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I'm allowed 200 words maximum and don't intend to waste any.

For many years CIPS wasn't relevant to me; I had achieved MCIPS which was a crucial step on the career ladder and I couldn't see what else the organisation had to offer. I maintained my professional status via direct debit, avoided branch meetings and steadfastly ignored the emails. I was totally disengaged.

Thankfully a chance event opened my eyes to the value of CIPS as a network of support, knowledge and experience – predominantly through the branches. That network kept me informed and made me a better practitioner. That's why I sought election to Congress; to support the network and consult on the significant changes currently being considered.

After a year in post I now appreciate the challenge. Congress members are not privy to the details of the members they represent and can only reach out via blind emails, which largely go unanswered. I'm learning to work around the limitations through the branches, using social media and pressing the flesh to develop new contacts, but progress is slow.

Congress has been described as "the conscience of CIPS", but to be effective Congress first needs to be conscious of the membership.