

A strong view was “Roles on board should be restricted to professional members, as should voting rights. Professional members must have either recognised skills and relevant experience or be a pioneer of good standing in an emerging area. All must adhere to the code of ethics. Associate members may have an interest, relevant experience, be an untrained manager working the ICT industry or be a student.”

Several responders suggested ACS should have additional membership categories:

- For C-suite members of organisations with ICT responsibilities (develop ICT governance)
- For PC technicians ( like BCS) ( show competence / validate skills)
- For Cadets 0 secondary students ( pathway into profession)
- For ICT practitioners / users. ( Involved with ICT but may never progress to higher level)

But this view was not unanimous : “[Re managers and users] If we try to be all things to all people, we are no longer a professional society”

### **BEC as conduit for Member Voice and Role of Branches**

Several responses stated, and others implied, that the Branch (and the BEC in particular) was the conduit for member voice.

A number of members felt that this capability had declined with: “The current influence by the CEO and staff is problematic.”

Most comments in this category linked roles within the governance structure to a simple conduit for expressing member needs and issues – and most such comments wished to preserve a branch role in the future constitution.

Members (particularly in larger states) endorsed the effectiveness of regional chapters as a supplement to branch roles.

As key link in the chain from member to ACS, the “role of branches should be enshrined in the future constitution, clearly spelling out the relationship between the elected members of the Branch BEC and the salaried Branch (or State) Manager”. Branches should perform to the budget approved at MC level as a joint exercise rather than imposed. Branches need access to limited additional funds for small unplanned projects that are professional member focused.

Branches and chapters are seen as essential, allowing local governance and focus, and engage more effectively than is possible nationally. Budget provision without undue oversight from national must be limited to an agreed budget. A federal model with branches agreed levels and areas of autonomy should also include who is responsible for what.

### **#Q04 – Associate Grade**

This was perhaps the topic that generated the most responses - with overwhelming recommendation to clearly distinguish professional membership from associate grades.

Many respondents advocated that there be multiple membership grades to address different levels of professional acuity or organisational roles Although this was not unanimous as discussed in the next section.

But generally, the view was that professional grades and associates, (and any other grades) should have clear eligibility criteria and thresholds for moving upwards. Indeed moving upwards / professional development of members was seen as a key function of the society.

But several commented that the value in membership was not highly visible. The benefits for Professional membership must appeal to the self-interest of the prospective professional member. A few aspired to a position, like other professional organisations, where professional grade membership was seen as a criterion for employment. Others acknowledged that membership and ACS certification was not highly regarded in the community.

Overwhelmingly, respondents expressed the opinion that only professional members have voting rights, with that being one of the motivations for associate members to upgrade.

#### #Q05 – Managers, Users

This topic addressed similar points as the prior topic.

A common theme was to have different membership categories to address different types of members – such as managers and users. No-one supported unrestricted access to membership for such folk.

The substantive opinion was that such people could have some level of ACS membership, subject to meeting relevant thresholds. And they should be provided with opportunity or pathway to become professional members. But there must not be any back-door entries. Integrity allows for no compromises

Membership for managers and users was opposed by some:

- *Barriers need to be drawn. Entry needs to remain tertiary qualification in an ICT discipline.*

Or

- *I have had a couple of managers of ICT functions that are 'professional managers' but have no understanding of the technology they manage. As such I do not think it would be appropriate for the ACS to give them standing as ICT professionals..... If anything, ACS should be \*pushing back\* against that alarming trend, not going out of our way to accommodate it (and thereby becoming complicit in it)*

#### **A discussion topic spawned off from this question related to technology specialisations.**

A common theme was that many specialisations have evolved recently ( eg: block chain, cyber security, cloud development, data analysis) but that these have not been adequately addressed by ACS.

*ACS needs to provide for specialisations within the ICT sector, either in collaboration with other compatible organisations (if they exist) or by itself if necessary*

SIGs are one way to address this, as is cooperation with independent societies where new fields are a fusion of multiple professions. And separately, several commented that there has been little recent activity from, or focus on SIG's.

## CRWG ANALYSIS

### Story-Lines from Tag-Files

#### 2. ACS Activities

##### #P01 – Embodiment of Values

The reference-point is the commitment of the professional Society to the public good, by means of the promulgation of professionalism in the field of ICT, and the provision of services to members and the public in order to promote and further that professionalism. That is underlined in the first two paragraphs of the Code of Ethics:

**1. The Primacy of the Public Interest**

You will place the interests of the public above those of personal, business or sectional interests.

**2. The Enhancement of Quality of Life**

You will strive to enhance the quality of life of those affected by your work.

There is concern among members that **these precepts are not embedded in the constitutional document, and neither are the Objects, or in more contemporary language the Society's mission, purposes and key functions**. This is seen by some members as having been instrumental in a drift in the ACS's behaviour away from the essential commitments of a professional society towards the mind-set of a commercial organisation. An approving expression of that approach by one member is that a business-line that is "ICT-related in any way" should be considered consistent with ACS values. Another member argues that ACS can run subsidiary companies in a for-profit manner. This resulted in a lot of departures of disillusioned now ex-members, and pushback from remaining members, who perceive the CLG notion as corporatisation and with that the abandonment rather than the embodiment of values.

