

Annual Chair's Report, 2020

Becky Macdonald CEng FIChemE
Chair, IChemE in New Zealand

It has been my privilege to be the Chair of the IChemE in NZ for the past 12 months. The NZ Board continues to be the regional face for IChemE members in our geographically remote part of the world. This is the first time we have convened the AGM in an online forum, which has been necessary due to the current Covid 19 travel restrictions – more on that later.

As I look back over the past year, it has obviously been a time of contrast and challenge. The year started in a very ordinary way with the AGM at Waikato University in Hamilton on 29th May, and now we are in the middle of a global pandemic.

Throughout the first part of the year the various NZ regional committees hosted a range of events including social gatherings, seminars, lectures and site visits (including four informative and educational visits to breweries and distilleries across the country). These various events attracted a members from many industries, with up to 40 people attending. Also, we have been working with Engineering NZ to form a more collaborative relationship, starting with cohosting events.

Thank you to all of the board members and regional representatives for the time they volunteer to IChemE. Specific thanks to Greig Wilson who continues to keep a careful eye on the NZ finances. Grieg is also the NZ representative of IChemE Congress where he ensures that the NZ voice is heard. He will talk about this later in the AGM. Also, David Platts, whilst no longer on the Board, continues to have a very active role within IChemE. He is currently a member of the Learned Society Committee, which provides strategic direction on technical matters to the Board of Trustees. It is amazing to have a someone from NZ taking such a key role in IChemE governance. As always Catherine Muldoon, who is our Board Secretary has kept things running seamlessly in the background. Thank you!

Over the past few months IChemE in NZ has run considerably fewer events, due to the Covid 19 pandemic that is currently disrupting life around the world. NZ has been in a “lock down” for several weeks impacting not only on the places we work, but also our home life. I have been working from home since the week starting the 23 March, setting up a new “home office” in what was my sewing room. I have acquired a new 9 year old co-worker, who’s working style involves short bursts of intense focus followed by longer bursts of loud and bouncy activity.

Covid 19 means that the world is in the middle of a period of great change where we are all having to rapidly adapt. For me working remotely from my colleagues means a lot more video conference and file sharing rather than face to face discussions. For parents balancing working with parenting and home schooling often means working into the evening. On a larger scale, the industries that chemical engineers work in has changed and universities have had to adapt very quickly to deliver much of the academic programme remotely. One local example of this change has been Chemeca 2020, which has been postponed.

As I embark on my second year as Chair, we will continue to adapt to a new way of doing things. The Board are looking into online seminars and webinars and how best to deliver these for NZ members. I would like to encourage all members to not only join in events, but lead events that interest you. If there is something you would like to see IChemE in NZ doing, approach one of the Board and we’ll see what we can do to make it happen.

Dr Becky Macdonald, C.Eng, FIChemE,
Chair IChemE in NZ