AUSIT's History

The genesis of AUSIT is intertwined with that of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). The latter was set up in 1977 with the express purpose of professionalising the work of interpreters and translators, which had first emerged in Australia with the ground-breaking establishment by the Federal Government in 1973 of the Emergency Telephone Interpreter Service (now TIS National).

From the very beginning of discussions about NAATI, around November 1973, the intention was always to create a system that would improve the quality of interpreting and translation services for the benefit of new arrivals who had come to Australia under the post-war migration program. In particular, it was recognised that communication problems were hampering migrants' access to services in the Australian community. The Immigration Minister at the time asked the Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications - COPQ, whose remit was to harmonise the different approaches by a range of professional bodies across Australia to the consideration of overseas qualifications – to devise a system for creating a T&I profession. Within seven months COPQ produced a report that would serve as the blueprint for setting up NAATI and a professional practitioners' association.

Despite a number of delays, in September 1977 NAATI was instituted and charged with the task of facilitating the birth of a national professional association. At the time it was expected that this association would take over the functions of NAATI, which itself was given a term of 5 years. On 1 July 1983, the restructured NAATI became a company limited by guarantee, owned by the nine governments of Australia. Its responsibilities were to be T&I accreditation, endorsement of qualifications, and registration. It had already devised a multilevel testing and accreditation program, which began operating at the beginning of the decade.

The second body planned to emerge from the restructure was the professional association. At this point, government ceased to fully fund NAATI and provide administrative support, expecting it to raise a large portion of its own operating funds. It was clear that no association could take over the work of accreditation, not only for financial reasons but also because of lack of coherence between the existing associations.

The transition to one Australia-wide association, set up essentially as a system of federated chapters, was not easy. Much time was spent arguing the pros and cons of having a single association; in the end almost all the existing associations decided to dissolve and become part of the association we have today. AUSIT was thus created through the work and financial support of NAATI, which facilitated a conference in Canberra in 1987 where the constitution and by-laws were created, and the Institute established.

An AUSIT National Council was appointed with representation from the State and Territory branches; the President and Executive Council would be appointed by the branches, rotating every two years. The draft constitution and bylaws of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators were endorsed at its inaugural national AGM at the Sydney Opera House in June 1988. AUSIT was incorporated in the A.C.T. Each branch appointed a Principal Delegate to represent it at National Council meetings, conducted quarterly via

teleconference until the advent of the internet helped to streamline communication. Annual General Meetings in the early 1990s were held in Melbourne, where the Institute had an office thanks to the generosity of the National Languages and Literacy institute of Australia (NLLIA).

In 1990 AUSIT became a member of FIT (the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs) and in 1996 the Institute hosted FIT's XV Triennial World Congress in Melbourne. This event came less than a year after the first international conference on what has come to be called 'community interpreting' was held in Canada, where Australia was able to showcase its work of the previous two decades in a field most of the rest of the world was only beginning to grapple with. FIT invited AUSIT to set up a Committee on Community Based Interpreting and in 1998/1999 the committee conducted an international survey of interpreters working in community settings. Nearly a decade later, in 2007, the first scientifically based survey of the profession in Australia was initiated by AUSIT and co-funded by Macquarie University, ASLIA(Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association) and AFDS (Australian Federation of Deaf Societies).

In 1998 some AUSIT NSW members approached Language Australia to establish a consortium to advise the Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee on language services provision for the 2000 Olympics. The consortium included several AUSIT members, and a number of the Institute's members contributed to the success of the Olympics and the Paralympics as interpreters, translators and editors.

The work of AUSIT has continually evolved over the last three decades, and its function as a professional association has seen it develop a number of initiatives such as the Jill Blewett Memorial Lecture, given in conjunction with each national AGM, the introduction of Excellence Awards, including student excellence awards, and the creation and revision of a Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct. It has introduced a nation-wide professional development program, an affiliate arrangement with several universities and TAFEs that teach interpreting and translation, a mentoring program and a system for the appointment of Institute Fellows. In recent years new membership categories have been added: Senior Practitioner, Student, and Retired categories. The Life Member award and the Legal and Medical specialist awards were also introduced recently.