A further instance of failure to embody the Society's values in its behaviour is **the hosting of industry associations**. This creates conflict within the organisation because, whereas industry associations can prioritise the interests of profit-making companies over the interests of consumers, a professional society cannot. One member raises the question as to whether, when acquiring an industry association, the Society can require them to adhere to the Society's values. Others argue that ACS must be a voice in the ethical and positive use of ICT to improve society, and that having Divisions that recognise other purposes such as the interests of its corporate members is **in direct conflict with the Society's obligations**.

In relation to the formulation of policy positions, members note the challenges involved in the validation of the consensus of ACS professionals in relation to those positions. Some members are concerned that the acknowledged need to contribute to public policy in relation to ICT must not result in dilution of the Society's performance of its important role in the development and promulgation of technical standards.

Along with mentions of insufficient contributions in relation to the big questions in society, such as climate change, one member expressed concern that the Society is taking no concrete actions in relation to reconciliation with first nation peoples, despite the bias embedded in 'big data' analytics techniques.

##### #Q02 – 'ICT'

Many members commented on the use of **'information and communications technologies' (ICT) as the primary means of defining the Society's scope**. Some discomfort exists about whether it is sufficiently comprehensive technically (e.g. is it clearly inclusive of data analytics, robotics and AI?), and sufficiently comprehensive in relation to broader management expertise relevant to ICT (cf. SFIA, including the 'business capability' approach encompassing people / process / structure / technology, ICT's integration into organisations, and organisational change).

Members also note that 'ICT' is at risk of being dated, and that it may need explicit extension to applications of ICT, and to implications of ICT, or to "enablement of society through appropriate use of technology". On the other hand, there is broad agreement that a general and succinct expression is necessary, that alternatives such as 'technology' and 'automation' are too broad, that other terms such as 'digital' are too ephemeral, and that fashions can be followed by adapting subsidiary tag-lines over time.

Concerns were expressed that the term 'ICT' is little-known to the public. Some members saw value in the provision of diverse examples of particular technologies that fall within ICT. Others commented that 'IT' is broader and more inclusive; that, since 2015, the home-page contains no visible reference to the 'Australian Computer Society' or even 'ICT Professionals'; and that 'computing' (as a human act) was a more appropriate term than 'computer' (whose primary usage refers to an artefact).

There was, however, a dominant feeling that, given the absence of any better alternative, ICT should continue as the, or at least the primary, scope-defining term.

### #Mission-Purposes

#### #Q03 – Mission, Purposes

*[ N.B. The following story-line reflects both the generic MP and the specific Q03 ]*

One proposed formulation for the ACS Mission is 'To advance [ICT] technology and practice for the benefit of the community' and another 'The ethical and positive use of computers and information technologies to improve society'. The list of Purposes, and performance against them, are seen as the basic underpinning of all ACS activities which should drive decision rationale.

An additional Principle is proposed as 'Strategic Alignment of Society activities with the ACS Professional Division Membership'. It is argued that this forces the resetting and resizing of ACS, consistent with its Mission and Purposes.

The absence of the word 'computer', or perhaps more appropriately 'computing' is a concern to some, as was the absence of ICT applications, and ICT implications / safety / ethicality.

Serious concern is expressed about the absence from the ACS home-page, since 2015, of 'computer', 'computing', 'IT' and 'Society', and the at best casual mentions of 'ICT' and 'professional'. This exacerbates the failure of the web-site's appearance and facilities to be anywhere near contemporary expectations of quality.

### #Key-Functions

#### #Q07 – Key Functions

*[ N.B. The following story-line reflects both the generic KF and the specific Q07 ]*

There was very widespread agreement the the mission of advancing computing, information and communications technology and practice leads to the most central functions being the **accreditation** of courses and institutions, **validation and certification** of individuals' education and expertise, and **professional education** to assist in achieving the necessary levels. These depend on the development, extension and maintenance of the quality of **the ACS Core Body of Knowledge for ICT Professionals (CBOK)**. The importance of **pathways for achieving CT/CP** was emphasised, including far greater agility to provide flexibility, integration with industry certification, constructive approaches to the 'micro-credential' notion, and rapid adaptation to ever-changing specialisations. Associated with those functions are the exchange of ideas, information transfer and information development. Concern was expressed about a lack of agility as specialisations emerge (e.g. virtual and augmented reality), in accreditation processes, in certification processes, and in CBOK. (The most recent revision of CBOK was almost 3 years ago).

The importance of coordinated (and where necessary funded) input by professional members to the more important **technical committees of Standards Australia and IFIP** was also underlined. The drift towards more management and policy Standards must not detract from the importance of and commitment to technical Standards.

Although one member voiced support for **the operation of incubators**, multiple members argued that **innovation** should instead be supported by direct grants and by education and standards activities, undertaken in conjunction with universities, governments and industry. Most members regard as inappropriate the direct involvement of ACS in the IR&D and commercialisation pipeline. It should not act as a landlord, and it should particularly not divert surplus into such activities.

