

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CHEMISTRY OLYMPIAD

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I. Introduction

The idea to organize the International Chemistry Olympiad (IChO) was born in former Czechoslovakia. The political situation in Czechoslovakia in Spring of 1968 was quite turbulent. A new leadership had planned a comprehensive political reform. Groups of intellectuals strove for "socialism with a human face". There was a smell of independence in the air. The people wanted more contacts with other countries. One of the new ideas was to organize an International Chemical Olympiad (this was the first name for the competition).

In 1968 the Chemistry Olympiad (ChO) was part of a secondary school system in all countries of the Soviet block. The ChO in the Soviet Union was a model for all other countries. It was the basis on which the idea of IChO was built. Teachers were already acquainted with competition and the system (from school competition to national competition) became a fact. The Ministry of Education of the host country was guarantor of the competition. Moreover, National Committees for Chemical Olympiads were established in participating countries. This was done rather smoothly because the first participating countries were all members of the same political block. No long explanations were necessary. But the same structure prevented any invitation to a western country.

In the Spring of 1968 the Czechoslovak National Committee for ChO supported by the Ministry of Education, sent letters of invitation to all "socialist" countries, except Romania, which country was not welcome in the Soviet Union at that time. Moreover, at the beginning of May 1968 the relations between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union started to be "nervous". Therefore, the invitation was only accepted by Poland and Hungary. The other three countries (Soviet Union, Bulgaria and German Democratic Republic) kept silent.

On May 15th, 1968 a meeting was organized in Ostrava (Czechoslovakia) with the aim to create some basic rules for the international competition, that later became the International Chemical Olympiad. Three countries took part, with representatives of the National committees of the countries. The report gave answers to some fundamental questions that formed the basis for the preliminary regulations of the new international competition.

The first regulations were very simple:

1. Competitions of this kind should promote friendship and co-operation among the pupils, closer contacts among the young scientific workers, exchange of pedagogical and scientific experience.
2. The organizer of the competition is the Ministry of Education of the organizing country.
3. The competition should be organized at the end of the school year.
4. A national team consists of pupils and accompanying persons (teachers).
5. Only pupils of the secondary school without a special chemical orientation can participate in the competition.
6. The IChO is a competition of individual pupils, not a competition of teams.
7. The IChO will consist of two parts: theoretical and experimental.

These first regulations were approved on June 21, 1968, during the 1st IChO.

II. A short review on the development of the International Chemistry Olympiads

1st IChO

June 18 - 21, 1968, in Prague (four days!).

Three teams of six pupils.

4 theoretical tasks in mother tongues; no experimental tasks.

Maximum points: 61.

The first three winners were given prizes. The first one gained 61 points.

A session at the end: preliminary regulations accepted; decision to invite other "socialist" countries.

2nd IChO

June 16-20, 1969, in Katowice, Poland (five days).

Four teams of five pupils. New country was Bulgaria. The German Democratic Republic and Soviet Union sent observers.

The competition was held in two days. Experimental tasks on the first day; theoretical tasks on the second day. The tasks were given to the competitors in their mother tongue. The translation was guaranteed by the organizer.

Maximum: 100 points.

Curiosity: there were three winners with the same score: (49 points).

Final session: A discussion about the differences in the curricula of chemistry in the participating countries took place at the end of the competition. It was definitely decided not to evaluate and publish the results of the countries because it might have bad consequences and an unhealthy rivalry among the participating countries could arise. Decision to invite more "socialist" countries to take part in the competition.

3rd IChO

July 1-5, 1970, in Budapest, Hungary (five days event).

Seven teams, each of four pupils. Curiosity: Two more pupils were present in each team as substitutes!

Countries: Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, GDR, Romania, Soviet Union.

IChO languages: Russian, German, French and English. Also official interpreters into mother tongue were at the disposal of the delegations.

