

## **A Concise History of the International Association of University Libraries (IATUL)**

Since its inception in 1954, the International Association of [Technical] University Libraries (IATUL) has grown from a small union of specialized libraries into a global association with broad inclusion. Its initial *raison d'être* was to address the explosion in scientific publishing that accompanied the rapid development of science and technology in the twentieth century, and the concomitant increase in importance of technical university libraries.

A voluntary organisation with NGO status, IATUL was formally admitted as a section within International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) in 1955. Dr E. Hemlin, its founder and inaugural president, defined it then as, “a union with practical co-operative purposes as well as a forum for the discussion of all theoretical matters relating to these technical university libraries where international co-operation would be necessary and useful.” Included among IATUL’s specific aims were the exchange of information on automation of library processes and standardization of international loans as well as information on staff training, exchanges, and visits.

In 1959, the early membership comprised 36 “public or private independent technical universities with a right to grant a doctor’s degree”<sup>1</sup> in 17 countries, mostly in Western Europe, but also in communist Poland and Yugoslavia. Initially, activity focused on consolidating IATUL membership and understanding members’ needs. Evolution proceeded apace, and by the early 1960s, an ambitious working programme was agreed which saw IATUL widen its statutes in order to extend full membership to non-technical universities with significant science and technology departments.

From 1963, under the incumbency of its new president, Dr L.J. Van der Volk, Director of the Delft University of Technology library, the working programme was implemented and significantly augmented, and membership duly rose to reach 93 by 1966. Among a raft of far-reaching new initiatives intended to inject dynamism and structure into the organisation, Van der Volk instigated working groups composed of young librarians, established an IATUL newsletter to facilitate information exchange among the membership, and proposed that future IATUL gatherings take place apart from the IFLA congress. While remaining a member of IFLA, IATUL thus became an independent organisation in its own right.

In seeking to define its independence more clearly, the international character of the organisation was emphasized. Accordingly, efforts were made to recruit members from other continents. These instantly bore fruit, and by the time of Van der Volk’s retirement, IATUL could boast 25 North American members, 5 from Asia, and 3 from Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr E. Hemlin’s report to the 20th IFLA Session/Council in Zagreb, October 1954

Originally planned as a joint initiative with IFLA, Van der Volk also set up IATUL seminars on library methods and innovations. Hosted in Delft between 1966 and 1968, these courses were offered to young, qualified librarians with the aim of introducing them to state-of-the-art developments, which they in turn would disseminate to the membership on return to their home institutions.

The election in 1966 of Dr James Mack of Lehigh University marked a general shift in orientation. For instance, Mack believed that IATUL should do more to support libraries in the developing world. It was also his view that the focus of IATUL activities should be less on dedicated librarianship issues – the core content of the seminars – and more on automating library processes. The pragmatism of Mack’s approach did not, however, sit well with all board members, and the following years were marked by ongoing disputes about the identity and purpose of IATUL.

Tony Evans of Loughborough University, who became president in 1970, sought to involve the wider membership more closely in the organisation’s activities – with limited success. An IATUL research grant in the form of a travelling scholarship was offered, and the IATUL Proceedings (formerly the IATUL Newsletter) evolved from a scholarly publication into an organ of communication with the members. However, it was effectively displaced in this function by the IATUL Conference Proceedings, which after the Copenhagen conference in 1975 not only went to a second print run, but began turning a profit in sales. Conferences became biennial events but disagreements over the relationship of IATUL to rival organisations, such as LIBER (Association of European Research Libraries), and IATUL’s possible (re)integration into IFLA, clouded discussions during this period. The disputants in these discussions locked horns at the board meeting at the University of Twente in November 1975, where the separatists eventually won out, and it was decided that IATUL should retain its independent status. IATUL’s 1977 application for international membership of IFLA was a further step towards establishing its independence from its parent organisation.

However, when, in 1976 G. A. Hamel of Twente University library took over as president, the question of IATUL’s identity had still been only partially resolved. The Board went so far as to publish a pamphlet entitled “What is IATUL?” Board members were invited to contribute lists of problems and projects for later synthesis under this heading, the most significant of which came from Board member Dr J. P. Sydler, Director of the ETH library, Zurich, whose call to prevent IATUL lapsing into a mere “conference association” was somewhat undermined by the uninterrupted success of IATUL in precisely this capacity.

In the period from 1981 until 1990, there was a rapid turnover of presidents, beginning with Dr Sydler himself. His incumbency ended in 1983, followed by Dr Westberg (1984-1985), Dr Shaw (1986-1990), and latterly Dr E. Tornudd, who chaired her first board meeting in the summer of 1990. Dr Shaw led redoubled efforts to extend IATULs remit

beyond European libraries, himself visiting North America, while other senior IATUL officers made forays eastward to destinations including Australia and China. Links with other organisations were consolidated. Dr Turnudd's senior position at UNESCO, for example, ensured its more intimate relationship with IATUL.

In addition to the continuation of biennial conferences, IATUL in the 1980s enjoyed a revival of seminars, harking back to the heyday of the Van der Volk era. In the second half of the decade, IATUL's recovery from its slump in the 1970s led to the improved provision of benefits to its members and the field at large, including publication of a new journal, *IATUL Quarterly*. At the Oxford conference of 1985, the record of topics under discussion give some indication of the scope of IATUL's reinvigorated agenda and ambition: industrial use of information; local access to information; access to information in electronic form; the future of the scientific journal and electronic publishing; the future of grey literature; information access in the electronic age: central planning versus free enterprise.