The quality of services and processes involved in skills assessment attracted criticism. Moreover, **skills assessment and ICT career-entry priorities** are perceived to be heavily committed to revenue-generation and hence immigrants, and to be failing the needs of people in Australia. Weaknesses include inadequate support for student members, and seriously inadequate emphasis on the need for employers to step back up to the plate and train their existing employees.

**Mentoring** is seen as an important element at both entry and higher levels. **Networking aspects**

**of professional development activities** are a key function, not a mere side-effect, and some purely social networking activities are also appropriate.

The enormous value of **SIGs** was mentioned in many different contexts, and their staff-driven demise was deplored. Particularly in the less-large Branches, **EdXN and other visiting speakers** are highly valued. Members mentioned the importance of **Branches** many times, because of their understanding of local conditions. The need is recognised for cross-funding support to smaller Branches and regional areas.

Some members noted the massive decrease in the proportion of revenue spent on professional matters and member services, despite revenue growth and a steep decline in professional membership. This is seen as a failure to sustain **strategic alignment of the organisation with the professional membership** – as distinct from the faux-membership categories of skills assessment and PY clients, and gratis associateships. Granted gratis associateship to employees and tenants is seen as a highly inappropriate manoeuvre that devalues professional qualification.

Among the ways in which it is seen that ACS can serve members during **career-transitions** are a focus on jobs; on the retention of wages and conditions for Australian residents despite the active measures being used to support immigration to bring salary-levels down; on Standards, in order to reduce 'the cowboy factor'; and on the needs of members outside the large urban areas.

A key function is seen to be assurance that professional members enjoy the confidence of those who employ their services. Many perceive an ongoing slide away from technical ICT expertise towards vaguer business roles. **Assurance of technical expertise** depends on the design and maintenance of thresholds for each level of professional membership, and for at least the key specialisations within the field, assistance to members to achieve those thresholds, and the testing of members against them.

The absence of a **threshold for Associate membership** was deplored by some members, who argue that voting rights in a professional society must be limited to professional members, and that Associates in any case need to be engaged in formal ICT studies, or be already capable ICT practitioners, or at least be skilled users of ICT. The absence of an **under-16 'student member / cadet' membership category** was seen as a missed opportunity to attract participation in the mid-High School years.

**Position papers** were called for, developed by or at least coordinated by professional members, on which to base public statements on policy issues, and public policy input to governments, directly and via peak bodies including industry associations. The reduction to three Boards in 2016 is seen as having been a regressive step. There need to be **sufficient Boards** that each has **workable scope**, each needs to be a **working board**, and each needs **the authority to act within its defined area**, i.e. to be a Committee of the governing committee, with delegations.

The ACS endorsement of the COVIDsafe app was criticised because of the absence of technical audit and analysis and the lack of a broader public interest base on which analysis could be conducted. Some members argue that ACS needs to achieve a sufficient public policy profile, because otherwise ICT and quality application of ICT are not seen as a major risk factor. A stronger focus is needed on quality factors, and on failures, their causes, and how to avoid them.

For proactive formulation of policy positions, it was argued to be necessary to validate the consensus of the professional members of the ACS. The demise of the Economic, Legal and Social implications Committee was noted, together with the fact that policy work fails to engage the ACS community. It was argued that open online fora are needed to enable that engagement.

ACS appears to some members to lack a commitment to playing our part as a profession in solving the big problems facing humanity such as climate change, sustainability and mental health, and generally making the world a better place for the next generation.

Public policy input needs to be complemented by more easily **digestible information for the general public**. This needs to embody a strong ethical perspective that emphasises ICT's use to improve people's lives at personal, organisational and societal levels, with the quality of public facing systems, and their security in the widest sense a particular focus.

A key function that is currently argued to be missing from the lists and appears not to be supported by ACS is channels, coordination and facilitation (e.g. through insurance) of **volunteering by ACS members** in immediately post-emergency contexts such as bushfires and floods, and perhaps also ongoing contexts as well, e.g. for those with disabilities and the socio-economically disadvantaged.



## CRWG ANALYSIS

### Story-Lines from Tag-Files

#### 3. ACS Business-Lines

The ACS has many key functions to perform. The term 'business-line' is used here to refer to additional activities, which have as a major purpose the achievement of surplus.

##### #P02 – Behaviour consistent with Values

Members see the point of ACS activities as being **the public good, plus, in order to facilitate professionalism, the interests of members need to be addressed**. Business activity that ACS engages in should be strictly and transparently aligned with its professional society values, mission and purposes. Business activities need to have 'line of sight' relevance to members.

Instead, members perceive that the professional society aspects have been lost along the way with other orientations coming in. They want ACS to go back to its roots and core principles and build from that. One member argued that applying the principle of **'strategic alignment with the ACS professional membership'** would bring a tighter focus on the key purpose of the Society.

More specifically, commercial undertakings such as **ACS Labs are seen by many members as being not congruent with ACS objectives**. If the aim is to support fledgling ICT endeavour, then other sources of sponsorship could be found. Running a real estate business does little to create sustainable revenue and carries unwelcome risk. Similarly, members argued that the **acquisition of a set of data marketing and analytics associations does not appear to be aligned with Society values or membership value**.

