



## A sense of belonging

Over the past few months, I have travelled to a number of faraway countries where the culture and customs are very different, and where a South African might be expected to feel alien and alone. However, in all of those places, I have encountered people with whom I have shared values or have found interests in common, and, as a result, there has been a sense of belonging and connection. This need to belong is a basic aspect of being human. Is this, perhaps, one of the things we look for when joining a society such as the SAIMM?

Groucho Marx famously said 'I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member'. The SAIMM, on the other hand, tries to be inclusive in its membership, while still maintaining focus on the fact that it is a professional institute. Different categories of membership apply according to the educational qualifications, experience, interests, achievements, and contributions of the individual member. Anyone with a declared interest and involvement in the minerals industry can apply to join as an Associate Member. Students in relevant fields of study are offered free membership. Companies can join too (as company affiliates).

For professionally qualified metallurgical and mining engineers, and those working in related disciplines, recognition by one's peers is very important. The letters MSAIMM (for full Corporate Members) and FSAIMM (for Fellows of the Institute) mean a great deal to people who work in the international minerals industry. These post-nominal letters signify professionalism, and show that the person is governed by a formal code of ethics. In order to qualify for MSAIMM, one typically needs to hold a recognized mining or metallurgical tertiary qualification and to have worked in a position of responsibility for at least two years. Members are welcome to apply to become a Fellow after being a member and holding a senior technical or consulting position for at least five years and having made a contribution to the work of the Institute, for example, by submitting papers to conferences or to the *Journal*, or participating in committees, assisting with organizing conferences, or reviewing papers. Honorary Life Fellowship is conferred by the Institute on Fellows who are deemed to have made an extraordinary contribution to the Institute or to the industry.

The current membership of the SAIMM is approximately 4800 (25% Students, 25% Associates, 37% Members, 12% Fellows, and < 1% Honorary Life Fellows).

There are also practical and tangible benefits to membership. It is useful to be kept informed about upcoming conferences, and perhaps even have the SAIMM provide the necessary financial backing and logistical support for members to hold a conference on a topic of particular interest. Many members also highly value the access they get to the OneMine database of over 100 000 technical papers from other societies in the global minerals industry.

The recently introduced membership card and benefits package (including discounts on car hire and cellphone contracts) are intended to assist members too.

The SAIMM likes to be known as a caring organization. For example, it works with the SAIMM Scholarship Trust Fund to support numerous students in financial need. Another recent initiative has involved the postponement or temporary waiving of fees for unemployed members, so allowing them to continue their membership even while going through a time of financial hardship.

Recent sociological studies have indicated that membership of groups in today's world is not only about what a person can get out of belonging, but is also strongly linked to whether people feel a strong affinity to the goals and objectives (the 'brand') of the organization. The SAIMM is known as an organization that values professionalism and is committed to the free and open dissemination of technical information.

The SAIMM has many long-standing loyal members, a number of whom have belonged to the Institute for over 50 years. The membership database shows that we have a number of members older than 90 years. This shows a remarkable sense of belonging. In addition to this, the recent surge of growth in student membership should continue to supply vigorous enthusiasm and energy to the life of the Institute, ensuring its success into the future.

The Institute exists primarily to serve the needs of its members, so I hope that you, our members, will let me know of any other needs that you would like to see being addressed by the SAIMM.

**R.T. Jones**  
*President, SAIMM*