

A short history of matters international

Jill Halliday

Jill Halliday, until 2011 SI international representative, tells the ICRIS story, an account of how over the last decade indexing societies from around the world have developed an ever-closer liaison, the latest stage being approval at their Triennial Meeting in July 2012 of revisions to the International Agreement which governs their relationship.

The International Committee of Representatives of Indexing Societies (ICRIS) has come into being over ten years of lively and active discussion and collaboration between all the known indexing societies (Australia and New Zealand, Canada, China, Germany, UK and Ireland, the Netherlands and Southern Africa). To understand its history, it is necessary to look back to the relationships between the societies prior to the year 2000.

For many years, the Society of Indexers (SI) enshrined its relationship with the other indexing societies in various parts of the world in its Constitution. The relationship was paternalistic and referred to 'affiliated societies'. The term 'overseas societies' was frequently used, which had an almost colonial hint, which by the 1980s and 1990s had become outdated and unpalatable. The function of the relationship with the affiliated societies was principally to facilitate the sale of *The Indexer* to members of these societies at a favourable rate. Members were attending each other's conferences on occasion and were always warmly welcomed, but they were never there in any formal sense of representing their societies nor did they carry any particular brief for discussion. The Australian Society of Indexers (AUSSI, later the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI)) was already thinking ahead and held its first international conference in Marysville in 1995, followed by its second international conference in Hobart in 1999.

The need for change became apparent at the American Society of Indexers (ASI) conference in Seattle in 1998. Discussions, quite heated at times, were held during the conference, over issues to do with subscriptions for *The Indexer*, which reflected on the then relationship between the societies. There were people present at that conference from the Australian and Canadian societies as well as the Society of Indexers. It became obvious to all of us involved that change was needed. It is to the enormous credit of members of the Australian and Canadian societies, particularly Alan Walker and Christine Jacobs, that waters were calmed and very constructive discussions got underway.

Following the Seattle conference, later in 1998, the Society of Indexers held its annual conference in Tynemouth. A meeting was convened there, chaired by Christine Jacobs from the Canadian society (ISC/SCI, then IASC/SCAD) to discuss a new relationship, and from that meeting, the embryo of the new structure for international relationships emerged.

The most important ideas to emerge from that meeting were that any future relationships must be equal and as far as practicable reciprocal, and that communication and

regular contact were essential. Communication had recently become a lot easier than it had been for previous generations as email was by then well established. It was decided at the Tynemouth meeting that each society would appoint an international representative, and an international meeting would be held every three years during the conference of one of the societies, and societies would take it in turns to host the Triennial Meeting.

The first Triennial Meeting was hosted by SI in 2000 in Cambridge. The American, Canadian, Australian/New Zealand and Southern African societies were all represented. The China Society of Indexers (CSI) was not represented, although Alan Walker of the Australian society (now ANZSI but then AUSSI) had earlier that year attended a conference of CSI and reported to the Cambridge conference about his experience there and what CSI was achieving.

The atmosphere at the meeting was positive, due in no small part to the groundwork which had been done at the Tynemouth conference. The outcome of the meeting was that an International Agreement (www.theindexer.org/files/intl%20agreet.pdf) should be drawn up, which would be reviewed at each Triennial Conference and revisions made as necessary, subject to ratification by the boards of each of the societies. The publication and distribution of *The Indexer* would remain at the heart of the International Agreement.

Reciprocal arrangements between the societies were an important part of the ethos of the International Agreement, and agreement was reached on free places at annual conferences for international representatives, exchange of newsletters, purchase of publications and, a later development, membership of Special Interest Groups (SIGs). It was much easier to decide these matters in the meetings than it was to implement them, and discussions have continued over the years as to how to achieve these reciprocal arrangements and to maintain them. Inevitable problems arise when working with organizations manned by volunteers: personnel change, and arrangements are forgotten.

The Triennial Conference which followed Cambridge was hosted by ANZSI in Sydney in 2003. Working relationships between the societies were improving all the time and the goodwill was tangible. Ideas and proposals could be discussed actively in a constructive way. The International Agreement was a working document respected by each of the societies.

One of the issues that emerged was the problem the Southern African Society (ASAIB) experienced with finances because of its disadvantage with the exchange rate.

This meant that travel outside the country was extremely expensive and that the cost of purchasing *The Indexer* was prohibitive to many of the members. Fortunately, members were at times able to attract sponsorship for travel, and it has been possible to make special provision for them (and for the China Society of Indexers (CSI) who have had similar currency exchange problems) to access *The Indexer* at a favourable rate.

Contacts were maintained with the Chinese indexers via Chinese nationals living in the United States and in the United Kingdom, but there remained both financial and cultural constraints on development of a full relationship for CSI with the international group. There were various attempts made by CSI to travel to conferences, and it was very gratifying when they were represented by one of their members at the 2006 Triennial Meeting in Toronto, which was jointly hosted by ASI and ISC/SCI. It was after this conference that, for the first time, CSI ratified the changes to the International Agreement. The Agreement then well and truly spoke for all of the societies. (It should also be noted that CSI have since been represented at the 2009 SI Conference, and that members of the ICRIS team visited CSI in Shanghai (2010) and attended the 2012 CSI Conference in Jinan City.)

