

# 'Science *meets* business'

## *at* Centenary *the* Congress

**Dave Sammut** speaks with Sharon Todd, SCI's Executive Director, about the organisation, its activities and its plans to participate in the 2017 Congress.

**T**he 2017 RACI Congress marks a milestone in the history of our organisation. We will be celebrating 100 years serving the chemical profession and the community more widely. This July event will bring together scholars and professionals from around the world, with the combination of nine separate conferences and events into one substantive experience.

SCI ([www.soci.org](http://www.soci.org)) will be one prominent participant in the Congress. In its own words 'SCI is a unique community – being "where science meets business" – and therefore its proposed contribution to the congress will focus on this uniqueness – bringing together both business and science'.

SCI's Executive Director Sharon Todd is an experienced senior executive with over 25 years in the chemical industry. She achieved her



SCI's motto, *Scientia et Opera*, depicted here on the Chemical Industry Medal. The medal is awarded annually by SCI for 'contributions toward the growth of the chemical industry'.

first career role, with Albright & Wilson plc., through an SCI careers and networking event, working for 15 years in a variety of commercial roles, including Director of Strategy for ICI's Acrylics business. In 2001, she was appointed to the Board of Innospec Inc. as Executive Vice President responsible for Corporate Development, and in 2002 became Managing Director of the Performance Chemicals Division. Both roles were focused on driving growth through acquisition.

Sharon ran her own consultancy and interim management business for eight years, focusing on business development, strategic repositioning of businesses and mergers and acquisitions. This has involved working with start-ups, university spin-outs and large corporates – most recently with Synthomer plc. as Director of Corporate Development.

Sharon has diplomas from both the Chartered Institute of Marketing and the Institute of Directors. She has been involved with a number of industry trade associations including the Chemical Industries Association, and is currently a Non Executive Director of Chemicals North West, an industry-led, chemical cluster support organisation for the £10 billion North West chemical sector, the largest in the UK.

## How did SCI begin?

SCI was established in 1881 as the Society of Chemical Industry. The founder members were scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs, people with a passion for science and for creating societal value through science. We are obviously a learned society, but our prime objective is the promotion of applied science into industry for the benefit of society.

Active early members included William Lever, who went on to form Lever Bros, now Unilever. Other members included Henry Tate, of Tate and Lyle, George Matthey (Johnson Matthey), Ernest Solvay (Solvay), Arthur Albright (Albright & Wilson,



**Ms Sharon Todd, Executive Director of SCI since June 2015.**

now Solvay), members from both the Proctor and Gamble families and Ludwig Mond, founder of ICI plc.

SCI was established as a forum to promote and foster innovation – through networking, educating and informing. Its motto '*Scientia et Opera*' translates as 'Science and Industry'.

SCI has a global network with members in over 100 countries. It is different from many other professional societies, placing an emphasis on a multiscience and multidisciplinary approach to take science out of the lab into everyday products..

SCI's Australian branch grew out of the former Society of Chemical Industry of Victoria (SCIV), which was established in 1900, and the RACI emerged after a meeting of the SCIV in 1916.

The industrial great ICI was originally established by SCI members who networked through the SCI. SCI has always provided a forum for members to help each other by sharing and building on ideas. The early members were an instrumental body of people who built an innovation ecosystem, and helped to shape government policy through that network.

## How has SCI changed under your leadership?

I have spent my career on the business side of industry in a global context. For me, then, any change has been on renewing the focus on industry and rebuilding industry linkages, and using applied science to drive the step changes in products and processes.

Over the course of my career, I have seen fundamental changes in industry and significant restructuring. As industry has become more fragmented (particularly in the Western world), from SCI's perspective it has become more challenging to keep some of the links going. It is important to maintain those links and to build a strategy to support industry in the future.

## How does SCI's 'science meets business' vision translate into direct action?

*SCI runs over 250 events per annum across a diverse range of topics, from 18 separate technical groups across a broad range of chemical topics. It is active in education and skills development, as well as providing expert advice in support of the development of Government policy in the UK and 'promoting informed debate' of important scientific issues through public forums.*

We strongly believe that personal networks are important. On the skills and education side, we run a wide range of events, including careers events to showcase opportunities in both large and small industry and a series of activities around the College of Scholars, promoting young people – in particular PhDs – for both academic and industry careers. Additionally, we

have a range of networking and training activities for young and early career people and an ambassadors' program, and we've recently launched a mentoring program, because we have a natural mentoring community.

We also run registered training courses in packaging, licensing, publishing, and the necessary areas of biology ... Skills and education is a very important focus for us.

In the policy area, we seek to support informed debate on topical issues. For instance, we provide an independent scientific view and expert advisory services to the UK Government on the areas of decarbonisation technologies for industry, or climate change targets. Mostly, we tend to provide advice on areas related to innovation and enabling the flow of science from the lab into industry.

## What do you see as the biggest challenges to the chemical industries over the next five or ten years?

There are global megatrends that everyone understands and knows so well – the burgeoning population and how to feed them; how to protect the planet; how to make sure that people's lives are better, that they are healthy and have improved wellbeing. We have also a low-growth global economy, a debt-laden economy, and now a dislocation in the Western communities from the political processes. In this context, science and innovation have a critical role to play in improving societal welfare.

Part of the solution to low growth has to involve science-based innovation. Organisations like SCI need to come to the fore and promote the ideas around how to bring

innovations to market more quickly. We have to help define the innovations that are going to lead to step changes; and help promote the linkages between academia and industry.

## What will SCI offer at the 2017 Congress?

We'll be doing a typical SCI agenda. Our event will have an overview of what is going on in the global marketplace, the broader trends and their impacts on industry and academia. We have experts who will talk about start-up companies, issues and challenges in commercialising new technologies and creating successful businesses. There will also be sessions on patenting, the challenges and opportunities in developing commercial patent portfolios, and publishing.

## Will you be travelling while you are in Australia?

I would love to. I've travelled to many places around the world, but I've never been to Australia. At 14, my grandfather misrepresented his age to come to Australia. He lived in Australia for many years as an adventurer out in the bush, and I'd quite like to retrace some of his footsteps – if time allows.

**Dave Sammut** FRACI CChem is principal of DCS Technical, a boutique scientific consultancy, providing services to the Australian and international minerals, waste recycling and general scientific industries.

The RACI Congress will run 23–27 July in Melbourne. SCI is a partner organisation of the Congress and will run both presentation and training sessions. For more information visit [www.racicongress.com](http://www.racicongress.com).