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## From the President

RACI  
REPORTER

More years ago than I care to remember, I heard the then deputy opposition leader, Gough Whitlam, address an audience of students at the University of NSW. At that time the students there were studying mainly a science or related discipline. Whitlam's major point was that, in all likelihood, we students would become employees of organisations rather than be self-employed or work in small practices. As I still have this as a memory some 40 years on, the concept of being an employee for a lifetime's work must not previously have been obvious.

Fundamentally, this truth of the sixties remains the truth today. While medical doctors, architects, dentists etc. are independent, scientists are (mainly) employed in large and small organisations, academic, government and industry and frequently with a non-scientist in charge. One concept of the working life has certainly changed. Personnel are now not expected to remain with the one organisation for lengthy periods of time, let alone for a lifetime. Indeed, in interviewing for more senior positions, employers regard time spent across a multiplicity of organisations and experiences as a distinct advantage.

In this era of organisational restructuring, job retrenchments (in all sectors), contract employment and short tenure periods, the concept of mutual loyalty regarding employer and employee and absolute job security is a thing of the past. This is not to say that these relations should be less than professional; indeed I believe the professionalism and the attitudes of both employer and employees are overall higher than ever. There are increasing community and legal expectations to require more transparency of organisations in all sorts of corporate areas, reflected in improved and better defined employer-employee structures and relationships.

It is also appropriate to recognise that careers can markedly change during the working lifetime. Many persons with chemistry training move into other organisational and employment sectors with their training as a solid base. It is said that new graduates will have three careers during the course of their working lives, and this will be correct in many cases. At least in industry, it is one of life's anomalies that career 'progress' is more likely to be (with many honourable exceptions) in management and administration than in the development of new science.

At a recent meeting of a subgroup to develop the Pharmaceutical Action Agenda a speaker lamented the inability within the Australian culture to move from academia to industry and to return. How prevalent is

such movement in the chemistry sector and how widely regarded is industrial experience for a subsequent academic posting?

How does our upbringing and education system prepare us for the necessary social and communication skills required to be employees, happy, efficient and productive in the service and fulfilling personal aspirations and ambitions? I would be interested in any reader comment on these points.

A lot of allegorical evidence is informally discussed regarding the number of students, qualifications of teachers, standards of teaching of chemistry at school and tertiary institutions and their subsequent access to (or lack of) employment opportunities. The RACI May Assembly endorsed a proposal for a systematic survey to be conducted by RACI, in conjunction with National Chemistry Council and Academy of Science, to develop hard and accurate data.

Our National Coordinator, Dr Elizabeth Gibson, will oversee this important initiative. Data developed can then be used to notify federal and state governments and institutions etc. of those areas requiring addressing to ensure the continuance of provision of chemists for the benefit of the community.

Despite what I have written above, the numbers and use of chemistry consultants is growing. The RACI National Office data shows the RACI has some 300 members who designate themselves as 'consultants'. Use of consultants in industry is now commonplace; it is cost-effective to engage a consultant for a specialist need on a limited time basis. I suspect that while consultants are used by administrative and business offices in the academic sector they are less likely to be engaged by chemistry or other science departments. Please advise me on this perception if I am incorrect.

Although, theoretically, some consultants are in competition with each other, all have areas of mutual concern, for example liability and insurance issues, marketing and recognition of their expertise, appropriate fee structures and acquisition of (small) business administrative skills. How can RACI assist its consultant members and vice versa? I would very much like to see a national structure to 'underwrite' and support those existing and developing structures at state levels and am interested in readers' thoughts on how this may be developed.