

STRATEGY FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE AUSTRALIA DIVISION OF IStructE

This paper seeks to address the current situation the IStructE in Australia, identify barriers to expansion, and recommend actions to make progress in the expansion of the Australia Division.

There are two principal issues:

- 1) The relatively low profile of the IStructE in Australia
- 2) The relatively low membership in Australia

1.0 HOW WE IMPROVE THE PROFILE OF ISTRUCTE?

There is a perception that IStructE is just a smaller version of IEAust, and therefore irrelevant. We need to identify the contribution we can make to the engineering profession in Australia. The standard of technical meetings in Australia is generally poor. They are treated more as a sales and marketing opportunity where presenters concentrate on selling themselves, their companies and their success.

We need to be better than this, and begin to grapple with the real challenges, problems, failures, and opportunities our profession faces. We need to approach this in an entirely different way, and we firmly believe we can do this through technical meetings where we assemble for full, frank, and meaningful discussion and mutual support.

When the IStructE seeks to take the lead in this way, we are convinced that there is a hunger and demand among younger engineers that will very quickly be manifested in a strengthening of our numbers in these meetings, and an appreciation that IStructE is distinctly different to other Institutions. The wealth of knowledge and skill, particularly among the more senior members of the Institution needs to be shared and passed on to younger members who are keen to learn and grow as professionals.

We don't need to have large numbers to be useful and influential. We do need to be useful to the profession in a relevant way and to have a future in Australia.

The raise our profile will require time and would be best achieved by organising technical meetings on particular projects, which are open to both members and potential members. Such technical meetings should address the particular aspects of structural problems during conception, analysis, and final design and especially during construction. Such open and frank discussions will assist our members enormously. Similar IEAust and CIA meetings that I have attended over the years tend to gloss over any real difficulties or how major problems were resolved. We all know that such things happen from time to time. These meetings should be true learning experience. It will be a slow process to increase our profile in the industry but the word will get about of the value of such meetings.

To achieve this first objective there are some practical actions we need to take:

2.0 CONCENTRATE ON ISTRUCTE MEETINGS AS A PRIORITY

Not all meetings should be for only member and it will be essential to hold meetings from time to time in conjunction with the CIA or IEAust Structural College. However, I believe that the latter see IStructE as a competitor rather than a companion. We will never thrive as a sub-set of IEAust Structural Branch, and eventually our potential membership will be lost as they fail to see the benefit of IStructE in this context

3.0 STIMULATE ACTIVE GROUPS IN EVERY STATE

The distribution of our membership would suggest that local groups could be formed in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth initially. Adelaide has a smaller membership and may need special assistance to establish an active group. It would not be necessary to hold an initial meeting at a convenient location or a consultants' office to see if there is sufficient interest among the local membership to form a group.

This group could form a committee of management similar to that formed in Melbourne. From then on it is a matter of organising meetings for members and potential members to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas relating to structural engineering and finding members who are prepared to discuss projects or other matters of interest to members.

4.0 EMPOWER LOCAL GROUPS TO HOLD ISTRUCTE MEETINGS BY PROVIDING PROPER FUNDING TO RAISE THE ISTRUCTE PROFILE LOCALLY

There are usually some costs associated with the organization of a meeting, which may include:

- Preparation and distribution of material to promote a meeting.
- Hire of a venue where necessary.
- Catering or refreshments would be essential for any function held after normal working hours
- Hire of audio-visual equipment
- Reimbursement of Speaker's expenses
- Any other expenses.

Many of these expenses must be paid up front and will require someone to pay them before claiming back against the Division. This is assuming that a budget has been submitted to Division previously. Otherwise, this means that a member of the State Group is required to pay for these items in advance of a meeting and until these cost are invoiced and passed to the Division treasurer for payment this individual will be out of pocket.

5.0 DON'T PUT YOUNG ENGINEERS OFF BY CONCENTRATING ON CHARGING AND MAKING A PROFIT

It is not advisable to make a charge for events until a group is firmly established. In particular, young engineers who already pay membership fees like to receive some return for those outlays. Thus reimbursement of speaker's expenses should not be the reason for charging for the event.

6.0 CHANGE THE RULES TO GIVE STATE GROUPS FREEDOM TO TAKE INITIATIVES TO RAISE THE ISTRUCTE PROFILE LOCALLY

As I understand the current Australian Division Regulation No. 25, it is necessary to provide the Division with an estimate of expenditure approximately 12 months in advance. This can be achieved with significant pre-planning. The difficult part is that the expenditure occurs first and has to be approved by the Treasurer some time later from the Annual Grant. The requirement that the Division Treasurer who shall pay all invoices when due will create an unnecessary load of work for the Treasurer.

This situation is unfair and the Division Regulations should be amended to allow State groups to hold funds in a bank account. The recent Guide, sent by David Donnan, on establishing Young members Group clearly states "Securing funding is critical to getting a new group off the ground." This applies equally to State Groups.

I propose the following changes to current to Division Regulations:

1. *Each active State Group shall have committee of Management. This Committee shall have not less than 5 members consisting of a chairman, deputy chairman, secretary/treasurer and at least 2 ordinary members. The State Group Treasurer shall open a bank account and operate it on behalf of the State Group members. State Group Treasurer shall provide quarterly financial reports to the Division Treasurer and a full account by 1st January/1st July as appropriate each year for inclusion into the Division's annual return to London.*
2. *Each State Group is shall submit a budget estimate of expenditure for the following year to the Division Treasurer who in turn consolidates all the State Group estimates for submission to the Resources Committee in London.*
3. *When the funds are provided from London to the Australian Division the approved funds should be divided up in proportion to each State Group budget estimate and forwarded to the State groups. The State group treasurer should bank the amount provided.*

This would provide State Groups with financial certainty and allow them to develop a program of meetings and activities and increase the Australian membership of the Institution. Funds raised by State Groups shall at all times be held on behalf of the Australia Division.

To achieve this would require changes to Regulations Nos. 25 and 32.

7.0 FORMULATE A 5 YEAR PLAN, AND IMPLEMENT IT

There is potential for the Australia Division to increase its membership and its prestige in Australia but to do so requires a clear vision for the future and a strategy or 5-year plan to achieve this. It is

probable that each group will develop along their own path and it will be essential for groups to exchange information on the things that worked and those that did not so that there is a steady increase in membership. A target of say 10 new members each year could be set for each State Group.

The recently distributed Guide to establishing Young Members Groups provides many ideas, which apply to starting State Groups.

8.0 STUDENT INITIATIVE

One important message is the need to present the Institution and its aims to students. One way to achieve is the organisation of student competitions (such as using paper or card with selotape to support a given weight). Organising meetings in the various Universities to present particular structures to the student body would help to create an awareness of IStructE and exposing them to student and graduate membership.

9.0 CME PREPARATION COURSES

The final stage to increase membership is to assist graduate members and others to prepare for the Chartered Membership examination. This would require the State Group to develop of a course to prepare potential members (graduates and others) to tackle the CM examination. Other State groups could use the format of the CME course developed by the Victoria Group.

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