

Zeitschrift: Swiss bulletin für angewandte Geologie = Swiss bulletin pour la géologie appliquée = Swiss bulletin per la geologia applicata = Swiss bulletin for applied geology

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung von Energie-Geowissenschaftlern; Schweizerische Fachgruppe für Ingenieurgeologie

Band: 16 (2011)

Heft: 1

Artikel: Future of the Swiss Association of Petroleum Geologists and Engineers : results of a poll among members

Autor: Bolliger, Werner

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-327743>

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Future of the Swiss Association of Petroleum Geologists and Engineers – results of a poll among members Werner Bolliger¹

Zusammenfassung

Aus den Resultaten einer Umfrage im August 2010 konnte sich die Schweizerische Vereinigung von Petroleumgeologen und -Ingenieuren (VSP) ein besseres Bild über die Zusammensetzung der Mitgliedschaft und die Wünsche der Mitglieder betreffend die Zukunft der Vereinigung machen als bisher. 108 (36%) der mit einem Fragebogen Angeschriebenen sandten ihre Antworten zurück und werden als repräsentativ für alle Mitglieder angesehen. Nachfolgend die relevanten Resultate:

1] Das Altersprofil der Antwortenden entspricht der Verteilung in der ganzen VSP. 28 % der Antworten kamen aus dem Ausland, was sich mit 22% Auslandmitgliedern der gesamten persönlichen Mitgliedschaften vergleicht.

2] Alle bis jetzt gebotenen Aktivitäten (Wissenschaft, Vertretung von Berufsinteressen, Präsentation von Fachwissen ausserhalb der VSP, gesellschaftliche Kontakte) werden unterstützt, mit Hauptgewicht auf Wissenschaft und gesellschaftlichen Kontakten.

3] Das Fachwissen der Antwortenden ist breit gefächert und umfasst neben Petrolgeologie auch andere Energiegebiete, natürliche Ressourcen und Umwelt.

4] Auch die jetzige Tätigkeit der Antwortenden ist vielseitig. Neben einer grossen Zahl von geologischen Beratern (unabhängig und als Angestellte) sind Universitäts- und Industrie-Angestellte gleichmässig vertreten. Beim Durchschnittsalter der Befragten von 61 Jahren ist es nicht erstaunlich, dass sich 43% bereits aus dem Berufsleben zurückgezogen haben.

5] 54 Antwortende (50%) sind bereit, ihr Fachwissen zur Verfügung zu stellen, indem sie die VSP mit Vorträgen, in öffentlichen Diskussionsforen, an Studentenanstalten und gegenüber den Behörden vertreten. Allerdings sind nur 29 davon in der Schweiz erreichbar.

6] Eine grosse Mehrheit (74%) der Antwortenden stimmt einer Namensänderung der VSP zu. Von den vorgeschlagenen Bezeichnungen «Schweizerische Vereinigung von Energiegeologen und -Ingenieuren» und «Schweizerische Vereinigung für Energie-Geologie» wird der erste bevorzugt. 11 Antwortende haben alternative Vorschläge. Ein gutes Viertel (26%) will keine Änderung.

Die angeschriebenen Mitglieder wurden auch eingeladen, ausserhalb der statistisch verwertbaren Antworten Vorschläge und Kommentare zur Funktion und Zukunft der VSP zu machen. Daraus kristallisieren sich neben der Namensänderung aus Sicht des Vorstands folgende Aktionspunkte und Diskussionsthemen heraus:

- Für die vermehrten Kontakte mit der Aussenwelt sollte eine Kommunikationsstruktur formalisiert werden.
- Ein «Mission Statement» sollte ausgearbeitet werden (komplementär zu einem möglichen neuen Namen).
- Vermehrte Kontakte mit verwandten Organisationen sollten geprüft werden, wie auch vermehrte Berücksichtigung von ökonomischen Aspekten im Bulletin und in Vorträgen.

