

President's Report

Annual General Meeting October 22, 2022

Welcome to all our members, attending in person or joining online from around Australia. We have not been able to meet in person since 2019 due to the COVID pandemic and it is significant that we can gather today. First, I would like to thank all members for your continuing support of Learning Difficulties Australia. We are only as strong as the members that make up LDA. We are fortunate indeed to have a deep well of experience and commitment in our member body; professionals working in a variety of roles and settings but all with one goal front of mind – to ensure that children and individuals with learning difficulties are enabled to overcome barriers to their learning and to experience success at school and beyond.

LDA has enjoyed a successful year, culminating in our Annual General Meeting where we celebrate the achievements of the year and honour individuals who have made a significant contribution to the education of children with learning difficulties.

As an association we are extraordinarily honoured that Professor Linnea Ehri has joined us to accept the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* Eminent Researcher Award. What a privilege to welcome Linnea to Australia. When I reached out into the internet to contact Linnea late last year to see if she would be prepared to come to Australia, I was not very optimistic that it would happen. To my absolute delight, Linnea responded quickly and with enthusiasm at the prospect. We are so looking forward to what she has to say to us today, as well as at the professional learning events to be held tomorrow and in Sydney on Tuesday. Linnea Ehri's decades and decades of research has helped us understand the processes involved in learning to read. This in turn helps us to know how to teach children how to read. Children who are most likely to face difficulties in acquiring the all-important skill of reading are at the heart of LDA's mission. We will also be celebrating our other LDA and AJLD award recipients today and we welcome them and their guests. We are very grateful for the passion and expertise our award recipients bring to their work for the benefit of all.

LDA Professional Development

Significant achievements in the LDA year have been our successful online Science of Writing workshop series held over six weeks in October and November last year. This was an extremely well subscribed event and all the members of the PD Committee worked hard in bringing the event together shortly after becoming the Council. This team was led by Kristin Anthian as Convenor and included Kate de Bruin, Eleanor McMillan, Geoff Ongley, Bec Rangas and Robyn Wheldall. Jacinta Conway became co-convenor of the PD committee with me after the Science of Writing ended in November. In March we hosted an online full-day conference on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), bringing together researchers and practitioners committed to ensuring that whatever a student's needs might be, they are met in a timely and effective fashion. I would like to thank Dr Kate de Bruin who worked closely

with Jacinta Conway to bring this successful day about and for the rest of the PD Committee for ensuring it was a successful day. There was a lot of enthusiasm generated including a call from our panel host, Jackie French, for a manifesto to promote the cause of making reading achievable for every child (see September issue of the *Bulletin*, piece co-edited by Jackie French and Julie Scali).

As already mentioned, we are excited about the next few days where hundreds of participants will engage in full-day programs of professional learning with Linnea Ehri, our award recipients among others, and our colleagues from the Macquarie University Centre for Reading. I would like to pay tribute to the Professional Development Committee under the leadership of Jacinta Conway and Kristin Anthian over the course of the last Council year. At this point I would also like to thank Dr Ros Neilson most sincerely for her work with Jacinta in bringing together the Linnea Ehri and Friends events in Melbourne and Sydney. These events, which are enjoyed by members and non-members alike, are a very important part of LDA's mission to disseminate evidence-based information on the most effective ways to teach. None of this would happen without all the work that goes on 'beyond the scenes'. We are so fortunate to have our Administration Officer, Bec Rangas, making it all happen like clockwork and I would like to pay tribute to, and thank, Bec for her work in this and all the other areas of LDA's operation. We have also really valued and benefitted from the huge contribution that Geoff Ongley of Training 24/7 and Get Reading Right has made on the technical front. This has extended well past the work involved in hosting online and hybrid events. Geoff has been a generous volunteer on the IT front all year. We are delighted that Geoff has recently joined us on Council as a Vice-President and Convenor of the IT and Systems Committee.