When ACS considers investment in business-lines, there must be protections against the pursuit of agendas that do not align with that of the ACS. Members are far from satisfied that any governing committee with substantial power can be trusted to make major decisions about new business-lines, in the absence of **clarity about the evaluation criteria** being applied, assurance that those criteria are actually being applied, and adequate information, in advance, about the nature of the activity being considered. **Effective accountability mechanisms** are essential, so that safeguards exist to prevent the Society being run away with.

##### #Business-Lines

Members expect that commercial activities are entered into for the prime purpose of **supporting the professional activities of the ACS, by generating surplus that can be applied to ACS's key functions**. Their function is not to prop up loss-making business ventures.

Some forms of business activity that might generate surplus are natural for ACS, e.g. ongoing education programs, training for transition into the workplace, indexes to ICT expertise and bodies of knowledge, and guidance to professionals on career pathways. Other activities are consistent with professional society values, or at least neutral. Some, however, need to be avoided, because they are inconsistent with the Society's values, mission or purposes, or conflict with key functions, e.g. if the activity competes with ACS's own members by performing consultancy or contracting within the ICT field, or the activities conflict with ACS's obligations to serve the public interest.

Members agree that **ACS should support innovation. The issue is how this should be done**. An incubator or an accelerator is seen as being tenable if it generates surplus, and, because innovation is consistent with the Society's values, even if it is reliably breakeven; but not if loss-making. The Labs Division is, however, a somewhat-value-added form of real estate management that is best left to universities, business organisations and government organisations that can share their resources and, importantly, can capitalise on the interaction with start-up innovators.

A number of members argued that **business-lines need to be clearly separated from the Society**, e.g. in a separately-managed subsidiary subject to governance under ethical investment principles. They must not become the *raison d'être* for the Society's existence, and must not expose the Society to reputational damage or monetary loss.

##### #Q09 – Consistency of Business-Lines with Society Values

Members want business-lines to be consistent with ACS values, **to generate surplus and/or provide material benefits to members more directly**, to be the subject of rigorous decision-making, to be **transparent to the membership**, and to members being able to influence decisions at least through **meaningful engagement processes**.

Some members are accepting of substantial delegations to the governing committee provided that the operation of business-lines is **subject to constraints within the constitutional document** rather than members exercising some power in order to keep the governing committee's activities consistent with the mission and purposes. One member argues, on the other hand, that "business strategy and priorities of ACS are completely operational, and members should have no involvement in their development".

#### #Q10 – Surplus Allocation

Members communicated the views that surplus funds should be directed to member benefits and the good of the wider ICT community. The **gains made from successful business-lines must be invested in the ACS's key functions, not in loss-making business ventures.**

Examples of appropriate allocation that were provided include events and initiatives to improve education and professional standing; lobbying efforts to improve the IT business environment; grants and scholarships to help support diversity and access in IT; discretionary financial resources for branches together with the devolved authority to spend them.

One member proposed a particular reserve be specified in the constitutional document along the lines of a 'fighting fund', requiring the membership's approval for use.

**Where the Society's surplus is allocated should be far more transparent to members than has been the case** in recent years.

#### #Industry-Associations

There was widespread agreement that ACS should engage with industry associations and build relationships with them. However, members' views were strongly that ACS is a professional membership-based society of people, and is not an organisation-serving industry association.

The majority of members' contributions involve **active opposition to the acquisition or operation of industry associations within ACS, and want divestment of all those that it currently has.** However, a minority of the contributions would accept industry associations within ACS, provided that they are maintained at arm's length (but by what means that can be achieved was not discussed), and that they provide benefits to ACS members, such as professional development included within membership fees or available to members at low cost.

#### #Q06 – Indy Associations

There was unanimity on the questions of ACS being a professional society (e.g. "ACS should host human members not organisational members"), and the need to have **constructive relationships with industry associations.**

On the other hand, opinions were substantially split on whether it was feasible for the ACS to devise a risk-managed way to host industry associations. The main factors arising in discussions include conflict or at the very least mismatch between **organisational values and missions**; whether industry associations are able to provide **benefits to ACS members**; and whether their operations have **financial viability** or are likely to need funding support.

Some members might accept industry associations within ACS if the associations were required to, and did, subscribe to **adherence to the Society's values and Code of Ethics.** This would, however, involve them prioritising the interests of the public over the interests of the companies participating in the association.

The suggestion was made that ACS develop and operate an **'association as a service' platform,** delivered through an ACS subsidiary, for fee, with industry associations as clients.

#### #Q08 – Innovation Labs

A modest majority of respondents favour **ACS support for incubators or accelerators, but only if** it is a transparent process, both prior to launch of the business-line and on a continuing basis; that it is aligned to benefits to members; that it is structurally separated from the main body of the professional Society; and that it operates profitably.

A large minority of members articulate strong views that direct financial support for incubators or accelerators is not appropriate, because of the risks involved and/or the existence of higher priority ways to allocate the available funding. One member argued that support for start-ups in Australia is now an active field, and ACS has little to contribute to, and little to gain from, running either accelerators or incubators.

