

## **PRESIDENTS REPORT TO THE 2023 AGM**

I have felt honoured to be the President of LDA in 2022/23 and have enjoyed working with such an amazing group of volunteers and staff. Since the last AGM, we have made great progress in many of our priority areas, which I have been privileged to be part of and to report on at this meeting. It has been a year of consolidation and laying the foundations for our future viability with the crucial recruitment of staff, a new Strategic Plan, new Committee structures, continuing upgrades to the website, and much-needed improvements to our financial and accounting systems.

My colleagues on the Executive have all provided great service to LDA and made my job much more manageable. We met monthly, but much more frequently when we were selecting our new General Manager. The business backgrounds of our VP, Geoff Ongley, and Treasurer, Iain Rothwell, have been indispensable in many of the issues and decisions we have dealt with this year. Our other VP, Dr. Robyn Wheldall, continues to provide us with her knowledgeable and invaluable advice about all things related to learning difficulties and LDA.

A special mention to Steph Murphy for agreeing to take on the Secretary role at very short notice, having only been on Council for about two weeks! Her organisational strengths, record-keeping, minute-taking and quick-thinking skills have contributed enormously to the smooth functioning of this term of Council, including this AGM.

### **1. STAFFING**

Most importantly, all our staff positions are now filled with three outstanding people. The proposal to recruit a part-time Education Manager (3 days a week) and a part-time General Manager (2 days a week) was approved by the 2021/22 Council. This decision was part of a growth strategy to keep our organisation viable and in a position to continue our commitment to “...assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research, both in the classroom and through individualised instruction” (from our website)

**Hema Desai**, our new Education Manager, started in the position in December 2022 and, since then, has accomplished much and demonstrated outstanding initiative, professionalism, knowledge and flexibility in adapting to our sometimes cumbersome decision-making processes. Many of you will have encountered Hema online at one of the many Professional Development sessions she has organised so effectively since February or possibly in person at the very successful inaugural Anne Barton Memorial Maths session at the Treacy Centre.

I thank her sincerely for all she contributes to LDA, including the reinvigorated E-news she produces monthly. I am always particularly grateful when I notice the now regular deposits from Trybooking into our account, all generated by her excellent work, the PD Convenor and Committee, and our other staff.

We welcome Hema's attendance at our 2023 AGM for what we are confident will be the first of many.

**Dr. Sherree Halliwell** joined us as our new General Manager in May, and we look forward to her first report to our AGM. We also look forward to meeting her in person after five months of regular Zoom meetings and countless phone calls. Sherree comes to us after a successful career in the private sector with high-level management experience. She has extensive experience in not-for-profit roles and has recently completed her PhD studies.

Working closely with Sherree via weekly or twice-weekly phone contact, monthly Executive meetings, and innumerable emails has been one of my most rewarding tasks as President. I have learnt a lot from her and greatly respect the invaluable expertise she brings to the role. She is always readily available, is a great problem solver, is genuinely dedicated to LDA and puts in far more of her time than two days a week. Having Sherree on board has already reduced the workload of volunteers, especially mine.

You will learn much more about the work Sherree has been doing in her report to this meeting. Still, I want to mention her enormous work in developing our new Strategic Plan and facilitating full collaboration with the Executive and the Council. Also well worth mentioning is the cover she and Hema provided when our Business Administrator, Bec Rangas, was on leave for seven weeks. Bec's role is highly diverse, and Sherree and Hema did impressive work familiarising themselves with a multitude of new tasks and managing the increased workload while ensuring their own work remained on track.

Our erstwhile Administration Officer, **Bec Rangas**, following a successful 12-month performance review in November 2022, is now our Business Administrator. Most of you will have had contact with Bec at some stage and be well aware of her wide-ranging skills and the commitment she brings to her work for LDA. We all owe Bec an enormous debt of gratitude for her support to all Council members, Committee Convenors, the Executive, and the membership at large. Personally, as a non-digital native, Bec's unfailing patience when assisting me with technology has been exemplary and hugely appreciated.

As was anticipated and as you will notice in the Financial reports, the cost of our increased staffing has contributed to a decline in our financial position. In the reporting period to the end of June 2023, the staffing costs included our full-time Business Administrator for the whole year, our Interim General Manager, Adrian Nolan, for three months, our Education Manager for six months and our new General Manager for two months. The reporting period also only includes roughly four months of activity in the ever-expanding Professional Development calendar of events created by Hema. With more income anticipated through our PD events, increasing membership, and implementing the new Strategic Plan, we are confident that this will cover the staffing costs in future.

## **2. MEMBERSHIP**

Membership numbers have been fluctuating in recent years. At the 2021 AGM, it was reported that the total membership, including non-voting members, had increased from around 500 to over 800, the highest on record. This was seen to be a result of the successful Weekly Wednesday Webinars PD series and an increased social media presence.

