

ICS STRATEGY
Consultation
June 17, 2013

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

As announced at the 2012 Annual Scientific Meeting in Beijing, the Board of Trustees has now begun a strategic plan which will guide the International Continence Society (ICS) over the next five years with the aim to re-establish the pre-eminent position of the ICS.

In late 2012, the first step of the review was launched with a members' survey. Information was also collected and analysed on both the ICS and similar scientific organisations within the fields of urology, gynaecology and incontinence care. Interview data from industry representatives provided key perspectives, carried out by an independent consultant. During the winter and early spring of 2013, the Trustees met on three occasions to:

- Plan strategy processes,
- Consider the information collected, and
- Create this draft strategy which was completed in May 2013.

The Trustees are now consulting a range of stakeholders with the aim of presenting an agreed strategy to the AGM in August.

CONTEXT

Why a new strategy?

The decision to begin a new strategy was driven by several factors:

- Financial outlook
- Reduced output in terms of scholarly activity in recent years
- Reputation of the ICS as a result of internal conflicts and of the reduced scholarly activity.

Financial outlook

Over the past 10 years, the key source of income for the ICS has been the Annual Meeting, the surpluses from which enabled the ICS to greatly expand scholarly and charitable activities.

Projections of income from future Annual Meetings are substantially lower than in previous years. International congresses in any field generate much less income when held outside North America and Europe. This was very much the case for the ICS meeting in Beijing, which generated no surplus, in contrast with the meeting in 2011 in Glasgow which produced a significant net income to the ICS. Projections for meetings after 2013 are currently at a level far below the 2011 surplus.

Future income is also potentially threatened by changes in the way industry is able to support scientific organisations such as ICS. Budgets are constrained by the global economic downturn, driving industry partners to use their money more cost-effectively, and as patents on drugs expire marketing budgets are shrinking. Competition for industry support is therefore increasing.

Scholarly activity

The Trustees were concerned that the past reputation of the ICS for scholarly excellence and standard setting had diminished through a reduced level of activity in the past few years. As scholarly activity is the ICS's *raison d'être* the potential consequences and threats to ICS are considerable: influence, impact on the lives of those affected by continence problems, membership numbers, and the ability to attract industry support

Reputation

The Trustees also recognise that conflict within the ICS in recent years has caused significant harm to its reputation among members, non-member clinicians, other health care professionals, and supporters in industry and elsewhere.

Aim of the strategy

The Trustees were therefore keen to establish a clear direction for the next five years that will

- Ensure the financial future of the ICS
- Re-establish reputation and influence of the ICS in the field.

They agreed the purpose of the strategic review was:

To re-establish ICS as the pre-eminent scientific ICS in incontinence, pelvic floor disorder and lower UTS dysfunction.

The CORE of ICS

As the starting point for the strategic review, the Trustees re-affirmed that the purpose of ICS was

To improve the quality of life of people with incontinence or pelvic floor disorders by extending and improving practice.

Indicators of success by which the progress and impact of the ICS and the strategy would be monitored were:

- Participation in the annual meeting (and other related parameters)
- Scholarly impact
- Change in practice
- Perceived value of engagement with ICS
- ICS being the 'go to' organisation for researchers, clinicians & public

- Numbers of different types of practitioners in the ICS and in the field.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Information gathering

Information was gathered in a variety of ways to establish a meaningful analysis of the current and projected operating position of ICS, in terms of both external and internal factors.

The inputs to the situation analysis were:

- Membership survey carried out in late 2012, to which 321 responses were received
- Information collated by ICS staff on other scientific societies in related fields and on the ICS itself
- Interviews with representatives of industry to understand their needs and concerns and their perceptions of ICS and other scientific societies
- Analyses carried out by the Trustees and directors of ICS of
 - external factors, using the PESTEL framework (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological, Legal)
 - internal factors, using the SWOT framework (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats).

Findings

These exercises led to the identification of a range of issues that must be considered and addressed if ICS is to re-establish its pre-eminent position:

- Reputation and status
- Relations with industry
- Financial outlook
- Potential for competition and cooperation with other scientific and professional organisations
- Growing the membership
- Issues of governance
- Key assets of the ICS.