**CRWG ANALYSIS**  
**Story-Lines from Tag-Files**  
Version of 28 November 2021

#### **4. ACS Internal Structures**

##### #P03 – Power Dispersion

There is substantial support for **devolved responsibility to Branch committees, and to Chapters and Branch SIGs, within a national framework**. The reasoning underlying this is that Branches know their local community, have the agility to respond to local needs, and are close to State and Territory governments, and to other professional societies and industry associations within the particular jurisdiction. As a result, the Branch is seen as the part of the organisation that members relate to, and as the key link in the chain from a member to the ACS.

There is also substantial support for **financial and other delegations to Branches**, to enable fulfilment of those functions. Members see it as essential that decisions can be made by Branch committees. Iron-fisted management-by-budget is seen as dysfunctional. Although it is acknowledged that Branch committees must be accountable for their actions and their use of funds, the pretence that all activities and all expenditure can be predicted 3-15 months ahead is harmful. Discretionary funds must be available within Branches for them to serve their members effectively.

The current circumstance in most Branches is denial of the power to make decisions, and denial of any flexibility in relation to access to funds. Members perceive that situation to be not only seriously dysfunctional, but also a breach of at least the spirit of the Society and arguably even of the constitutional document.

Members are all the more disenchanted because of the vast revenue the Society has been generating, the perceived wastage of much of it on expenditure of little or no apparent relevance to the membership, and the salting away of millions into reserves while Branches are denied funding. They see **budget creation as a joint exercise and not something imposed from above**. They expect adequate discretionary funds to exist, to enable opportunities that emerge during a budget period to be addressed, without the delay of time-wasting approval processes.

A minority view was voiced to the effect that all elements of federalism should be purged, that all power should be centralised in the national office, and that election by Branch members of representatives in an electoral college for choosing governing committee members disenfranchises members, and that this is a more serious problem than the dominance of elections by Sydney and Melbourne members.

##### #P10 – Branches

Most members see members as being the reason the society exists, and the Society's priority. A qualification to that is the need for the Society to fulfil its responsibility to the public as a whole, and hence to serve the profession, in order to serve society and the economy more effectively.

There is strong support for the ideas that **Branches, Chapters and Branch-level SIGs are essential elements of the Society**, the critical link in the chain, and the conduit for members to engage with ACS. Because local needs in each Branch and Chapter are different, flexibility is needed to support, engage and empower local members. The ACS structure needs to foster grass roots agility, innovation and value-added activities at Branch level.

The key role for Branch committees is engagement with and support for the local members through events, activities, mentoring schemes and other service delivery. Members want decisions delegated to the lowest level at which those decisions are sensibly made. This means funds available to Branch committees for events conceived, developed and run by local members with the support of Branch staff.

[ Members' contributions to national activities, on the other hand, are appropriately made through national committees, which may operate Branch-level sub-committees. ]

A commonly-held view is that **the current dominance of the CEO and staff is seriously problematic**. For example, Branch committees lack the ability to contact their local members directly. Members want Branch managers and staff to be there to help Branch committees, not to direct Branch members.

Matrix management is seen as an established technique which works in organisations of the size of the ACS. It is based on trust, collaboration and communication, and needs to be reflected in job descriptions and KPIs.

The view was put that members should be guaranteed **a minimum level of uniform service**, despite the small size of some Branches and Chapters. This requires in effect cross-subsidies from the Branches that operate at considerable scale across to less densely-populated regions.

#### #Q11 – Branches

A common theme was that Branch committees need **sufficient autonomy** to be able to act locally on events, initiatives and local industry/government liaison.

One view was that COVID has underscored the pivotal role of State Governments. **ACS's federated model reflects the national model. ACS must honour that, and comply with its Rules.** Another view was that Branches understand their constituents, and are much closer to their State/Territory and local politicians. They need sufficient autonomy and authority plus funding – which is very different from the centralised control that's been imposed in recent times.

There was strong support for Branch committees regarding a level of control over budget setting, local staff and Branch funds.

There was also strong support for **clear definition of responsibilities between Branch committees, Branch Managers and National Office, with far more devolution of power to Branches**, and Branch Managers working for the Branch within a national context, not controlling the Branch committee.

#### #Chapters

Members recognised that each Branch and each Chapter is different, and flexibility is needed to support each of them appropriately. The importance of Chapters in serving at least regional, rural and remote areas was generally recognised.

It was perceived that **well-established Chapters need funding, with a budget and power to initiate projects and activities, with oversight.** North Queensland Chapter deplored the expropriation by national office of its earned reserve of \$10,400.

A minority view was that Branches should be replaced with communities of interest, which by their nature would be primarily national in nature rather than regional.

Another minority view was that Branches should advise and contribute to strategic opportunities for ACS [ in line with policies promulgated from national office in recent years ], rather than serving their regional members.

