

SACAC President's Report for 2004

Introduction

The main purpose of SACAC is to promote the science and practice of automation and computation for the benefit and economic prosperity of the people of South Africa. In fulfilling this purpose, it serves the interests of member organisations from industry and institutions involved in automation at a high level. Membership of SACAC is only applicable to organisations involved in automation and not to individuals. It is also the local representative National Member Organisation (NMO) of the International Federation of Automatic Control (IFAC). SACAC therefore forms the link between IFAC and its members.

IFAC was founded in September 1957 and is a multinational federation of 50 national member organisations, each one representing the engineering and scientific societies concerned with automatic control in its own country. The purpose of the Federation is to promote the science and technology of control in the broadest sense in all systems, whether, for example, engineering, physical, biological, social or economic, in both the theory and application. IFAC is also concerned with the impact of control technology on society.

Highlights of 2004

2004 was a prosperous year for SACAC. During 2004 the SACAC Exco gave serious thought on how SACAC could most benefit its members. In the process the following important Strategic Initiatives were identified:

- Strengthen the Relationship with IFAC
- Improve co-operation Between Industry and Institutions
- Stimulate Technical Interaction between Industry Members
- Increase Vendor Participation
- Build Automation Capacity.

Strengthen the Relationship with IFAC

SACAC strives to strengthen the relationship with IFAC, particularly because of SACAC's intention to host the IFAC World Congress in 2014. Initiatives targeted to strengthen the relationship includes the hosting of IFAC events, participation on IFAC Committees, promotion of IFAC benefits to SACAC members and the presenting of Papers at IFAC events.

Hosting of IFAC Events: SACAC put in a bid to host the triennial International Non-Linear Control Conference in 2007 (NOLCOS 07). The bid was successful and the Conference will be held at the University of Pretoria from 22 to 24 July 2007. SACAC also considered bidding for the MMM 2007 conference, but it was given to Canada. SACAC will aim to bring MMM 2010 to South Africa. The first African Control Conference was successfully held in Cape Town in December 2003. SACAC has subsequently obtained official support from IFAC for this event to be held triennially, although it is not an official IFAC Event. AFCON 2006 will be held at the University of Kwazulu Natal from 27 to 29 July 2006.

IFAC holds a World Congress every three years with an attendance of over 2000 delegates. The 16th Congress will be held in Prague in 2005, the 17th Congress will be held in Seoul in 2008 and the 18th Congress will be held in Italy in 2011. SACAC is working hard to host the 19th Congress in Cape Town in 2014. The SACAC Executive Committee members will be actively campaigning in Prague to host this event in South Africa. SACAC will be hosting a Friendship Evening dinner on 4 July 2005 for the IFAC decision makers and selected guests. The SACAC President, the South African Ambassador to the Czech Republic and SA Tourism will be making presentations to this effect. It would also be appropriate if member organisations would send representatives and/or co-sponsor this function. In return sponsors will be mentioned as a co-sponsors and receive branding opportunities.

Participation on IFAC Committees: The participation of South Africans on IFAC Committees needs to be expanded. SACAC members would be encouraged to play an active role in this regard.

Promotion of IFAC benefits to SACAC members: IFAC correspondence is sent regularly to the SACAC members by the secretariat and a link to the IFAC has been put on the SACAC website. Further initiatives to promote the benefits of IFAC to SACAC members will be undertaken.

Presenting of Papers at IFAC events: The presenting of Papers at IFAC Events will be encouraged. A student was again sponsored by SACAC during 2004 to present a Paper at MMM2004 and increased funding will be made available for this purpose in future.

Improve Co-operation Between Industry and Institutions

SACAC participation has the unique benefit of bringing Industry and Institutional members together. It provides a forum whereby the needs of Industry can be shared with Institutions and the strengths of Institutions can be showcased to Industry. Initiatives undertaken to improve co-operation includes the holding of related events, the hosting of Post Graduate Student open days and participation in Continued Professional Development (CPD) initiatives. The events that took place this year include

- A joint workshop with the SAIEE on Automation in Manufacturing, held on 1 April 2004
- An Industry - Research Collaboration workshop, held on 12 October 2004
- A Control Systems Day, held on 3 December 2004 where academics presented research work they are involved in
- A Robot Soccer Competition, held on 4 December 2004.