Following the Toronto Triennial Meeting, the 2009 meeting was hosted by ASAIB near Johannesburg. ASAIB has always been a relatively small society, but they were able to arrange an outstanding conference and the International Meeting was again extremely constructive. It was at this meeting that attempts were made to decide upon a name for the international group and to bring some structure to it. Up until this point, there had been no official leader or administrator. SI had taken the role of unofficial 'chivvier' to ensure that people were aware of the Triennial Meetings and that changes to the International Agreement were ratified and recorded appropriately. This role was taken over by ISC/SCI in 2006. It was proposed at this meeting that an international coordinator be appointed to ensure effective running of the group, which was still nameless. Ruth Pincoe was the first person to hold this post, handing over the reins to Mary Russell (ANZSI) at the following Triennial Conference (Brighton 2012). Ultimately, the name International Committee of Representatives of Indexing Societies (ICRIS) was agreed.

In recent years, two networks have been formed, one in Germany, the Deutsches Netzwerk der Indexer (DNI), the other in the Netherlands, Nederlands Indexers Network (NIN). These are both informal groups representing the relatively small number of indexers in their respective countries. They are part of ICRIS, participating in all the reciprocal arrangements so far as their small size and limited resources allow. Although they do not arrange their own conferences, DNI, since its inception, has held meetings at the Frankfurt Book Fair each year and engaged with publishers there, and NIN arranged and ran an extremely successful conference on behalf of SI in Middelburg in the south of the Netherlands in 2010.

The triennial meetings represent the formal structure of the international group, but it has always been important to maintain ongoing dialogue between the societies. Email was

the obvious means of communication, and out of informal emails amongst the group a discussion list for ICRIS was created. Also, indexers frequently attend each other's conferences, and informal interim meetings are held at most conferences. If the international representative for a society is not attending a particular conference, another member who has been briefed can attend, as these meetings are only for discussion of topics in general. The only decisions taken at them relate to routine procedural matters. They serve a valuable function in keeping topics alive and for general exchange of information.

Each of the societies now publishes its newsletter in electronic format, even if it also publishes hard copy. This has simplified reciprocal exchange of newsletters, now available to the full membership of all the societies. ASI does not publish a newsletter, but instead has its publication *Key Words* to which special reciprocal arrangements apply.

The publication of *The Indexer* has maintained its place at the heart of the International Agreement. In 1999 SI (which for reasons of legal responsibility retains ownership of the journal) decided that it was vital to make it a fully international journal. The subtitle 'The International Journal of Indexing' was added and appears on the front cover of all issues. SI appoints the editor (not necessarily a member of the British society) and *The Indexer* Management Committee, but participation of all of the societies is ensured by encouraging each society to nominate a member of *The Indexer* International Advisory Committee. More than 70 per cent of *Indexer* contributions now come from outside the United Kingdom, and all the societies and networks have taken at least one turn at guest-editing the journal. Around the World (ATW) which for some years has reported on news from the societies is about to come to a close, its original purpose now being better served by the online society and network newsletters, but other editorial changes are in hand to try to ensure comprehensive cross-border coverage for example in relation to book reviews.

Where next for ICRIS? Reported elsewhere in this issue are the discussion and main decisions taken at the 2012 Triennial Meeting. Much of this is about what one might call 'housekeeping', ways of building on and improving the working practices established by ICRIS over the years. Revisions to the International Agreement itself are very few, and more about tidying up than pushing off in new directions. And now there is a dedicated ICRIS webpage on *The Indexer* website to make it easy for anybody interested, including ICRIS members, to check out what ICRIS is and does.

Other ideas are afloat for enhancing international cooperation, the most important of which relate to promoting the cause of indexing in the digital publishing world. Pivotal at this point in time is the work of the Indexes Working Group (IWG), set up by the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) in January 2012 to look at EPUB specifications for indexes so that they become active parts of ebooks. ASI and ANZSI are both represented on the IWG, with ISC/SCI and SI (through its Publishing Trends Group) contributing to the discussion from time to time. It is now a matter of 'watch this space' (<https://code.google.com/p/epub-revision/wiki/IndexesMainPage>), with some firm recommendations expected by the end of 2012.

It seems to me so important that there is cooperation between the societies in these initiatives and that the lines of communication are open. It is my belief that the openness between the societies in looking towards the future of indexing has, to a great extent, been fostered by the work put into the relationships between the societies since the late 1990s.

Regnat ICRIS.

Jill Halliday is a freelance indexer working in the life sciences, principally in medical and biological indexing. Her interest in the international relationships of the indexing societies came about by accident, when she attended the ASI conference in Seattle as chairman of SI. She became the first international representative of SI, a position she held until 2011. She also became involved with the training activities of SI and was actively involved in encouraging use of SI's training materials by the other societies.

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