#### #P04 – Sub-Societies

#### #Q12 – Umbrella Organisation

[ N.B. The following story-line reflects both the generic P04 and the specific Q12 ]

Widespread support exists for the notion of ACS being an umbrella organisation. However, two qualifications were evident:

- sub-organisations must be professional and serve individuals, not organisations; and
- the risk of drifting away from the nucleus of ICT must be carefully managed.

One area of discussion was the Society's own identity. **The breadth of scope is enormous and growing, and specialisations are continually changing.** This makes it challenging to establish and retain effective coverage of all areas.

Concern was expressed by some that, although the extension of ACS scope into organisational aspects is relevant, it has been associated with a reduction in the quality and depth of technical offerings, with **many events with technical titles being heavily-imbued with marketing-speak.**

The risk arises of becoming too diffuse and hence too superficial. To address that risk, the core must be identified and **focus on the core must be sustained.** This includes, for example, specification and maintenance of Body Of Knowledge (BOK) documents, course accreditation requirements, CT/CP specialisation recognition, the offering of market-leading events and courseware, and active participation in industry Standards.

Ways to support non-core areas include:

- **constructively partnering with compatible professional societies**, e.g. by means of MoUs, cross-accreditation of professional education offerings, and discounted joint memberships of two or more professional societies, co-branding of events;
- **hosting compatible professional organisations**, e.g. as National SIGs; and
- **enabling organic, self-organising groups within ACS**, especially as Branch SIGs and virtual communities-of-interest or practice.

To achieve this, however, the ACS has to be **organisationally vastly more agile**, and must overcome the current, massive deficit in its internal ICT, so as to efficiently provide convenient and effective **service-bundles for National SIGs, Branch SIGs and virtual communities-of-interest**.

### #SIGs

ACS needs to provide for specialisations within the ICT sector, variously in collaboration with other compatible organisations and by itself. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are one well-established way of doing this.

[ **SIGs are relatively informal organisational units that support professional and social networking, and information access and interchange, in a specialised area**. The topic-area is in some cases of an established nature, and in others of a topical, leading-edge or speculative kind. Some are long-lived, many are short-term and some are ephemeral.

[ They are a flexible tool, well-suited to a topic-area whose boundaries are as yet unclear, and whose longevity is in doubt. They are generally very inexpensive, because they harness the energy of members who commit considerable effort and time to stimulate and coordinate professionally-relevant activities. Many are fragile, because of their dependence on one or two individuals.

[ SIGs have typically been oriented towards real-world / face-to-face activities, particularly addresses and panels with invited speakers, demonstrations and site-visits. Electronic channels tend to be used as a supporting tool rather than as the primary vehicle. Alternative, perhaps broader terms are 'community of interest (CoI)' and 'community of practice (CoP)'. These may emphasise electronic channels more strongly than the conduct of events in a single location.

Members noted that SIGs offer benefits not only to members, but also to the Society as a whole. They can act as seeds of structures within ACS that reflect new specialisations. They can spawn additional pathways to CP, provide a basis for the establishment of a National SIG, or represent a vehicle for the formalisation of collaborative relationships with other compatible organisations.

Many members deplored **the abolition of most SIGs in 2016-17**, by withdrawing such funding as they had available to them. One member documented 65 that were active in different Branches in 2016, generating considerable activity. In 2021, not a single Branch web-page mentions SIGs. The destruction of SIGs is associated by many members with the collapse in membership that has occurred during the last 5 years, with one arguing that it was emblematic of the manner in which the centralisation and bureaucracy has lost track of Branch members as people.

Multiple members were adamant **SIGs need to again become a key feature of Branch activities**, supported by modest in-kind and financial budgets, welcoming prospective as well as current members, and working collaboratively with other organisations. One member underlined the need for ACS to provide SIGs with a digital platform including self-managed Web-presence, membership management, and communications services.

[ Actions to close down SIGs were very probably *ultra vires*. Branch SIGs are mentioned in Rule 14.3.2, and NatReg 8.15 empowers Branch Executive Committees to establish and dissolve Branch SIGs "for any purpose consistent with the Objects, Rules and National Regulations which consist of members or members and non-members that the Branch Executive Committee invites to participate" and empowers BECs to delegate functions to them.

[ The Glossary at <https://www.acs.org.au/governance/gloassary.html> states that "Branch Executive Committees may establish Branch SIGs for similar reasons to that of a National Special Interest Group, but in particular to support networking among Branch members and knowledge exchange". ]

## #P11 – Governance

Members noted **the need for much-improved accountability by the Management Committee**, but also for **far more delegation of powers and funding to groups of members**, and associated accountability measures. [ In current terms, those 'groups of members' are Boards, national committees, task forces and working groups, and Branch committees, sub-committees and SIGs ].

As part of the necessary checks and balances, members called for **the Objects, the Mission, the Purposes and the Key Functions of the ACS to be firmly embedded in the constitutional document**.

The electoral college system is perceived as having helped isolate the membership from exerting direct power. Its narrow eligibility rules have enabled the emergence of a small, self-perpetuating elite buffered from the membership as a whole.

It was argued that there need to be **more Boards**, each of which has much **more focussed** scope, is a **working** board, and has **the authority to act independently within its defined area**, rather than being a mere advisory group [ i.e. is a committee of the governing committee, and has defined delegations ].

