

Here's a quick recap of what's going on at SACNASP

Letter from SACNASP President, Dr Gerda Botha

The SACNASP Council had a strategic planning session on the 25 February and I would like to share some of the key aspects. But first, following the earlier announcement, I am delighted to introduce to you Dr. Pradish Rampersadh, the new Executive Director of SACNASP.

Dr Rampersadh now fills the shoes of Dr. Rolf Becker who so ably steered the ship and contributed to its growth.

Dr. Rampersadh obtained his PhD in Inorganic Chemistry at the University of Witwatersrand, and completed the Management Advancement Programme at the Wits Business School and the Technology Leadership Programme at the Tshwane University of Technology.

Dr. Rampersadh brings a wealth of experience to SACNASP in teaching, scientific research and management. Before joining SACNASP, he was the Content Adviser to the Portfolio Committee on Energy in the National Assembly at the Parliament of South Africa. In this role he advised the Committee on aspects related to its oversight role of the department and entities involved in the energy space in South Africa. The majority of his experience has however been gained in the nuclear industry where he held various research positions, including Head of the Plasma Technology Group in Applied Chemistry at the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation.

We have every faith that Dr. Rampersadh will build on what Dr. Becker achieved and continue to position SACNASP for the future, ensuring that it will remain the pre-eminent voice on natural scientific professions matters in South Africa.

In order for SACNASP to fulfil its mandate, the Council at the planning session set the following five year strategic objectives:

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- Proactively advise government on the natural scientific professions.
- Registration and enhancement of registration status of natural scientists in South Africa
- Promotion of the understanding of the role and importance of the natural sciences profession
- Fostering good corporate principles
- Expanding the influence, impact and reputation of SACNASP.

Goals and outcomes that speak to these objectives have been developed and will be reviewed annually.

From these objectives the Council hope that amongst other important areas, the focus as an enabler to the registered natural scientist will become more evident and that we are able to assist scientists in their careers from student to retirement (re: the planned roll out programmes around Candidate Mentoring and Continuous Professional Development).

The Council is very positive and optimistic about the future of SACNASP and natural science in general in South Africa. We believe that these objectives will ensure that SACNASP will make a significant contribution to science in South Africa.

Gerda Botha (gbotha@sacnasp.org.za)

A letter from the Executive Director

Dear Registered Scientist

I am delighted to address you for the first time as Executive Director.

While this is my first communique to you, I wish to assure you that we have hit the ground running this year.

As you are aware, SACNASP's raison d'être is the registration of natural scientists and, in so doing, providing protection to the public and the profession. In this regard, government departments and entities are increasingly contacting SACNASP to enquire about the status of natural science professionals. This shows the employment sector is placing more emphasis on the "professionalisation" of natural science in South Africa.

SACNASP is also reviewing the current SACNASP Act. We therefore sent you an email requesting your input to ensure our enabling act remains relevant in an ever-changing and increasingly competitive world.

The Council, in an endeavour to be more effective in its functioning, has also decided to focus on other areas that are expected of us by the legislation.

The first of these is enabling our registered natural scientists, and assessing how we can help you advance in your careers.



Dr. Pradish Rampersadh

We have generated many ideas towards this aim and will continue to do so.

One of the important areas in enabling is that of the Candidate Mentoring Programme, where junior scientists are mentored and assisted professionally to the point that they could register as Professional Natural Scientists, and the Continuous Professional Development programme, where registered scientists can stay current and keep up with the changing environment and technology. To ensure we are in a position to fulfil this requirement, we applied to the Department of Science and Technology for a R12.6-million endowment, which has been granted. More details are provided in this newsletter.

Secondly, the Council has decided to focus on providing information and advice to the Minister and Department of Science and Technology, as appropriate, on the Natural Sciences in South Africa. The Hon Mrs. Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology, indicated at the inauguration of the

new SACNASP Council in June last year that she wanted us to help enhance South Africa's standing of the natural scientific professions. She indicated the government was determined to significantly invest in the sector as it believes it is a driver for economic growth.

In response to this, we have requested input from the 41 Voluntary Associations aligned with us to gain greater insight into the professions, and provide the much-needed advice to the Minister and DST and entrench SACNASP as a key stakeholder in the National System of Innovation. We are also in discussion with other entities in the National System of Innovation to enable our registered scientists to be more involved in some of their work and contribute to the national agenda. These discussions are ongoing.

In conclusion we believe that by focusing on regulation, enabling and advising, we will make a significant contribution to science in South Africa.

A notice about categories

Two years ago SACNASP created additional categories of registration to enable opportunities for registration by persons previously excluded yet still adhering to Council protocol and processes.

This was done with expectation that the new Natural Science Professions Act, which included these new categories, would be passed into law.

Unfortunately, the lengthy legislative amendment has delayed the enactment of the new Act, forcing SACNASP to revert to its former categories while the legislative process takes its course.

We have therefore had to move scientists in the affected categories into categories that are identified in the existing act.

The affected categories are:

- Associate Natural Scientist
- Certificated Natural Scientist level A and B
- Trainee Natural Scientist level A and B

Registered scientists affected by this reclassification will be notified and sent new certificates.

SACNASP is working to rectify this issue as a matter of urgency. The Natural Science Professions Act is currently being revised and we will keep you posted on developments.

A notice about a DST grant

We are pleased to announce that the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has awarded SACNASP a R12.6-million, three-year grant to:

- Improve our database to increase the efficiency of the registration and other processes associated with managing registration;
- Increase our marketing efforts to promote awareness of SACNASP and increase our advocacy endeavours to enhance our stature; and
- Support the development of the candidate phase of registration of young professionals and mentorships.

We had applied to the department for funding last year because the current infrastructure cannot cope with the increase in applications for registration.

Upgrading the database will make it possible to improve the system so all applications can be processed electronically, greatly reducing the incurred costs and improving internal efficiency.

An upgrade will also support the development of the continued professional development (CPD) programme, which we have initiated and is currently in a pilot phase with three voluntary associations.

We also applied for funding for marketing because, while we have been reasonably successful in projecting our value to stakeholders, a shortage of resources has limited our marketing activities.

Finally, the support, growth and development of young scientists in South Africa needs urgent attention.

We are developing a structured candidate phase of registration for young professionals to facilitate their entry into the profession. Science graduates also need to gain appropriate, structured, work experience during this phase. At the end of this period their activities, along with mentor report(s), will be assessed before their application for professional registration is considered.

We believe the improved internal efficiencies provided through the enhanced database, a more aggressive and substantive approach to marketing SACNASP and embedding CPD will guarantee a further increase in the number of registered scientists as well as an increase in professionalism and ethical conduct of scientists with the aim of protecting the public.

This subsidy will therefore greatly increase the future financial sustainability of the Council.

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