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## From Young Attendees to Young Actors: The “Young Chemists Symposium” at IUPAC2019

Stéphanie Halbert

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# From Young Attendees to Young Actors:

by Sophie Carenco et al.

For 100 years, IUPAC has supported chemists worldwide in all facets of their craft: industrial development, academic research, teaching, and many more. Mindful of nurturing its future leaders, since 2020 the Union ensured the attendance of the younger generation of chemists at the General Assembly and Congress in part through their “Young Observers” program [1]. It provides an opportunity for scientists below 40 to acquaint themselves with the work of the Divisions and Committees. The IUPAC Congress, which attracts several thousand attendees every two years, was not finely tuned to the expectations and contributions of the rising generation of chemists. However, the paradigm has begun to change. For the 47<sup>th</sup> Congress organized in Paris, France, 5-12 July 2019, the scientific executive committee, chaired by Clément Sanchez, enthusiastically received the proposal from a team of young chemists to build a “Young Chemists Symposium”, organized by younger chemists for the benefit of all the attendees.

Organization of the symposium started two years earlier under the leadership of Camille Oger, assistant professor at the University of Montpellier and a former board member of the RJ-SCF (the French young

chemists network) [2] and the European Young Chemists Network (EYCN) [3]. In order to foster international collaboration and intercultural cooperation, other networks were invited to contribute to the symposium organization: the International Younger Chemists Network (IYCN) [4], EYCN, and Afriscitech [5]. The sessions were open to all attendees.

In addition to an opening networking session with poster presentations, six sessions were hosted in the symposium:

- “*From the bench to the market*” with testimonies from entrepreneurs, was especially appreciated as it unraveled the do’s and don’ts of a start-up business;
- “*Scientific writing*” with contributions from the European Research Council (ERC) executive agency, a journal editor and a writing coach, was well attended by attendees at all stages of their career;
- “*Teaching*” was enlightening to all by demonstrating new, stimulating practices in countries such as Singapore, Netherlands and France;
- “*New channels and challenges for scientific outreach*” illustrated how Youtube and the digital world could rejuvenate the field;

An IYCN-centered session brought together younger chemists from around the world and was focused around professional development and the personal success stories of empowered young leaders in chemistry;

“*Redefining scientific excellence in Africa*” highlighted, from the point of view of three researchers from this continent, how research could be better appreciated in countries where it is still not enough developed.

The symposium was complemented by other events that brought young chemists together. This included a tour of Paris’ historical sites around the life of Marie Skłodowska-Curie as a social event (provided by the association “Parcours des Sciences” [6]). The IYCN offered a CV-clinic during one of the lunch time sessions that featured Robert Bowles of the RSC leading the discussion, and a Q&A style discussion with Michelle Lucas and Georg Wießmeier from Sibelco. Lastly, a special evening event was organized to foster discussions between the younger chemists from the conference and these from the Paris area. Held in the grand auditorium at la Maison de la Chimie, it dealt with “young chemists and politics”, with two VIPs: Zhenan Bao from Stanford University and Ken Xie from the Australian Embassy in Paris. During the evening, the winners of the “Chemistry Rediscovered” video contest organized by EYCN were presented [7].

Overall, more than 20 speakers contributed to



Young Chemist Symposium at the Palais des Congrès, Paris

# The “Young Chemists Symposium” at IUPAC2019



*An evening about Young Chemists in Politics at la Maison de la Chimie. From left to right: Camille Oger, Zhenan Bao, and Ken Xie.*

the symposium, which gathered a large number of attendees from academia, industry and teaching, in the 100-seat modern room of the Palais des Congrès. It was covered live through a dedicated twitter account (@YoungSci\_IUPAC) whose audience rapidly reached 600 followers. It also effectively served as a meeting point for active members of younger chemists' networks, for young observers, as well as for the IYCN delegates who participated in the congress, thus fostering unique opportunities for the younger generations to connect with the IUPAC community. As the first of its kind, gathering funding was challenging for such an innovative event. Fortunately, several partners contributed to allow the symposium to take place, including IUPAC, Fondation de la Maison de la Chimie, UdPPC, Sibelco, Evonik, ACS, RSC, SCF, GDCh and IYCN.

In conclusion, the “Young Chemists Symposium” managed to address topics not covered by the rest of the congress (e.g. entrepreneurship), and to provide original viewpoints on other issues (e.g. teaching, outreach, young chemists in politics) for the benefit of all attendees. Let us hope that this is the beginning of a

new era for IUPAC Congresses and similar program will be staged in Montreal during the 2021 Congress, in one form or another. 🍷

## References

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**Contributors include from the Société Chimique de France (SCF):** Camille Oger, Victor Mougel, Stéphanie Halbert, Sophie Carenco, Lydia Sosa-Vargas, and Benjamin Poggi; **from the International Younger Chemists Network (IYCN):** Lori Ferrins, Bailey Mourant, and Catherine Rawlins; **from the European Young Chemists Network (EYCN):** Antonio M. Rodríguez, Alice Soldà, and Maximilian Menche; and **from Afriscitech:** Luc Allemand