

President's Report

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I would like to begin this report by thanking Dr Richard Roberts, who has in fact carried the brunt of the President's activities this year. When elected President in 2006 I believed that I could commit the necessary time to do the job well, but a change in my personal circumstances at mid-year prevented this, and as such I have been somewhat of an absentee President. Richard has stepped into the breach with great goodwill, and in doing so has shown that the Council is in good hands from this time onwards. I would also like to thank the whole Executive Committee for their support in this respect.

This year appears to have shown a change in the nature of SACAC activity. We seem to be moving from a pattern of many small events to fewer, larger events. This has to some extent been driven by past criticism from IFAC in our efforts to host the IFAC World Congress – specifically, the perception that we do not host a significant number of IFAC conferences and workshops. There are three very significant events on the horizon in this regard – the hosting of NOLCOS '07 later this year, our bid to host the MMM conference in 2010, and the very real possibility that we will be selected to host the IFAC World Congress (WC) in 2014. I think I speak for the whole organization in saying that our selection on a shortlist of two contenders to hold the 2014 WC is very exciting. I have been something of a World Congress skeptic in the past, because I felt that our efforts to win this opportunity had very little chance of success, and were a distraction from the business of growing SACAC's membership and activities. I concede that I have been proven wrong – we have punched above our weight in this contest, and I think there is a very real chance of success now. I would like to thank and congratulate the SACAC representatives who have put enormous effort into this over the last few years – if I mention specifically Ian Craig, Les Lange, Ed Boje, Gunter Metzner, Johan Enslin, Richard Roberts and Fernando Camisani, I hope I will be forgiven if I have left out anyone who deserves our thanks. We await the final decision later this year with keen anticipation.

True to its roots in the field of control, SACAC is an organization that is adaptable and responsive to feedback. This is a good thing, because South Africa's industry and academia need to be able to adapt rapidly if we are to remain competitive under the threats of globalization, the brain drain, and the increasing tendency of school leavers to avoid the technical professions. Professional engineers find themselves under growing pressure to increase their personal productivity, and as a result have less time for activities which will only pay off in the long term. These activities include continuing professional development, and involvement in the professional bodies. We all recognize the danger in this situation; we are so busy trying to stay afloat, we are unable to put any effort into navigating our way to dry land.

SACAC has an important role to play in this situation. A company that is adaptive in the face of change is going to be more successful than one that is not, but it will be less successful than a company that correctly forecasts the change and implements a

new strategy to lead, rather than respond to change. To stick with our control analogy, we need feedforward as well as feedback strategies.

I would like to challenge the incoming leadership of SACAC to consider how the organization can act as a catalyst to lead the preparation for future change. If we take just one agent of change that we must deal with – for example, global warming, which is very topical at the moment – we can see a number of areas where SACAC can lead the way:

- Control strategies and systems for energy efficiency.
- Control strategies and systems for water saving.
- Control strategies in modern nuclear power generation.
- Modelling of the dynamics of environmental, social and economic response to climate forcing.
- Control systems in new technologies such as electric and hybrid vehicles.
- Engineering education for sustainability.

If our organization is relevant, then our own sustainability and growth are assured.

In closing, during my association with SACAC, I have tried to encourage the Council to be more inward-focused - towards South Africa rather than towards IFAC – and also to acknowledge the role of industry as a driver and participant in research, rather than as a receiver of handed-down theory. There will probably always be a tension in SACAC between its two roles as a bridge to IFAC, and as the senior professional organization in control systems in South Africa. Should we win the bid to host the 2014 WC, this tension will be even stronger. I encourage the new Executive Committee to do their best to balance these two roles, and wish them the best of luck in the year to come.



Jonathan Tapson