

SACAC President's Report for 2005

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 approximately 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.

SACAC Strategic Objectives

During 2005 the SACAC Exco revisited its strategy 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
- Build 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 won the bid to host the triennial International Non-Linear Control Conference in 2007 (NOLCOS 07), which will be held at the University of Pretoria in July 2007. SACAC will also consider bidding for the MMM 2010 conference. The second African Control Conference will be held at the University of Kwazulu Natal in Durban in July 2006. The IFAC Technical Board in principle accepted that the event would be held "in co-operation with IFAC", but that the event was not sufficiently representative of Africa as a regional conference. SACAC will facilitate the forming an African Control Organisation and will approach the IFAC Foundation for possible funding to set it up.

World Congress 2014: IFAC holds a World Congress every three years with an attendance of over 2000 delegates. The 16th Congress was held in Prague in 2005, the 17th Congress will be held in Seoul in 2008 and the 18th Congress will be held in Milan in 2011. SACAC is working hard to host the 19th Congress in Cape Town in 2014. The SACAC Executive Committee members actively campaigned in Prague by hosting a Friendship Evening dinner on 4 July 2005 for the IFAC decision makers and selected guests. The SACAC President spoke about South Africa and Dr Ian Craig spoke about the history of SACAC and its IFAC connection, as part of the launch of the SACAC history booklet.

Participation on IFAC Committees: The participation of South Africans on IFAC Committees was encouraged. Several EXCO members had indicated their willingness to serve on the IFAC Technical Committees and these had been submitted to IFAC.

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.

Presenting of Papers at IFAC events: The presenting of papers at IFAC Events was encouraged and increased funding was made available for this purpose. Several students who had presented papers IFAC workshops recently also presented these papers at the Post Graduate Workshop in December 2005.

IFAC Foundation: The IFAC Foundation is in the process of being launched. This Foundation could possibly in future assist with sponsorship of projects that are in line with the IFAC vision and mission statements. It had been officially registered in Switzerland and would seek suitable projects to assist. Associations seeking sponsorships would be able to submit applications. The Trustees would then decide on which project to sponsor. Local projects would stand a good chance of being funded, as Africa had many underprivileged students who could not afford training. An African Federation of Automatic Control could be put in place to assist and sponsorship for the establishment of an African Control Organisation can be applied for. SACAC will obtain a copy of the IFAC Foundation Constitution to establish details to determine how best benefit can be derived from these sponsorships.

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 include 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 Control Systems Day, held on 2 December 2005 at UF
- A Post Graduate Student Open Day, held on 2 December 2005 at UP
- A Robot Soccer Competition, held on 3 December 2005 at Brooklyn Mall.

Capacity Building Within Industry

One of the other benefits of SACAC participation is the technical interaction between its members, which contributes to the building of capacity in Automation in the country. Engineers from different industries have opportunities to meet and share automation related problems and solutions with each other. A workshop on Fieldbuses in Automation was held at Rand Water on 13 October 2005.

Finances

There was a reduction in the accumulated funds of SACAC from R320k at the beginning of the year to R270k at the end. This was largely due to the costs associated with the compilation of the SACAC history book as well as costs associated with the Friendship Evening in Prague. An alternative membership subscription fee structure was also introduced, whereby member organisations have the option to pay a larger subscription, but then be able to send up to 5 delegates free of charge to any SACAC workshop. Those members who participated in this way had much larger presentation at workshops as it reduces the administration of orders and invoicing for workshop attendance considerably.

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

SACAC related issues were regularly published in the Electron.

Future Events

The following events are planned:

- Joint mining and minerals related workshop with the SAIMM on 20 April 2006 at Rand Water
- AFCON 2006 to be held in July 2006 at the University of Kwazulu Natal
- A Post Graduate Student Open Day to be held early December 2006
- A Control Systems Day to be held early December 2006
- A Robot Soccer Competition to be held to be held early December 2006
- NOLCOS 2007 to be held in July 2007 at the University of Pretoria.
- Energy Management workshop (proposed)
- Advanced Control workshop (proposed).

Conclusion

As can be seen from this report, there are numerous initiatives undertaken by SACAC. 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.

As outgoing 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

10 March 2006