LDA Publications

LDA members rate the publications that they receive as part of their membership very highly and as one of the many excellent reasons that they are members of the association. Under the leadership of Dr Molly de Lemos AM as Convenor of the Publications Committee, three issues of the LDA *Bulletin* have been released over the course of the Council year (since September 2021) and two issues of the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (AJLD) have been published. These publications are of tremendous importance in terms of professional learning and are a distinguishing feature of LDA member benefits. A huge thanks to Dr Ros Neilson who has been the editor of the *Bulletin* over the past two and a half years and who is retiring from this role (as well as the role of LDA Secretary). We are so grateful indeed for all the work that Ros has done for LDA over recent years. I would also like to thank the editors of the AJLD, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM and Dr Alison Madelaine, ably assisted by Dr Nicola Bell. Kevin and Alison have a long history with LDA publications having edited the AJLD and *Bulletin* over various and extended periods. We were very grateful when they both stepped up again to take on the editorship of AJLD when Associate Professor Tanya Serry retired from the role in September 2021. Kevin has now retired from the role also, due to health problems (also retiring from Council in May for the same reason) and Alison continues as the sole editor of AJLD. I would like to express deep thanks to them both.

In good news, we have a new *Bulletin* editor. Julie Scali, who has recently joined Council, is taking on this important role. She will be assisted by Kim Knight, who will also be providing

support to Alison and the AJLD. Our publications will continue in good hands and members will receive the benefit accordingly.

LDA Consultants

Our LDA Consultants continue to deliver all-important tuition to their students and support one another through network meetings. Again, this is another important activity of the association that fulfils our mission. The demand for services from families needing support for a child or young person with learning difficulties outstrips supply and we are hoping to build the capacity of our consultant body going forward. One way of doing this is through the addition of speech pathologists into the consultant membership of LDA. This recent achievement was the result of a lot of hard work and planning by the Consultant Committee led by Vice-President and Consultant Committee Convenor Elaine McLeish and in liaison with members of Council who are speech pathologists, Eleanor McMillan (dual-qualified) and Ros Neilson. I would like to sincerely congratulate the committee on this initiative in expanding the consultant group. We already have our first speech pathologist consultant on board.

LDA Website and Social Media

A great deal of time and effort has been expended during the Council year on refining the LDA website that was launched in June 2021. Many areas of the site were not fit-for-purpose and Jacinta Conway, as Convenor of the Website and Social Media Committee, assisted by Bec Rangas and Geoff Ongley, worked tirelessly on identifying improvements to the site. Additional features were also introduced such as the online Awards nomination process and nominations for Council, among others.

Jacinta Conway and Bec Rangas engaged in social media training and the results are evident in our presence on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. These channels have been important in promoting events and other activities occurring in LDA.

LDA and AJLD Awards

One of the highlights for me of the LDA AGM is the presentation of the LDA and AJLD Awards. It is so encouraging to hear about what people are doing in our field – improving practice at the class and individual level and to celebrate their contribution and achievements. We are grateful for the people who nominated individuals for this year's awards as this is an important act in honouring the work and contributions of colleagues. We are thrilled to have our award recipients here today and we look forward to hearing from them during the course of today and tomorrow. Dr Molly de Lemos is the Convenor of the Awards Committee and I would like to thank Molly, who unfortunately cannot be with us for this meeting, for her work in this important area of LDA's life. We also extend our thanks to the Judging Panel.

Award Recipients in 2022

Professor Linnea Ehri

Dr Nathaniel Swain and Emina McLean

Jocelyn Seamer

Mim Davidson

Dr Signy Wegener

Haley Tancredi

AJLD Eminent Researcher Award

Mona Tobias Award

Bruce Wicking Award

Rosemary Carter Award

AJLD Early Researcher Award

Tertiary Student Award

Interim General Manager

We were fortunate to have the contribution of Adrian Nolan for several months from late May to early September in the role of part-time interim General Manager (GM). With a high level of demand on the time of our volunteer Council members, particularly the Executive (President, Vice Pres 1, Vice Pres 2, Treasurer and Secretary) and with only one paid member of staff (Administration Officer, Bec Rangas), it was decided to trial a GM position for a few months. This was a successful exercise and provided much-needed support during months when some of the Executive were not available to carry on a number of duties (including me due to personal circumstances). Adrian's appointment ended when he moved to other full-time employment but it demonstrated to us that this was a position that should be filled going forward.

