Secretary General's Column

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During the last few months, the IUPAC Officers, Division Presidents, and others have spent a great deal of time considering the mission and structure of the Union in order to position IUPAC to best meet the challenges of the coming decade. As a prelude to the 39th General Assembly (see pages 96–104), I would like to give a summary of some of the major activities and actions.

Outside advice

As I indicated in a previous column (*Chem. Int.*, January 1997, pages 6–7), we held a meeting in London on 24 February, which brought together ten leaders in chemistry from eastern and western Europe. This meeting was a follow-up to one in North America (at the Belmont Conference Center). The London meeting was aimed at obtaining guidance on IUPAC's future roles in such areas as the objectives and priority areas of the Union; the service of chemistry to society, developing countries and the international community in general; the role of the Union in chemical education at all levels; international communication in the chemistry community; and the organization of IUPAC. The group provided 21 thoughtful recommendations on these and other topics. Many recommendations were reflected in later actions, as described below.

The third and final meeting in this series was held in Singapore on 21 June to sample opinion from a number of scientific leaders in the Asia/Pacific region. Recommendations will be available to the IUPAC Bureau for action at the General Assembly in Geneva.

Vice-President's Critical Assessment (VPCA)

Under our Bylaws, 'The Vice-President shall submit to the Bureau biennially a critical assessment of the programmes and projects of all IUPAC bodies'. Vice-President Jortner divided his 1997 Assessment into two major parts–Science Policy of the Union, and Structure and Function. In Part I, he commented on principles, general activities and future directions of the Union. In line with recommendations from the Belmont and London meetings, he proposed augmenting the general Objectives in the IUPAC Statutes with 13 Goals that would better define the mission and activities of IUPAC for the next few years. In Part II, he analyzed the current Divisional and Commission structure, and recommended specific changes to improve interdisciplinary activities and to close gaps in the Union's activities.

It is not possible here to give details of Prof. Jortner's VPCA, which runs to 34 pages. Copies have been distributed to Division Committees, Commission and Committee Officers and National Adhering Organizations and will be available at the General Assembly.

Organization and Management of IUPAC's Scientific Work

A special meeting of Division Presidents and Vice-Presidents in Frankfurt on 24 March focused on ways in which many of the recommendations in the VPCA can be implemented. The principal items discussed involve improved allocation of resources, possible modifications in the structure of Commissions and conduct of interdivisional activities. A major objective of virtually all participants was an increase in flexibility for Division Committees.

Building on the ideas expressed at this meeting and on historical efforts to bring about needed changes in the structure and operation of the Union, I presented to the Executive Committee (EC) at its meeting in Jerusalem on 6–7 April 1997 a paper that advocated moving much of our scientific work to a project-driven structure, with primarily time-limited Commissions selected to carry out well-defined projects in a specific period of time. Under this approach, Divisions would regard the entire worldwide chemical community as the resource both for ideas and for volunteers to carry out projects. Just how to generate such ideas, develop projects and seek out people able and willing to work on the projects is, of course, the key to success or failure. I am con-

vinced that ideas for useful work usually originate in a 'bottoms-up' manner, not as directed from 'top-down'. In fact, the establishment of the pool of Titular Members was to permit the undertaking of such 'top-down' projects generated outside the mainstream of Commission activity, but after several years there are very few such projects. If we implement the type of structure envisioned here, but without a good mechanism to identify and develop projects—and to secure the services of experts on the Commissions—we will destroy the valuable work that is now being done by Commissions. A great deal of thought and planning is needed to ensure that IUPAC can develop the processes to do this without the large cadre of long-term members of Commissions.

In this space I cannot begin to list the many advantages and possible pitfalls that I see in modifying our organization and procedures, and I am sure there are many others that I have not envisioned. The EC discussed this proposal in detail and decided to adopt the concept, but with the recognition that many details must be examined before it can be implemented. The EC also endorsed in principle the recommendations in the VPCA to establish clear Goals for IUPAC but, again, recognized that further thought and discussion are needed to refine the Goals. The EC concluded that a broad-based committee would be needed to develop the necessary strategic thrusts and to consider their implementation in terms of the structure and guidelines for scientific activity. The EC therefore authorized the formation of a Strategy Development and Implementation Committee (SDIC), to report back to the EC in April 1998. From the findings and recommendations of the SDIC, the EC expects to formulate specific proposals for approval by the Bureau in September 1998 and for necessary action by Council in 1999.

The SDIC, under the chairmanship of the President-Elect, includes representation from the Divisions, the Bureau, the Officers and the chemistry community at large. The Committee held its initial meeting on 24 June, so that some preliminary views might be reported to the Bureau and Council in Geneva.