1. Introduction

The Swiss Association of Petroleum Geologists and Engineers (ASP) is currently scrutinizing its purpose and role internally for its members, and externally towards the Swiss energy scene. As the second largest association of geoscientists in Switzerland it intends to raise its profile. This was stated at the last annual convention at Stresa (Bull. 15/2, 2010, p. 72). Subsequently and as a basis for further discussions and eventual decisions, a poll among personal members was organized with the aim to 1] achieve an improved and up-to-date demographic picture of the membership, and 2] to scrutinize members' opinions on relevant questions concerning the future of the ASP. Besides formalised answers that could be statistically evaluated, members had the opportunity to comment verbally on workings and future of the ASP.

A questionnaire was sent to all personal members in August 2010, covering the following aspects:

¹ Member of the Board VSP/ASP

- A. Expected purpose and function of the ASP (4 questions);
- B. Expertise of the addressee, from education and experience (subdivided into 14 areas and sub-areas), as well as age;
- C. Current activity and functions of the addressee, and past activity if relevant (subdivided into 6 areas);
- D. Readiness of the addressee to represent the ASP (in his/her particular field of competence) as an expert outside the ASP (4 possibilities);
- E. Opinion on possible name change for ASP.

Individual answers were (and still are) treated in strict confidence. Only statistical evaluations are being discussed here.

2. Results

General

108 of 297 addressed members, or 36.4%, answered the poll. 78 (72%) of these originated in Switzerland, 25 (23%) came from the rest of Europe, and 5 (5%) from other parts of the world. Of the two versions – German and English – of the questionnaires, German was chosen in 66 cases, English in 42. One addressee did not disclose his/her identity to protect privacy.

- The response rate is considered good for such a poll.
- Distribution of the returned ages corresponds very well with the age distribution of the entire population of the ASP, as shown on fig. 1, with an average of 61 and 60 respectively.
- Despite the above general correspondence of age, student members were strongly underrepresented in the poll (only 2 [8%] of totally 26 responded).
- Proportionally more returns came from abroad than the rate of foreign residents among the entire personal membership (28% vs 22%).

- Based on the good match of the age distributions (fig. 1) and in the absence of other significant statistical parameters that could suggest differently, we assume that the poll results are representative for the entire ASP membership.

A. Main purpose / function of the Association, expected by members

Here questions were asked regarding four of the offered services of the ASP, and each answer could be weighted from 1 to 4 (4 indicating strong support) corresponding to the member's interest:

- (1) Science (bulletin, lectures, geological excursions);
- (2) Representation / support of professional interests;
- (3) Representation of the ASP towards the outside world as a pool of experts for geology and energy;
- (4) Social contacts (personal networking, reunions of «old boys» and partners in nice surroundings in and around Switzerland).

Results presented for all returns, and split into two age groups, are shown in fig. 2. All aspects were considered as important. Main interests, however, are in «science» and «social contacts». This is particularly borne out in the older age group (> 59 years), which also represents a majority within the returns (57%). Among the younger age group (< 60 years and 43% of returns) the interest is more or less equally distributed between the four aspects.

B. Expertise of addressees

Here areas of expertise, from education and experience, were investigated, subdivided into the following categories and sub-categories:

- Geology and Geophysics; each covered expertise in fields such as petroleum / gas,

other energy carriers, other raw materials, construction, academia;

- Petroleum Engineering was divided in: drilling, reservoir and production engineering;
- Geothermal energy;
- Environmental geology.

Results of the evaluations are shown in fig. 3. They show a wide distribution of responding members' expertise, which is often spread

over several disciplines. Emphasis is on oil and gas geology and geophysics (58% and 34% respectively). Geothermal energy is well represented with 26%. Hydrogeology was not specifically mentioned in the questionnaires but was listed by some members in their replies under «other expertise». In the statistics it is combined with environmental geology.