Reputation and status

ICS was previously viewed as the pre-eminent scientific society in the field. The scholarly outputs set standards and were widely adopted. As the quantity of these outputs has fallen, so has the influence of the ICS.

This has been compounded by a wide perception of ICS as an organisation preoccupied and dominated by internal conflict and infighting that has spilled over

into its relations with members and industry. Thus ICS appears no longer focused on its core scientific role.

Relations with industry

Interviews with industry made it clear that ICS occupies a unique ‘niche’ and has made vital contributions in the past. There is much goodwill towards the ICS and a desire that it should succeed and willingness to help it do so.

More recently, however, industry has shared in the perception of ICS as preoccupied with internal issues, having lost direction and not fulfilling its scientific role. Moreover, some representatives felt that ICS has become hostile to industry, disinterested in the needs or wishes of industry and unwilling to engage with them on equal terms.

Financial outlook

This is discussed in detail elsewhere in this document (see Page 7). The critical issue is that there are significant potential threats to income in the next few years. If the threats materialise ICS could be forced to reduce the scale and scope of its activities.

Competition and cooperation with other organisations

As the pool of finance available to scientific and professional organisations shrinks, there is increasing competition among those organisations to secure that money for themselves. This is paralleled by competition for ‘market share’ in terms of membership, status of major meetings, and position as leading in key areas.

At the same time, there are areas of overlapping interest among these organisations and it may be advantageous to consider collaborations where they will lead to greater impact or cost-effectiveness.

Growing the membership

The ability of ICS to achieve its purpose of influencing practice to improve quality of life for people affected by incontinence, pelvic floor disorders, and lower UTS dysfunction depends on the level of engagement it can achieve with key stakeholder groups. Central among these stakeholders are clinicians, researchers and other health care professionals.

A key means for achieving that engagement is to bring as many members into the ICS as possible. Membership numbers appear to have been driven primarily by attendance at the Annual Meeting. Success has also been achieved through the affiliate member scheme. Other methods of increasing the membership need to be found.

Governance

ICS is led by a highly committed and active volunteer Board of Trustees supported by a skilled office staff and an extensive cadre of committees, involving 175 members,

who undertake the key scholarly activities of the ICS. The time given by those members is critical to the work of the ICS; at the same time, the number of committees, the overlap between their remits, the absence of a framework that aligns their work strategically or governs delivery, and the administrative burden on ICS staff, risk inefficient use of scarce resources and could impair performance and consistency of standards.

Assets

It is important to note that the ICS has a number of key strengths to draw on as it works towards the future:

- It commands much goodwill among many stakeholder groups, including members, other professionals, and industry
- The excellent work in the past is still highly valued and sets a benchmark to which the ICS can return
- It brings together multiple disciplines from across the world, which represents a unique strength greatly valued by many people.

KEY AIMS

The strategy identifies three key aims for ICS over the next five years

1. To develop scholarly activity to the highest standards
2. To restore the reputation of the ICS with key stakeholders
3. To ensure financial security for the foreseeable future.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Critical success factors (CSFs) identify those major areas of activity that the ICS must address and make significant progress in if it is to achieve its aims. The CSFs identified by the strategic review are:

- Scholarly activity
- Communications
- Finance
- Developing the organisation.

Scholarly activity

Current situation

Excellence in science is the core function of the ICS. To date the scholarly outputs have centred on the production and publication of standardisation reports which have been regarded as the gold standard for terminology in continence-related science. Reports, both as sole products or with the collaboration of partner societies with similar interests, have been widely quoted and universally used.

Over the last three years there has been a decline in the number of reports from the ICS and others have taken the lead, resulting in a reduction in the standing of the ICS in the scientific community.

Key Issues

Increase in and maintenance of quality of the scholarly output is a key issue for the ICS. Scholarly output should not only concentrate on core business to date - the production of standardisation reports and definitions of terminology for use by the scientific community - but also broaden into allied areas:

- Educational quality and accreditation standards (including establishment of ICS as an accrediting authority)
- The running of “best brains” consensus conferences resulting in the production and publication of consensus statements and scoping reviews in relevant areas of interest.
- Exploitation and commercialisation of information technology products and protection of the associated intellectual property.

