

AUSTRALIAN ACOUSTICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

One of the outcomes of the Future Directions Workshop held by the Council in May 2003 was that a survey was needed to determine if the Society meets members needs and to find out how the services and activities can be improved. The questionnaire was developed by council with some advice from a social scientist. It was intentionally kept simple to encourage a high response. The two page form was distributed to members via the Society's journal *Acoustics Australia* and was also available on the website. The responses were analysed by David Watkins and the detailed results are available on the website (www.acoustics.asn.au). This report summarises the findings.

RESULTS

Response The response from 90 members represents 23% of the membership of the Society (excluding Sustaining Members). Responses to such surveys are generally not high and this rate, while disappointing in that we would like to hear from all of the membership, is about average for such surveys.

Activities of the Society The first three questions were designed to assess if members are aware of the services and activities provided by the Society. Respondents were asked:-

Are you aware of all of the activities of the Society?

Are you aware of the Society's Code of Ethics?

Are you aware of the Memorandum of Association, Articles of Association and By-Laws?

The results indicate that most respondents are aware of the activities of the Society (Definitely 30% and Mostly 58%). Less were aware of the Code of Ethics (Definitely 36% and Mostly 37%) while most members are not familiar with the Memorandum of Association, Articles of Association and By-Laws (Definitely 19%, Mostly 23% and A Little 39%).

Whilst it is encouraging that most respondents are aware of the activities of the Society, it is disappointing that more respondents are not familiar with the Code of Ethics. The code is designed to encourage members to meet the highest standards of ethical conduct in their professional duties as acoustic consultants. The recent decision to print the Code of Ethics in the journal on an annual basis is well justified. It is not really surprising that the members are not familiar with the association documents as these are generally only used by office bearers.

The majority of members indicated they found membership to be beneficial (Definitely 49% and Mostly

31%). To assess members' involvement with the Society, respondents were asked:-

How involved are you with the Society's activities?

When you are involved how satisfied are you with the activities?

The results show that most members are not very active in the Society (Very 22%, Moderate 26%, A Little 40% and Not at All 11%). But when members are involved in the Society they are moderately satisfied with the activities (Very 24%, Moderate 62% and A Little 10%). Some of the comments made by members indicate that pressure of business workloads makes it difficult to attend Society functions and that meetings could be broader based and more relevant to members.

Communications with members. There was a clear preference for receipt of information from the Society electronically (Email or web 70% Mail 26% and Fax 3%). As the response to a later question on the 'usefulness' of the web does not indicate a high rating it can be inferred that members prefer email to the web.

Membership. The Council of the Society is concerned that membership has been stagnant for a number of years and there are many acousticians who have never joined the Society. Question 8 asked for suggestions for encouraging others to join the Society. Some of the most common responses to this open-ended question were:-

- Ask members to invite prospective non-members to join.
- Invite non-members to a Technical Meeting.
- Consider a professional accreditation and development scheme.
- Simplify membership application process – especially Associates, Subscribers and Students.
- Promote membership amongst students.
- Raise the profile of the Society - higher visibility in the media.
- Advertise in other journals and magazines.

Society Services Respondents were asked to rate the following six activities undertaken by the Society from 'very important' to 'not important'.

- Graded membership system
- Register of members
- Code of Ethics
- Participation in Australian and International Standards Committees

- Input into Government Policy
- Membership of FASTS.

The first five activities were rated either "very important" or "important" by around 90% of respondents while membership of FASTS was only rated by 50% with a significant number indicating they didn't know or just did not answer the FASTS question. The Society has been a member of FASTS for some time and there have been regular reports in the journal. However it is only this year that the Society has become more directly involved with FASTS and its activities so it will be interesting to see if the awareness of FASTS increases in future surveys.

Products The following is a list of the products in order of 'usefulness' as rated by the respondents:-

1. Acoustics Australia journal.
2. Annual Conferences.
3. International Conferences in Australia.
4. Division Technical Meetings.
5. Event Calendar.
6. Proceedings of Annual Conferences.
7. Website.
8. Division Networking Meetings.
9. Division Workshop.
10. Other Publications.

It can be seen that members find the Society journal and conferences the most beneficial services provided by the Society. Of concern is the low response regarding the usefulness of the Society website. Future surveys should attempt to determine why the website is not found to be more useful. The low rating of Division Network Meetings, Division Workshops and Other Publications may be due to the Society rarely providing products in these areas.

Administration of the Society Question 12 was designed to gauge members opinion about the Society employing staff to carry out the administration work of the Society. The Society needs more volunteers or paid staff if it is to become more involved in activities such as publicly promoting itself, introducing a scheme of professional accreditation, running

more international conferences, contributing to government noise policy, Standards, etc. Respondents were asked:-

The majority of the work of the Society is done by volunteers – the only functions that are paid for are the General Secretary and the auditor. Do you consider the Society should pay for more of the fundamental administration type of services so that the volunteers have more time to expand its activities and products?

Respondents were almost split three ways with 34% giving a definite yes, 28% a no and 38% indicating that it depends on the increase in membership fee.

Other comments A range of comments were received and the following were repeated by more than one respondent:-

- Some form of professional recognition or accreditation is needed in line with the AAAC.
- Concern about "split off" groups like the AAAC taking over the acoustic profession.
- The Society should encourage the AAAC to become part of the AAS.
- Pressure of work makes it difficult to attend meetings and carry out volunteer work for the Society.
- Technical Meetings should be more informative and on subjects that interest the membership.

Demographic Factors A higher percentage of responses were received from members residing in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia than from the Queensland and South Australia. Fellows, Graduates and Members provided the most responses while Associates and Students the least. This may indicate that Fellows, Members and Graduates are more interested, or actively involved, with the Society than the other grades.

CONCLUSION

The membership survey achieved a reasonable response and provided guidance for the direction for the Council. Those products such as the journal and the annual conferences which are clearly considered useful will continue to be supported. Constructive comments provided guidance on approaches to improving the services to the members in the other areas.

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