Stimulate Technical Interaction Between Industry Members

One of the other benefits of SACAC participation is the technical interaction between its members. Engineers from different industries now have opportunities to meet one another and to share automation related problems and solutions with each other. It was also proposed that SACAC provide a forum for casual discussions. These frequently occur at SACAC events and could also be provided for on the website. Events in the pipeline for 2005 to discuss these typical issues are

- Fieldbus and Industrial Internet solutions
- Configuration Management.

Increase Vendor Participation

Vendors in Automation products who are members of SACAC should derive increased benefit from their SACAC involvement. It is envisaged that SACAC will create opportunities for Vendor members to market themselves and sponsor SACAC related events. Feedback received from current Vendor members regarding benefits from SACAC membership include

- Closer contact with academics locally for collaboration projects and research
- Access to the latest international trends through IFAC conferences and symposia
- Networking opportunities with high-tech clients and other vendors
- Opportunities for Vendors employees to grow professionally and to present Papers
- Marketing opportunities for Vendors within the SACAC member organisations.

Capacity Building

The aim of this initiative is to contribute towards the building of capacity in Automation in the country. Something that would make an actual impact is needed, apart from the fact that SACAC already organises conferences and workshops. Possibilities included informing potential students and school children of the various career opportunities within the industry.

Finances

There was a healthy growth in the accumulated funds of SACAC from R251k at the beginning of the year to R325k at the end. This was largely due to an unbudgeted income from the AFCON 2003 and under budget spending. Furthermore the Honorary Treasurer is in the process of developing a 10-year Financial Plan to grow the SACAC reserves to a level adequate to host the IFAC World Congress in 2014, should SACAC be successful with its bid. Thanks to Dr. Camisani and Mrs. Aviges for managing the finances well.

Website

The website www.sacac.org.za is fully operational and up to date. Thanks to Dr. Camisani again for his hard work in this regard.

Publicity

A concerted effort was made to publish SACAC related issues regularly in the Electron. The President wrote the Lead Editorial in May 2005, workshops were announced, strategic initiatives were listed in the November/December issue and profiles of different SACAC Exco members were published regularly.

History

The history of SACAC is being collated into a publication. The Secretary has collected all the historical Minutes of Meetings and has summarized events of interest to be included in the draft SACAC History publication. This document will now be upgraded into an official SACAC history for publication purposes. This document will be completed by July 2005, in time for the IFAC Friendship Evening in Prague.

Outlook for the Future

In future the current strategic initiatives will be reviewed and expanded. The following events are planned:

- Fieldbus and Industrial Internet solutions (to be scheduled in 2005)
- Configuration Management (to be scheduled in 2005)
- Post Graduate Student Open Days (to be scheduled in 2005)
- IFAC Friendship Evening to be held on 4 July 2005 at the IFAC World Congress in Prague
- A Control Systems Day to be held on 2 December 2005 at the University of Pretoria
- A Robot Soccer Competition to be held on 3 December 2005 at the Menlin Shopping Centre
- AFCON 2006 to be held from 27 to 29 July 2006 at the University of Kwazulu Natal
- NOLCOS 2007 to be held from 22 to 24 July 2007 at the University of Pretoria.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this report, there are many initiatives undertaken by SACAC. A large emphasis is to create value for its member organisations through the different strategic initiatives. Being a member organisation of SACAC should add much more value for the member than the actual cost of membership. However the value SACAC membership has for its members is largely dependent on the level of participation of the SACAC representative for that member organisation.

From me as President, a word of thanks to the members of the SACAC Exco, the Secretariat and all the representatives from member organisations for their dedication, support, participation and enthusiasm.

Les Lange
SACAC President

8 March 2005