

JAAS 25th anniversary—Atomic Spectrometry Updates

DOI: 10.1039/c005499m

The Atomic Spectrometry Updates (ASU) have been an integral part of the Journal of Analytical Atomic Spectrometry (JAAS) since the first edition in 1986. However, the history of the Updates goes back to the late 1960's when the newly formed Atomic Spectroscopy Group of the then Society for Analytical Chemistry, SAC (now the Analytical Division of the RSC) joined with the Institute of Physics and Physics Society to organise the International Atomic Absorption Spectroscopy Conference in Sheffield in 1969. The success and enthusiasm generated by the conference encouraged the Atomic Spectroscopy Group to initiate an annual publication to review progress in the field. The project was supported by the Council of SAC and the first volume of the "Annual Reports on Analytical Atomic Spectroscopy (ARAAS)" was published in the summer of 1972 reporting developments during 1971. The book was well received.

In 1984 the RSC were considering launching a new international journal for the publication of original papers relating to the development and application of atomic spectrometric techniques. The original concept was conceived by the late John Ottaway, a Board member of ARAAS and Chair of the Analytical Editorial Board, and Barry Sharp who was at the time Chair of the ARAAS Board. The new journal was to be called the Journal of Analytical Atomic Spectrometry (JAAS). At that time, the publication of ARAAS in hardback book format was becoming difficult to sustain given the inherent costs of production, and so it was agreed that the subject matter published in ARAAS would be divided into approximately six equal sections and incorporated into JAAS. One section, covering a defined topic, was to be published in each issue reviewing material for the 12 months ending 6 months prior to the publication date of JAAS. The first of these newly named "Atomic Spectrometry Updates"

covering 'Environmental Analysis' was published in the first issue.

Of the original members of the ARAAS Board, five were still serving when it disbanded and they transferred to the ASU Board. The new Board consisted of 43 members, of which 36 were existing ARAAS board members, including Malcolm Cresser who became the first Chair of the ASU Board. The original

ASU Board also had 20 members from outside the UK. Since that time the composition of the Board has changed and it is now much more dynamic in terms of membership, indeed over 140 analytical scientists have served on the Board since 1986 (see Fig. 1). The ASU board has had six Chairs since Malcolm Cresser in 1986—Doug Miles, 1989; Andy Ellis, 1995; John Marshall, 1998; Steve Hill,



Fig. 1 Past annual general meetings of the General Atomic Spectrometry Updates Group. The top picture was taken in 1995 (Bristol), and the bottom picture in 2007 (Rome).

2001; Phil Potts, 2005 and currently Andrew Taylor 2009. The Board now has 34 members, of which nearly a third (11 members) are non UK based. John Price was the last remaining Board member from the original ARAAS Editorial Board. John retired from the ASU Board in 2008 having served for nearly 36 years! Sadly, several Board members have also passed away during this period. In addition to John Ottaway who is mentioned above, Alistair Brown, John Dawson, David Hickman, and Allan Ure were all valued colleagues who contributed greatly to the ASU Reviews. The work of Allan Ure, a passionate advocate of encouraging and helping younger scientists, is remembered through the Allan Ure Bursary which is jointly supported by the ASU and the Atomic Spectroscopy Group of the RSC.

The changing Board membership of the ASU reflects the gradual evolution of the reviews themselves. There has been a move away from the manual preparation and collection of abstracts to a fully computerised system which now handles in excess of 12,000 abstracts each year. Interestingly, an attempt in the early 1990's (prior to the availability of robust search engines) to make ASU abstracts available to scientists in an electronic form was discontinued after a few years when it became clear that user demand

was limited! Of perhaps more importance to current reviews, are the gradual changes which have been made to the content and style of the reviews. Over the years new sections devoted to "X-ray fluorescence" and to "Atomic mass spectrometry" have been added and previous sections amalgamated, *e.g.*, "Instrumentation" was merged into "Advances in atomic emission, absorption and fluorescence spectrometry and related techniques" and "Minerals and Refractories" merged into "Industrial Analysis, metals, chemicals and advanced materials". More recently the changes have focused more on the style of the reviews as the focus moves away from an attempt at comprehensive coverage to more selective reviews highlighting significant advances and identifying trends. Of course, the scientific content of the reviews continues to evolve, and this has produced further changes to the coverage of each review. Most recently we have seen a further merging of topic areas with the creation of a single review covering all instrumental developments with the exception of those in X-ray fluorescence spectrometry. A new review, "Elemental speciation", focusing on the important role of atomic spectroscopy in this area, has been added to the ASU portfolio.

One significant difference between the production of the ASU Reviews and other

reviews is the refereeing process. Each topic group has a referee assigned to the group. Clearly the referee works completely independently of the writing group, but provides detailed feedback on both the content and presentation of the reviews. Having good knowledge of the subject area is clearly vital, but the referees also need to be familiar with the ASU production style to ensure consistency. They also feed back on quality issues to the ASU General Editor who has the task of overseeing the production process and ensuring that the quality of the reviews remains high. The ASU Editorial Board welcomes feedback from the readership on any aspect of the reviews (www.asureviews.org).

ASU and JAAS have both evolved greatly since 1986. ASU is now far more autonomous than in the early days of JAAS. However, the association between them remains strong. This perhaps reflects something of the community for which they operate. The formation of ARASS and then ASU (and indeed JAAS), were the direct result of the energy and enthusiasm of individuals working together in an exciting area of science. Today the ASU Board continues to reflect that same enthusiasm and commitment to produce something of value to the user community.

Steve Hill