



From strengthening an institution to stewarding a system



It is often said that a picture speaks a thousand words. As I reflected on the journey of the past 11 months, I realised that the accompanying illustration captures its evolution more clearly than a list of activities or achievements ever could.

It has been an incredible year—shaped by conversations, relationships, tough questions, unexpected insights, and an increasingly clear understanding of the constraints facing the minerals industry and the role SAIMM must play in addressing them.

When I began my presidency, my commitment was straightforward: to help strengthen SAIMM.

A strong professional institute requires an effective operating model, clear governance, capable leadership, disciplined execution, and a value proposition relevant to its members and the industry it serves. Much of the early work therefore focused on strengthening SAIMM from within.

That work remains important. An institution cannot address the needs of its industry unless it has the capability to perform its own role effectively.

However, as the year progressed, my perspective began to change.

Through hundreds of engagements with students, young professionals, university leaders, experienced practitioners, mining and metallurgical companies, technical associations, professional bodies, regulators, and industry leaders, a common pattern gradually emerged.

Universities are under pressure. Structured workplace development is inconsistent. Mentoring capacity is limited. Progression to professional registration is slow. The pool of experienced technical practitioners is diminishing, specialist knowledge is at risk of being lost, and the industry is becoming increasingly complex.

The challenge is therefore not simply whether we are producing enough graduates. It is whether the professional capability system is consistently developing the technicians, technologists, professionals, specialists, mentors, and future leaders required to operate, improve, and lead an increasingly complex industry.

This led to the defining insight of the year:

One of the most significant constraints facing the future of the minerals industry is a fragmented and weakening professional capability system—one that no single organisation can rebuild alone.

The question guiding my presidency consequently evolved from:

How do we strengthen SAIMM to how must SAIMM evolve to help address the capability constraints facing the minerals industry?

I began the year looking inward at SAIMM. Listening led me to look outward at the industry. The pattern that emerged revealed a system constraint—and that changed what I believe SAIMM must become.

Professional capability does not develop within a single institution. It emerges through an interconnected system involving education, workplace experience, mentoring, professional registration, technical communities, knowledge sharing, and continuing professional development.

When these elements work together, capability develops and compounds. When they become fragmented, people are lost between stages, development becomes inconsistent, and the industry gradually loses the technical depth and professional competence on which its future depends.

What became increasingly clear to me is that capability must be treated as an endowment in its own right—deliberately built, renewed, and protected, just as the industry invests in its mineral resources and in the physical and digital assets required to develop it.

Without the people capable of operating, improving, and leading increasingly complex businesses, neither the resource endowment nor the asset base can be converted into sustainable value.

President's Corner (continued)

SAIMM must therefore evolve beyond the traditional boundaries of a membership institute to become a more industry-facing professional institution. This means beginning with the present and future needs of the minerals industry and aligning its programmes, partnerships, knowledge platforms, and development pathways with the people and capabilities the industry requires.

Its role is not to serve the short-term interests of any individual organisation, but to provide an independent platform through which the industry's longer-term capability needs can be understood and addressed.

SAIMM should not attempt to own the professional capability system or replace the organisations already working within it. Its contribution is to help the system function more effectively: to convene, connect, enable capability development, preserve knowledge, provide an independent professional voice, and steward the long-term health of the system.

Strengthening SAIMM was therefore not displaced by the wider capability agenda. It became the foundation from which the Institute could contribute to it.

This thinking has already begun to take practical form through the strengthening of SAIMM's operating model, the development of the SAIMM Academy, deeper engagement with universities and industry, and new collaborative platforms focused on workplace development and the professional pipeline.

The work, however, is only beginning. Capability develops over many years, while a presidency lasts for only one. The true measure of this year will not be the number of initiatives started. It will be whether the thinking continues, the connections deepen, and SAIMM helps the industry to develop the people and capabilities required for its future.

I am deeply grateful to everyone across SAIMM, academia, industry, and the wider professional community who shared their perspectives and contributed to this journey. Every conversation added something to the picture.

The year reinforced a belief that has shaped much of my professional life: sustainable performance is achieved not by continually demanding greater effort from people, but by designing better systems through which people can develop, contribute, and succeed.

I began the year wanting to strengthen an institution.

I now have a deeper appreciation that the purpose of strengthening SAIMM is to enable it to address the needs of the minerals industry and strengthen the professional capability system upon which that industry depends.

The future of the minerals industry will be determined not only by the resources we possess, but by the capability of the people we develop and the professional capability system we collectively build and sustain.

Strengthen the institution. Connect the system. Steward the future.

G.R. Lane
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