The competition was held in two days. Change: Theoretical tasks on the first day, followed by the experimental tasks on the second day. The competitors received the tasks in their mother tongue. The translation was guaranteed by the organizer.

Maximum 100 points.

More than first three winners were given prizes.

Final session: preliminary regulations accepted.

Although the 3rd IChO was successful, no place and date was fixed for the 4th IChO. And thus, no IChO was organized in 1971. After some diplomatic work on ministry level it was agreed that the next three organizers for the following years would be: Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Romania.

4th IChO

July 1-10, 1972, in Moscow, Soviet Union (ten days).

Seven teams each of four pupils and two accompanying persons, mentors.

The competition was held in three days.

July 4th: Pupils solved 4 theoretical problems; July 6th: Task No 5 (qualitative analysis) was solved in laboratories; July 7th: Task No 6 (quantitative analysis) was performed.

Maximum 100 points.

A. At the first session the International Jury was established and a new Statute of IChO was discussed and adopted.

B. For the first time the organizer sent 60 preparatory tasks (without detailed solutions) in advance to all participating countries. All mentors praised this activity since it influenced very positively the preparation of pupils as well as the results of competitors. The best one gained 88 points, the worst one 31.5 points.

C. At the last session of the International Jury a proposal was accepted to invite further "socialist" countries to participate in the IChO (Vietnam, Mongolia, Cuba, but not China!).

D. At the closing ceremony a representative of Bulgaria invited the delegations to take part in the 5th IChO in 1973. This was a turning point in the history of IChO because after the 4th IChO a representative of the host country made an official invitation for the next IChO during the closing ceremony of the current IChO to all participating countries. Consequently, an unwritten rule was also accepted: all countries which attended the current IChO could take part automatically in the next IChO.

5th IChO

July 1-10, 1973, in Sofia, Bulgaria (ten days).

Seven teams of four pupils.

Nothing changed concerning the course of the competition: two days (theoretical part first), the tasks in mother tongues, translations made by the organizer, the role of mentors was to check the translation and the corrections of the pupils' solutions was done by the authors!!

Maximum 100 points but still there was no rule about the fixed proportion between the theoretical and experimental part.

The proposal was accepted not to award only the first three winners but more proportional to the number of participants (about three first places, three second places and three third places).

6th IChO

July 1-10, 1974, in Bucharest, Romania (ten days).

Romania had the courage to invite Sweden and Yugoslavia(!). Austria and Federal Republic Germany sent their observers.

Therefore, nine countries participated: Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, GDR, Romania, Soviet Union, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

Competition: the same course as at the 5th IChO.

Romania organized a seminar for the first time. This two-day seminar was dedicated to the Olympiads and problems connected with chemical education in different countries. The representatives of Austria, FRG and Sweden reported on the teaching programs in their countries.

To the problems of Olympiads:

A. "Gaudeamus igitur" was proposed as a hymn of the IChO.

B. The IChO tasks should be adapted to the level of pupils and the creative feature of the tasks should be emphasized.

C. Historical approach should be kept in the tasks "so that the pupils would not come to the wrong conclusion the world begins with them."

7th IChO

July 1-10, 1975, in Veszprem, Hungary (ten days).

Twelve teams each of four pupils, i.e. 48 competing pupils. New countries: Austria, FRG, Belgium.

Novelty: For the first time the Xerox copies of the solutions were made and corrected separately both by the authors and by the mentors. Both corrections were then compared.

Special seminar on IChO in Štířín near Prague

May 3-6, 1976

9 countries took part, and a representative of UNESCO.

Program: 1. New Regulations; 2. Co-operation with non-governmental organizations.

New regulations were discussed in details and finally accepted. The ratio between theoretical and experimental part was stated as 60 : 40 points. The Regulations were issued by the Czechoslovak Committee of ChO in four official languages and the 9th IChO was already organized according to them.

The possibilities of UNESCO were explained and discussed. Co-operation with UNESCO was possible and it was realized at the 9th IChO in Bratislava for the first time.

