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Meet the members - Professor Ian McLoughlin

Over 22 years, **McLoughlin**'s career has included work on three continents, for multinationals, big and small industries, charities, consultancies and academia. He's written books, built technical systems, become fluent in foreign languages and presented to presidents and prime ministers.

When joining the **IET** as a student **member** back in 1987, never in a million years did Professor **ian** **McLoughlin** guess what his career would entail. His interest in engineering began as a child, and to this day he still has a passion for it.



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"Many people like to play with new gadgets and learn about the latest advances in technology, but it is only engineers who know exactly what's going on inside those gadgets, and who actually push the envelope of technology forwards," he says. "Imagine getting to play with the latest technologies and get paid for doing so!"

McLoughlin's early education was nothing spectacular, he wasn't really inspired until he could choose what subjects to study at A level. After doing the rounds and visiting various engineering universities, he chose to study electronic and electrical engineering at the University of Birmingham.

Before beginning the course, however, he applied for a number of sponsorships, eventually gaining a place at the GEC Hirst Research Centre, which entailed working for them during holidays and his sandwich year in industry.

By the time he graduated, GEC no longer had a job for him. He went on to be hired by Her Majesty's Government Communications Centre (HMGCC), which had an **IET** accredited training scheme. After enrolling, he began to keep a professional development record (PDR), as he rotated around various departments.

Back to school

Four years later, he was back at Birmingham University.

"HMGCC was a great place, however I wanted to learn more and become a specialist in my particular area of work. Also, I couldn't help noting that my two department bosses had a 'Dr' in front of their names.

"In fact the more I looked, the more I realised that a PhD seemed to do two good things for people," he says. "Firstly it recognised their speciality, helping them to stay focused on that area rather than be shifted around a company and to different projects at the whim of management, and secondly to set them apart from their peers with a certain distinction."

Going global

On completion of his PhD, it wasn't long before **McLoughlin** made his first international move – to become first a lecturer, then assistant professor in Singapore. Next he emigrated to Christchurch, New Zealand to work for Tait Electronics Group Research as a senior, and later principal engineer. It was while working at Tait that he nominated his team for the inaugural 2005 **IET** Innovation Awards: they won on the basis of their product design for the world's most spectrally efficient narrowband wireless product.

Five years later and academia again beckoned: **McLoughlin** returned to Singapore.

"I'm an Associate Professor in Computer Engineering at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, and also a Principal Investigator in the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS). It's an interesting job: I work on speech processing, have built a satellite, a bionic voice, some novel computer architecture, many embedded systems, solar powered demonstrator systems and helped to forge new wireless algorithms," he says.

"Sometimes I get to travel: in the past year I've been to places as diverse as Europe, Malaysia, USA, Hong Kong, up a volcano in Indonesia and soon to Tokyo. Conferences, in particular, are great opportunities to travel," he adds.

The world of academia

"Being an academic gives me a lot of freedom: I don't need to sign in or out when I visit my industrial collaborators, and

apart from assigned courses to teach I also have freedom to research whatever areas appear interesting to me.

"On paper my 42 days paid annual leave sounds great, but in reality neither I nor my colleagues are able to benefit fully from this due to extreme pressure to publish good quality research papers and books. Yes, it is hard work, but I enjoy the diversity of research interests, I like writing – I have around 100 papers and have authored two books so far."

"When I look back at my early days in engineering, I realise how immensely important it was to have received a top quality university education – this is like a passport to the world, and something that lasts throughout ones career.

"It colours my thinking patterns even now, and sometimes lends me perspectives that those around me might miss. Similarly I was fortunate in having an industrial sponsorship to introduce me to the world of work. The experiences I had at GEC and HMGCC taught me invaluable lessons that have never left me: what it means to be a professional engineer, how to work in a team, how to get the job done, and the confidence to tackle even the most seemingly intractable of engineering problems."

Importance of IET membership

McLoughlin also appreciates the benefits he's garnered from IET membership.

"The IET PDR, the accredited training schemes, etc, were wonderful opportunities to learn in themselves, but also ultimately led to me becoming a Chartered Engineer in 1998. The CEng title is, and should be, a mark of distinction that is earned. It is recognised by many employers worldwide, even here in Singapore, and in New Zealand.

"Apart from the status, the IET has helped me to keep in touch with technology, events, and news, and has provided great networking opportunities. Regular events are held: even as far away as here in Singapore there are many interesting talks and visits organised by the IET, and we have a very active local IET network."

McLoughlin is now a volunteer for the IET, trying to give back a little of the benefits he has accrued over the years.



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