

2020 Annual Report of Congress

This report covers the first full year of Congress activities between the Institution's AGMs in May 2019 and June 2020.

Congress has continued to operate in an efficient and effective manner. It has proved its value both in terms of representing members' views and offering advice to the Board of Trustees. This involves considerable dedication on the part of Congress members. Consistent with IChemE's aims in Strategy 2024, Congress operates as a global forum where discussions are held in a 'virtual space' provided by Microsoft's 'Yammer' and 'SharePoint' software which enable members to fit in Congress around work and family commitments. We have just held our second elections, and I am pleased to welcome the 11 new Congress members, bringing our total membership back to 32 out of 40 available seats. A number of previously vacant seats, particularly in the UK, have now been filled.

Congress has continued to define its role, as I mentioned in my last report. We exist to represent member's view to the Trustees and other parts of the organisation, and to provide critical feedback and advice where necessary. The make-up of Congress is inclusive. Seats are allocated to all member grades and regions to ensure that there are diverse perspectives in our discussions. All grades of IChemE members are encouraged to engage with Congress, via e-mail and the IChemE website. Debates have been of a high quality. Valuable input has been made to the drafting of the new Code of Conduct; review of the role, recording and monitoring of Continued Professional Development and to support the establishment of the Learned Society. These areas are key to the future of the Institution's role in the profession.

Whilst Congress has participated in two joint committees with the Trustees, covering member engagement and communications, the work of Congress is not primarily about being a "Congress representative" on another committee, or "doing projects". Congress's task continues to be the voice of members and through discussion and debate hold the Trustees and the rest of the organisation to account on behalf of members. We have encouraged the Trustees to involve Congress at the earliest stages of any new initiatives, to take advantage of the diversity of member experience in Congress and so ensure that members interests are fully engaged. Over the last 12 months Congress has deliberately maintained a low profile until the concept was fully established, and we had proven track-record. We now look forward to raising our profile and increasing our effectiveness in the coming year. In particular we look to engage with Special Interest and Member groups on a wide basis.

Unfortunately, the 2020 Congress Face to Face meeting has been cancelled amid COVID-19 travel restrictions, we look forward to the 2021 meeting alongside the 2021 AGM. Congress plans to monitor progress implementing key projects that are of member interest, including Programme SMART, enhanced Continuing Professional Development and the Learned Society. We intend to provide further input into the Code of Conduct and associated disciplinary processes.

Finally, Congress could not function without the wholehearted backing of the staff at Rugby, and I am delighted that our new Congress Officer, Sarah Fox, has continued the tradition of unstinting support established by her predecessors.

Nigel Hirst
 Congress Chair