Members exchange information and ideas through online forums and a quarterly magazine. In addition to the annual national conference, smaller conferences are regularly organised by individual branches. AUSIT members frequently participate in and present at relevant national and international conferences, and the Institute is represented on many external committees at both national and state levels. Members participate in the education of those who work with interpreters, briefing the legal and health professions and producing publications including guidelines for employers. AUSIT's members cover a wide range of areas, from court interpreting to literary translation, from conference interpreting to specialised technical translation and more. Many AUSIT members are included in NAATI's language panels which set and mark credentials tests, monitor courses and contribute to other relevant NAATI initiatives.

On the administrative side, AUSIT has a well-structured and efficient website providing the public and members with up-to-date information. The Institute employs administrators, to enhance its ability to deal efficiently with issues that come before it and to meet members' expectations. AUSIT works with educational institutions conducting training in interpreting and translating, as well as with NAATI, ASLIA and the union Professionals Australia, and has reciprocal membership arrangements with NZSTI, the New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters. It engages in dialogue with interpreting agencies, government and business entities, and makes submissions to government and to relevant inquiries about the work of interpreters and translators.

Above all, AUSIT is a community of translators and interpreters run by committed volunteers, where members provide each other with support and assistance and share knowledge, information and ideas.

Timeline

This timeline is not intended to be exhaustive; rather it serves as a brief guide to understanding how the T&I industry has developed. These are just a few of its many milestones.

- 1947 - First Commonwealth translating service established
- 1973 - The Department of Immigration establishes the first fee-free emergency telephone interpreting service for non-English speakers. It is the first worldwide.
- 1975 - The Western Australian Institute of Translators and Interpreters, WAITI, is founded in Perth. The oldest T&I association in Australia, it focuses on Western Australian issues, while also actively pioneering or contributing to initiatives affecting practitioners at the national level.
- 1977 - NAATI is established as a T&Iaccreditation body. It is the first of its kind worldwide.
- 1987 - AUSIT is founded when NAATI calls practitioners, educators and government language service provider representatives from around Australia to a meeting in Canberra to establish a national professional association.
- 1991 - ASLIA, based in NSW, is established as the national peak organisation representing the needs and interests of Auslan/English interpreters and Deaf (Relay) Interpreters in Australia. It encompasses the previously established State organisations, which continue to also exist independently.
- 1995 - First AUSIT Code of Ethics completed, endorsed by NAATI and adopted by AUSIT at its National Annual General Meeting. It is later adopted by all other Australian T&I associations.
- 1997 - ALiTrA, founded in the mid-1990s, begins publishing a journal with funding from the Literature Board of the Australia Council, showcasing the work of Australian translators.
- 2010 - ALiTrA changes name to AALITRA, the Australian Association for Literary Translation, reinforcing its position as a national organisation to promote interest in all aspects of literary translation.
- 2011 - APESMA (now Professionals Australia), supported by a network of 25,000 professionals and contractors Australia-wide, is the union chosen by a group of practitioners, in Victoria and other States, to represent the interests of T&I members. In 2014, it obtains ACCC authorisation to collectively negotiate the terms of

engagement for its T&I members who operate as independent contractors. Together with AUSIT and ASLIA, it was a member of the NAATI Transition Roundtable.

- 2012 - The Revised AUSIT Code of Ethics is written in recognition of the significant development and diversification of the field in Australia, and the growing attention to ethical issues in interpreting and translation around the world. This occurs in consultation with a working group of Australian academics, NAATI and the T&I professional associations.
- 2014 - AUTIF, the Australian University Translating and Interpreting Forum, is established by university educators, practitioners, and researchers from all over Australia, to showcase translation and interpreting at local, national and international levels.