

AARE Working Party *Protecting and Extending Research in Education in Australia:* Final Report to AGM 2021

Purpose of final report:

To place on the Association's record a report to members on the work of the Working Party 2018-2021, established by the Executive early 2018 arising from 2017 AGM motions.

Chronology of the Working Party:

At the **2017 annual conference**, an inter-generational symposium entitled "Governance failure in the Australian university sector: What's our politics?" highlighted key problems for educational research futures in higher education. The symposium noted challenges that arose from managerially-driven budget fixations, workload intensifications (including much that workload models keep invisible), and academic workforce restructurings resulting in job losses and exacerbating workload issues. The panel gave particular focus to consequences for early- and mid-career trajectories that include time and opportunity to grow research and scholarship capacities, in decent balance with teaching and administration workloads. This issue was taken up further in the meeting of the Professional and Higher Education SIG. Following both events, a large number of people (100+) attended the AARE AGM, where a statement on the problem was outlined and motions were put forward:

We, members who are in attendance at the 2017 AGM of AARE, support strategies that build broad participation in research and teaching for academics in the Australian tertiary sector.

We support academic staff across all levels having access to time, support, and work conditions that enable them to reach their potentials across service and engagement, research, teaching, and leadership.

We express our concern at the ongoing impact of policies that do not attend to these issues for the quality of educational research and teaching.

To that end, AARE membership asks:

- That the AARE Executive places this issue on its agenda and reports back to the broader AARE membership on possible responses in relation to this important issue.
- That when restructures occur, AARE will, where possible, release public statements in support of members and contest executive-managerial decisions that adversely affect the present and future of rich and viable teaching and research.

These motions were carried unanimously.

At the first AARE Executive meeting of **2018**, a Working Party was commissioned to investigate and follow up the issues, under Executive's power to establish Committees for particular purposes, envisaging a potential role for the Working Party as a Standing Committee of the Association in the longer term. During 2018, the Working Party conducted a literature review; developed and trialled a draft survey document; and conducted a special inter-generational workshop at the annual conference with volunteers from among the AARE membership, including the Immediate Past President and President of AARE, HDR, ECR, MCR, professoriate and senior researcher members from across the Australian university sector. This workshop enabled mapping of key issues and potential recommendations for AARE action, as well as informing changes to the draft survey.

These activities were reported to the Executive at all Executive meetings in 2018 and to membership in the 2018 Annual Report and at the 2018 AGM via the President's report. In addition, the Working Party contributed significantly to the AARE submission to the Coaldrake Review, contributed to the AARE submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Funding of Research, and liaised with BERA executive members who were considering similar issues in the UK context.

In 2019, reports on the work of the Working Party were made available to Executive meetings.

Zipin and Brennan wrote an *EduResearch Matters* blog post to promote discussion (January 29, 2019), titled *Universities are investing in teaching at the expense of research: Here's why we should fight it* (<https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=3635>).

The Working Party designed, trialled and administered a Survey entitled *Mapping Research Opportunities in the Field of Education in Australia*, with ethical clearance (VU HREC19-09). The online survey was notified to members and opened in June, with 162 responses, including over 1300 qualitative comments. The survey instrument was shared with BERA colleagues who agreed to send their work to the Working Party. Members of the Working Party met with BERA Executive members, at their request, during the 2019 ECER Conference to discuss shared work. AARE's Immediate Past President Annette Woods was invited to a special meeting of a sub-group of the BERA Executive during the BERA 2019 Conference to share AARE experience, report on Working Party research to date, and advise on BERA future plans.

At the 2019 AARE conference, Working Party members presented on survey findings in a symposium session. A combined Working Party meeting of AARE and BERA Executive members in attendance at the AARE Conference continued collaboration across the two contexts.

The Working Party reported on findings of the survey research at the AGM, receiving support and direction for continuing/expanding Working Party activities and membership. At the AGM the following motions were put to the meeting and voted upon. These Motions from the 2019 AGM were:

That at the 2019 AGM, the membership of AARE

1. Recognises and contests the 'new normal' of academic overwork, casualisation and the difficulty for many academics, especially early career and mid-career, to undertake research, to do good supervision, and to be able to balance teaching and research roles, as part of an appropriate academic workload.
2. Commissions the Working Party to continue investigations, following the Survey, especially of the effects of restructures and the ways in which the supposedly normative 40:40:20 workload model is eroding through working conditions and restructures, pointing to need for a politics of research and the relationship of research and teaching in balanced academic careers
3. Requests that the Working Party's agenda be a standing item at AARE Executive and AGM
4. Asks that AARE Executive work with the Working Party
 - (a) to design a media strategy as part of a public politics of education research around the release of the report from the Working Party which will be delivered to the Executive for consultation in January 2020; and
 - (b) to map out a strategy for continued work of the Working Party (including the expansion of Working Party membership).