The idea to create any coordinating committee of IChO appeared for the first time. According to the representative of UNESCO it was necessary to have such a body since it could be a partner for UNESCO in making some contracts in the future.

8th IChO

July 10-19, 1976, in Halle, GDR (ten days).

Twelve countries participated, 46 participants, (Belgium, only 2 pupils).

The competition as in Veszprém 1975.

Differences:

- Points altogether (100 theory, 60 practice).
- Preparatory tasks in four languages, they contained solutions for the first time.
- The competition tasks were prepared in four official languages. For the first time the mentors had to translate the tasks very quickly into the mother tongues of competing pupils and they even had to produce the tasks in four copies on type machines. The era of well-known "long nights" began.
- For the first time the Jury was separated from the competitors in the days of the competition.
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9th IChO

July 4-14, 1977, in Bratislava (Czechoslovakia) (eleven days).

Twelve countries, 47 competing pupils.

Observers from Finland, Turkey and UNESCO.

The course of the competition according to the new Regulations which involved the best experiences of the previous Olympiads.

Maximum 100 points; 60 theory, 40 practice. Experimental technique and skill still appreciated.

Differences:

A. For the first time the winners were awarded real medals (gold, silver and bronze). Only a written diploma was given to a winner before.

B. The Polish delegation was allowed to send one more person in a role of the observer since the next IChO was supposed to be organized in Poland. Later it became a rule.

C. The Third seminar on the development of IChO was organized in co-operation with UNESCO. Program: Short reports of representatives of participating countries on the level of chemistry teaching in their countries. The expected role of UNESCO in the development of IChO.

10th IChO

July 3-13, 1978, in Torun (Poland) (eleven days).

Twelve teams each of four pupils: 48 competing pupils. Two new countries: Finland and Turkey. Two countries missing: Belgium and Yugoslavia.

Observer from Spain.

Differences:

A. The IChO was organized in co-operation with UNESCO which gave a financial support.

B. Decision to give medals according to the system 10 % - 20 % - 30 %.

C. Decision not to give any points for "laboratory technique".

Invitation to Leningrad (11th IChO) and a statement that the 12th IChO would be organized in Austria.

11th IChO

July 2-11, 1979, Leningrad (Soviet Union) (nine days).

Eleven teams, 44 competitors.

Turkey missing.

The competition as above.

One-day seminar on chemical education organized by the Ministry of Education. Program:

A. Discussion how chemistry curricula of the secondary schools in particular countries were reflected in the level of competition tasks of IChOs.

B. Politics in IChO: Discussion on the aims and function of a Secretariat of IChO. The Soviet Union gave support (at that time it was very important) to the idea to create the secretariat in Czechoslovakia. It was the highest time since the number of "socialist countries" was all the time the same and the number of "capitalist countries" was expected to be increased, in particular after the 12th IChO which was supposed to take place in Austria.

12th IChO

July 13-23, 1980, in Linz (Austria) (eleven days).

A new situation: The IChO was organized for the first time in a "capitalist country".

Thirteen countries, 52 competitors (plus the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, minus Soviet Union).

Observers from France, USA and UK.

Competition as above.

Politics in IChO again: Soviet Union did not participate. Special meeting of mentors from "socialist countries".

Consultations led to the conclusion that a special meeting should be organized in Czechoslovakia in Spring 1982 with the aim to create a Secretariat of IChO in Bratislava.

13th IChO

July 13-23, 1981, in Burgas (Bulgaria) (eleven days).

Organized in co-operation with UNESCO.

Fourteen countries, 55 competitors (plus: France, Soviet Union; minus Belgium).

Observers from Norway.

Competition as above.

Seminar:

A. Chemical Olympiad in different countries, advantages, organization, etc. Since ChO proved to be successful in some countries as an effective tool for encouraging young people in their study of chemistry, IChO can serve as a model for other countries as well.

