

FEBS – 25th Anniversary

In the early sixties it became evident that the intra-European relations between biochemists had to be fostered by putting their contacts onto a more established basis by arranging meetings for European biochemists. This led to the creation of FEBS which was conceived in 1963 when a group of biochemists met on the initiative of the Biochemical Society of the United Kingdom during its Oxford meeting. The Federation itself came into official existence on the 1st of January 1964 with 20 adhering societies. Yugoslavia and Israel joined in 1964, USSR in 1967, Rumania in 1968, Greece in 1969, Iceland in 1972 and finally Turkey in 1978, so that FEBS has now 26 Constituent Societies. FEBS comprises more than 39 000 members as the members of a Constituent Society are automatically members of FEBS (table 1).

In the beginning, FEBS was formed only with the idea that the Societies might come together to hold general meetings. These meetings provide the main opportunity for European biochemists to get together, and their size has been increasing steadily.

The *Meetings* are hosted by one Constituent Society every year unless there is an IUB Congress in Europe. When the IUB Congress is not in Europe there is a smaller *Special FEBS Meeting* with a restricted programme. Almost all European countries have hosted FEBS Meetings (table 2). The next FEBS Meetings will be held in Budapest (1990), Dublin (1992), Sweden (1993), Helsinki (1994, Special Meeting), Basel (1995) and Barcelona (1996).

The financial arrangements for a FEBS Meeting and its organization are the responsibility of the Host Society. In some instances, FEBS helps by lending money to the Host Society or by giving a guarantee against loss, but in these cases it requires to be acquainted with the budget of the Meeting. In order to facilitate the work of the Meeting organizers, and to pass on the experience of former organizers, the office of Meetings Counsellor was created in 1978. S.G. van den Bergh was the first holder of this office which was taken up by H. Kleinkauf in 1988.

The question as to whether it is worthwhile organizing such large and broad meetings, as FEBS Meetings have become, was raised in, and discussed by, Council. The general opinion that emerged was that FEBS Meetings should continue to be held, since they were thought to be very useful, especially for young biochemists. FEBS Meetings often provide the only opportunity for young people to present their results to, and discuss them with, a broad audience of specialists and also to meet outstanding scientists. At these meetings too the most distinguished biochemists of our time expound their work in plenary lectures, two of which are delivered by the recipients of the Sir Hans Krebs and the Prakash Datta Medals. FEBS Meetings are conducted in a friendly and congenial atmosphere and lead to lasting scientific and human relationships.

Soon after its foundation FEBS began publishing of a FEBS *Bulletin* listing FEBS activities, meetings of Constituent Societies and international meetings, courses and other relevant announcements. This bulletin is presently distributed twice a year, via the Societies, to all scientists belonging to a FEBS Constituent Society. It is managed by J. Skoda from Prague.

At the second FEBS Meeting in Vienna, H.R.V. Arnstein proposed that FEBS should organize summer schools. He became on this account the summer school organizer and in turn persuaded C. de Duve to run the first such school on 'Centrifugal Fractionation of Animal Cells; Theoretical Basis and Practical Procedures' in Louvain. Gradually, the Committee broadened its activities and began also to sponsor symposia, workshops, round-table discussions, etc. and the summer schools were renamed *Advanced Courses* (since some of them were held in winter!). H.R.V. Arnstein chaired the committee for the period 1965-1967, followed by P.N. Campbell (1967-1970) and M. Gruber (1970-1977). After 1977, under the chairmanship of G. Bernardi, the Advanced Courses Committee increased its activities and adopted a new policy - to sponsor almost exclusively events of educational value and to refuse to fund symposia and other types of meetings beneficial mainly to well-established scientists. The new policy underlines the concern felt by FEBS for young

Table 1

Federation of European Biochemical Societies	
Constituent Societies	Number of Members
Austria	450
Belgium	825
Bulgaria	387
Czechoslovakia	1350
Denmark	750
Federal Republic of Germany	3100
Finland	1200
France	1100
German Democratic Republic	1000
Greece	280
Hungary	800
Iceland	66
Israel	350
Italy	1020
The Netherlands	2180
Norway	1250
Poland	1290
Portugal	300
Rumania	520
Spain	1289
Sweden	778
Switzerland	758
Turkey	200
United Kingdom + Ireland	7482
USSR	10496
Yugoslavia	375
Total	39596

