



General Manager's Report

Annual General Meeting October 14, 2023

I joined Learning Difficulties Australia in May this year, at the beginning of our ambitious and visionary journey towards long-term organisational alignment, sustainability and growth. For the first two months of my tenure, I engaged in an extensive review of the rich history of our organisation and spoke individually with the LDA Executive, Council, Committee Members, Consultants, Members, Staff and Partnership organisations to garner feedback on our organisation's purpose, strategic positioning and future ambitions.

It was quickly evident to me that LDA's family comprises many philanthropic, proactive, professional and passionate people. Although LDA did not have a formal 'Strategic Plan', there was remarkable alignment at every level regarding LDA's purpose and key priorities. Within weeks of joining the organisation, I was also able to appraise, first-hand, our complex administrative processes. LDA's Business Administrator, Bec Rangas' extended annual leave gave me an opportunity to identify process efficiencies requiring immediate prioritisation and investment. It also gave me a deep appreciation of the important role that LDA plays in supporting our members' common goal to ensure that all students with learning difficulties have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

As is highlighted in this year's President's Report and Treasurer's Report, the Financial Year to June 2023 has been one of consolidation and preparedness for this next exciting stage of LDA's journey. The Financial Statements record that the end of FY2023 result was an operating deficit, driven by an increase in overhead and operational expenses. This was always expected, with the impact of structural changes to the business model only starting to take effect in the next financial year. We anticipate that the end-of-year result for FY2024 will see considerable progress towards sustainable long-term financial growth.

We are excited to share news of our new 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, which focuses and prioritises the work of the organisation on key initiatives that align with our Purpose, Vision, Mission and Values. It is therefore fitting that this General Manager's Report is oriented towards the future of LDA and the plans we are making to amplify our impact.

Amplifying Our Impact: 2024-2027 Strategic Plan

LDA is a valued partner to hundreds of teachers and professionals dedicated to assisting students with learning difficulties. LDA's efforts over the past half-century have been inspired by an unwavering purpose to ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach their potential. As an organisation run by and for education professionals, we strive to raise awareness of evidence-based practices that best support students with learning difficulties.

As with all of our valued social institutions, LDA faces challenges in remaining sustainable and relevant as we move deeper into the twenty-first century. As the pace of change, both social and technological, continues its relentless acceleration, it is essential that our organisation evolves to reflect the needs and character of our changing world. The strategy detailed in our 2024-2027 Strategic Plan responds to those changes but is also strongly rooted in the rich history of our organisation.

Importantly, *Amplifying Our Impact* seeks to re-prioritise our resource allocations to better deliver on our mission. This proactive focus will ensure that students with learning difficulties are supported at every stage in their educational journey, and not just once they have been left behind. Fundamental to this proactive focus is amplifying our role as an advocate for better understanding, recognition and implementation of high-quality inclusive education practices across the education sector.

● Financial Sustainability

We are committed to a disciplined approach to financial stewardship founded on strong principles of strategic, operational and financial planning. The 2024-2027 Strategic Plan highlights several opportunities to improve our financial sustainability, including income diversification through sponsorship, advertising and third-party collaboration/partnerships. We will continue to drive our membership value proposition to remain competitive in an increasingly saturated educational and training market. We will also invest strategically in growing awareness of our organisation to fuel Membership, Professional Development and Conference revenue.

In the context of this highly competitive environment, we will also develop a financially sustainable model for our operations. Operating losses in 2022-23 are systemic (driven by overhead costs in excess of income generated) and will be addressed in LDA's 2024 Business Model and Budgets.

- **Strategies for Growth**

The 2024-2027 Strategic Plan identifies 3 key Strategic Imperatives for growth. These are: 1. Strengthen Profile & Reputation; 2. Enhance Value Proposition; and 3. Diversify and Secure Funding. These priorities position LDA for long-term financial sustainability and focus LDA's resources on core activities that will achieve its Vision and Mission.