B. Discussion on secretariat of IChO. Politics again. The representative of UNESCO supported unexpectedly Bulgarian organizers and wanted to create ad hoc a Secretariat with a secretary from Bulgaria. After a hot discussion it was decided that the problem would be solved in Bratislava.

Seminar in Bratislava, April 1982.

Program: The necessity to create the Secretariat of IChO is actual.

Finally the program was changed and many reports were read on chemistry olympiads achievements.

Politics again: The Ministry of Education choose a man from Bratislava (the unknown person for the foreign delegations) and appointed him to be the head of the Secretariat. The suggested functions of the Secretariat were changed to such an extent that they could not be accepted by other countries. The final decision was postponed to the 14th IChO.

14th IChO

July 3-12, 1982, in Stockholm (Sweden) (ten days).

17 teams, 68 competitors. New countries: Yugoslavia, Denmark, Norway.

Observers from UK, Nigeria, Venezuela.

The competition as above.

Novelty: two scientific lectures for all.

The session of the IChO: Conclusion was accepted that Secretariat of IChO would be in Bratislava.

15th IChO

July 2-11, 1983, at the University of Timisoara, Romania (ten days).

18 teams with 72 competitors. New country: United Kingdom.

Observers from the United States and Kuwait.

Competition as above. As usual the theoretical examination first (5 hours) and after one day rest the practical examination. Also 5 hours with an interruption for lunch like in Sweden.

16th IChO

July 1-10, 1984, Frankfurt, West-Germany (11 days).

21 teams with 84 competitors. New countries were Belgium (absent since 1980), Greece, Kuwait and the USA. Kuwait took part hors concours. GDR was absent, undoubtedly for political reasons.

Novelty: attention was also paid to biochemistry.

Competition as above.

There came no invitation for 1985 at the closing ceremony. Countries for 1986 and 1987 were available.

Since 1979 east and west countries alternated in organizing the IChO. But that year there seemed to be a problem in the "east". Everybody was hoping the expression "chemists have solutions" would be true again. Much light was produced by the German organizers, for the first time an IChO was closed with a nice firework.

17th IChO

July 1-8, 1985, Bratislava, Czechoslovakia (eight days).

Bratislava saved the situation and all participating countries were invited to attend the 17th IChO. Everybody was happy with this solution. A year without an IChO would be bad for the continuity of the work of the national committees in the participating countries.

22 delegations with 84 competing pupils. Kuwait participated again hors concours. Cuba participated for the first time. Canada sent observers. Italy did the same; that year no team from Italy.

Competition as above.

The organizers surprised all with a flag dedicated to the International Chemistry Olympiad, with an Olympic logo in the four official languages; English, French, German and Russian. At the closing ceremony the flag was given to the next organizer. This was the start of a new tradition. The Netherlands had the honour to be organizer of the 18th IChO in 1986.

A new version of the Regulations of the IChO occurred.

18th IChO

July 6-15, 1986, Leiden, The Netherlands (ten days).

23 teams with 92 competitors. Canada participated for the first time. China, Cuba, Italy and Switzerland sent observers.

Technical chemistry was introduced as a new field of interest.

After the theoretical and practical parts had been finished and the corrections by the authors were ready, the chemistry of each problem was explained to all competitors in a lecture.

19th IChO

July 6-15, 1987, Veszprém, Hungary (ten days).

26 teams with 104 competitors. For the first time more than 100 competing pupils. Switzerland and China participated for the first time. Italy was back again after two years of absence. Observers from Australia and Singapore.

The chemical thread was environmental chemistry.

Organization of the IChO without any substantial changes.

20th IChO

July 2-9, 1988, Espoo, Finland (eight days).

29 teams were expected, only 26 came! New countries: Australia and Singapore.

Due of financial reasons the 20th IChO was shortened to eight days. There was no days rest between theoretical and practical part.