These motions were carried unanimously. The Working Party notes that no Executive action was taken on motions 3 and 4.

In 2020, reports on the work of the Working Party were made available at each Executive meeting in January, May and November). In May draft findings and recommendations from the Final Report were made available for discussion at the Executive, with the Working Party seeking feedback. The final Working Party report was sent to AARE Executive in June. The full report was placed on the AARE's website for member access in late June, and this was advertised in a Members' Update and as a News Item on the AARE website. The Working Party was disappointed that no feedback was received from the Executive on the report or its recommendations.

In **July 2020**, the Working Party held a zoom with representatives of multiple education peak groups – including cADRE, ATEA, ACDE, AAUP, with a report to Executive, including suggested actions and strategies.

Ahead of the **final 2020** Executive meeting held before the annual conference, the Working Party submitted a progress report to the executive and also submitted a report to the 2020 AGM to fulfil responsibilities related to the motion of a standing item on the AGM Agenda, as carried at the 2019 AGM. However, this AGM report was not accepted by the Executive nor circulated to members because it included motions and we were told that all motions needed to precede the AGM by 21 days or more. There had been no call for motions for the AGM made to membership in 2020. As an alternative to discussion at the AGM, AARE Members attending the AGM were offered time following the official AGM to discuss Working Party findings and recommendations. Members at this discussion petitioned the Executive for a Special General Meeting on the basis of the Working Party report and motions (previously submitted for the AGM), which was read by the Working Party Chair in the discussion meeting. Members attending the online discussion gave assent to the Petition through the Chat function of the online meeting.

The Recommendations of the Working Party's Final Report were designed to address the objects/purposes of the AARE, as spelt out in its Constitution:

The objects of the Association are:

- to promote, support and improve research and scholarship in education;
- through the dissemination and application of research and scholarship in education, to enhance understanding of educational processes and the development of policy and practice at all levels; and
- to improve quality and equity in education within Australia, and more broadly where relevant.

These objects include recognising excellence in educational research, advocating on behalf of educational research, co-operating with other organisations on matters concerned with educational research, and promoting co-operation among educational researchers nationally and internationally.

<https://www.aare.edu.au/assets/documents/AARE-Constitution-and-By-laws-v3-small.pdf>

The recommendations recorded in the Final Report are as follows:

1. *That AARE advocate for education research with key governance bodies, seeking collaboration with other professional associations, recognising the difficulties of the sector as a whole while insisting that research is central to teaching quality, to a quality university sector, and to the capacities of citizens educated through universities to deal with social, environmental, health, economic and political problems. Particular issues requiring public naming, contestation and advocacy include:*
 - a. *Restriction of HDR, ECR and MCR research trajectories through funding and institutional practices of workloads, governance, competitive and unrealistic performance measures;*
 - b. *Growing numbers of casual, teaching-only and research-only staff as the default setting for appointments or transfers of existing staff, diminishing the teaching & research academic fraction, with consequences for succession-planning, career trajectories and the future of Australian research and teaching quality in education and other fields;*
 - c. *Inappropriate measures, based on the sciences, used for judgement of research quality in education, and other humanities and social science fields, rather than international peer review*
 - d. *Inadequate workload allocations and invisible work that restrict capacity to undertake research and collaboration across institutions and internationally*

- e. *Through all the above, the narrowing of the purposes and contribution of universities for Australia, with too strong an emphasis on vocational skill formation rather than capacitating citizenry to work within uncertain futures and new knowledge creation.*
2. *That AARE work with Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and others with responsibility for education academic work to document and assess medium and longer-term implications for education research capacity. A past model for this engagement is available in the Strategic Alliance project between AARE, ACDE and ATEA that investigated strengthening a research-rich teaching profession in Australia.*
3. *That, in light of the consistent and rapid changes in education, accelerated by the Pandemic, AARE lobby for an education-specific research fund, commensurate with student numbers, and the importance of the field to Australian and global needs and purposes. This recognises that strong research cultures are important for education workforces across all levels.*
4. *That AARE expand the Working Party on supporting and capacitating the future of education research as a regular standing committee of the executive. (https://www.aare.edu.au/assets/documents/AARE-WorkingParty_Report-4Wed-June24-2020.pdf. p9)*

The Working Party recognised that the urgency of issues facing universities in Australia and the field of education research had only expanded as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We saw the escalation of impacts of the changing sector as challenging the ways of working of a voluntary membership organisation – making it both more needed and more difficult to address the complexity of issues.

