

JUNE 2025



## SACEE CELEBRATES 70 YEARS

On Saturday 24 May, SACEE celebrated 70 years of service to English in South Africa at the majestic Northwards House in Johannesburg.

The celebratory function was preceded by the 70<sup>th</sup> AGM attended by current and past members of SACEE's Central Management Committee (CMC).

### CMC

In attendance as current members of the CMC were the following:

**National Chairperson:** Dr Malcolm Venter

**National Secretary and Treasurer:** Mrs Lesley Todd

**Branch Chairs:** Mr Warrick Brown (Johannesburg), Ms Stella Papageorgio (Mid-Vaal), Ms Amanda Swanepoel (Pretoria), Mrs Alison Gwynn-Evans (Western Cape, online) and Ms Lisa Musto (Border)

**National Project Leaders:** Mr Robert Sharman (English Olympiad), Ms Kirsten Dean (*English Alive*), Ms Lisa Musto (National Language Challenge and Short Story Competition)

### Past members of CMC

**Past office-bearers** who had contributed significantly to SACEE:

**Past National Chairperson:** Mr Ken Saycell

**Past Branch Chairpersons:** Mrs Verushka Packrey (Border), Mrs Terril Nicolay (Western Cape)

**Past national project leaders:** Dr Di McDermott (English Olympiad), Mr Twanji Kalula (*English Alive*, online).

### Apologies

Apologies were received from: Professor Elwyn Jenkins (Past National Chairperson), Mrs Anne Peltason (Past Eastern Cape Chairperson), Dr Rohan Quince (Past Johannesburg Chairperson).

(continued on page 2)



From Left to right—Ms Amanda Swanepoel (Pretoria Chair); Dr Malcolm Venter (National Chair) and Mrs Lesley Todd (National Secretary/Treasurer)

SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR ENGLISH  
EDUCATION

OUR MISSION: To support the teaching and appreciation of  
English in South Africa

[www.sacee.org.za](http://www.sacee.org.za)



(continued from page 1)



Robin Malan

The meeting also acknowledged the massive contribution of Robin Malan to *English Alive*, which he had edited and supported since its inception in 1967. Robin sadly passed away in September 2024.

Special mention was made of the new logo for SACEE, the brainchild of Alison Gwynn-Evans, and the special 70<sup>th</sup> version for 2025.

Dr Malcolm Venter, who has been the National Chair for the past 25 years, was re-elected as National Chair. In accepting the nomination, he indicated that this would be his last stint. 'By the time this term of office over,' he said, 'I shall be an octogenarian! We need someone younger to take over.' Mr Twanji Kalula, former editor of *English Alive*, and still a stalwart supporter of the project, was elected as National Vice-Chair.



Twanji Kalula



Malcolm Venter



**The AGM was followed by a celebratory function at which two special guests joined the members of the SACEE Central Management Committee. Professor Owen Seda, President of the English Academy of South Africa, and Dr Michal-Maré Linden, Chief Language Practitioner at the Pan South African Language Board, were welcomed as representatives of their respective kindred organisations.**



SACEE—AGM 2025 AND 70TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Northward House, Parktown , Johannesburg—24th May 2025

From left to right: Mr Warrick Brown (Branch Chair— Johannesburg); Mr Kenneth Saycell (Past Central Executive Chair); Dr Ms Michal-Maré Linden (PanSALB); Ms Amanda Swanepoel (Acting Branch Chair—Pretoria); Prof Owen Seda (President of the English Academy); Mr Robert Sharman (National Academic Project coordinator for the English Olympiad); Mrs Lesley Todd (National Secretary/Treasurer); Dr Malcolm Venter (Chairperson—SACEE Central Management Committee); Ms Kirsten Deane (*English Alive*—Project Co-Ordinator); Mrs Lisa Musto (Branch Chair—Border); Mrs Verushka Packery (Past Branch Chair—Border); Ms Anastella Papageorgiou (Branch Chair—Mid-Vaal); Dr Di Ayliff- McDermott (Past Branch Chair—Eastern Cape); Mrs Yvette Morgan (Branch Chair—Eastern Cape) Mrs Terrill Nicolay (Past Branch Chair—Western Cape).

