

Report of the International Advisory Board

The International Advisory Board of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry met in Prague on July 16-17, 2012. Nine out of the ten members of the IAB were present in person, whereas the 10th member participated in some deliberations through teleconference. The main purpose of the meeting was to review the scientific teams of the IOCB on the basis of written materials, comments of the outside reviewers, and on-site presentations by the team leaders. The resulting summary reports and recommendations for 21 groups are attached. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the reports on two groups have not yet been completed and they are expected to be delivered to the IOCB Director in mid-August.

The IAB has concluded that a vast majority of the research groups of the IOCB perform on a “good” level, with several deemed to be truly excellent. To make them equitable, the ratings were applied separately to the senior and junior teams. However, the IAB had some concerns about the performance of several groups, and these have been highlighted in the final reports. The IAB would also like to make a general recommendation that all teams should strive to publish at least some of their results in higher-impact journals, thus increasing their international visibility. Some other matters have been discussed by the IAB during the meeting, leading to the recommendations below.

The IOCB has introduced the establishment of junior groups as the main approach to continuously rejuvenate the Institute and to develop its research portfolio. This approach is strongly supported by the IAB. At the same time, the IAB was concerned that some of the younger team leaders may not be obtaining sufficient mentoring; developing and maintaining a successful junior group program requires a strong mentoring program, but no such program is currently in place. The mentoring of junior group leaders should go well beyond the usual informal discussions with senior scientists at the same institution, and should help the young group leaders to perform well and make the best choices, both for their future career and for the Institute. The IAB therefore recommends implementation of a group leader mentoring program, where each newly recruited group leader selects one or two mentors either from within or highly familiar with the IOCB, to discuss pertinent questions on a regular basis. A direct training or hierarchical relationship between mentor and mentee should be avoided. Informal meetings should be regularly scheduled, preferably twice per year, and may include questions of leadership, personnel, research focus, expected performance, publication and grant strategies, etc. It is suggested that such a mentoring program be implemented for the current junior group leaders as soon as possible and be automatically offered to all newly selected group leaders in the future. Members of the IAB would be willing to aid in this process, but should not be direct mentors of the IOCB group leaders due to the need to remain impartial.

On another matter, the IAB recommends establishment of a new type of membership in the Institute, that of “Adjunct Member.” Adjunct members would be scientists who have close working relationships with one or more teams of the IOCB, but whose primary appointment is at a different university or institute. An adjunct member would enjoy privileges in terms of access to equipment, services and facilities (to an extent to be determined by the Director and

his leadership team) but would not normally receive any financial support from the Institute. Such appointments could be proposed by team leaders, with a need for approval by the Director. They should be reviewed for continuation or termination on an annual basis. Adjunct members might have a small number of coworkers who utilize Institute facilities on a space-available basis, but such arrangements should require the sponsorship of a team leader in good standing.

The Institute would benefit from such appointments by broadening the scope of its research, an influx of scientists of specialized expertise, and the temporary appointment of visiting scientists and collaborators from other institutions. This should enhance the stature and international reputation of the IOCB, while simultaneously increasing the research output of existing teams.

The IAB was very concerned that a large fraction of the personnel of the IOCB is part of support or research-support teams, which are not subject to outside review. The allocation of resources to such teams might not fully reflect their accomplishments and usefulness to the Institute, but, in the absence of detailed information, we were unable to make any recommendations in this area. A discussion among the IAB members and the IOCB Director led to an agreement that full review of these teams, involving the IAB members but not other outside reviewers, should be conducted in the spring or summer of 2013, with the rules to be communicated to the affected team leaders by the end of September 2012.

This letter and the final reports on the individual teams of IOCB represent a consensus of the IAB members.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AW', followed by a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line extending to the right.

Alexander Wlodawer, IAB Chair
Frederick, MD, USA, July 25, 2012