

**Chairman's Report to the General Assembly  
Louvain-la-Neuve, September 2008**

1. For English speaking members of the Association the French term '*rapport moral*' is a little puzzling – is this to be a report of the chairman's activities? a review of the Association's current 'state of health'? a vision of the Association's role in the world or an account of the day to day activities of its officers and Governing Board members? In fact, it has elements of each of these but with emphasis on the notion of reflection on the current state of the Association and the direction in which it is heading.
2. Perhaps the best way forward is to take up where my predecessor, Jean-Louis Levesque, left off. His 2006 report, which is contained within the minutes of the last General Assembly at the Rheims Conference, took the form of a consideration of successes and challenges.
3. In terms of success, his starting point was the continued respect for the IAUTA constitution. While it would be wrong to suggest otherwise, I would only add that our constitution, which has the force of law, should always be used positively to facilitate the work of the Association and never to impede or delay its achievements. The constitution is a safeguard not a barrier.
4. In that same section of his report, Jean-Louis Levesque expressed the gratitude of the Association to AG2R for their constant support which is demonstrated in many day to day practical ways, not least of which in financial terms, of which more later. May I also add my sincere thanks for this continuing and generous support which manifests itself at both organisational and personal levels.
5. The second aspect of success recorded in the 2006 report was the extent to which the Association engendered positive interest in many different countries. In 2006 this was reflected in the invitations received by the President and to which he was able to respond. I am happy to report that this level of interest has continued to be a successful feature of the Association's life. Since 2006, and in addition to the day to day communication with members, there has been contact between IAUTA and U3As or similar organisations in over 20 different countries as well as with such international organisations as FIAPA<sup>i</sup> and the OECD.<sup>ii</sup> About half of these contacts have taken the form of invitations to participate in events. Your Chairman has responded to such invitations by addressing conferences in Scotland, Poland, Portugal and England, as well as by participating in the *OECD Global Forum on Education* held in the Dominican Republic and, in China, by way of a paper for distribution to some 100 delegates at an international conference in

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<sup>i</sup> The International Federation of Associations of Older People (Fédération Internationale des Associations de Personnes Agées)

<sup>ii</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

- Shanghai, which is taking place as I speak. (A further speaking engagement in the Czech Republic was only forestalled by illness.)
6. Enquiries regarding possible collaboration or in respect of research have been received from Poland, the Czech Republic, Singapore, Vietnam, Korea, the USA and the European Community. Development of U3As and potential membership of IAUTA has taken place in Nepal, India and Japan. All of these contacts have underlined the value of IAUTA as perceived by many individuals and associations across the world. It is also the outcome of initiatives taken by individual colleagues to whom I would wish to offer the warm thanks of the Association.
  7. The combined efforts of U3As in a number of different countries which, under the leadership of Prof. Paulin Duchesne, produced "*Europe united in its Proverbs*", were applauded in my predecessor's report. To this I can readily add further congratulation on the publication of a second volume "*European popular wisdom at the dining table and in the workplace*" which again represents a multi-national collaboration facilitated through IAUTA membership. This type of multi-national collaboration is a developing feature in the field of 3<sup>rd</sup> Age learning and I am pleased to note the participation of IAUTA members in such projects e.g. the eLiLL project to support the development of e-learning among senior citizens, based at the University of Ulm, Germany.
  8. IAUTA itself has not neglected ICT development. In order to facilitate contact between Governing Board members dispersed in distant countries, agreement was reached with the UK Open University to have free access to its newly developed system of video-conferencing, known as "*Flashmeeting*". This has not only enabled low cost meetings of Board members but also participation in seminars or conferences in Germany and India which, in the latter case, brought together simultaneously contributors from the UK, Australia and India.
  9. The Association's website had been the subject of important development during the previous administration but was to some extent impeded by being technically managed within AG2R where the primary concern was quite properly the demands of that organisation. In addition, the need for translation often exceeded the immediate capacity of the Association to respond. Accordingly, agreement was reached to release the website and its management directly into the hands of the Association where an expert volunteer took charge of technical maintenance of the site. This resulted in an updated bi-lingual site (French and English) [www.aiuta.org](http://www.aiuta.org) operated directly through the IAUTA office under the direction of the President. While this gave new impetus to the website, it has not yet been possible to bring it totally up to date. This situation has been exacerbated by the webmanager no longer being able to guarantee regular availability. Discussions are now on-going regarding the possibility of involving a professional website management company in order to maintain regular updating of the site which currently records some 100 'hits' per week.
  10. Finance has been and continues to be a major concern. Much time and effort has been taken up in trying to resolve the basic problem of a voluntary association whose income is almost entirely based on its members' subscriptions but whose ambitions are to be a major international player in the

world of 3<sup>rd</sup> Age learning. This difficult situation is compounded by a number of factors:

- The failure over a sustained period to keep subscriptions in line with increases in the cost of living index;
- Financial difficulties experienced by member organisations, particularly those in emerging nations;
- Intermittent payment of subscriptions;
- The difficulty of marketing an organisation which is several steps removed from the immediate focus of interest of individual members of U3As in different countries and
- The demands on those whose voluntary contribution to the administration and management of IAUTA sits alongside their more immediate local responsibilities.

11. My predecessor declared that this situation should be attended to as soon as possible. Although this recommendation has only recently come to light with the production of the written text of his report, our thinking was obviously on the same lines since, immediately on taking office, I opened discussions with AG2R to seek ways in which our principal financial liabilities could be lessened. I am pleased to report that this has been achieved in two steps by the very generous response of AG2R to reduce IAUTA's contribution to the salary of our administrative assistant who is an employee of AG2R on secondment to the Association for a proportion of her working time. The impact of this reduced financial burden has already begun to ease the financial situation. Two other consequences flow from this change in the Association's financial arrangements:

- The reduction of the availability of our administrative assistant places a concomitant increased demand on the Governing Board volunteers to deal directly with some of the Association's administration;
- Secondly, in recognition of the limitations of our budget but also of the opportunity offered by these changes, the Governing Board has resolved to ring-fence 50% of its income for non-administrative, educational activities.

The impact of these recent decisions should be positive but are not as yet visible.

12. Just as in my predecessor's case, I have to report some disappointments. Despite the best of intentions, it has not been possible to produce further issues of the IAUTA Newsletter "*Le Courrier de l'AIUTA*". The IAUTA three-fold leaflet has been reproduced locally in various languages e.g. in English but as yet has not benefited from a major revision in its form and content. These two publications are items for active consideration in the coming months.

13. The major disappointment has been in respect of the planned IAUTA Conference in Turin, Italy. Many hours of devoted consideration and planning including Presidential collaboration on site in Turin, have been frustrated by the failure of Italian sponsors to produce the promised financial support. This underlines the comments in the previous Chairman's report regarding the very heavy demands placed on those planning a major international conference such as ours and the need to consider a longer interval between such conferences. At the time of writing discussions are imminent in Turin to finally resolve the date for the postponed conference in April 2009. It is hoped

that an announcement will be made at the General Assembly at the end of September 2008.

14. On a happier note, however, I can report that, in addition to the Namur publications referred to above (*para 7*), IAUTA has inspired a travelling exhibition, organised by the U3A of Vannes, France, related to popular wisdom in Europe<sup>iii</sup> and also the translation into Spanish and Catalan of another Namur document entitled “*Mythology in the housewife’s shopping basket*”. There has also been joint research into the pedagogy of gerontology (*known as gerontagogy*) involving Belgian and Canadian colleagues and resulting from work undertaken at previous IAUTA conferences. Further IAUTA inspired activities include exchange visits between French and Italian U3As and the promotion of IAUTA at U3A federal conferences in Italy.
15. From all these various strands, what can be woven together to produce an image of IAUTA 2008 and a projection of its future development? As a voluntary organisation whose prime concern is development, collaboration and recognition of U3As worldwide, its achievements continue to fall short of its ambitions. However, this should not diminish the substantial impact it does have on an increasing number of organisations and individuals who recognise its unique position as an international representative body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Age learning.
16. I wish to pay tribute to all the many colleagues who through their membership, voluntary support and interest in IAUTA’s affairs make a vital contribution to the increasing recognition of the important role played by the Third Age in many countries. Finally, let me add my personal word of thanks for their support to the members of the Governing Board and to our administrative assistant, Bérengère Delli, whose contribution goes well beyond the terms of her contract.

Stanley Miller  
Evesham, September 2008

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<sup>iii</sup> Under the title “La Valse des Sentences” this exhibition is now being made freely available to U3As in other countries. Those interested should contact Vannes U3A.