21th IChO

July 2-10, 1989, Halle, German Democratic Republic (nine days).

26 teams. Singapore was missing but Greece was back again. Observers from Cyprus, Japan, and Thailand. No substantial changes occurred in the competition.

22nd IChO

July 8-17, 1990, Paris, France (ten days).

28 teams. New: Cyprus, Thailand. Singapore was back again. The Soviet Union was missing (no visa).

No substantial changes in the competition.

With regard to a great number of participating countries and in the expectation that the number would rapidly increase in the next five years (many new states were created) doubts were expressed whether the Secretariat would be able in the new situation to influence the course of the IChOs.

23rd IChO

July 7-15, 1991, Lodz, Poland (nine days).

30 teams with 118 competitors. New countries: Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia. Observers from Mexico and Taiwan.

For the first time: practical work first, theoretical work two days later. This procedure fitted better with the short first IChO day, the practical work demands less translation time than the voluminous theoretical work. Since the number of countries is already too high and two mentors from each participating country are the members of the International Jury, discussions in the Jury are complicated and it becomes more and more difficult to come to any conclusion. Consequently, the need to create any committee that would be able to prepare some proposals for the working sessions of the International Jury, was desirable.

24th IChO

July 11-22, 1992, Pittsburgh and Washington, USA (twelve days).

33 countries took part

Environmental chemistry as a new field in the IChO. No organizational changes in the competition.

Final session of the International Jury: A new body of the IChO, the so-called Steering Committee was established. The first chairman was from the UK. The members are representatives from different parts of the world and are elected by the International Jury for a two years period.

25th IChO

July, 11-22, 1993, Perugia, Italy.

38 teams, New countries: Iran, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Taiwan, Korea.

Business session of the International Jury: Discussion about the rights and duties of the particular bodies of the IChO (Organizing Committee, International Body, Steering Committee) and mutual relationship between them. The Slovak delegation proposed to create an International Information Center of the IChO. The idea was accepted and all countries that would be interested in the creation of such a center, were asked to prepare a project for the next IChO.

26th IChO

July 3-11, 1994, Oslo, Norway (nine days).

39 teams. New: Estonia, Turkey, Ukraine.

Observers from Argentina, Vietnam, Belarus, Spain.

Two novelties introduced:

- informal consultations with the authors before the meeting of the International Jury at which the final versions of the competition tasks were approved;
- blue (preliminary) and red (final) points were introduced into the grading.

Business session: The International Jury judged the complex project for the creation of the International Information Center which proposed the Slovak delegation. It was decided by voting that the Center would be established in Bratislava, Slovakia.

A new text of some paragraphs in the Regulations of the IChO was approved.

27th IChO

July 13-20, 1995, Beijing, China (eight days).

42 delegations with 163 competitors.

Observers from Belarus, Indonesia, Ireland, Spain, Vietnam.

Competition as above.

Business session: The discussion about some paragraphs in the Regulations was again open. The necessity to prepare such a proposal of the Regulations which would take into account new situation in the IChO competition, was obvious. The Head of the International Information Center of the IChO was appointed to prepare a new and complete version of the Regulations for the next IChO.

28th IChO

July 14-23, 1996, Moscow, Russian Federation (ten days).

45 teams with 175 competitors.

Observers from Indonesia, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan.

Competition as above.

Business session: The version of the Regulation was accepted which did not suppose the existence of any secretariat of the IChO and a secretary. Some paragraphs left for further discussion. This is also an example how difficult it is to come to a conclusion when the Jury consists of 90 members. The role of the Steering Committee is irreparable.

6th International Workshop on the Development of the International Chemistry Olympiads, Warsaw, Poland, October 25-27, 1996

The main purpose of the working group meeting was to examine some of the problems which had arisen at previous IChOs but particularly those discussed in a preliminary way in Moscow such as:

- Laboratory tasks
- Sub-groups of mentors for evaluations of competition tasks
- Overtraining
- Financing of the IChOs in the future
- Some new regulations for theoretical and practical parts of the competition
- The level of competition tasks and preparatory problems

29th IChO

July 13-22, 1997, Montreal, Canada (ten days).

