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Industrial Orientation and Skills Development for Chemists and Chemical Engineers from Developing Countries.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is an international body formed to implement the Articles of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which came into effect on 29 April 1997. Under Article XI of the Chemical Weapons Convention the OPCW are charged with the task of 'encouraging the fullest possible exchange of ... scientific and technical information relating to the development and application of chemistry for peaceful purposes'.

In December 1998, a panel of experts from industry and academia was convened to devise an Associate Programme aimed at professional Chemists and Chemical Engineers from developing nations, to promote the exchange of good practice in Industrial Chemistry/Chemical Engineering between developed and developing nations. The first programme was run September-December 2000 and it is now run on an annual basis August-October. Twenty-three countries have so far participated in the programme including Armenia, Bangladesh, Burkino Faso, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lithuania, Malawi, Peru, Venezuela and Vietnam.

The entire programme is divided into five distinct phases: i) Briefing and Preparation, OPCW headquarters, the Hague (1 week); ii) Industrial Orientation and Skills Development Course, University of Surrey, UK (3 weeks); iii) Research Project and Inspection Training, OPCW (1 week); iv) Industrial Secondment, Chemical Company, Europe (3 weeks); and, v) Research Project, Debriefing and Evaluation, OPCW (2 weeks).

This paper focuses on the Industrial Orientation and Skills Development course organised and run by the Department of Chemical and Process Engineering, University of Surrey. This course provides the opportunity for delegates to develop an understanding of working practices and business structures within well developed chemical industries. The course is highly experiential and is supported by a number of major multi-national chemical/pharmaceutical companies. The final week of the course is based around a business simulation of a small chemical company during which the course participants have to operate a small production plant, run a research and development facility and organise a small business management team.

The main features of this experiential learning environment will be highlighted together with some of the key outcomes and learning points gained from this innovative and unique course.