

## Report from Chair of Congress to Trustees

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### Executive Summary

- Congress has got off to a good start
- Discussion has been of a high quality
- Topics discussed have been of great interest and relevance to IChemE members
- The burden of work for a few members has been much higher than anticipated
- The role of Congress needs further and urgent definition.

### Summary of Progress

Congress opened its first session on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Thirty-two members were appointed, with eight vacant seats in various regions. The process was run in accordance with good election practice. However, some regions did not offer candidates which resulted in vacancies. Congress has asked that regions/Member Groups be informed of vacancies in future years before nomination deadlines are reached.

The platform used (a Microsoft product) proved difficult to set up for some users and took everyone some time to become familiar with. A Chair (Nigel Hirst) and a Vice Chair (Jane Cutler) were elected by Congress using an electronic poll. Six sessions (the maximum allowed) were scheduled for the first twelve months period of operation. A face-to-face meeting is scheduled for two days in May, around the time of the AGM in Rugby, for Congress members to meet and discuss matters of relevance. It is hoped that this meeting will encourage input from those who have not yet engaged deeply and will re-invigorate those who have spent a considerable time making well-judged and considered inputs.

The quality of debate has been high, with generally a good level of engagement. A range of discussion topics were suggested by Congress Members, which were selected for debate over a series of sessions. Examples include 'what is IChemE for?', 'communications between Congress and our electorate' and 'building a sustainable membership'. Two Congress Working Groups were established to look at member engagement and communications.

Congress was also consulted on the Strategy 2024 document proposed by the Board of Trustees and all comments were sent back. A joint session with Trustees will be held at the May meeting which will look at how they can assist the Trustees to implement the Strategy.

It was discovered very early on that there is a considerable overlap between the concerns and actions being taken by Congress, and those of the Trustees. This has resulted in the recent Member Survey being issued under joint auspices, with Congress tasked with analysing the results, and a joint (Trustee/Congress) Communications Panel being established.

### Concerns and areas for development

Congress operates virtually, primarily using a private Microsoft discussion forum. This is backed up by video calls (especially for the working groups) and visits to Rugby by the Chairman and other members as necessary. This method of operation requires a high level of input from the Chair, Vice Chair and particularly the Congress Officer. Initially, the amount of discussion required an almost unsustainable level of work to co-ordinate, reply to and report on. Several Congress members have

also commented on the burden, and some members' personal situations have required them to reduce their input. Burn-out of the senior office holders and particularly Working Group chairs is a concern.

The role of Congress was deliberately not fully defined by the Trustees so that Congress could establish its modus operandi, therefore its 'status' relative to the Trustees, Country Boards is also yet to be fully defined. The way in which IChemE is organised and Congress's role and relevance will be discussed at the May meeting. At the moment, Congress Members currently wish to better understand where Congress stands in relation to other parts of IChemE so that they can provide an effective contribution to the running of the Institution.

Looking ahead, succession planning is already a topic of discussion. The Congress Regulations were written to allow Congress to determine its succession plans. They therefore need to establish how the election process is to be applied to ensure that there is not a wholesale change of membership due to co-termination of office. There has been much discussion about the wisdom and method of trying to fill the eight vacant seats before the 2020 AGM election cycle, but it was generally felt that, in the absence of a methodology and to avoid a state of permanent election, the seats will remain vacant during this election cycle. Perhaps a measure of Congress success will be the number of empty seats after the next election and the percentage of the seats with more than one candidate so requiring an actual election.

Other than the annual Meeting, Congress has no budget for operation. However, as its role evolves, it may be necessary to liaise with some of the committees and Country Boards to agree whether budget needs to be re-allocated.