Some members argued for **separation of the business-lines** that are run in order to generate surplus into a separate company with a separate CEO and Board reporting to the ACS governing committee.

One member, however, argued that the most involvement that members should have in governance is to vote for which director they want to fill a vacancy.

**CRWG ANALYSIS**  
**Story-Lines from Tag-Files**  
Version of 28 November 2021

## **5. ACS Governing Committee**

### #Directors

Generally, the expectation was to achieve sufficient spread of expertise, and to build in turnover without losing corporate memory, but avoid having so many directors that the governing committee becomes unworkably big.

There was a distinct preference for any member in the professional division being able to stand for the board, but the need was recognised for qualifications and experience, if necessary by supplementing the elected board members with a small number of qualified external directors.

Arguments were made for ACS to have a programme for developing future leaders, with BEC experience used in part as a training-ground.

Questions were raised about the appropriateness of the view of ACS as a multi-million dollar "company".

There was some sympathy for director diversity, across Branches, and across gender, age and race; but there was considerable opposition to the use of a nomination committee.

Arguments were put for separation of powers between elected members and employed staff.

[ Recurrent confusions arise from the highly unusual usages of terms in the current ACS Rules. Specifically, the following terms need to be used in the replacement constitutional document in ways consistent with normal organisational practice: board, director, executive committee, branch committee, branch executive committee. ]

### #P05 – Open Nomination

The majority of responders thought that any member should be able to nominate for a position on the board, but that they need to demonstrate their qualifications and/or experience relevant to governing committee work, and have access to funded opportunities to acquire appropriate training.

Those who addressed membership status limited eligibility to members in the Professional Division.

Payment to directors was contested territory, the majority favouring expense-reimbursement only.

Serious concern was expressed about the current, complex eligibility rules, which restrict nominees to a narrow elite, but also about the need to maintain representation of smaller Branches.

There was tension between a minority view that being a multi-million dollar operation meant that the organisation has to be run on a commercial basis, and the majority view that it's a professional society first and foremost, and conventional corporate governance is a constraint not the objective.

There was some discussion of the need for diversity, such as 50-50 gender representation.

### #Q13 – Director Nomination

The view was strongly expressed that either all, or at least the predominant majority of, members of the governing committee must be from among the professional members – specifically excluding associates or guest members.

A few proposed empowering the board to invite a small number of independent members, but only for the specific purpose of achieving reasonable coverage across the board expertise matrix.

Almost all agreed that prior board experience was desirable. A few supported that as an eligibility criterion, but most argued it should be left to voters to take into account. Almost all agreed it was appropriate for ACS to support educational courses for new members of the governing committee.

Many argued against board control through such mechanisms as a nomination committee. Many were very concerned about the current, extremely stringent eligibility rules, and the resulting very narrow fields of candidates. It was argued that this has isolated the membership from exerting direct power at what has been quite a tumultuous time for our society.

Some expressed concern about the dominance of Sydney and Melbourne that is inevitable if a single system of one-professional-member / one-vote is used.

Some argued for members of the governing committee to be remunerated / paid an honorarium.

A few suggested requiring diversity representation on the board, re age, gender, race and location.

The argument was presented as to why the CEO should not be a board member of a member-based and member-serving organisation.

An overtone throughout was deep concern about how to ensure the trustworthiness of the governing committee, in the eyes of the membership as a whole.

#### #P06 – Dual-Electorate

Disempowerment of Branches is clearly a major concern for many members. This concern is, as it has been throughout the ACS's existence, particularly acute among smaller Branches. There is seen to be a major risk of dominance of governing committee positions, and hence of the values underlying decisions, by large Branches and the major capital cities.

The concern is exacerbated in Sydney's case by it being the seat of head office, hence affording ready access to general meetings for Sydney members, and enabling the active exercise of the right to vote by Sydney-based staff-members, who have a conflict of interest and can be subject to employer pressure.

Several participants were attracted to a hybrid voting model, partly the conventional single-electorate, one-member/one-vote, and partly a 'Senate' or 'electoral college' model along the lines of the current Congress. Another participant argued for a wholly 'electoral college' model, with its substantial bias towards smaller Branches. [ Currently, NSW with 29% of the voting members, and Vic, with 25%, are effectively guaranteed 1 seat each of 11 on MC, but the other 7 elected positions are voted on by 26 electors of whom as few as 4 are from NSW and Vic ].

#### #P07 – Workable Delegations

A common theme in this area was that delegations to elected officials should be anchored in the constitution, and should facilitate decision and action rather than impede them.

It was argued that elected officials need to be supported by staff and not directed by them.

This need extends beyond elected officials at national level to Branch Committees. Specific areas in which delegations are seen to be necessary are the leadership of interactions with State and Territory governments and agencies, the direction of local activities and programs, budget management including a discretionary component to ensure agility, and the direction of local staff, consistent with policies set at national level, and workplace law.

Inadequacies in accountability measures are a serious concern. The argument was put that governing committee Minutes should be published, including information about initiatives under discussion, such as new business-lines. The need was acknowledged for a small minority of the details to be recorded in an unpublished section of the Minutes.