In Attendance (virtual) - not photographed: Mrs Alison Gwynne-Evans (Branch Chair—Western Cape ) and Mr Twanji Kalula (Past Editor—*English Alive*)

## CELEBRATORY FUNCTION

An apology was registered on behalf of Professor Elwyn Jenkins, the oldest living Past National Chair of SACEE. He sent the following email message:

Greetings to all of you, who have gathered to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the South African Council for English Education. I apologise for not being able to join you on this significant occasion.

The country when SACEE was formed differs markedly from the country we live in today. It is therefore understandable that some of the reasons people had for starting SACEE no longer apply, and consequently it has changed. However, what I see as SACEE's greatest contribution to society has been a constant, running through all the multitude of activities it has organised over the years.

That contribution is that it has enriched the lives of countless young people. This is something to be proud of. I congratulate SACEE. Long may it continue to serve our youth in its own special way.

Dr Malcolm Venter addressed the assembled group as follows:

It is my pleasure and privilege, in my personal and official capacity, to preside over this special 70<sup>th</sup>-year celebration.

From a *personal* point of view, I owe SACEE a deep gratitude:

- Sixty years ago, I was awarded a SACEE teaching bursary (I know that Rob Sharman and Ken Saycell, both present today, were also recipients of that bursary).
- I then received an English Honours bursary which SACEE adjudicated on behalf of a family trust.
- At the end of my third year of teaching, SACEE once again very graciously granted me an overseas travelling fellowship which they handled on behalf of the British Council.

In my *official capacity* as the National Chair for the past 25 years, I would like to pay tribute to SACEE and those who founded it and those who later contributed to its continued existence.

Let me take you back to the beginning of SACEE...

In **August 1954**, the Grand Lodge Education Committee proposed that a special meeting be held on 6th September 1954 with a view to forming a National Council for English Education. 'We need,' they said, 'a strong body of people prepared to work to save the English language and British traditions.'



A meeting of the 'Sons of England' was duly convened on **6 September** of that year to discuss English Education. 'The language and teacher problem,' it was said, 'is deteriorating'. It was proposed that an organisation be formed, to be called *The National Council for English Education*, whereby interested parties would be able to set up branches throughout the country. It was stressed that the proposed organisation would be strictly non-political and it was not intended that there should be liaison of any sort with any of the political parties.

At a meeting of the South African National Council for English Education held in Pretoria on **15 March 1955**, a motion was passed to change the name to *The South African Council for English Education (SACEE)*.

At a meeting of SACEE in Pretoria on **28 March** later that year, final amendments were made to the constitution and the main aims were listed as follows: (a) *To maintain, promote and encourage English Education in the Union of South Africa and neighbouring Territories;* (b) *To maintain, promote and encourage the knowledge and teaching of British culture and traditions.*



Malcolm Venter speaking at the celebration, photographed with Lesley Todd (National Secretary and Treasurer) and Kirsten Deane (Editor, *English Alive*)

Now I know this all sounds pretty jingoistic and cringe-worthy today. But we must remember the context. SACEE was founded just seven years after the National Party took office. With this came a threat to English in South Africa, as the NP was hell-bent on promoting Afrikaans and Afrikanerdom.

Over the years SACEE acknowledged that the times, they were a-changing. Despite the efforts of the National Party – including its disastrous actions in 1976—English became the undeclared lingua franca of the country (and, indeed, of most of the world). As we heard from Elwyn Jenkins, SACEE realised that some of the reasons for its establishment no longer applied, and it adapted accordingly.

Gone are the references to British culture or even promoting the use of English. Instead we have operated in terms of our mission statement, which is *To support the teaching, learning and appreciation of English*. And, as we say on our website, *SACEE draws together people with an appreciation of the richness of the language, a concern for clarity of thought and a respect for the multilingual diversity of South Africa*.

Our focus has been on schools. In 1995, when we were celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> year, Peter Mundell, then National Chairperson of SACEE, said: ‘There are many teachers and tens of thousands of pupils who have benefited from the financial support and encouragement of this organisation. South Africa is the richer for its existence and campaigns to make English a truly valuable resource for all citizens to use and enjoy.’

Elwyn Jenkins, as we mentioned earlier, echoes this sentiment.

How have we done this?

