



I am pleased to say that after 78 years of traditional service, the SAIW is now transforming into a modern, digitalised provider of fit-for-purpose services and support for the welding and inspection industry.

We have now appointed Vicus Burger as the new executive director, which demonstrates our commitment to driving operational efficiency and excellence. His experience in transformational business leadership and the integration of artificial intelligence into administrative processes will be instrumental in helping us to upgrade operational systems to meet modern benchmarks.

At the heart of this renewal is the transformation of service delivery levels and the provision of better support for our students and staff, SAIW personal and corporate members, all welders, and welding-related businesses in Southern Africa. To do this, we are implementing AI-driven business systems to help us manage all of our interactions and transactions.

We have already established a new central Student Management System that will soon be accessible from a new SAIW website under development. This AI-driven system will replace a traditional database that required a lot of human input with a comprehensive automated system that will manage every aspect of a student's records, from the time they enrol to the time they qualify. It will include ID-number and contact detail verification at the onset; it will give access to the course programmes and, on registration, to the materials; it will manage examinations and automatically upload results; and as soon as all of the criteria have been met, it will automatically create and

upload a student's course certificate.

We also want to support our staff better, so, as well as developing a new and easily accessible HR system, we are striving to modernise access to materials and to automate the generation and marking of examinations. We have employed a younger generation of experienced lecturers who are more open and familiar with these systems. This will remove some of the more time-consuming and bureaucratic tasks they previously had to do, so that they can concentrate on supporting the development needs of their students.

It is important to note that the SAIW's core purpose remains rooted in raising quality standards for welding. We want to make it easier for people to access the help they need to achieve the necessary quality standards. This means easier access and lower costs for our courses, and better technical support to help fabricators solve welding problems. We enable South African industry to succeed, to be more globally competitive, and to be ready to deliver to world-class standards.

For welder training, we are continuing to expand our use of Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR and AR) solutions, which we believe can significantly reduce the costs associated with welder training, making it far more accessible to young South Africans. We have to uplift our youth, get them enthusiastic about new technologies, and prepare them to build new infrastructure in support of South Africa's economic growth.

VR is an important first step in this regard. It doesn't involve consumables, plate, weld preparations or PPE. And students who achieve 80% scores for a VR welding process can be far more quickly qualified on a real



process, making the welder training more time-efficient and cheaper.

We are in the process of putting together a mobile welder training school built using converted shipping containers. The school will have a small VR-welder training room and a classroom, both powered using solar panels. We will be able to transport the whole facility on a low loader to any school or college to expose learners to welding and inspire them to join the profession.

We are also considering coupling this initiative with entrepreneur training and marketing support to encourage more young people to set up and succeed in their own businesses.

Finally, I would like to point out that South Africa is part of Africa. In recent years, the SAIW and the Nigerian Institute of Welding (NIW) jointly founded the Welding Federation Africa. With the IIW's support, we hope to expand our training initiatives across the continent so that instead of importing scarce skills into our continent, we can be exporting them.

Joseph Zinyana

SAIW Board and Management Team

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