In early October 2022, immediately before our last AGM, the total membership was 707.

At the end of September 2023, we are thrilled to be back to 818 members, exactly the same as our previous record.

### 3. SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Thanks to Bec and Hema, our social media reach has expanded significantly in this council term, as shown in the data provided by Bec

	2022	2023	
	22nd Dec 2022	18th Sep	% increase since Dec 2022
LinkedIn	572	854	49.3%
Twitter	3,531	3625	2.7%
Facebook	8,534	10334	21.1%
Instagram	10	249	2390%
		<b>Ave. Incr.</b>	615.8%
		<b>Excl. Insta.</b>	24.4%

### 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE WORK OF OUR COMMITTEES

#### Publications

Dr Alison Madelaine continues her excellent work as our Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties Editor, with the much-appreciated support of Assistant Editor Kim Knight. This publication helps keep us up-to-date with current educational research and is a highly valued resource for our members.

The Bulletin, always welcome for its informative articles, has tackled some important issues this year. Julie Scali stepped up to take over the editorship of this publication in the 2022/23 Council and is now ably assisted by our part-time copy editor, Kate Laister. We are enormously grateful to Julie for her work on the Bulletin and for maintaining its high standards.

#### Professional Development

There has been so much happening in the PD space that it would take too long to mention everything. You will undoubtedly have noticed the increase in our PD offerings through regular communications on E-news, social media, and emails. I have already acknowledged the work of our Education Manager. Still, our PD Convenor, Jacinta Conway, and the Committee members have also contributed many hours working with Hema to generate ideas, assist with planning and implementation, and present sessions. Not to forget the always reliable administrative support provided by Bec.

As reported previously, In October 2022, the Linnea Ehri events in Melbourne and Sydney were a great success. This year's highlights have included the Morph Mastery sessions, NCCD for teachers and the Unlocking Numeracy event at the Treacy Centre.

As of the end of September, the total number of registrations for paid events is 1285. Well done, and many thanks to all involved.

## **Consultants**

Dr Anne Bellert has now taken over as Convenor of this Committee following a handover period as co-convenor with me. Felicity Brown has taken on the Consultant Registrar duties. This sharing of responsibilities has helped to reduce the burden on the Convenor.

A session on the NCCD for Consultants was very well received. This was a free event, presented by one of our Consultants and with other Consultants and a Council member generously sharing their expertise in a QandA.

After much of the Committee's previous planning was interrupted by Covid-19, it was great to finally meet again in person at the Treacy Centre for a Maths PD in memory of our late colleague Anne Barton. A donation from Anne's family partly funded this event.

Anne's extensive resources were also donated and available on the day for attendees to select from.

Thanks to Anne and Felicity for managing this important and often complex area of LDA.

Maintaining high standards for new Consultant applicants and annual renewal of Consultant membership can be challenging and time-consuming.

Although much smaller in number these days, Consultants continue to be very loyal and engaged members through our Consultant Networks and with high attendance rates at our PD and AGMs.

## **IT/Systems**

Web development priorities continue to be rolled into production, including automated membership renewal reminders, freeing up much administration time. The amount of work Geoff Ongley puts into this area is incalculable, and I don't know where we would be without him.

## **Awards**

Eleanor McMillan has done great work as the new Convenor of this Committee, developing extensive documentation of procedures, timelines, and templates in this critical, high-profile area. She has been ably assisted by Alison Madelaine, who, as the editor of the AJLD, is responsible for their awards. Our thanks go to Eleanor, Alison, and the various members of the judging panels for their time and effort in ensuring a high standard of awardees.

## **5. ADVOCACY**

### **NSRA submission**

Our Vice President, Robyn Wheldall and Secretary, Stephanie Murphy, collaborated to prepare a submission for the National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA). This agreement extends invitations to principal stakeholders, urging their active engagement in outlining the key challenges and opportunities in Australian education. This executive team felt this was a key advocacy opportunity for LDA to contribute to the discussion. The promotion of Response to Intervention frameworks, Science of Reading and Learning pedagogies, explicit instruction, engaging school environments, and a commitment to the Primary Reading Pledge were at the forefront of our recommendations for a better and fairer education system.

### **Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria**

Robyn and Steph were joined by Julie Scali to work on a submission from LDA, due on 13 October. The submission will be shared with the wider LDA community in the next e-newsletter.