In late **January 2021**, the Working Party approached the President about the Special General Meeting (SGM) arrangements, given that the meeting would need 21 days notification to members and should be held within 3 months of the petition, according to the constitution. A Zoom meeting with the AARE President and Chair and another member of the Working Party was held on March 9. The Working Party had further Zoom meetings and prepared briefing papers which were provided to Executive in March. **Executive met on April 14**, and the President communicated to the Working Party that the following motions had been passed:

1. *That the SGM be called, after consultation with you, for at the earliest one day in the week beginning 10 May.*
2. *That the current vacant Executive role of Research Development Coordinator be expanded to include leadership of advocacy for AARE. This role will be the Research Development and Advocacy role on the Executive.*
3. *That once someone has been appointed to this role, their first task would be to convene a Standing Committee on Policy Advocacy that reports to executive and to a standing item on the AGM agenda*
(Email Allyson Holbrook to Working Party members, cc Executive 14 April 2021).

The email went on to say:

The Executive noted again that they greatly appreciate all the work that the Working Party have put into identifying the key challenges facing Educational research, and this is reflected in our voting today for a dedicated executive role to enable this momentum to continue within the executive, especially in light of even more recent developments in the sector.

The SGM was held by Zoom in May 2021. Motions that had been put forward by the Working Party, with one amended by negotiation between The WP and Executive, along with motions to endorse action proposed by the Executive were passed. (See SGM Minutes.)

Once the co-option of Anna Sullivan to the vacant executive portfolio of Research and Development was announced in an AARE update (31/8/2021), the Working Party approached her and a zoom meeting was held with her and the new Secretary, John Lester, to discuss the Standing Committee on 14/10/2021.

In conclusion: Ways forward

The Working Party members see even more urgency in the Advocacy role of the organisation, not only broadly for supporting and defending the field of education research but also for members of the Association. We have lost members to university restructuring and downsizing, including redundancies and the increase in teaching-only positions. Career pathways that include adequate time for research and research cooperation are being severely restricted across the country – occurring prior to our report, during Covid and continuing. Institutional managerial authoritarian practices, poor funding and policy framings have also restricted democratic participation in decisions affecting universities, internally and more broadly.

The key dangers for the field of education research in Australia identified by members in our discussions, workshops, survey and personal communications were reported in our report (p.8) as:

- *poor infrastructure for developing ECR and MCR capacity and the inter-generational injustice involved in current approaches;*
- *loss of numbers of those able to undertake research in education, build research track records sufficient to attract grants and supervise HDR students well;*
- *casualisation of academic work, often disaggregating tasks;*
- *breaking the research-teaching nexus, with implications for lowered quality teaching for the kinds of knowledge-abilities needed in the current and future society;*
- *education research, along with scholarship in humanities and social sciences (HASS) more generally, being judged by criteria developed for other disciplines such as the sciences, resulting in marginalisation of HASS research. This is occurring at a time when inter-disciplinarity is being foregrounded, and there are urgent social issues requiring transdisciplinary attention in Australian society;*
- *reduced experience of education and education research among leadership including those in roles of heads of school and Deans of Faculties. This translates to an unfamiliarity with the work and networks required of quality education researchers, and a lack of representation of education-specific issues in senior forums of the university. This is despite the significant percentage of students, both domestic and international, who are enrolled in education programs, including research degrees.*

These broader challenges signal the need for rethinking the practices in a voluntary membership organisation such as AARE. Portfolio traditions may need to rework how they support members, contribute to advocacy and enhance understanding of education and education research. Communication and participation strategies for members are likely to need to alter. Monitoring, collaborative work with other associations, speaking out on key issues and changes to conditions for members' capacity to undertake quality research and support of members are thus central to the work of the Executive, its portfolio groups, and Standing Committee/s. Further Working Parties may well be needed to undertake specific, short-term tasks.

In finishing our work, the Working Party is pleased to have done so with and for our colleague members. We look forward to further collegial, democratic dialogue, analysis and action for our field of education research.

From:

The AARE Working Party *Protecting and Extending Research in Education in Australia*

Members: Marie Brennan (Chair), Amy McPherson, Annette Woods, Bev Rogers, Gregory Martin, Lew Zipin, Rosie Barron and Sophie Rudolph.

October 28, 2021.