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Dr Ian Oppermann (r) being congratulated on his election win by former President Yohan Ramasundara

**As expected, Dr Ian Oppermann had been elected President of the Australian Computer Society. He will serve until the end of 2021 and replaces former President Yohan Ramasundara, who as Immediate Past President remains on the National Committee.**

Dr Oppermann was unopposed after Dr Roger Clark's candidature was rejected by the National Committee (/it-industry/oppermann-unopposed-as-ac-s-president-%E2%80%93-clark-ruled-ineligible.html) on the grounds that his previous membership of the Committee, a prerequisite, was invalid because it occurred before constitutional changes ten years ago.

Dr Clarke is the leader of the group that successfully challenged (/it-industry/acs-loses-major-court-battle-over-irregular-vote.html) the ACS's vote last October to transition to a Company Limited by Guarantee. He and his group expressed serious concerns about how the vote was conducted and challenged the result in court.

They were successful, and vote declared null and void, with Justice Wigney in the Federal Court delivering a blistering attack on ACS management for irregularities in the vote.

The court action meant that ACS started the year with no President, for the first time in its 52 year history, because the National Committee had assumed the vote would proceed and no President would be needed under the new Constitution.

Dr Clarke's group also expressed serious concerns about ACS's strategic direction and what they see as a lack of attention to members' interests. They cite as evidence the precipitous decline in the number of professional members of the ACS (/it-industry/acs-critic-circulates-more-detailed-membership-numbers.html) – over 10,000 have left in the last decade. There has been a very public debate between his group and ACS management.our

Dr Oppermann hopes to heal the rift. In comments to iTWire after his election, and the election of a new Vice President and committee members, he said that the new committee "reintroduces a

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diversity of views around the management table. Our focus from here is getting the remaining governance pieces in place.”

His election leaves open the important position of Vice President Academic, which he previously held.

“This role will be open to expressions of interest in the hope of attracting good candidates. We then focussed on next steps and getting the Branch Executive Committees to be fully operational,” he said, referring to the state and territory ACS branches, many of whom also did not hold the elections in anticipation of the constitutional changes.

There are many fences to mend. The most vocal critic of the aborted vote last year and the ACS's direction has been Professor Ashley Goldsworthy, a Life Member and the only person to be both President and CEO of the ACS, more than 30 years ago.

Professor Goldsworthy wasted no time in reminding Dr Oppermann of his grievances. Within hours of Oppermann's election he sent him an email, which he shared with iTWire. Many of the points he made in that email repeated the criticisms he made to ACS CEO Andrew Johnson late last year.

The criticisms centre mostly around expenditure on travel, gifts, and political donations and a lack of disclosure of various financial matters. iTWire reported extensively on these at the time – the full list can be found here. (/it-industry/industry-heavyweight-unloads-on-ac.html)

Professor Goldsworthy now has more to say. “ACS has been ordered by the Court to pay Roger Clarke's legal costs of \$127,000 (/it-industry/here-we-go-again-%E2%80%93-ac-cour-cas-over.html), typically not mentioned in the ACS press release,” he said in his email to Dr Oppermann.

“How much of ACS members' funds were spent by the Management Committee on legal fees? I suspect that at least \$750,000 of members' funds have gone down the gurgler on this malfeasance of defending the indefensible.

“In addition, could you please explain your plans as President and leader of the management committee to reduce the disastrous decline in professional memberships in recent years. Also, as President do you intend to maintain the farrago of fiction and deception that the membership of the ACS is 45,000?”

That is the number of members the ACS has been quoting. It does not mention the fact that the great majority of these are non-voting members, many of them from overseas or temporary visa holders, who are automatically included because of their involvement in ACS's extensive accreditation program.

“As you were a member of the Management Committee I would appreciate, as a sign of good faith, your answering these questions as President, as an indication you believe in transparency rather than obfuscation and puffery.

“Finally, do you intend to refresh the executive team to reinforce the vision and mission of the ACS to be a professional society and not a commercial organisation? I await, with keen anticipation, the flowering of your embryonic leadership of the ACS.”

Dr Oppermann told iTWire that he met with Professor Goldsworthy after his earlier calls for action. “Ashley certainly deserves respect for his past contributions to the ACS. At our meeting, we had a largely positive conversation and it was clear his concerns for the future of the ACS were deeply held. I look forward to constructive conversations with Ashley. He clearly cares deeply.”

Dr Oppermann's diplomatic comments differ greatly in tone from Professor Goldsworthy's stridently expressed criticisms. He will need all the diplomacy he can muster to overcome the difference in views between the ACS National Committee and the group led by Dr Clarke and Professor Goldsworthy. He will need to become Dr Ian Supermann.

The Clarke/Goldsworthy group, though not represented directly on the National Committee, has many supporters in the branches. Many of them are influential, senior and long-standing ACS members. There will now no doubt be an internal debate at ACS and almost certainly an attempt at another vote to change the Constitution.

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How this is done, and how the diversity of views that Dr Oppermann celebrates are reconciled, will be closely observed.

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Graeme Philipson is senior associate editor at iTWire. He is one of Australia's longest serving and most experienced IT journalists. He is author of the only definitive history of the Australian IT industry, 'A Vision Splendid: The History of Australian Computing.'

He has been in the high tech industry for more than 30 years, most of that time as a market researcher, analyst and journalist. He was founding editor of MIS magazine, and is a former editor of Computerworld Australia. He was a research director for Gartner Asia Pacific and research manager for the Yankee Group Australia. He was a long time weekly IT columnist in The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald, and is a recipient of the Kester Award for lifetime achievement in IT journalism.

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