

newsletter

November 2010

Dear Members,

JSD Chairmans Report

A Joint Initiative of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering and the Institution of Structural Engineers.

Institutional matters

Your chairman has been privileged to attend a number of executive board meetings of SAICE as well as the two Council Meetings during the course of 2010. I have found these meetings of value and of assistance in making some of the concerns of the Joint Structural Division, and its needs, known to the wider body of the organisation. I have also attended three council meetings of the London based IStructE. One of the main topics of the 2010 year was the introduction of compulsory reporting of CPD activities to the Institution. I was able to make a positive contribution on the subject based on the South African experience over the last five years which was well received. Specifically the issue of professionals lecturing to their peers was not covered in the original ECSA proposals which focused primarily on full or half day courses. Five years ago I took this matter up with ECSA and SAICE and it was agreed that professionals lecturing to their peers would not warrant a R5,000 fee in order to obtain recognition for the CPD points.

This means that we can award CPD points for our Tuesday night lecture series which otherwise had not been provided for in the original CPD concept. Another area that was not considered in the original formulation was awarding CPD points for individuals going on computer training courses. For example, if someone went and did a five-day course on solids modeling, ECSA were originally unwilling to recognize this as a CPD activity. This was primarily as a result of ECSA being afraid that software suppliers would try and validate mere demos of their software with CPD points, but this is clearly unlikely as a demo would not last five days. Fortunately this position was reversed partly on my persuasion and with the assistance of Mr. Jan Pienaar of ECSA so it is now possible to obtain CPD points for training on top end computer software packages. Compulsory CPD reporting for IStructE will come into operation in the near future but where professionals such as ourselves are already reporting CPD to other organisations, such reporting will be recognized in terms of IStructE requirements. It may require a short motivation demonstrating how the ECSA CPD requirements meet the new IStructE requirements. The IStructE has always used its Chartered Membership examination (formerly known as part 3) as the doorway to corporate membership of the Institution. Consideration is presently being given to the possibility of having a top-up exam for those countries where structural engineers already write a professional exam to be recognized as structural engineers. This is the present situation in China for example.

Spencer Erling commented in his last chairman's report that the new CEO of IStructE Mr. Martin Powell had been recently appointed I have to report to you that as at the first of October 2010, SAICE has a new CEO Mr. Manglin Pillay. The previous CEO of SAICE Mr. Dawie Botha retired at the end of March 2010 and an acting CEO, Mr. Phiroshaw Camay, took over for six months. I have enjoyed building relationships with all these newly appointed individuals. By the time this report appears in print I am sure that far more information about Mr. Pillay will have been made available via the Journal and so I will not enumerate his background or details.

Tuesday Afternoon Talks

Our popular Tuesday afternoon talks on the third Tuesday of each month have continued to be well attended but I would encourage more of you to be prepared to make a contribution. Such contribution need not be a highly academic treatise or erudite technical exposition but if you have worked on an interesting project and overcome challenging design requirements, we would be delighted to hear of your experiences and would no doubt be enriched by your contribution. My thanks go to John Duncan, Victor Booth, and Steve Mackey for their ongoing services in making these meetings happen. Although we do not make vast profits from these activities we are able to cover the costs of rental and refreshments. I am also pleased to report that during 2010 the Joint Structural Division was able to start an equivalent series of lectures in Pretoria on the first Tuesday of the month, once again ably led by John Duncan and with active assistance from Marelize Visser.

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It has been a concern of mine for several years that Engineers in Pretoria would find it extremely difficult to travel to the lecture at the War Museum during the late afternoon. Given the road system and traffic patterns, moving the lecture to a midpoint between Johannesburg and Pretoria would not have improved the situation. The better solution is to move the lecturer to Pretoria rather than trying to move a large number of people over a greater distance. I am therefore delighted that it has been possible to start these lectures and my hope is that Engineers from the Pretoria area will come forward and present their material at the Johannesburg meeting.

The Joint Structural Division, in association with other organisations provides many different kinds of training to structural engineers in terms of materials, and codes of practice and other general professional practice issues. I believe that the members of the division are presently adequately served in that regard.

Code of Practice

The new code of practice is due to go out for public comment and will probably have done so by the time this report appears in print. My thanks to Rob Young for his ongoing efforts to shepherd this document through ECSA even under trying conditions. We will have to wait and see as to whether the Code of Practice will address all or merely some of the Joint Structural Division's concerns in the area of structural safety and the competence of those attempting to practice in the area of structural engineering.

In this regard, the dark side of 2010 reveals that the professional engineer responsible for a serious structural failure of a three storey building in 2008 was struck off the registration role at ECSA. This is only the second time that this has happened in the history of ECSA. The previous occasion also involved a structural engineer. The greatest concern that the Joint Structural Division has, is that of inadequately qualified people dabbling in the area of structural engineering and causing loss of life. I am hopeful that with SAICE and ECSA support going forward, this issue will find a positive solution.

Young people

Frederica Herbert from Durban is getting the young structural engineers group off the ground and I thank her for her efforts in this regard. The encouragement and development of younger engineers is the responsibility of all of us if we are going to maintain a structural engineering capability in South Africa. One of my greatest fears is that the current pressure on structural engineers as a result of fee cutting, pressure of work and the unjustifiable expectations of clients etc. could effectively reduce the structural engineering capability of this country to a point where developers will have to start to import these skills. Mention should also be made of the sterling work done by Allyson Lawless, a previous vice president of IStructE and corresponding member of the JSD, in terms of the efforts being made to assist young engineers towards various categories of registration at ECSA and general professional development.

The Website and other Communications

My thanks to the vice chairman Mr. Tony Smith of Durban for the updating of the Joint Structural Division website and also the distribution of communications with the Joint Structural Division membership even if it is on an irregular basis. Instead of being bound by the time pressures of a regular newsletter I felt that would be more important that we issue communications on an irregular basis when ever information of interest to structural engineers became available. It is hoped that these will occur at least once a month if not more frequently. After a lot of work in updating the e-mail lists we had a good rate of success and the response from the membership has been of one of overwhelming support for the concept. Now that the idea and processes have been established, I hope that the Joint Structural Division will be able to have more meaningful contact with its members.

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The Banquet

A pleasant evening with colleagues and friends was held on the 15th of October at the Johannesburg Country Club. My thanks to our sponsors Arup, The SA Institute of Steel Construction and TWP for their generous donations towards the financial success of the evening and again to Steve and Pat Mackie for their behind-the-scenes labours in making the banquet happen. Thanks also to Bruce Raath for acting as M. C. in his inimitable style.

In Closing

I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their support during 2010 and especially on occasions where difficult waters had to be navigated. It would be difficult to thank all the members individually for their contributions during the year but I would particularly like to thank Spencer Erling for having taken on the role of treasurer and keeping us on the financial straight and narrow. I look forward to working with your committee during 2011 to consolidate the gains that have been made during 2010 and to implement the vision that we hold for 2011. Our vision for the 2011 can be summed up simply as a desire to promote the health of structural engineering in South Africa. Being part of two learned societies we see our role not as looking after the financial and business interests of our members because that would amount to being a trade union, but of supporting the development of our members and protecting the role of the Professional Structural Engineer. We see that role as that of finding ways in which we can promote best practice, connecting people together via e-mail communications and providing ways in which the technical competence of each member can be raised.

Kind Regards

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