One of the activities of the interim GM was to coordinate the development of a Strategic Plan for LDA. While this is still being finalised with Council, what emerged was the need for more paid staff on the LDA team. To this end, a position of Education Manager (part-time) has been created and recently advertised. The incumbent in this role will facilitate a calendar of LDA professional learning events including the re-establishment of a series of Weekly Wednesday Webinars that proved so popular during the height of the pandemic and the LDA e-news to keep members apprised of interesting developments and events in our field. We are looking forward to making this appointment. In addition, we will seek to appoint a General Manager for two days a week to guide the growing activities of the association. With our full-time Administration Officer, we will have two full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing for the association.

Changes in LDA Council

The LDA Council of 2021-22 included some long standing LDA Council members as well as some new faces. We were delighted to welcome Felicity Brown, Dr Kate Bruin, Jacinta Conway, Melanie Henry and Michelle van Puyvelde after the commencement of the Council year, filling casual vacancies. Later in the year we welcomed Geoff Ongley, CEO of Training 24/7 and Get Reading Right as Vice President (replacing Dr Molly de Lemos who was retiring) and Iain Rothwell, Managing Director of MultiLit, as Treasurer. We have been most appreciative of the business skill and experience of these two people as we move forward in LDA. Please see the list below for details of the outgoing and incoming Council.

LDA Council 2021-2022

Honorary Officers (Executive)

President	Dr Robyn Wheldall
Vice President	Dr Molly de Lemos (to September 2021) Geoff Ongley
Vice President	Elaine McLeish
Treasurer	Ann Ryan (to August 2022, retired from Council) Elaine McLeish Acting Treasurer (August-September 2022) Iain Rothwell (from September 2022)
Secretary	Dr Roslyn Neilson

Ordinary members of Council

Kristin Anthian

Felicity Brown

Dr Kate de Bruin (until September 2022)

Jacinta Conway

Melanie Henry

Dr Molly de Lemos AM (from September 2022 to make way for Geoff Ongley as VP)

Dr Alison Madelaine

Eleanor McMillan

Michelle van Puyvelde (to February 2022)

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM (to May 2021, retired due to ill-health)

LDA Council 2022-2023

Honorary Officers (Executive)

President Elaine McLeish

Vice President Geoff Ongley

Vice President Dr Robyn Wheldall

Treasurer Iain Rothwell

Secretary Melanie Henry

Ordinary members of Council

Felicity Brown

Jacinta Conway

Amanda Krantz

Dr Alison Madelaine

Eleanor McMillan

Julie Scali

There are currently three (3) vacancies on LDA Council (2022-23). If you are interested in being involved in the activity of Council, please let us know.

We are very grateful for the service of our members of Council. The roles are voluntary but can be a substantial commitment of time and effort. We are endeavouring to make being a member of Council achievable and sustainable by moving more of the operational aspects of the roles to our paid team of employees (once appointed). A sincere thank you to everyone on Council who has contributed so much over the past year.

We are sorry that Kristin Anthian will not be continuing on Council into 2022-23 but we hope to have Kristin back on Council when she has 'fewer balls in the air'. We thank Kristin for her significant contribution to LDA Council, especially her outstanding work in bringing the Science of Writing PD series to fruition.

And congratulations to our new Council members and Honorary Officers. We look forward to working closely together.

Update on ongoing matters

As has been previously communicated to members, LDA has engaged Conscious Governance to guide us through the process of making LDA a Registered Australian Body (RAB). This is not legally essential in terms of how we currently operate across all the states and territories of Australia, but we have decided to take this step as part of future-proofing the association.

We are also in the process of applying for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status to add to our status as a Registered Charity so that we can offer tax deductible receipts in the event of donations being made to the association.

When these matters are finalised, members will be advised of the outcome.

Note of thanks on the retirement of long-standing members of Council

I would like to give particular thanks to some long-standing members who have already retired from LDA Council, or will do so, at this AGM.