47 teams, 184 participants

Observers from Azerbaijan, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India, and Uruguay.

The first IChO where the host country made a request for voluntary participation fees and received them from many teams.

No substantial changes were introduced into the competition.

Business session: Discussion about some paragraphs of the regulations of the IChO again. General problem of financing of the IChO was discussed but no final decision was reached.

It was decided to arrange in the cooperation with the organizers of the 30th IChO in Melbourne a seminar on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the IChO.

30th IChO

July 5-14, 1998, Melbourne, Australia (ten days).

47 teams with 184 participants

Brazil, Cuba, and Kuwait who each participated in the 29th IChO, withdrew their participations.

Observers from Azerbaijan, India, Uruguay, Kenya, Albania, Brunei and Turkmenistan withdrew for financial reasons.

The first IChO held in Winter in the southern hemisphere.

The olympic flame for the first time.

Reorganization of the arbitrary process. A new level of security had to be explored. The tasks were judged in split sessions but finally approved by the complete International Jury.

30th International Chemistry Olympiad Celebration Dinner was organized and as a part of it three lectures were held on the history, theoretical and practical tasks of the IChO, respectively. On this occasion a booklet appeared with the title "A Brief Review on the History and Content of the International Chemistry Olympiad" that was prepared, printed and distributed by the International Information Center of the IChO.

Business session: Starting in 1999 each delegation would pay a minimum general participation fee calculated with a formula approved by the International Jury.

7th International Workshop on the Development of the International Chemistry Olympiads, Smolenice, Slovakia, October 23-26, 1998

The problems discussed at Smolenice meeting could be divided into nine chapters:

- International Jury sessions,
- final version of the regulations,
- classification of the chemical topics in practical competition tasks,
- media and IChO,
- security during the competition,
- final report of the IChO,
- central fund,
- participation fee,
- IUPAC and IChO.

The results of the meeting were summarized in a booklet "The Latest Problems occurring in the International Chemistry Olympiads and Proposed Solutions", (Editors A. Sirota and M. Kerschbaumer, printed and distributed by the International Information Center of the IChO) and served as recommendations for the next International Jury session and organizers.

31st IChO

July 4-11, 1999, Bangkok, Thailand (8 days).

52 teams, 196 participants .

New countries in the competition: Brazil, India, Kazakhstan.

Cuba and Kuwait back again.

The final versions of the competition tasks were judged and approved in two parallel sessions of the International Jury. The other recommendations of the 7th International Workshop were also accepted by the organizer.

Business session: The Regulations of the IChO finally were accepted by the International Jury in full extent.

III. A glance back in History and a glance to the Future

The idea

The International Chemistry Olympiad (IChO) was founded in former Czechoslovakia. In Spring 1968, the political situation was quite turbulent in the CSSR. A new leadership had planned a comprehensive political reform (Prague Spring). Independence was in the air. The population was influenced by this new spirit and strove to take up contact with other countries. One of the new ideas was the "International Chemistry Olympiad". In the beginning it was still a political issue: which countries were allowed to participate at the Olympiad. For this reason, the Czechoslovakian committee invited only socialistic countries. The invitation was only valid then for Poland and Hungary, since the political situation at that time between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was extremely tense. Only three nations participated at the first International Chemistry Olympiad from the 18th - 21st June in Prague. Every national team was comprised of six students. They had to solve four theoretical tasks.