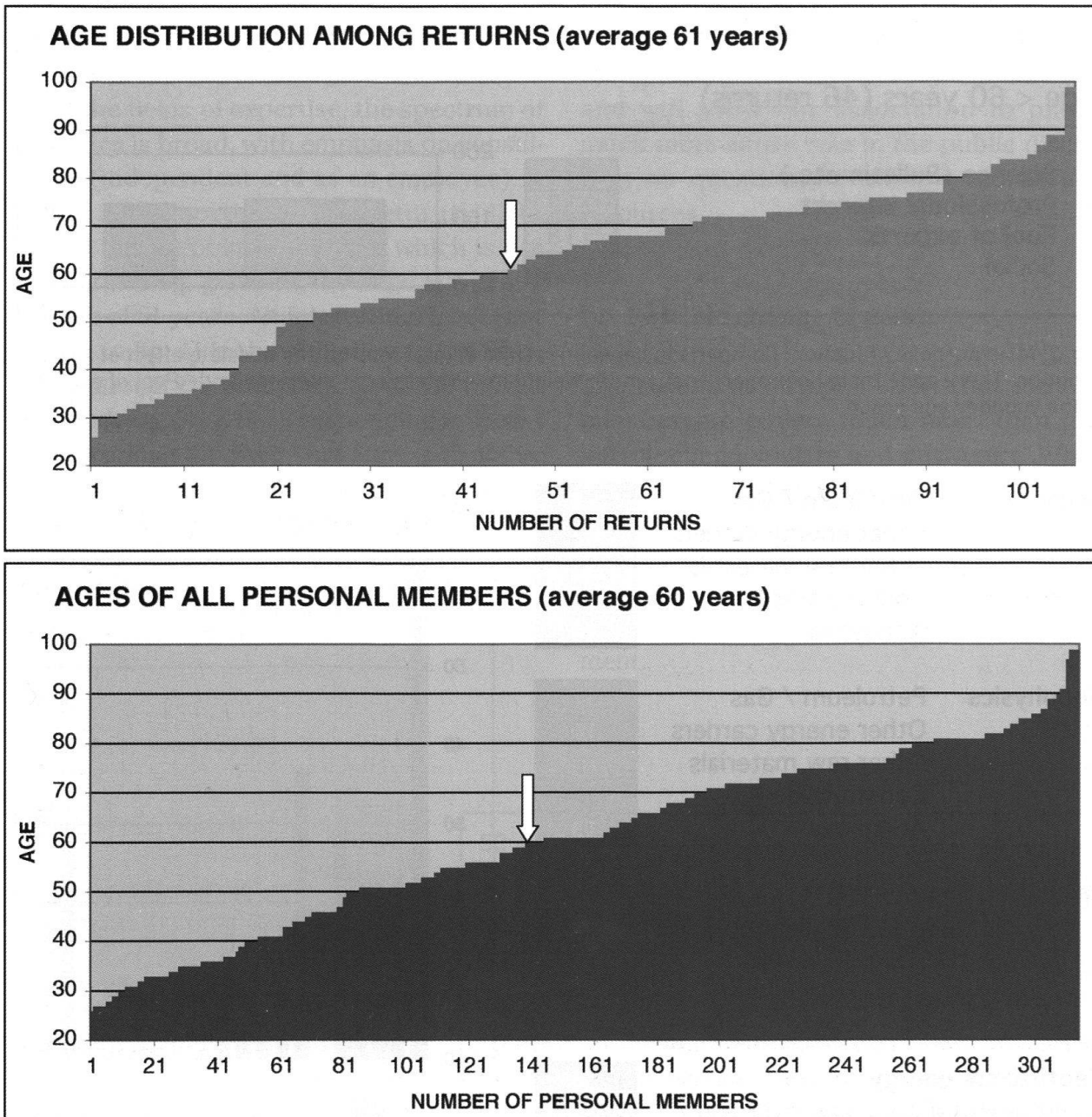
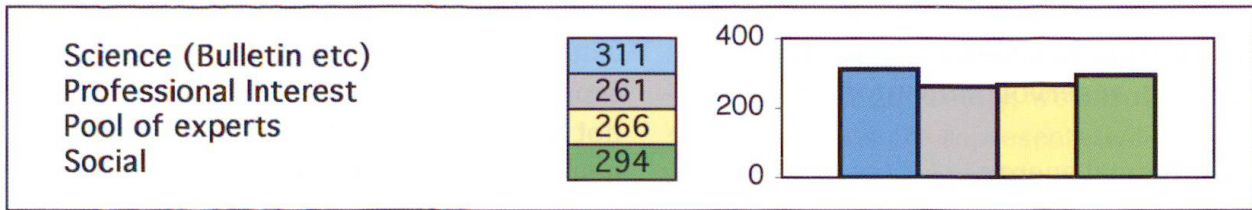