Table 2

FEBS Meetings and Special Meetings		
Meeting No.	Location	Dates
1	London	23-25 March 1964
2	Vienna	21-24 April 1965
3	Warsaw	4-7 April 1966
4	Oslo	3-7 July 1967
5	Prague	15-20 July 1968
6	Madrid	7-11 April 1969
7	Varna	20-25 September 1969
8	Amsterdam	20-25 August 1972
Special	Dublin	15-19 April 1973
9	Budapest	25-30 August 1974
10	Paris	20-25 July 1975
11	Copenhagen	14-19 August 1977
12	Dresden	2-8 July 1978
Special	Dubrovnik-Cavtat	17-21 April 1979
13	Jerusalem	24-29 August 1980
14	Edinburgh	28 March-4 April 1981
Special	Athens	25-29 April 1982
15	Brussels	24-29 July 1983
16	Moscow	25-30 June 1984
Special	Algarve	21-26 April 1985
17	Berlin(West)	24-29 August 1986
18	Ljubljana	28 June-3 July 1987
19	Rome	2-7 July 1989

(According to the figures indicated by the Secretaries of the Constituent Societies on 1 January 1988)

biochemists, under the age of 31, who alone are entitled to grants from FEBS Youth Travel Fund to attend FEBS Advanced Courses. The courses are residential, involving as few as 10 (in the case of practical courses) and up to 250 participants. In some cases they are jointly sponsored by other organizations such as NATO or EMBO. A total of 116 FEBS Advanced Courses have been organized between 1964 and 1988. 276 travel grants were awarded in 1988 for a total of 328 430 DM and 392 974 DM were given to the course organizers. The geographical distribution of these courses is given in table 3.

The Advanced Courses Committee also sponsors and organizes *Lecture Tours* by prominent scientists, from both within and outside Europe, who visit different 'FEBS' countries where, besides giving lectures, they visit laboratories for discussion and consultations.

Since 1987, the Chairman of the Advanced Course Committee has been H. Feldmann.

The first publication issued on behalf of FEBS was the volume of Abstracts of the first FEBS Meeting in 1964. Since then 70 volumes have appeared with varying success. The reluctance of some invited speakers to provide manuscripts and the proliferation of volumes on the topics of many symposia has in recent years inhibited Host Societies from publishing the Symposia they have organized. Nevertheless, Council has reiterated its view that the proceedings of selected and timely Symposia are useful and should still be published.

At the second FEBS meeting in Vienna in 1965 it was decided to have a Publications Sub-Committee whose members were: Jean-Emile Courtois (Paris), Otto Hoffmann-Ostenhof (Vienna), Claude Liébecq (Liège), Uriel Z. Littauer (Rehovot), Pavao Mildner (Zagreb), Peter Reichard (Stockholm) and William J. Whelan

Table 3

Geographical Distribution of FEBS Advanced Courses (1974-1988)

Austria	12
Belgium	7
Bulgaria	3
Czechoslovakia	6
Denmark	2
Finland	3
France	18
FRG	16
GDR	6
Greece	17
Hungary	6
Iceland	0
Ireland	0
Israel	2
Italy	10
The Netherlands	7
Norway	0
Poland	4
Portugal	2
Rumania	1
Spain	4
Sweden	4
Switzerland	10
Turkey	0
United Kingdom	17
USSR	3
Yugoslavia	3

Diverse: Tunisia 1, Kenya 1, Egypt 1

Table 4

Distribution of FEBS Journals

	1984	1985	1986	1987
FEBS Letters				
Total no. of Subscriptions	1655	1664	1682	1702
% Europe	42.8	42.8	42.4	42.6
% America	36.6	36.4	36.3	35.6
% Africa	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.0
% Asia	17.6	17.3	18	18.5
% Australia + New Zealand	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.3
EJB				
Total no. of Subscriptions	2017	2004	2048	2048
% Europe	43.3	42.4	40.0	39.8
% Americ	34.9	35.3	36.5	36.8
% Africa	1.2	1.5	1.6	1.4
% Asia	18.4	18.5	19.5	19.7
% Australia + New Zealand	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.2

Remark: The diminution in distribution of EJB to Europe between 1985 and 1986 is because in Berlin and Amsterdam there are two important booksellers who distribute subscriptions outside Europe. These figured before 1986 under FRG and The Netherlands and from 1986 on under their respective countries.