Strengthen Profile & Reputation

LDA will develop a strong reputation in **Advocacy** to ensure we build a deep and long-lasting impact on local, state and federal policies. We will increase our impact and influence by leveraging our membership network, industry alliances and collaborations with new industry partners.

We will grow brand awareness and quickly establish a national profile and presence by communicating a **Compelling LDA Story**. Low awareness of LDA in the education sector is the chief barrier to membership growth and Professional Development (PD) course/conference attendance. These two revenue streams are key to LDA's financial sustainability and profitable growth. The majority of LDA's expenses are fixed overheads (staff, general admin and journal fees), therefore increases in membership and PD/conference attendance deliver additional revenue that goes directly to the bottom line.

Enhance Value Proposition

LDA operates in an increasingly competitive environment, where our key sources of income (membership, PD and conferences) are all under threat from competitors whose brand awareness, national coverage, free resources, and corporate sponsorships position them at a significant advantage. To co-exist and thrive in this increasingly competitive environment, we will review and restructure LDA's membership packages and PD/conference model, and seek additional income streams from partner organisations and collaborators.

PD courses and conferences have traditionally been LDA's strongest revenue drivers. In the increasingly competitive education and training environment, these elements of

LDA's Business Model are most under threat. Our new PD/conference model focuses on 3 key principles - accessibility, loyalty, and quality.

Our PD and conference calendar will be published on our website and social media channels on a rolling 6-monthly basis to ensure that teachers and professionals can lock in LDA PD when they are developing their personal development plans. We will grow our On-Demand PD Platform to ensure that quality PD is available to our members and non-members to suit their availability and meet their specific learning needs. We will strive to hold two LDA conferences per year to provide a deep dive into key themes and networking opportunities.

We will reward attendance across multiple PD courses and conferences through loyalty incentives (e.g., discounts, access to mentoring, and partner benefits). Where possible, we will book presenters for multiple courses (series) to promote multi-course bookings and drive administrative efficiencies.

We will maintain the academic and vocational rigour of our PD courses as a key differentiator versus competitors whose free blogs and PD are often less structured. We will also seek accreditation for PD courses that are to be added to our On-Demand PD Platform.

Diversify and Secure Funding

LDA's brand awareness and profile is a key barrier to growth, therefore our 2024-2027 Strategic Plan proposes that LDA 'borrows' awareness from higher profile, nationally recognised partners who share a common goal. We will seek to collaborate with like-minded partner competitors (i.e., Aispeld and Think Forward Educators) on at least one PD course/conference per quarter to cross-promote our services to our membership databases. We will also target third-party PD and training providers, whose products and services are aligned with LDA's evidence-based approach. Through cross-promotion of services to our networks and membership/customer databases, LDA will strive for win/win outcomes with partners and collaborators. We have also committed to developing a Sponsorship and Advertising strategy, for trial in the last quarter of 2023 (RTI Conference) and roll-out in 2024.

A final tenet of LDA's growth strategy is a new foray into Fundraising. This missional activity leverages LDA's charity status and positions LDA for PBI status in the future (where a direct impact on "people in need" must be demonstrated). The proposed benevolent fund provides direct assistance to students with learning difficulties by funding private tutor support. This also provides LDA with a PR opportunity that can drive brand awareness and possibly align with partners and collaborators.

In Closing

My deepest thanks to outgoing President, Elaine McLeish, whose boundless energy, advice and organisational knowledge have been so invaluable throughout my onboarding. The Executive, Council and Staff are indebted to Elaine for her tireless work as custodian of our Constitution, her long hours of planning, preparation and prioritisation, and her collaborative and efficient chairing of our Executive and Council meetings. Whilst these have been hallmarks of her Presidency, on a personal note, I also thank Elaine for her incredible generosity, good humour and towering support.

Thank you to the LDA Executive, Council, Committee Members, Membership and Staff for your warm and generous welcome, and for the work you each do day in and day out. I am proud to be a part of this organisation and look forward to contributing to creating a bright and sustainable future for LDA.

Dr Sherree Dawn Halliwell

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sherree Dawn Halliwell', written in a cursive style.

LDA General Manager

October 2023