## 6. NEW COUNCIL FOR 2023/24

Following the call for Council nominations, we received one nomination for each of the five Honorary Officer/Executive positions and nine nominations for the nine ordinary members. There was, therefore, no need for a ballot. Those nominated and therefore elected to Council are as follows:

### **Honorary Officers/Executive**

President; Geoff Ongley NSW

Vice President 1: Dr.Robyn Wheldall (bank signatory) NSW

Vice President 2: Elaine McLeish (bank signatory) VIC

Secretary: Steph Murphy (bank signatory) VIC

Treasurer: Iain Rothwell (bank signatory) NSW

### **Ordinary members**

Dr.Alison Madelaine NSW

Felicity Brown VIC

Eleanor McMillan ACT

Julie Scali WA

Dr.Damon Thomas QLD

Erin Rollason VIC

Laura Glasson WA

Dr. Siobhan Merlo QLD

The stability and continuity this provides will ensure a smooth transition and no casual vacancies to fill, as was required in both 2021 and 2022. I look forward to continuing my involvement with the LDA Council and the Executive team as one of the two Vice Presidents. I am most grateful to Geoff Ongley for agreeing to be nominated for the position of President, and I congratulate him on his appointment. Geoff has already shown extraordinary commitment to LDA, spending countless hours on website improvements. He is well-positioned to take on this leadership role through his active involvement in all the 2022/23 Council and Executive activities. I know that everyone on the Council, including myself, will enjoy working with him as our new President.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SERVICE

**Jacinta Conway** has worked tirelessly for LDA in the two years she has been on Council. As a newcomer in 2021/22, she very soon found herself convening two very busy Committees-Professional Development and Website. Jacinta played a crucial role in the planning and eventual success of the Linnea Ehri events in October 2022, committing countless volunteer hours. In 2022/23, she continued her dedicated PD Committee leadership. She was actively involved in the successful recruitment of Hema Desai as Education Manager and has worked closely with Hema over the past ten months in developing an impressive calendar of events. Her commitment has included attending most of these events to provide technical support.

I know her work for LDA has taken much time away from her family, and I fully understand her desire to take a break. I also know that everyone who has worked with Jacinta, including myself, will miss her enormously, wish her all the best, and hope to see her back on the Council in the not-too-distant future.

We also farewelled another member of the Council early in this term. **Melanie Henry** joined the 2021/22 Council as an ordinary member, where her expertise in governance issues was much appreciated. Mel then stepped up to the Secretary role in the current Council but unfortunately resigned in November because of increased work, family and study commitments. As Secretary, Mel demonstrated excellent administration skills and a fine eye

for detail. We were sorry to lose her, wish her all the best and would welcome her back on Council in future if her other commitments permit.

## **8. WELCOME TO OUR NEW COUNCIL MEMBER FOR 2023/24**

We are pleased to welcome Dr Siobhan Merlo as the new member of the next council. Siobhan has much to offer LDA as an experienced Psychologist and Learning Intervention Teacher who has worked in the field for over 20 years. She lectured in numerous subjects as part of the Masters of Learning Intervention at the University of Melbourne and designed and developed the Specific Learning Difficulties in Numeracy subject. Siobhan is currently a Senior Product Developer and member of the MultiLit Research Unit.

## **9. HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIPS**

These awards are in recognition of special services to the association. We have not granted any new Life Members since 2017, but the Executive made two recommendations to the Council this year. Both were approved unanimously.

It is my great pleasure to announce that Honorary Life Membership has been awarded to **Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM** in recognition of his exceptional services to the Association over many years. Kevin became a member of LDA in 2000 and joined the Council in 2004. He was VP in 2005, President in 2006 and 2007, Executive Editor of LDA publications from 2006, and responsible for the AJLD becoming a Taylor and Francis publication and establishing the AJLD awards. He was a joint editor of the Bulletin from 2005 for many years and again from 2012 to 2014. Kevin was awarded the Mona Tobias Award in 2009 and received a Special LDA Anniversary Award in 2015 in recognition of his outstanding contributions to LDA Publications from 2005 to 2014

I am also delighted to announce that **Dr. Roslyn Neilson** has been awarded an Honorary Life Membership for her special services to the Association. Ros has been a member of LDA for over 20 years and has served in three Council terms. Ros was a regular contributor to the Bulletin and became part of the editorial team from 2015 to 2020 and then an outstanding editor from 2021 to her retirement in 2022. In the 2021/22 Council, Ros provided excellent service as Secretary and had a heavy workload, contributing significantly across many areas of LDA at a time when the Executive team was depleted. Ros was awarded the Mona Tobias Award in 2016.

Congratulations to them both for these well-deserved awards

## **10. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AWARDS FOR 2023**

AJLD Eminent Researcher Award - Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM

LDA Mona Tobias Award- Julie Phillips

LDA Bruce Wicking Award- Julie Mavlian

LDA Rosemary Carter Award- Ann Ryan

LDA Tertiary Student Award- Elvira Kalenjuk

LDA Tertiary Student Highly Commended- Shae Marie Wissell

You will find more information about our current and past award winners on our website. Congratulations to all this year's Award recipients, and we look forward to hearing presentations from all recipients after the AGM.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all our members for their continuing support of LDA and my colleagues for all the advice and encouragement they have given me over the last 12 months. Serving as President of LDA has been both a challenge and a privilege, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

**Report prepared by:**

Elaine McLeish



LDA President

30/09/2023