

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017

The highlight of SACAC's activities for 2017 was without doubt the Control Conference Africa (CCA), including the workshops that preceded it. Other than this, SACAC hosted a series of free evening lectures, provided substantial sponsorships to our members to attend the IFAC 2017 world congress, and interacted with students through a series of guest lectures and awards to top achievers in control systems courses. These, and future initiatives however need to be evaluated against SACAC's mission statement, to ensure that SACAC's activities align with our objectives, which can be summarized as:

- Strengthening SACAC's relationship with IFAC
- Improving co-operation between industry and institutions
- Developing capacity within the automation industry
- Providing value for our members

CCA

The IFAC co-sponsored Control Conference Africa (CCA) was held from 7 – 8 December at the historical Lilliesleaf farm in Rivonia. The conference venue was packed to capacity, with over 80 delegates attending. Six plenary speakers participated, with topics ranging from the optimal control of a formula one racing car (presented by David Limebeer), to using a control systems approach in treating diseases (presented by Babatunde Ogunnaike). Two well-attended workshops preceded the conference, including a hands-on workshop on 'The A-Z of Process Control', and a more theoretical workshop on 'Process Data Analytics'.

A major objective of the conference was to attract delegates from other African countries, with the aim of establishing IFAC national member organisations (NMOs) in other African countries. African delegates from Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria and Zambia attended, assisted by a generous travel and accommodation sponsorship from the IEEE Control Systems Society Outreach Fund. SACAC remains optimistic that the event will be repeated in another African country in four years' time. An event of this nature is only possible through a lot of hard work behind the scenes. A special word of thanks goes to the organising committee, especially SACAC's past president, Otis Nyandoro who had the vision of organising CCA and played a key role in securing the IEEE sponsorship, Margret Bauer and Kevin Brooks, for the role they played in organising the conference and workshops and ensuring industry / academic participation, and also SACAC's treasurer, Derik le Roux, who did a lot of the legwork to make everything come together, and who also ensured that the proceedings were published on IFAC-PapersOnLine in a record time. SACAC's secretariat proved their skills as conference organisers and social function coordinators, and Keri Garland and her team at Office Executives certainly deserves special mention.

SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorships to attend IFAC events are awarded to add value to SACAC members and create an increased awareness of SACAC and its activities. Two industrial and two student members received sponsorships of R20,000 each to attend the IFAC world congress in Toulouse, from 20 – 24 July 2017. Student prizes were awarded to the top achievers in final year control systems courses offered by SACAC's academic members, which was often combined with a guest-lecture presented by an industry member. In the coming year, the EXCO will consider sponsorship initiatives, to ensure that it has maximum impact and aligns with SACAC's mandate. SACAC also made sponsorship available for CCA, as part of our commitment to IFAC, following a successful world congress hosted in 2014.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

As an alternative to SACAC's full- or half day courses typically offered, we experimented with hosting free evening talks on topics relevant to industry. Three evening talks were presented:

- Control Engineering in Development Projects
- Advanced control in water and waste-water treatment
- Industrial Innovation Funding

Although these events do not generate any income, they provide valuable networking opportunities, generate interest in a field and also acts as an introduction to more comprehensive workshops. Suggestions on topics and innovative ideas on how to package such events to maximise industry / academic interaction are always encouraged.

SACAC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH IFAC

IFAC's co-sponsorship of CCA, as well as granting SACAC permission to host CCA during a world congress year, is evidence of SACAC good relationship with IFAC. We are very excited about our successful bid to host the IFAC symposium on Mining, Mineral and Metal Processing (MMM) in Stellenbosch, in August 2019. A special word of thanks goes to Lidia Auret and Kevin Brooks for preparing the successful bid, and the work done to meet the requirements of the bidding process. This is an event that overlaps with the interests of a number of institutions, and SACAC is actively investigating, and encouraging participation from other institutions.

Prof. Ian Craig continues being SACAC's main contact with IFAC, and he is currently the Chair of the Publications Committee, as well as an IFAC advisor. Kevin Brooks also serves on the IFAC industry committee, focussing on closer collaboration between industry and academia.

Approximately 20 South Africans serve on the IFAC Technical Committees (TCs) in various fields. During the year SACAC played an active role in nominating suitable candidates to TCs, and also assisted TC chairs in identifying retired TC members, as well as members not involved in specific areas any longer. It is encouraging to see the depth of the automation community locally - not only restricted to chemical- and minerals processing industries.

FINANCES

SACAC's finances for the year are dominated by CCA, and the overall conference financials shows an approximately break-even result for the conference. SACAC made a surplus of approximately R100,000 for the year, but the situation is much less optimistic if investment income is excluded. While exceptional expenditure such as IFAC2017 world congress sponsorships formed a major component in SACACs expenditure, SACAC needs to diversify its income streams in the years ahead, consider activities carefully to ensure that their impact is maximised, and ensure that all activities are run in a sustainable fashion.



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THE YEAR AHEAD

2018 does not have any local IFAC event, and although some major work needs to be done on MMM 2019, SACAC's focus will be on hosting local events on topics relevant to our members. A repeat of the Observer Design workshop is in the pipeline, as well as the popular workshop on Functional Design Specifications. Guest-lectures presented at universities also remains a priority in improving industry / academic collaboration.

SACAC's strength has always been its combination of academic and industry members. This allows SACAC to offer a balanced view on highly technical topics, to present these in a manner that is comprehensible by normal people, without having an excessive marketing focus. SACAC needs to continue innovating and adapting to changing trends and technologies, exploiting our strengths in providing a unique offering not driven by sensation. Without giving away too much, some ideas are on the table to extend the practical aspects of events, providing an opportunity for industry and academia to rub shoulders in a neutral environment.

CLOSING REMARKS

The 2017 SACAC EXCO was a diverse, hard-working group, taking initiative and perusing opportunities they are passionate about in the field of automation and control. I need to single out the enthusiastic group in the Western Cape, actively participating in CCA, the MMM2019 bid, meetings and SACAC events.

It has been a privilege having this team on the EXCO, and I'd like to take the opportunity to thank each and every EXCO member for their selfless efforts. A special word of thanks goes to our Honorary Treasurer and Secretary, Derik le Roux for keeping a firm hand on SACAC's finances and managing our website, Keri Garland, our secretariat and also the active role SACAC past-presidents keeps on playing in the organisation.

I also wish to thank each SACAC member for their ongoing support and participation. I'm looking forward to a year in which SACAC will play an increasing role in the control community, through active participation in topics of relevance to the industry, and by working closer together with other institutions active in the field.

Kobus Oosthuizen

President

23 February 2018