

SACAC President's Annual Report 1998/1999

Presented at the Annual General Meeting – 30 November 1999

Last year I started my report stating that 1998 has been a good year for the South African Council for Automation and Computation (SACAC). This is also true of 1999. With the core of the executive now ending their second term, SACAC has generated a level of activity and continuity that will stand us in good stead in the years to come.

Internationally, SACAC has raised its profile within the International Federation of Automatic Control (IFAC) as a one of its active and dependable National Member Organisations. The South African Function, held in July 1999 at the IFAC World Congress in Beijing, was certainly one of the highlights of the year. Locally, SACAC executive members were involved in organizing 5 events. We also paid attention to improving our back-office operations, which should allow us to better serve our members in future. These and other highlights are covered in what follows.

IFAC

Cape Town 2011

SACAC has managed to retain the prominence it obtained in the eyes of the IFAC community through MMM95. In 1997 our intention to host the 2011 World Congress was officially noted by the Immediate Past President of IFAC, Dr. Yong-Zai Lu. Our IFAC profile was raised considerably in July 1999, when SACAC played host to the IFAC elite at a South African Function, held at the IFAC World Congress in Beijing. This function was officially opened by Mr. Chris Dlamini, the South African Ambassador to China, and included an address by myself, and a screening of the SATOUR video "The lion's share". My thanks go to the organizing committee of this event, Xiaohua Xia, Fernando Camisani, Martie Ferreira, and Henriette Greef. Together with the South African delegates at this event, they helped to ensure that the Function was a great success! Also a big thank you to our sponsors; SATOUR (Henriette Greef) for their financial support, and the Beijing office of ISCOR (JP Mulder) for the South African wine.

The Cape Town 2011 bid process was officially launched in the Western Cape at a meeting held at the offices of Cape Metropolitan Tourism on 11 November 1999. SACAC is ensured of strong local support for its bid and we have allocated financial resources in the 1999/2000 budget to ensure that we present a credible bid. Thanks to Don Stepto for his efforts in this regard.

IFAC meetings and appointments

In July at the Beijing World Congress, Gunter Metzner and I attended the triennial IFAC General Assembly. The General Assembly is the supreme decision making body of IFAC with the meeting following a structure similar to our AGM. 38 of the 48 National Member Organizations were present in person or represented by proxy. As newly appointed member of the IFAC Technical Board, I also attended the Technical Board meetings and the IPC meeting for the Barcelona 2002 World

Congress. I was again struck by the goodwill IFAC officials have for South Africa and the high regard in which they hold our control and automation community.

SACAC members continue to be active in various IFAC Technical Committees for which they deserve a word of thanks. In particular I want to express our gratitude to Ian MacLeod for his tireless efforts as the now past Chairman of the TC on Distributed Computer Systems, and for Dr. Naude van Wyk for his active participation as vice-chair of the DECOM TC. Congratulations to Gunter Metzner who together with myself, are the 2 new associate editors of the IFAC Journal, Control Engineering Practice. Other South African editorial board members include Dave Hulbert (Editor) and Martin Braae (Associate Editor). SACAC as NMO has also nominated 7 members to various IFAC Technical Committees.

DECOM TT-2000

Planning for the Conference on "Technology Transfer in Developing Countries: Automation in Infrastructure Creation", is progressing well. It will be held from 5-7 July 2000 at The University of Pretoria. After a slow start, paper submissions have picked up significantly, and we should see more than 50 papers presented at this Conference. Thanks to the NOC for their efforts in planning this event. I would again like to appeal that you give this event your full support.

SACAC workshops

As in 1998, each executive committee member was tasked with organizing a workshop. Three workshops were held during the year, whilst various others are in the planning stage. Two of these workshops were comfortably profitable, partly because they were held at subsidized venues. SACAC also acted as a technical sponsor for the *International Symposium on Quantitative Feedback Theory and Robust Frequency Domain Methods*, which was organized by Ed Boje and held in Durban in August.

Workshop on Control Engineering Education (UCT - 10 September 1999)

This workshop was aimed at educators and other interested parties who are involved with teaching control engineering (and closely related topics) to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The purpose of the workshop was to exchange ideas on all aspects relating to the effective education of control engineers. This workshop was a great technical success with high quality papers presented. Financially the workshop showed a small surplus, even though the attendance was somewhat disappointing. Thanks very much to Martin Braae, Don Stepto and Jon Tapson for their efforts in organizing this event.

Plant safety: how does the "digital" age affect you and what are your responsibilities (Wits - 5 October 1999)

To aim of this workshop was to expose delegates to IEC Standard 61508: "Functional Safety: Safety-Related Systems", and to introduce and promote the concept of a Safety Lifecycle Model. The workshop was attended by 22 paying delegates. Thanks very much to Nigel Burrow, Ian MacLeod and Peter Knothe for making this event a great success.