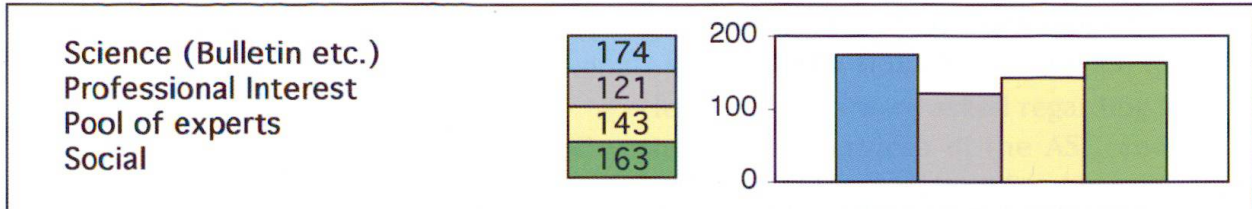
Fig. 1: Age distribution from the returns corresponds well with the distribution of the ASP population, with an average age of 61 and 60, respectively.

From 108 returns*

* 1 unknown age not included in age splits



Age > 59 years (61 returns)



Age < 60 years (46 returns)

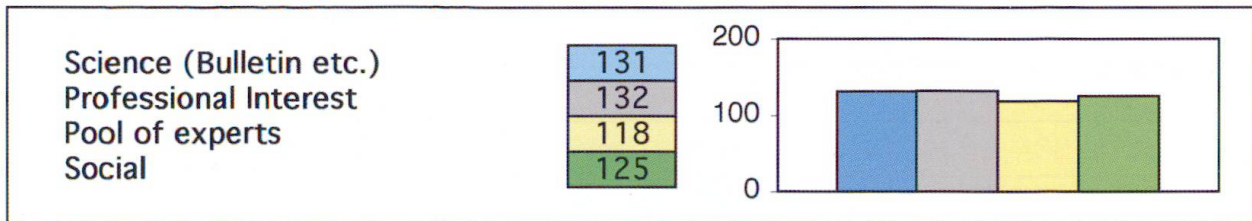


Fig. 2: Main purpose / function: Comparison between results of total returns and possible effect of age distribution. There appears to be proportionally more weight in «Professional interest» and «Pool of experts» in the younger age group.