Additional (socialistic) states participate at the event

Bulgaria participated at the second Chemistry Olympiad in Poland in 1969. The four national teams each consisted of five students and for the first time they had to solve experimental tasks. The delegation decided to invite more (socialistic) countries and limited the size of the team to four participants. In the following year (1970), the GDR, Rumania and the Soviet Union participated at the third Olympiad in Hungary. For 1971 it was not possible to agree on a location so the competition was cancelled. This organisational problem was solved on diplomatic level for the following three years: Soviet Union (1972), Bulgaria (1973) and Rumania (1974).

During the Olympiad in the Soviet Union, a jury suggested inviting Vietnam, Mongolia, Cuba, but not China to the next Olympiad. The agreement did not realise so only seven teams took place at the next event in Bulgaria. Rumania invited Sweden and Yugoslavia to the Olympiad in Bucharest (1974). West Germany and Austria sent observers. The Federal Republic of Germany was represented as the first NATO country by sending an observer. From 1975, Sweden, Yugoslavia and Belgium participated together with West Germany and Austria.

The Chemistry Olympiad becomes an international open competition

In the following years, the UNESCO became patron of the IChO and thus made participation internationally possible. Linz in Austria was the first non-socialistic location for the Chemistry Olympiad (1980). The number of participating countries continuously increased. Whereas in Linz thirteen nationalities participated, 21 delegations came to Frankfurt am Main in 1984: This was the first Olympiad which was carried out in West Germany. The former GDR hosted the event in 1976 and 1989. With the decay of the Soviet Union in 1991, the number of participating countries rose sharply. The Chemistry Olympiad had now become an internationally open and attractive competition at which Asiatic and American States were strongly engaged. Especially the Asiatic countries such as China, Korea, Thailand and Singapore were responsible for the high performance levels of the competition in the following years.

Present state of affairs

Nowadays the official rulebook of the International Chemistry Olympiad states how countries can participate. Every new country interested in participating have to send an observer for two year in sequence before the students are allowed to participate. All countries can apply for arranging this student competition to the international jury which then decides on the next host country.

Kiel grasps the opportunity

For the 36th International Chemistry Olympiad in 2004, Switzerland had originally been chosen as the venue location. However, the country was unable to accept the offer. A successor was sought for immediately. The Chemistry Olympiad has turned into quite a time-consuming event in the meantime and, therefore, requires long-term planning. This is why a preparatory period of five years is quite normal for this event. Germany recognized its opportunity. The Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), the Federation of Chemical Industries (VCI) and the Society of German Chemists (GDCh), as well as the Leibnitz Institute for Science Education (IPN) and the Christian-Albrechts University, Kiel (CAU) joined forces and thus made the organization of the 36th International Chemistry Olympiad in Kiel possible. The IPN team, in cooperation with the CAU, accepted the challenge to set up the competition in less than two years.

Once Olympiad, always Olympiad

Such engagement reflect the spirit of the Olympiad. This spirit is carried by the mentors and tutors from the respective participating countries. They, as delegates, are responsible that everything runs smoothly and for the high level of the tasks presented at the competition. Everyone who was ever involved in this affair finds the competition so fascinating that they continuously remain involved with it. The same can be said for the former Olympiad competitors. The IChO in Germany is an example of this. The majority from the Scientific

Board was comprised of former Olympiad participants who are working in research and teaching at different universities nowadays. This is an excellent prerequisite to develop sophisticated and interesting tasks for the competition.

For the organization, Dr. Wolfgang Bänder and Wolfgang Hampe, who have been acting as representatives of the German Delegation at the International Chemistry Olympiad for many years, were offering their advice and experience. Their ideas and concepts gathered throughout the many Chemistry Olympiads were integrated into the competition tasks and its organization – during the preparation on the spot and in the realization of the event of July 2004.

After 2004 the International Chemistry Olympiad was organised in Taiwan, Korea, Russia, Hungary and the United Kingdom.

In 2010 IChO will be in Japan, in 2011 in Turkey, in 2012 in the USA. All over the world there are chemists working for IChO and especially for promoting friendship and co-operation among young people, just as the Czechoslovak chemists started to do in 1968.