- Firstly, through our *national projects*, which include: *English Alive*, which has been publishing the writings of high school learners continuously since 1967; The National English Olympiad, which this year celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> examination; and, in more recent years, the National Language Challenge and Short Story Competition. These have offered opportunities for many thousands of learners to show what they can do.
- Then there are the activities which engage and celebrate hundreds of young people at *branch* level each year.





**A TOAST WAS DRUNK TO SACEE – TO ITS FOUNDERS AND TO THOSE WHO HAVE CONTINUED ITS GOOD WORK.**

**‘IN THE WORDS OF ELWYN JENKINS,’ SAID MALCOLM VENTER “LONG MAY [SACEE] CONTINUE TO SERVE OUR YOUTH IN ITS OWN SPECIAL WAY!’**

## **KEN SAYCELL**

**Ken Saycell, past National Chair, addressed the gathering with the following words:**

I very much appreciate the invitation to be here and to celebrate SACEE’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

What came to mind initially, as I thought of my 25-plus years with SACEE branches (both Johannesburg and Pretoria) and with the CEC, as we called it then, were the many human and humane people I came to know and respect. Some, such as Elwyn Jenkins and (earlier) Joe de Villiers, were in many respects mentors and guides. Others were characterful, entertaining, dedicated and committed educationists. A random list would include Mr Ferguson, the redoubtable, Daphne Ffolliott, inspirational leader in Port Elizabeth (whose golden cocker spaniels have a special place among my memories), and Norah Taylor, whose life was dedicated to speech and drama. As national chair and vice-chair, I was also privileged to work with a superb team: I recall many hours of poring over SACEE’s finances with James Forsyth, honorary treasurer, and about half a dozen national secretaries without whom national affairs would have swiftly ceased. Pat Bootland was the last of these administrative officers with whom I worked and it was with much sadness that I learned of her passing.

The many committee members with whom I worked all deserve to be remembered and honoured.

Over and over, in my contacts with teachers and lecturers abroad, I tried to convey the notion that no one knows everything and that learning is about encountering the unknown, being comfortable with making mistakes and then learning from those mistakes, and finally being willing to engage in exploration not just of ‘facts’ and information but also of the intangible and the complex issues and topics that we should be contending with each day of our lives. Above all, curiosity is the basic requirement for learning and it should not be stifled.

What does this have to do with SACEE? Well, I have spent some time looking at the website and at some of the projects that branches are involved in. This exercise brought home to me that, in the past and right into the present, SACEE has been advancing the goals of exploratory and creative learning, allowing schools, teachers and pupils to go beyond a basic curriculum and to confront the fascinating, difficult and exciting world of ideas, people and relationships. I am proud to have been associated with and part of SACEE.

May I, in conclusion, offer my congratulations on its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary to SACEE, its members and all participants on making a worthy contribution to the attainment of this transforming energy in our troubled but still ‘beloved country’.





## GREETINGS FROM OUR SPECIAL GUESTS

### PROFESSOR OWEN SEDA, PRESIDENT, ENGLISH ACADEMY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to begin my few words of solidarity by conveying the English Academy of Southern Africa's hearty congratulations to SACEE on the council's grand 70th anniversary.

The English Academy of Southern Africa would like to take the opportunity of this proud moment in the life of the South African Council for English Education to stand side by side with an organization that has spent the last 70 years promoting, maintaining, and encouraging local education through the medium of English.

We in the English Academy feel greatly honoured to be part of this momentous occasion as we bask in the celebration of your 70 years of service to the English language pursuing your set goal to improve the standards of written and spoken English in South Africa. As an organisation, whose vision and mission are to make the English language accessible and available to all who wish to use it through research, debates and representations that reward excellence among users, the English Academy is proud to say that in SACEE it sees a complementary association and partner with whom it has travelled the long and good road. Where SACEE has executed a 70-year mission to teach, educate and build capacity in English, the English Academy has executed a 60-year mission as a civil society movement that builds capacity in writing and the use of the English language through the numerous literary competitions and awards that it has run over the years. I am also proud to say that the English Academy's flagship DHET accredited journal, the *English Academy Review* has provided a veritable forum in which members of SACEE, and members of the English Academy can engage issues about the English language at an intellectual level.

