

Tenure Review and Outlook



by Christoph Buxtorf

After eight years of service, my term as treasurer of IUPAC will be over at the end of 2007. I have enjoyed a strong working relationship with the officers and with IUPAC in general, and I received much help from John Jost and his staff and, last but not least, from the Finance Committee. Therefore, I would like to thank everyone who made my work fruitful and who was so helpful in getting the Union's finances in good health.

In 1999, our investment portfolio was valued at about USD 3.9 million—the figures for 2006 are showing almost USD 5.6 million. This increase of almost 41 percent results from a rise in value of investments, additions to our portfolio from donors such as Samsung Total Petrochemical Co., Ltd., and savings from operations.

However, as your careful “Swiss banker,” I have to acknowledge some changes in the financial environment. The Union was not untouched by downturns in the financial markets in 2000 and later, and by the increase in the value of the Euro against almost all other currencies, especially the U.S. dollar. IUPAC responded to these changes in many ways. In 2003, at the General Assembly in Ottawa, Canada, the Council adopted a change to billing in national currencies rather than in U.S. dollars, and agreed to provide financial support for delegates to attend the General Assembly. With these changes, many of the problems due to “exchange rates” and unequal treatment in national subscriptions were resolved.

Still, some of our members—Adhering Organizations—have problems paying their dues to IUPAC. In the past, we have only made very moderate increases in the national subscription rate recognizing the financial limitations of some of our members. These modest increases have been enabled, in part, by the income generated by our investment portfolio.

Meanwhile, activities to broaden the Union's national membership base and encourage more involvement from the chemical industry are in progress. Some very generous grants, such as those from Samsung Total

Petrochemical Co., Ltd., noted above, and for the IUPAC-Richter Prize, were very helpful toward these efforts.


Looking at the financial future, I see some darker shades to the current bright picture. It seems that the present contributions from our members are at their limit. The change to the “project system” in IUPAC was the most important move in the last eight years. The system is now well established and requires a more-or-less constant amount of funding. After an initial period of trial and error, the project system consumes its allocated budget, which leaves no room for bigger opportunities and for real strategic moves.

To address this issue, the “divisional reserve” is being reallocated as a “strategic fund.” While before the reserve was used to fund projects for which individual committees did not have adequate budgets, the fund will now require setting priorities and making choices about which projects will give IUPAC more visibility. This is, in my opinion, of the highest importance.

The environment for an organization like IUPAC is becoming more and more competitive, especially if we try to raise funds from third parties. We are still a recognized player in our field. For example, the development of the IUPAC International Chemical Identifier (InChI), which is used to define and recognize a chemical substance, is an outstanding achievement. Other outstanding examples include the Committee on Chemistry and Industry's activity in plant safety, the Committee on Chemistry Education's efforts, and the “color” books (e.g., the new XML “Gold Book”). Another of IUPAC's premier achievements is its central role in the Chemical Weapons Convention, organizing international workshops and helping to create networks of experts to communicate intelligently on this critical issue.

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Let us do more of these fine things—mostly for free. On the other hand, we need more outside funding if we want to continue to do these things in the future. Our most valuable resources are the many volunteer experts in global chemistry. The increasing costs of travel and accommodations and the limitations of contributions from NAOs have already created some constraints. In the future, IUPAC has to think more

broadly when soliciting funding for its work, without jeopardizing the idea of disseminating its know-how for free, especially to countries isolated from the mainstream of chemical knowledge. We may have to search more for contributions and grants from foundations to support specific activities that help to create "a better world." If we want IUPAC to become a more lively organization, we will need more financial help from the outside. And better visibility for IUPAC will only enhance its ability to advance worldwide chemistry. 

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FINANCIAL NEWS

Financial Reports were recently presented at the IUPAC Council on 12–13 August 2007. Details are included in the Council agenda book, which is available online at <www.iupac.org/symposia/conferences/ga07/council_agenda.html>. At its meeting, the Council approved the Budget for 2008–2009, including an increase in the total National Subscriptions of 3 percent per annum.

On January 2008, Dr. Buxtorf will be succeeded by Prof. John Corish from Ireland. Elected as the new Treasurer by the Council on 13 August 2007, Corish has served IUPAC in many functions since 1979, including a four-year term on the Finance Committee and earlier a four-year term as president of the Inorganic Chemistry Division.



See also www.iupac.org/publications/ci/indexes/stamps.html

Stamps International

Wöhler's Masterpiece

Friedrich Wöhler (1800–1882), one of the most important German chemists of the 19th century, is best known for his serendipitous preparation of urea from ammonium cyanate in 1828. This momentous discovery happened at a time when most scientists believed that naturally occurring organic compounds such as urea, which was first isolated from urine by the French chemist Hilaire Marin Rouelle in 1773, could only be produced by living organisms. Thus, Wöhler's synthesis of urea not only helped to bridge the gap between organic and inorganic chemistry that prevailed then, but also played a key role in the demise of the vitalistic theory. It is also worth noting that Wöhler was a man of many talents: He discovered organic radicals with his lifelong friend and collaborator Justus von Liebig, he worked with Berzelius on the isolation of beryllium and silicon, he prepared the first (impure) sample of metallic aluminum, and he was a prolific writer and a dedicated teacher at the University of Göttingen for more than 45 years.

The 100th anniversary of Wöhler's death was commemorated with the stamp that illustrates this note, issued in Germany on 12 August 1982. It displays a beautiful ball-and-stick diagram of urea, clearly show-

ing a carbon–oxygen double bond for the carbonyl group, and a balanced chemical equation for its synthesis from ammonium cyanate. Interestingly, the latter is a relatively unstable species that can be generated from the reaction of silver cyanate with ammonium chloride or the treatment of lead cyanate with aqueous ammonia, two of the methods originally reported by Wöhler. However, urea is nowadays obtained industrially on a massive scale from ammonia and carbon dioxide (i.e., the Bosch–Meiser process), and some 90 percent of the world production (more than 100 megatonne per year!) is used as a fertilizer.

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