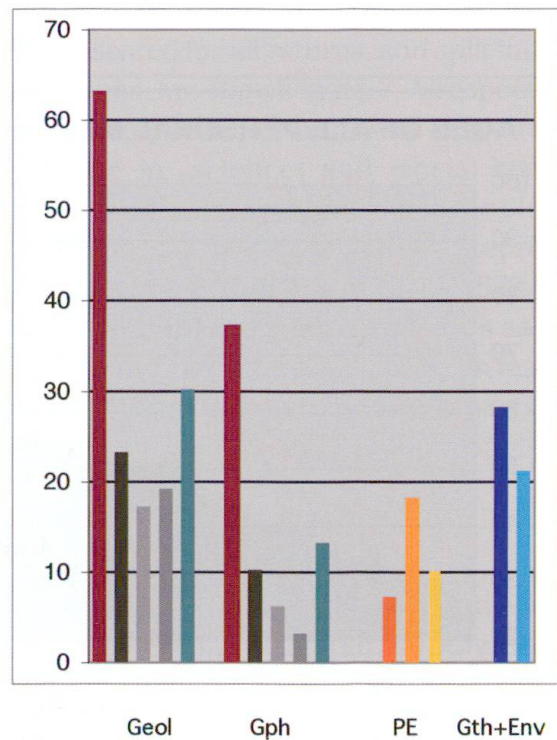
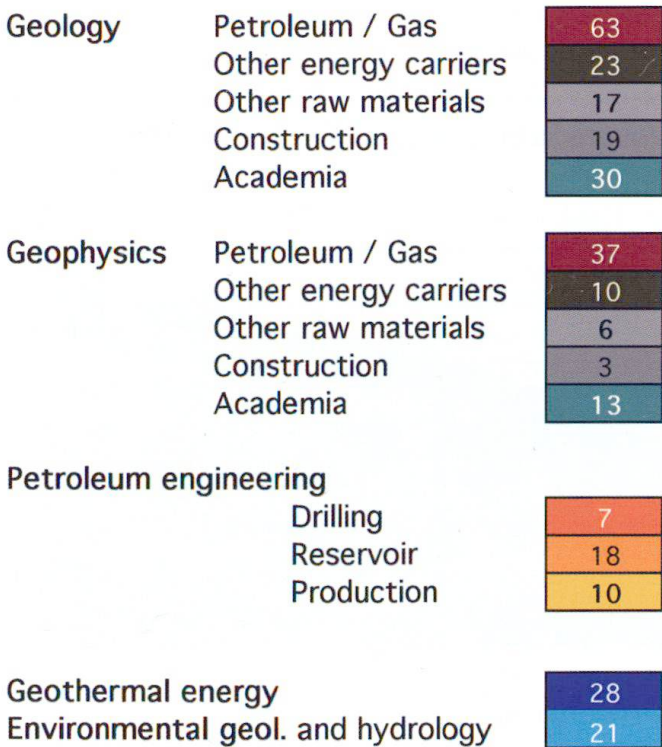


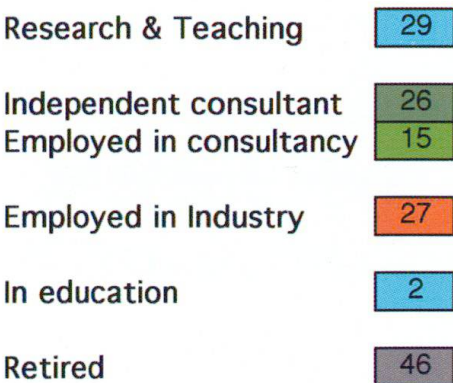
Fig. 3: Areas of expertise among members.

C. Current activity of addressees

To investigate current connections of members, the question on current activity was subdivided into six groups, complemented with particulars on employing firms or universities where applicable:

- (1) Research & teaching (Organisation, University);
- (2) Independent consultancy;
- (3) Employed in consultancy (Firm);
- (4) Employed in industry (Firm);
- (5) Receiving education (University);
- (6) Retired (ex company).

Results of the evaluations are shown in fig. 4. As in the fields of expertise, the spectrum of activities is broad, with emphasis on consultancy (independent and as an employee). A rather large portion of the returns (43%) shows members in retirement, which is not too surprising, given the average age of the sample of 61 years. An interesting detail (not shown in fig. 4) is the affiliation to the Shell International Oil Company. 19 of the retired respondents (41% of all responding retirees) were working for Shell, and 5 are still active there. This shows the traditional liaison between Shell and Swiss oil geologists, and at the same time demonstrates that the trend is changing.



D. Readiness of the addressees to represent the ASP

In 54 returns (50%) ASP members expressed their potential readiness to represent the Association in energy and other fields towards the outside world in one or more ways (fig. 5). 25 of these are actually residing abroad or can for other reasons not easily be engaged for representation. The five potential occasions for such a representation are about equally covered, and the corresponding expertises are derived from the individual returns (evaluated in fig. 3).