This resurgence was accompanied by growth in membership. Seminars held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1984 produced new applications for membership from North America. By the time of the 1985 conference, IATUL membership had increased to 120 in 32 countries. By 1989, total membership had increased to 182. Of the total, 104 were European, 37 North American, 16 were from Asia, 13 from Australia, 10 from Africa, and 2 from South America. This expansion was further reflected in the formation of regional groupings in both North America and Australasia. The first IATUL Pacific seminar was held at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1988.

The 1990s witnessed a revolution in IT, with profound implications for all aspects of library services and information management. Email became the official medium of association communication and conferences during the decade addressed themes such as "Networks and Networking: implications for the digital library" and "Virtual Libraries, virtual communities." IATUL conferences continued to attract burgeoning numbers of delegates. Whereas in the 1980s they had all taken place in Europe, the 14<sup>th</sup> biennial conference at MIT in 1991 was attended by 93 participants from 18 countries; the 1996 conference at Irvine, California, hosted 130 delegates; in 1998, there were 244 registrations from 26 countries for the conference in Pretoria, South Africa. In view of the fact that IATUL seminars, which were held in the intervening years between conferences, were now almost as extensive and expensive, it was decided in 1996 to merge these events and make IATUL conferences an annual event.

Publication of *IATUL Quarterly*, however, was discontinued. The burden of editing a scholarly journal – exacerbated by confusion over the membership and journal subscriptions – was eschewed in favour of a return to a quarterly IATUL Newsletter and publication of conference proceedings, to be published electronically. The presidency changed hands at three- to four-yearly intervals: Dr Turnudd stepped down

in 1993, succeeded by Dr Van Marle. Dr Fjallbrant took over in 1996, followed by Michael Breaks in 2000.

In 1999, Breaks, then IATUL Secretary, produced a SWOT analysis entitled “Exploring futures for IATUL,” echoing the institutional soul-searching that had characterised the 1970s. However, in contrast to the in-fighting that had dogged previous discussions of IATUL’s purpose, this document provided a detailed outline of possible opportunities and threats. These included both a suggested increase in membership of up to 300 to support training initiatives and closer links to university libraries in developing countries, and at the same time identified the conflicting expectations of an expanded membership as a threat. Membership remained stable at around 230 throughout the period. Once again, it was noted that IATUL’s primary function was as a conference association.

It is no surprise, therefore, that IATUL conferences continued to flourish in the new millennium. For the first time, more conferences were held outside Europe than within it. Conferences were held in Turkey (2003), Canada (2005), Egypt (2006), New Zealand (2008), and Hong Kong (2009). Conference themes became more tightly focussed and attracted both improved sponsorship and high level speakers from international academe as well as decision makers from other important institutions. Grants to support conference attendance were introduced in 2007. On the downside, membership among Anglo-American institutions declined, in spite of efforts to raise IATUL’s profile in the UK at the 2008 conference in London, although this trend was offset by increased membership in Asia.

Technological developments, such as the launch of the IATUL website and the inauguration of a membership database, testify to the progressive trend over the decade, continued in the wake of Breaks’ presidency under Gaynor Austen from 2004-2006, and Maria Heijne from 2006-2009. The impracticality of maintaining a membership database separate from the subscriptions dataset was a thorn in the side of the IATUL treasury until Dr R. Kallenborn of the Technical University of Munich (TUM) assumed the treasurer’s role in 2005 and unified the two. All IATUL software support was subsequently provided from TUM. An IATUL archive, now housed at TUM, was established to preserve the association’s history, papers and conference proceedings.

In its efforts to increase membership, the Board agreed in 2005 that providing enhanced services would be a potentially fruitful approach. The members were invited to submit their views and suggestions in 2007/8 and the response indicated that the website and conferences were perceived as the most important services then offered. Proposals for new services included the formation of special interest groups on information literacy as well as cross-border development projects. Such initiatives harked back to the earlier activities and seminar groups of Van der Volk’s day.

By the second decade of the new millennium, with Ainslie Dewe assuming the presidency from 2010-2012, the volume of academic publishing had expanded exponentially in almost every field of academic and professional enquiry. This was reflected in increased interdisciplinarity both within and between university departments, and between separate universities and non-academic institutions. In response, under the stewardship of its current president, Dr R. Kallenborn, IATUL has broadened its scope to include not only dedicated scientific and technical universities but general education universities, which are now admissible as ordinary members of IATUL. This represents a paradigm shift in philosophy and approach to university library management. The Board agreed the move in 2013 and the IATUL Constitution was redrafted accordingly in 2014. In addition, although the IATUL acronym was left unchanged, the word 'Technical' was dropped from the full official name, which became the International Association of University Libraries to mark the association's policy of universal inclusion.

Since then, a concerted programme of new projects and professional services has been instigated, which has resulted in a renewed upturn in membership after the falling-off recorded at the beginning of the decade. These include the establishment of a permanent IATUL office, the development of IT-centred projects, such as an e-research programme, and a renewed focus on library management issues, with workshops on professional development and a leadership academy offered at conferences. In general, a more member-oriented culture has been fostered, with constant updates to the website, and an emphasis on intra-organisation communication beyond the annual IATUL Conference, as well as regular canvassing of members' needs and wants. Another recent addition to services introduced by Dr Kallenborn is the IATUL Translation and Editing service, which is free to IATUL member libraries' staff, and available to all academics at member universities.

While it remains to be seen whether IATUL can transcend its role as a conference association, and fulfil its long-stated goal of reaching out to larger numbers of universities on other continents, the auguries are good. It is to be hoped that the combination of progressive leadership, along with enhanced member support and services to meet the increasingly complex challenges for university libraries in the digital age will see IATUL emerge as a safe haven for developing and advanced institutions around the world, as well as a forerunner in sharing library innovation and best practice as envisioned by its founders and pioneers.

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