Subject to the availability of sufficient and sustainable funding the ICS also needs to be active in its support for research through fellowships, scholarships, grants and awards.

Communications

Current situation

The ICS office has a strong Projects and IT Team which maintains regular communications output to members. However, communication has not been seen as strategically critical; activity has often been limited to disseminating information to members. Feedback from members indicates that they seek more systematic and comprehensive information on a range of topics, including the activities of the ICS. Equally, if we are to achieve our aims we need to reach beyond the membership to all health care professionals currently or potentially involved with people affected by incontinence, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with other stakeholders including industry and policy makers.

Key issues

In the next three years the ICS will need to strengthen communications capability and impact.

- We will develop and implement a strategic approach to communications based on the needs and wishes of key stakeholder groups and an understanding of the media by which they prefer to engage – which will include the development of greater sophistication in the use of social and other new media
- We will aim to engage all key stakeholders to ensure that
 - ICS is seen as a key, dependable and trusted source of information
 - We are aware of their needs and wishes and adapt to those as they change

- They feel engaged with ICS
- Specific activities could include
 - Establishing an active Industry Advisory Board
 - Identifying and completing key standards documents
 - Aligning the work of the Publications and Communications Committee to support the fulfilment of this strategy
 - Training for ICS office staff and/or employment of marketing or communications professionals if additional skills and/or capacity are required.

Finance

Current situation

ICS currently has financial reserves in line with its policy; hence it is secure in the short term. However, as discussed earlier in this document, the medium and longer-term outlook is less secure. In the worst-case scenario, income could fall dramatically and hence the scale and scope of ICS activities would have to be radically reduced.

The ICS depends heavily on income from the Annual Meeting. We cannot safely assume it will remain at recent levels in future; indeed we know that in 2012 there was no surplus and are uncertain of the outcome in future meetings. Our two other income streams are membership subscriptions and funding from industry.

Membership fee is less than the actual cost and is subsidised by ICS from other sources; income from industry is reducing.

Key issues

Urgent action is required in a number of areas:

- The way in which Annual Meetings are organised must be reviewed to ensure that income is maximised while preserving value as a scientific forum designed to promote research and extend good practice
- The membership scheme will be reviewed, including consideration of an appropriate subscription structure to move towards cost-neutrality while continuing to grow and diversify membership
- Engagement with industry will be re-examined, so that ICS can respond to industry needs while preserving scientific and professional integrity, and hence secure and grow income from this source
- Other potential revenue sources will be examined, including funding of ICS workshops and courses by other organisations; seeking donations from foundations, government bodies, etc; and becoming an accrediting body.
- Financial management practices and methods will be reviewed to ensure rigorous control of funds
- Investments of the ICS will be reviewed to optimise the return
- Consideration will be given to the establishment of an endowed foundation that can attract donations from other bodies and will distribute funds to support research.

Developing the ICS

Current situation

ICS stands on strong organisational foundations: it has an active Board of Trustees which is heavily engaged in tackling the challenges facing the ICS; it has a strong infrastructure of interested members, including 13 committees with 175 members; and a committed and capable staff group with a range of skills that gives it flexibility to respond to new challenges.

However, the Board, Committees and staff are not currently aligned around an agreed plan. A stronger framework for monitoring performance and for accountability is needed. And the Board's workload is excessive, especially given the practical difficulties that arise from having a membership distributed across five continents.

Key issues

In taking on the ambitious programme implicit in this strategy, it will be essential to focus and align all of the resources of the ICS to achieve maximal effectiveness and efficiency.

We will

- Review governance structures to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Committees are aligned with strategy, and that they take on only those tasks best undertaken by volunteer structures
- Develop the skills of staff to equip them to deliver the strategy
- Establish a 'dashboard' reflecting key performance indicators that will enable staff, Trustees and members to keep track of progress towards our aims
- Establish clear lines of reporting, accountability and performance management
- Examine ways to optimise membership engagement, potentially including doing so on a regional basis

IMPLEMENTATION

This draft strategy is subject to amendment in the light of the current consultation. Initial planning of implementation is underway and will be finalised after the findings of the consultation are known. The final version of the strategy will include a timetable of key tasks and targets for the next three years.