

## PRESIDENTS REPORT

### A year of disruption and possibility

This has been a challenging year for Education, educators, students and educational researchers. AARE echoes the general population in applauding the amazing resilience and innovativeness of the education sector, and in hoping against hope that we are on the way out of lockdowns and the pandemic. As the sector struggles toward a new version of normal, other events are thrown into sharp relief, among them the introduction of a nationally funded Research organisation – the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). This is a government funded ‘national evidence body’ aiming to ‘generate high-quality evidence, make high-quality evidence accessible and enhance the use of evidence in Australian education’. The introduction of AERO will change the dynamic of funded education research and highlights what AARE has always promulgated - how vital interactions are between researchers, teachers and policy makers. Significant strides are being made by many schools in this direction as they invest in research and research skills development. Other shifts include changes in the way research is captured statistically. From 2020 much of the fragmentation of Field of Research *Education* codes (now division 39) were amended, but of particular significance was the creation of Division 45 *Indigenous Studies*. It will be very interesting to follow these developments and see what new research trends emerge. Clearly AARE would seek to be proactive in monitoring and responding to all such changes to achieve its mission. There have been numerous other developments within state jurisdictions, universities and schools. Many Australian universities have undergone structural changes involving course and program rationalisation and loss of students and staff. Schools, colleges and university campuses have moved rapidly to online teaching, accelerating a shift already in progress prior to Covid. At the same time there have been major changes in international relationships not least in respect of China. If there ever was a time for education academics and leaders to be adaptable, resolute and foresightful, it is now.

AARE too is facing a changing landscape. Covid presented Associations with financial risks and there are increasing risks inherent during a more litigative and transitioning period. As President, my primary role is to ensure the health and good governance of this Association, its operations and procedures. From the outset I have been mindful that the strength of an Association is in both its members and its Constitution. AARE has passed the 50 year mark. I am advised that the constitution has weaknesses borne of many years of small changes and the recommendation is that AARE adopt a new constitution which is ‘consistent with the Associations Incorporation Regulations 2008 (SA) and good governance principles’. I aspire to a strong constitution with clearly specified directions. Doing some groundwork for this is something I hope to pursue in my second year of the Presidency, along with a new Strategic Plan. This planning will align with the term of the incoming President Elect and the employment of our new service contract with FineHaus Management Pty Ltd.

It is with considerable sadness that, with our new contract with FineHaus, we say goodbye to an era, and the wonderful Deborah Cracknell. Deb has lived and breathed every success and challenge of the organisation, and has shown extraordinary efficiency, good humour, skills, knowledge, and deep interest in what we do as an Association. Deb, so ably assisted by Lisa Batten, will be very much missed. Lisa is leaving too, having taken on a university position. I am sure all members wish them both well and especially hope they have very happy times ahead in retirement and work. Amanda Mehegan will head up office services from hereon. Welcome Amanda and FineHaus and thank you in advance for your work at our final executive meeting and at the conference this November-December. This change also means we vacate our office in Canberra and take on a new address in Melbourne.

Covid posed many challenges for membership. With sinking hearts, the executive were aware that from the last quarter of 2020 we had a very small membership, as the graph below clearly indicates.



I am pleased to say, and with the conference standing committee's great work in conjunction with a strong conference response membership bounced back. I know Stewart Riddle and Amanda Heffernan were very disappointed they did not get to run the fantastic 50-year Conference last year, and we were all devastated that Covid also undermined the Hybrid conference this year. However the conference committee and SIG convenors planned for every contingency and so we have a fully online event with hubs in many places. This experimentation, planning and experience will serve AARE in good stead for years to come as we take on a range of digital possibilities in meetings. I am very excited to see how it comes together, to attend the keynotes, and to meet many of you in sessions and at special events.

We extend a big thank you RMIT and USQ for their support of the conference this year. RMIT for providing Jason Wong as a member of the Conference Standing Committee and for a group of volunteers for our zoom rooms. USQ for the zoom capacity for our multiple break out rooms and for volunteers to help throughout the whole conference. I can only underline how grateful we are for all this effort on behalf of members and the sustainability of the Association. We will seek to continue to build, and to increase efforts to ensure we support and showcase high quality research in all its forms and provide members with positive experiences, networks and fora.

This year we ran a Special General Meeting in May. The focus was accepting and responding to motions linked to the report of a working party convened to carry out the task of investigating issues connected with the environment of educational research and research workforce. The report they produced was: *The Growing Urgency of Attending to the State of Education Research in Australian Higher Education*. The minutes of that meeting are attached to these papers. You will note that an epilogue to that report is one of three motions circulated for the 2021AGM. That document should be noted with a vote of thanks. The third of the three motions from the members of the working Party needs extremely careful consideration in light of my aforementioned comments about prevalence of risk to Executive and the sustainability of AARE. To inform discussion of that motion prior to it being put at the AGM, the legal advice sought by the Executive Management Team has been circulated with the Agenda.

At the time of the Special General Meeting we had already agreed in Executive, to co-opt a leading researcher to the vacant Research Development Coordinator role. Associate Professor Anna Sullivan whose voluntary work with MCERA and timely detailed insights into trends in ARC grant outcomes in education accepted the position and has made a running start. She has followed up on early connections we made with AERO, recently setting up a Zoom conversation with that body for AARE members, as well as engaging energetically with a number of key groups and associations. Anna has already begun organising a summit of peak bodies to be held mid next year.

There are so many people to thank for going above and beyond in their work and support for AARE this year. I especially thank the Executive and will personally thank all those with special portfolios by name at the AGM. At this point I especially would like to thank lisahunter for her work on awards and Ilektra Spandagou for her dedicated co-ordination of the SIGS and the SIGS co-ordinators for the work they do for SIGS members. Congratulations too to Angelique Howell and Natalie Downes. They have received a wonderful response to the PGS/ECR pre-conference events. Finally, thank you to Deb Hayes as outgoing past president for her wise and continued counsel, to Michele Simons whose tireless work as Treasurer is so important to the Association and Nicole Mockler in her exemplary work for the *AER*.

To all members I wish you a stunning 2022 and thank you for the privilege of leading AARE. Thank you all.

Allyson Holbrook (Professor).

10/11/2021