Workshop on Information Technology vs. Traditional Control and Automation Systems-where is the balance? (Deb Tech Auditorium, Johannesburg - 29 October 1999)

The aim of this workshop was to give delegates a view of what the impact of the current rapid development in information technology on traditional control and automation systems is likely to be. Topics such as networking, databases, web-technology, electronic mail, programming developments and security issues were included. The workshop was attended by 19 paying delegates. Thanks very much to Gunter Metzner for making this event a great success.

Emerging and Converging Technologies and Standards for Industrial Communications (Rand Water Auditorium, Johannesburg - 17 November 1999)

The aim of this workshop was to expose participants to the main technical principles of emerging communications standards and to speculate on what and how Communications standards and Technology will look like in the future. It was attended by 26 paying delegates. Thanks very much to Mark Miller and Les Lange for making this event a great success.

Future workshop topics

Besides the DECOM–TT2000 Conference, various workshops are planned for 2000.

- Automation vs. job creation (Richard Roberts)
- Artificial Intelligence (Joachim Schubert)
- Modelling and Control of Mineral and Metal Processing (with SAIMM)

Liaison with Professional Institutions

During the year I had the pleasure of attending the AGM's and banquets of the SAIEE and the SAIMC. Such events provide good networking opportunities and ideas for improving what we do. I would like to express my thanks to the respective Presidents for the invitations and their hospitality. SACAC has had a long-standing mutually beneficial relationship with these two organisations, and my wish is that in the years to follow our ties will become even stronger.

I also attended a strategic planning session of the SAIMC. As a result of this session, Research International was tasked with doing a market survey amongst the readership of Tech News to determine how members and potential members of the SAIMC regard the services offered by the SAIMC. Respondents were in general reasonably happy with what the SAIMC has been doing, but felt that the Institute should be run more professionally. This again raises the question of employing a professional executive director to manage the affairs of the SAIMC. The question of cross membership between SACAC and the SAIMC has hopefully now been resolved with the SAIMC remaining a member of SACAC, which it has been since our founding in 1961.

I also had the pleasure of attending the AGM of the Gauteng branch of the CSSA in June and gained some fresh insight into how the CSSA operates. My thanks go to Rex van Olst for the invitation to attend this meeting.

Finance

Many thanks to our Honorary Treasurer, Les Lange, for the competent way in which he is overseeing the finances of SACAC.

The finances of SACAC are in a healthy state and at the financial year-end we had some R100 000 in the bank. This excludes the income generated by the 2 most recent events. Our major expenses continue to be the IFAC subscription fees and our secretarial fees, with our major sources of income being events, interest, and membership subscriptions.

A loan of R50 000 was made to the DECOM – TT2000 National Organising Committee and hopefully this amount will be returned with interest during the second half of next year.

One of our main benefits to members is the sponsorship that we offer for attending IFAC events. During 1999 a post-graduate student from the University of Pretoria, Fernando Camisani, was sponsored with R5000 to present a paper at the IFAC World Congress in Beijing.

Membership

We have managed to grow the number of active members during the past year due to the efforts of the members of the executive committee. Some problems do however remain in keeping our membership list current, which impact negatively on our ability to collect membership dues. Thanks very much to Gunter Metzner and Jean McKenzie for their efforts in this regard.

Publicity

The Elektron Magazine has agreed to publish a monthly SACAC news feature. This feature, which has been published since April 1999, typically consists of general SACAC news followed by a short profile on a SACAC member. Thanks very much to Francois Loubser and EE Publishers for making this feature a success.

Our website at www.ee.up.ac.za/sacac/ has become a convenient source of information on SACAC and IFAC, and has recorded some 1100 hits since 1 April 1998. It contains information on the history and constitution of SACAC, its Executive Committee, Secretariat, a President's Message, Members, an IFAC President's message, useful links, events, and how to join SACAC. Thanks very much to Fernando Camisani for maintaining this site.

Secretariat

During 1998, the executive has reviewed what it requires from a secretariat, in particular as regards our finances. The paper based bookkeeping system has been

partially automated, but some problem areas still remain. Les Lange, our honorary treasurer, is working closely with the Secretariat on improving the current system.

SACAC Life-time Achievement Award

During the last executive committee meeting it was decided to award the first *SACAC Life-time Achievement Award* to Dr. Naude van Wyk for his dedication to SACAC and IFAC since the founding of SACAC in 1961. He was President of SACAC from 1965 to 1967 and has served IFAC in many capacities, including one term as Council member. Dr. van Wyk can unfortunately not be with us today due to ill health, and we will find an appropriate occasion to present this award to him. On behalf of our members and the SACAC executive, I would like to wish Dr. van Wyk a speedy recovery. Our best wishes goes to him and his family.

General

As in 1998, many of the executive committee members had the opportunity to host the 6-weekly SACAC executive meeting at their place of work. The meetings are usually followed by some technical demonstration, which makes for an interesting afternoon. This system works very well and I would encourage future executives to continue with this practice.

Finally, I would like to thank our members, the Executive Committee and Jean McKenzie of JCCI for making this a successful year for SACAC. I wish you and your family peace and happiness through the festive season and a prosperous new millenium.

Ian K Craig
30 November 1999