(London). The first task of the Sub-Committee was to discuss the launching of a European Journal of Biochemistry. It was T. Bücher who persuaded the Gesellschaft für Biologische Chemie in turn to persuade Springer-Verlag to agree to convert the 'Biochemische Zeitschrift' into a FEBS journal called *European Journal of Biochemistry* (EJB). The Journal publishes papers on fundamental aspects of Biochemistry, Biophysics, Molecular Biology or Cellular Biology. The Journal also publishes regularly review articles. C. Liébecq was the Editor-in-Chief of EJB for a period of 22 years from its beginning until the previous year (1967-1988). Last year P. Christen took up the task of Editor-in-Chief. EJB is published on behalf of FEBS by Springer-Verlag in Heidelberg and appears twice a month. Table 4 shows that EJB is well distributed all around the world.

The inception of *FEBS Letters*, in July 1968 has been recently reviewed [1-3]. It publishes concise reports in Biochemistry, Biophysics and Molecular Biology where the over-riding criterion is that the communication must be of sufficient immediate importance to the work of other investigators to merit urgent publication. As well as Research Letters which must be essentially complete and final reports, the journal contains topical Minireviews, Meeting Reports, Commentaries and Hypotheses. The average time from submission to appearance in print is currently around 60 days. Since 1980, the journal has also produced separately an annual 'Index of Biochemical Reviews'. *FEBS Letters* is published on behalf of FEBS by Elsevier Science Publishers in Amsterdam and appears twice a month.

FEBS Letters has done exceptionally well in large measure through the hard work and enthusiasm of its Managing Editor S.P. Datta who retired in 1985 from the post he had held since *FEBS Letters* was launched. G. Semenza has succeeded him since 1985 and continues the successful development of *FEBS Letters*

(table 4). It is important to note that the two FEBS journals are financially very beneficial to FEBS. Their incomes support the large part of the activities of FEBS.

In 1969 it was resolved to form a Publications Committee, that would consider and recommend publication policies for FEBS. In this capacity it advises the Executive Committee of FEBS on the policies regarding the publication of the FEBS Bulletin, Proceedings of Meeting Symposia, EJB and FEBS Letters. The Committee was chaired by Claude Liébecq (Liège) from 1969 to 1972, followed by Bo G. Malmström (Göteborg), 1972–1975, Samuel Rapoport (Berlin), 1975–1978, and Trevor W. Goodwin (Liverpool), 1978–1984.

Since 1984, the Chairman of the Publications Committee has been U.Z. Littauer.

FEBS most recent venture, the fellowships programme, started in 1979. *Fellowships* were to support short-term visits (up to two, or exceptionally, three months) by members of any FEBS Constituent Society to laboratories in another FEBS country for the purpose of carrying out experiments with special techniques or other forms of scientific collaboration or advanced training, and especially to support developments arising at short notice. This programme is administered by the Chairman of the FEBS Fellowships Committee (G. Dirheimer 1979–1983 and C. Gancedo since 1983). This programme became rapidly very successful; in the course of ten years 428 fellowships were granted. All 'FEBS' countries have received or sent fellows, or both (fig.1). A limited number of fellowships were awarded to people not from a 'FEBS' country (Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon). Most fellows have been young scientists with a PhD degree and they have been very appreciative in their reports and grateful for the opportunity that their fellowship gave them. In 1983 the FEBS Council decided that fellowships should not be awarded to undergraduate students or those just starting research (a PhD degree or a publication in a major journal is a prerequisite), nor are senior scientists eligible. Since 1985, the fellowships programme has been enlarged. *Summer Fellowships* were created in 1985. They are intended to help to support one-month research projects by young promising students (not older than 26) in laboratories within the FEBS area in a country different from that where the applicant works on a topic related to their current studies. Two years ago, FEBS started a *One Year Fellowships* programme. This is a very ambitious, but absolutely necessary activity in Europe because, due to administrative constraints, it is not possible, in many European countries to manage grants, like in the USA. Very often there are no salaries included in these grants and no possibility of converting bench money, or money for apparatus, to post-doctoral fellowships. The award comprises a salary of up to DM 30 000, travel expenses, and family assistance of up to DM 3600, but no bench fees or research costs. Thus, this activity is very expensive and