As the English Academy stands beside you today in celebration of your 70-year anniversary, it too cannot help but look back into the past with a proud sense of nostalgia. The Academy cannot help but recall the principal instigator of its establishment in 1961 when it came to life in direct reaction to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which enforced Afrikaans as the medium of instruction among all non-whites in South Africa. Who then could have chosen a better partner than SACEE to complement their struggle in promoting English as an internationally accepted vital resource with which users then and now can more easily access the global community of nations?

It is the complementary nature of our work in the service of English and of course, our mutually long lives working and operating in tandem that has allowed members of the English Academy to enjoy dual membership with SACEE and vice-versa.

As I stand before you today on behalf of the English Academy of Southern Africa, allow me to conclude my few remarks by wishing SACEE another ten-fold 70 years doing great work in the teaching and promotion of English in South Africa.

I thank You.





## DR MICHAL-MARÉ LINDEN, CHIEF PRACTITIONER: ENGLISH, PANSALB

It is a pleasure to bring warm greetings from the Pan South African Language Board on this momentous occasion. Seventy years is no small feat. It represents an unwavering commitment to the quality teaching, as well as learning and appreciation, of the English language in South Africa.

At PanSALB, our mandate includes “the creation of conditions for the development and the promotion of equitable use and enjoyment of all the official languages of South Africa”, “the prevention of the use of any language for the purposes of exploitation, domination, or division”, and the promotion of multilingualism.

Unfortunately, government is often reluctant to use indigenous languages in public communication and many members of the public have reasonable anxieties about the inaccessibility of public services, work opportunities, and educational opportunities if they are not fluent in English. There is also the history of English and colonialism that must be acknowledged. The dominance of English in South Africa means that, in some spaces, English has been painted as villainous. In other spaces, it has meant that the usefulness of indigenous languages has been dismissed and multilingualism is not aspired to.

However, PanSALB, as advised by its English National Language Body, recognises that English need not be a problem or barrier, but rather a bridge: to multilingualism, social empowerment, and unity. South African English is very much part of our country’s multilingual landscape. It borrows and overlaps with our other local languages; it serves as a historical record and a record of our flora and fauna; its been developed into subvarieties unique to Indian, Asian, Black, Coloured, white, and mixed race communities; and it offers a model for the democratic standardisation of other indigenous languages.

In that sense, English, especially South African English, needs to be taught well. It must be appreciated. SACEE has, for longer than PanSALB’s existence, supported this vision, by encouraging excellence in English use, supporting educators and learners, and nurturing literary creativity across all ages. SACEE has worked to encourage young writers and champion the richness and beauty of English in ways that strengthen South Africa’s linguistic landscape. SACEE does this without neglecting the broader context of our nation’s multilingual and multicultural identity, understanding that the promotion of English need not come at the expense of our indigenous languages, but rather can be inclusive, respectful, and empowering. And for that, we are grateful.

Our English National Language Body and PanSALB takes a keen interest in the work of SACEE and we offer our support, not only today, but for the future work of SACEE. Congratulations on your 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary; we wish you all the best for the next 70 years.



**PanSALB**  
PAN SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE BOARD



## CONTACT DETAILS

**National Secretary/  
Treasurer:**

**Mrs Lesley Todd**

**82 4488 372**

**[sacee.national@gmail.com](mailto:sacee.national@gmail.com)**

## WHO IS SACEE?

The South African Council for English Education is a registered non-profit association mainly consisting of voluntary members. SACEE was established in 1955 by a small group of people who were dedicated to the protection of English usage. That was necessary at the time, as the Nationalist government, which had taken office in 1948, aimed to sideline English in favour of Afrikaans.

Our mission statement – to support the teaching, learning and appreciation of English—is our focus now that that situation no longer pertains.

Through a network of branches and membership, the Council succeeds in initiating and sustaining a wide variety of worthwhile activities and projects, undertaken voluntarily by members and aimed at benefitting teachers, learners as well as college and university students. SACEE provides a practical means for individuals and organisations to participate in the development of skills and in the enjoyment of the English language. SACEE draws together people with an appreciation of the richness of the language, a concern for clarity of thought and a respect for the multilingual diversity of South Africa.