An alternative plan for ACS governance change

The process should be managed by a task force.

By Roger Clarke on Aug 25 2020 11:22 AM

This opinion article is a response to the statement by Management Committee on 19 August about the forthcoming process to devise a new constitution

(https://ia.acs.org.au/article/2020/the-plan-for-acs-governance-change.html).

The open letter (https://itwire.com/c-level/open-letter-to-acs-management-committee.html) to the ACS Management Committee published in ITWire on 24 August has laid out quite starkly the issues that are confronting us all as members of the professional society.

In this piece, I am seeking to present to ACS members the specific proposals that the 'Rescue Your ACS' group has already put before the ACS executive.

(https://membership.acs.org.au/member-insight/acsplus.html)

Firstly, the process needs to be managed by a task force that is independent of the Management Committee, and transparent. The purpose of the task force is to achieve a basis for trust, and to ensure that all views of the members are gathered, are considered, and to the extent practicable are reflected in the resulting constitution to be put to the members for formal approval.

The task force needs appropriate Terms of Reference, composition, powers and resources. Its Terms need to be established by, and it needs to report to, the Congress, not Management Committee. Under ACS Rule 8.1(a), the Congress has the power to "determine directions and policies for the Society".

Secondly, it is vital that the consultation process be framed by a suitable set of documents.

Such a document-set has been prepared by the Rescue group. It commences with Principles relating to the nature and purposes of the Society. Those Principles lead to a list of key features of the constitution. The clauses in the group's draft constitution derive from that features list.

We believe that the Management Committee should produce a similar document to express their vision for the constitution, arguing from principles, to features, to clauses. Both sets need to be provided to members. Members' comments, and the evaluation of members' comments, rather than being a scatter of ideas, will then fit within a coherent framework. Each member will be able to indicate their preference for one approach, or for the other approach, or for some variation of either of them; or they will be able to counter-propose alternatives approaches if they don't see either of the two as being satisfactory.

Thirdly, the submissions made by members must not disappear inside a machine. All submissions need to be published to the membership. Where individuals request it, submissions could be anonymous. If any submissions are expressed in a combative or controversial manner, or contain what appear to be unsubstantiated assertions, the task force could include a qualification or comment.

Finally, the lack of a communication channel cross-ways among ACS members needs to be overcome. Individual members need to be able to comment both on the framing documents and on one another's comments. Conventional code of conduct provisions for a discussion forum would of course apply. This is a professional Society, and steadiness of expression is to be expected.

The vague process outline provided by Management Committee in the article of 19 August risks another process as flawed as the one conducted during 2019. The Society can't afford a re-run.

The Rescue group submits that the approach described here will enable our professional Society to put behind us the problems of the last 18 months, establish a new constitutional form that reflects members' needs, and deliver new member-oriented impetus that enables the organisation to flourish in the post-COVID world.

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