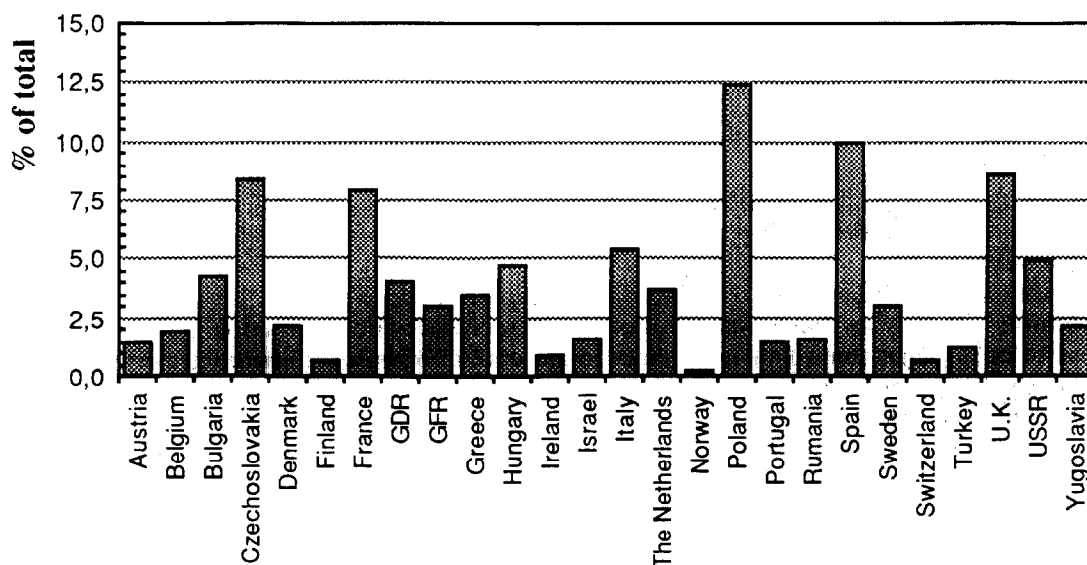


Fig.1. Comparison of the geographical distribution of the FEBS Short-Term Fellowships (1979–1988).

as FEBS is a private organization it has to raise the money for it. There were 5 recipients in 1987 and 6 in 1988.

FEBS devoted just over 1.1 million DM last year to its scientific activities (table 5). These expenses correspond essentially to the income of the two FEBS journals. It is therefore important that the numbers of subscriptions to EJB and FEBS Letters increase and also that European Biochemists publish in the FEBS journals. On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of FEBS there has been a special offer of low personal subscriptions for each of these journals.

Finally FEBS gives several *Awards*:

Sir Hans Krebs Medal

This is a silver medal awarded since 1973 at a Meeting to a distinguished active scientist invited by the Organizing Committee to present a plenary lecture. The lecture is published in one of the FEBS Journals and the recipient's travel expenses are met from the interest on a donation from the Lord Rank Centre for Research to which FEBS added a capital sum.

Prakash Datta Medal

This medal, provided by Elsevier Science Publishers, is awarded for outstanding achievements in Biochemistry. The awarding committee is convened by a nominee of the next Meeting Organizing Committee and comprises, in addition, one person nominated by Council and one member of the Executive Committee. The travel expenses for the recipient to attend the Meeting and deliver a plenary lecture are met from the interest on a generous capital gift from Elsevier Science Publishers.

FEBS Anniversary Prizes of the Gesellschaft für Biologische Chemie

On the 10th Anniversary of FEBS the Gesellschaft für Biologische Chemie offered these prizes to be awarded at each FEBS Meeting for outstanding achievements in Biochemistry to persons under the age of 40, selected from among the invited lecturers at that Meeting. The selection committee is composed of the Meetings Counsellor and a representative of (i) the Gesellschaft für Biologische Chemie, (ii) the previous FEBS Meeting and (iii) the present Meeting. Currently valued at DM 1500, the prizes derive from capital given by Boehringer Mannheim GmbH and Eppendorf Gerätebau Netheler + Hinz GmbH.

