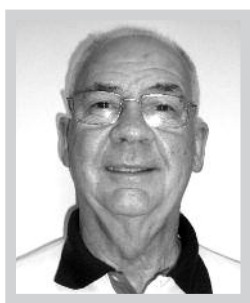


From the President



Over the past few months, a discussion paper proposing changes to membership requirements has been circulated, first to Branches and Divisions and then, after consideration by the November Assembly, to all members through an article in the February 2009 edition of

Chemistry in Australia (pp. 19-20). I wrote the discussion paper following a workshop run by Gary Golding, then President of the Queensland Branch, at the May 2008 Assembly. Gary raised many important issues around marketing the RACI, including reaching out to the next generation of chemists. My article looked at just one aspect of the recruitment issue, broadening the catchment area.

Many people, and several RACI groups, sent detailed comments on the discussion paper. Most comments were generally favourable of the proposed reforms, but with significant reservations. The most substantive concern was that by opening up the membership to those without a chemistry degree, especially to those with TAFE and similar qualifications, the RACI brand could suffer. This issue was considered at some length during the November Assembly. It was concluded that although the basic membership criteria could be opened up, the set of qualifications that specifically addressed professional recognition, in particular Chartered Chemist (CChem), should remain. Essentially, if the proposals included in the article published in *Chemistry in Australia* are adopted, then most of the present Associate (non-Corporate) membership will be entitled to apply for full membership and attain voting rights.

A few people were sufficiently disturbed by the proposal to open up membership to non-chemistry degree holders that they said they would resign from the RACI and join either the American Chemical Society (ACS) or the Royal Society of Chemistry. I found this position interesting because both societies already allow non-degree holders to join providing they meet the sorts of constraints discussed in my article. Moreover, as a member of the ACS, I know how simple it is to join that organisation by comparison with the need to pass the state and National Office barriers to attain membership of the RACI. My thinking was quite heavily influenced by the ACS membership process - it should be possible to process membership applications in the National Office, passing on

to the states only those who wish to be admitted to the CChem and other levels.

Many people addressed the issue of school teachers joining the RACI. There was a common theme of allowing a reduced rate for members of this profession and a need to engage more strongly with the school system. Other issues raised included a need to recognise that RACI membership does not appeal to present graduate students, especially those in the biological areas of chemistry. The present structure around traditional Divisions and state Branches has been frozen for well over a quarter of a century and does not readily reflect the multidisciplinary nature of chemistry.

Among other responses, there were a couple of calls for the RACI to push for the Chartered Chemist qualification to be properly recognised by government and other certifying bodies as an approved signature for chemically related issues. It was seen that the CPChem qualification needs to be properly managed and brought back into effect. There was also a place for those with a general interest in chemistry and for those who continue to remain interested in chemistry even though they have left the field.

The May Assembly will revisit this issue and the Board will then propose changes to the Constitution and By-Laws that will allow us to move to a broader membership base. Of course, these changes do not address the major problem of reaching out to the next generation. That issue will also continue to be addressed by the Board and Assembly but there is still a way to go before a discussion paper is produced. If you do have any suggestions, please send them to any member of the Board or to your state or Division President.

Bob Watts FRACI CChem <rowatts@bigpond.net.au>

CONTRIBUTOR DEADLINES

Your prompt submissions are greatly appreciated and will assist the timely production of *Chemistry in Australia*.

July issue

Wednesday 6 May

August issue

Wednesday 10 June

September issue

Wednesday 8 July