#### #P08 – Accountability / Transparency / Engagement

There was considerable argument to the effect that greater **transparency** is required. It was argued that the culture of information suppression must change, and the perceived norm of providing vague and late response to questions or no response at all must be replaced by sensible answers to sensible questions.

Specific examples of initiatives that lacked transparency, lacked engagement and/or were considered seriously inappropriate were identified as "the most expensive office space in Australia", "buying a book on Menzies, being a member of WEF, attending meetings in Davos", halting the publication of detailed membership data, the acquisition of ADMA, and the acquisition and development of incubators.

As regards **engagement**, it was argued that the Management Committee and executive needs to share information about strategic initiatives, particularly those relating to membership and major new business-lines, and to seek and embrace feedback from members. Both the acquisition of ADMA, and the acquisition and development of incubators, were argued to be so significant as to demand prior engagement.



It was acknowledged that there are hard choices to be made about which things are to be delegated to the board by the membership, versus published-to-members-in-advance, versus hard-consultative-with-plebiscite, versus put to determinative-member-vote / referendum.

A key issue was seen as being which matters and/or which documents are the ones that members most need to be strongly influenced by members rather than delegated to an all-powerful governing committee.

In relation to **accountability**, the desire was clear for ways in which members are able to stop the board potentially abusing its power and dragging the Society somewhere the members don't want it to go. This conflicts with the currently expressed vogue for a 'lean' constitution that empowers the board to make almost all decisions – because that implies the need for a high level of trust in all future boards, which is probably unattainable. Members want influence well beyond just voting for board-members.

In particular, members not only want to know in advance about changes in membership arrangements and major new business-lines, but also to be able to influence impending decisions that they see as inappropriate.

Possible mechanisms that were discussed include guidance on the allocation of surplus built into the governing documents, a requirement that the more important matters go to the members [ for 'approval' / 'ratification' / 'endorsement' ], the capacity of each BEC to escalate issues (through such instruments as 'a motion of concern', 'a motion of serious concern', 'a motion of no confidence' and a 'disallowance' motion that binds the board), and passage by two BECs of a materially identical 'motion of no confidence' automatically triggering a General Meeting at which the motion must be put and debated.

#### #P09 – Key Documents

For important matters (such as internal structures, processes, member representation, Branch powers, norms and priorities), a mechanism is needed to stop unpalatable changes of direction by those to whom members have delegated authority, before it happens. That mechanism needs to include:

- **transparency**, including easy discovery of and access to documents;
- efficient and rapid **engagement** with the membership using electronic communications and Branch involvement;
- efficient and rapid **endorsement** using secure online voting facilities; and
- protection against dominance by small, energetic minorities, through the setting of **a minimum-participation threshold**.

#### #Q14 – Key Documents

Because of the abuse of trust that they perceive to have occurred, many members want the new constitution to include the ability of members to influence important matters well beyond just voting for board-members. One member did, however, argue for zero member involvement in any aspect of policy. Between those extremes, several urged that care be taken in identifying which documents, or which aspects of policy and strategy, are appropriate to subject to member control.

No single formulation emerged of what the key aspects are, but membership and particularly membership grades and eligibility requirements were frequently raised, with mentions also of Branches, Chapters, ACS objectives, the Code of Ethics, and major activities and initiatives.

Multiple members were aware that a variety of measures need to be considered, and that measures that afford greater power to members require clear and sufficiently strong justification, because of the risk of ungovernability.

The proposal was put that trust depends on a series of layers of regulatory measures.

**Transparency** is the most basic requirement, and its absence was fundamental to the recent collapse in trust. Beyond communication, **Explanation** of the reasons for decisions is essential, and for significant decisions this must be provided in advance. The next level is **Engagement**, which has to feature meaningful opportunities to provide input, and to see that it is reflected in the decision-making process. This includes the capacity of each BEC to pass a motion of concern, or a motion of serious concern – the second category being communicated to the membership.

Some categories of decision are sufficiently important that they warrant **Endorsement / Ratification** by the membership, by (electronic) vote of the Professional Division members. This is

at the level of 'strong advice' by the members, by means of a plebiscite. Some categories of decision, with particular reference to membership grades and the Code of Ethics, were seen by some members as requiring **Approval** by the membership (by electronic vote), equivalent to a referendum.

The uppermost-layer regulatory measure is the well-established mechanism of a **Motion of No Confidence in the governing committee**. The consequence of passage of such a motion is a spill of positions and the entering of caretaker mode pending the completion of the election process. The threshold of membership numbers needed to force a General Meeting to consider such a Motion must be practicably achievable. In addition, a proposal was put that any two BECs be able to trigger a General Meeting. These uppermost-layer regulatory features are expressly intended as the mechanism of last resort, with the lower layers expected to be sufficient to achieve the resolution of issues.

#### #P12 – Legal Compliance

This attracted little attention, on the grounds that compliance obligations are by definition mandated, so there is little discretion. The comment was made that non-compliant behaviour occurs despite mandation, and that checks and balances must be in place.