FEBS Diplôme d'Honneur

Inaugurated as part of the 10th Anniversary Celebrations, the Diplôme is awarded to individuals judged by the Executive Committee as having made an exceptional contribution to FEBS activities. Nominations are solicited from the Constituent Societies and recipients are invited to attend FEBS Meetings without having to pay a registration fee.

Thus as time goes on, FEBS activities expand. At the moment a small *Executive Committee* consisting of eight officers, Chairman (of Council), Immediate Past-Chairman, Secretary-General, Treasurer, Chairman

Table 5
FEBS Scientific Budget (in DM)

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Short-Term Fellowships	160 000	120 000	188 000	168 000	168 000	216 000
Long-Term Fellowships	—	—	—	—	91 000	171 000
Summer Fellowships	—	—	10 000	18 000	20 000	31 000
Advanced Courses and Lecture Tours	387 000	424 000	512 000	342 000	468 000	401 000
Youth Travel Funds	117 000	366 000	235 000	345 000	290 000	329 000
Total	664 000	910 000	945 000	873 000	1 037 000	1 148 000

Remark: The sums are rounded up to the nearest 1000 DM.

of the Publications Committee, Chairman of the Advanced Courses Committee, Chairman of the Fellowships Committee and Meetings Counsellor, has overall responsibility for FEBS, between Council Meetings, but the various activities described above are organized on a decentralized basis. These arrangements have the advantage of being highly flexible and keeping the administrative costs extremely low. Whereas a permanent FEBS secretariat might be convenient, it would be expensive and not necessarily more efficient.

All FEBS activities are supervised by Council which is composed of one delegate from each Constituent Society and the members of the Executive Committee. Council meets during every full FEBS Meeting and on other occasions when necessary.

To complete the list of officers those not mentioned above include:

Chairmen:

F.C. Happold (1964), O. Hoffmann-Ostenhof (1964–1965), K. Zakrewski (1965–1966), A. Pihl (1966–1967), F. Sorm (1967–1968), J.R. Villanueva (1968–1969), T.K. Nikolov (1969–1972), L.L.M. van Deenen (1972–1974), F. Guba (1974–1975), J.P. Ebel (1975–1977), F. Lundquist (1977–1978), S. Rapoport (1978–1980), N. Sharon (1980–1981), H.M. Keir (1981–1983), C. Liébecq (1983–1984), Yu.A. Ovchinnikov (1984–1986), K. Decker (1986–1987), V. Turk (1987–1989), D. Cavallini (1989–1990).

Secretaries-General:

W.J. Whelan (1965–1967), H.R.V. Arnstein (1967–1974), L.L.M. van Deenen (1975–1977), M. Yomtov (1978–1983), G. Dirheimer (1984–1989). V. Turk (1990).

It is regrettable that in this short paper, it is not possible to pay tribute to all those biochemists involved in the foundation and successful development of FEBS. As an independent organization, building bridges across the political and linguistic barriers in Europe, without having succumbed to bureaucracy, FEBS may be a precursor of the kind of organizations which could rule Europe in the next decades. Last but not least, FEBS has been of immense benefit to European biochemists and particularly young scientists.

The FEBS Executive Committee is convinced that a large number of those who contributed to the success of FEBS will be happy to meet again at the Anniversary Meeting in Rome and we wish them, the organizers and all participants an interesting and successful meeting.

Guy Dirheimer
Secretary-General of FEBS

REFERENCES

- [1] Whelan, W.J. (1986) FEBS Lett. 194, v–vii.
- [2] Arnstein, H.R.V. (1986) FEBS Lett. 194, viii.
- [3] Semenza, G. (1986) FEBS Lett. 194, ix.

Note:

More details about the history of FEBS are to be found in the special issues of FEBS Letters commemorating both the 10th Anniversary of FEBS (Volume 40, Supplement 23, March 1974) and the 20th Anniversary of FEBS (Volume 171, June 1984, pp. 1–4).