The fact that so many members volunteered to represent the ASP is very encouraging and will allow our association to play a much more active role in the public discussion on questions of energy and natural resources.

E. Possible change of name

The results of this poll show that the ASP membership covers much more than just petroleum geologists and engineers. While these form a majority in the association, its membership encompasses a substantial number of professionals from industry and academia who are specialised in other fields of energy, or other resources, and environment.

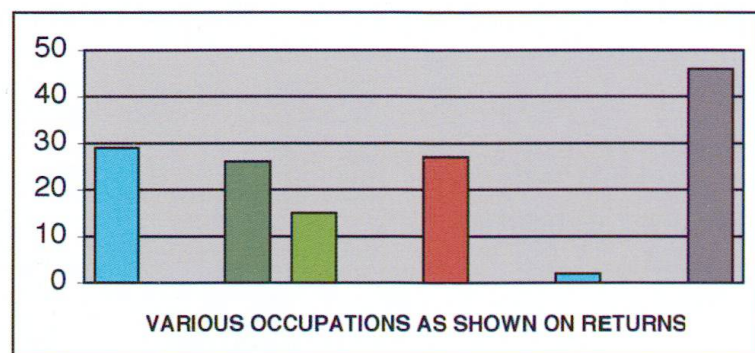


Fig. 4: Current activity.

The name «Swiss Association of Petroleum Geologists and Engineers» creates - wrongly - the impression that it is a lobbying group for the oil- and gas-industry. The questionnaire asked therefore for members' opinion on two alternative, neutral names, omitting «Petroleum»:

1. «Swiss Association of Energy Geologists and Engineers»
2. «Swiss Association for Energy Geology»

In the returns of the questionnaires the first name received 42 votes and the second 21 votes, while 11 respondents proposed alternative names. 26 returns favoured no change, and 8 had no opinion. Respondents indicated therefore a strong preference (69% for, 24% against) for changing the association's name. The gist of the eleven alternative proposals was the following:

- to replace the term «geologists and engineers» with «geoscientists» to cover the broader professional spectrum, and
- to replace «energy» with the broader term «resources».

Further discussion appears to be necessary and may be concluded in the near future.

3. Conclusions and outlook

The results of the poll (36% returns) have been very encouraging. They are assumed to be representative for the entire population of the association and form a sound basis for further decisions regarding the future.

Apart from the clear wish for a new name, the role of the association vis-à-vis the outside world is being addressed. More public presentations are envisaged in the various fields of competence residing in the association. Following the poll 13 volunteer members have already confirmed their readiness to represent the ASP in various ways, and have agreed that their names may be publicised for this purpose within the association, so that members and especially the committee know who could help out when topics have to be addressed. A decision on how this will be done is still pending.

The following action points, which emerged mainly from comments in the returns, are being taken up:

- The committee will work out a framework of communication between the ASP and the outside world (i. e. authorization of presentations, of media-requested statements and comments).
- A mission statement to complement the name of the association should be formulated.

Members prepared to represent the association towards the outside world -

	% of returns:					
- at public discussions	25	23%	24	4	10	5
- in the media	24	22%	23	8	11	7
- at students' briefings	32	30%	23	13	11	7
- towards authorities	26	24%	24	8	10	4
- lectures	27	25%	26	7	10	4

with the following expertises: Geol/Gphys PE Geoth. Environm.

Fig. 5: Readiness of members to represent ASP towards the outside world (includes members that currently may not be available for representation).

- Possibly closer cooperation with related organizations (e. g. «Vereinigung für Geothermie», «Energie Zukunft Schweiz», «Bundesamt für Energie», «Erdöl-Vereinigung», «Géothermie Suisse») should be investigated.
- Due consideration of economic aspects in the fields of energy and resource geology should be given, by inviting relevant presentations and publications in the bulletin.

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