Ann Ryan

Ann has been on Council since 2017 but has been a very long-term member of LDA, including being an LDA Consultant. She has been actively engaged across most areas of LDA, most recently being its Treasurer from September 2021 until August 2022. Ann was Convenor of the Consultant Committee from 2018 to 2020. It was under Ann's leadership that work commenced on opening up Consultant membership to allied health professionals, starting with speech pathologists. Ann also established the Distance Network for Consultants residing outside Victoria and she initiated many improvements for Consultant members of LDA. In addition to her work in the Consultants area and most recently being Treasurer, Ann has served LDA as Secretary, Vice-President and the editor of the e-news. Underpinning all of Ann's efforts for LDA, was her genuine commitment to our mission and her passion to improve the lives of children with learning difficulties. We thank Ann for the enormous amount of work that she has done for LDA in her various roles in the association. We wish her all the very best in her retirement from LDA.

Dr Roslyn Neilson

Ros has devoted so much energy to her role as Secretary of LDA in the current Council year with a heavy workload as we inducted a largely new Council. Ros's experience and wisdom has been essential across the many areas of LDA's operation over the course of the 2021-22 Council year. She has also been heavily involved in the details of the visit from Linnea Ehri and the accompanying professional learning events and we are most appreciative of this contribution. As well as being an exemplary Secretary, Ros has also been the editor of our popular *Bulletin* since 2020 until now. We have so appreciated Ros's skill as an editor drawing together high-quality translations of the latest research for the benefit of our members. Prior to becoming the editor of the *Bulletin*, Ros was a regular contributor and a co-editor to 2020. We are very grateful that Ros will stay on as a mentor to the new *Bulletin* team as they 'learn the ropes'. In addition, Ros was a Council member from 2014 to 2015, and from 2019 to the present. Ros was a most worthy recipient of the Mona Tobias Award in 2016. We wish Ros all the very best in her retirement from LDA at this AGM.

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM

Kevin retired from Council in May this year because of declining health. As many of you will know, Kevin was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma in 2009 (with a pessimistic prognosis) and has displayed extraordinary tenacity in the face of ongoing cancer treatment. In addition to being a Council member in 2021-22, Kevin also returned as joint editor of LDA's journal the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (AJLD) with Dr Alison Madelaine. He now retires formally from that role. Kevin had previously been editor of the AJLD from 2005 until 2015.

Kevin became a member of LDA in 2000 and in 2004 he joined the Council. He served as a President of LDA in 2006-2007 (and was Vice President in 2005) and took on the role of Executive Editor of LDA Publications from 2006. He was responsible for the AJLD becoming a Taylor and Francis journal and the establishment of the AJLD awards. Kevin was also the joint editor of the *Bulletin* from 2005 for many years and again over the period 2012 to 2014, with Dr Alison Madelaine. In 2009 he was awarded the Mona Tobias Award and received a Special LDA Anniversary Award in 2015 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to LDA publications over the period 2005 to 2014. I would like to pay special tribute to Kevin's commitment to LDA over a sustained period of time, including when he has faced enormous challenges to his health. We wish him well in his retirement from LDA.

Dr Marion (Molly) de Lemos AM

Molly is retiring from LDA at this AGM after years and years of dedicated service to the association commencing in 2004 when she became a member of Council member. In recent years (and until very recently) Molly has been a Vice-President, as well as being the Convenor of the Publications Committee and the Awards Committee. Molly was also a former President of LDA in 2013-14 and was a member of Council from 2004 to 2015, serving as Secretary of LDA from 2004 to 2012. After a short break, Molly returned to LDA Council in 2019.

In 2012, Molly was the recipient of the Mona Tobias Award in recognition of her long-standing advocacy of effective appropriate support for students with learning difficulties and effective evidence-based instruction for all students. In recognition of her service, Molly is a Life Member of LDA.

Molly's unstinting service to LDA is nothing short of remarkable and we pay special tribute to her today. She is the repository of much of the organisational knowledge of the association and is frequently referred to on matters of procedure and policy. There are many memorable LDA events that Molly was responsible for – stand out occasions that were planned and executed with great finesse. Her keen eye for detail and forensic analysis of data and issues has been of enormous benefit to LDA over nearly two decades. We are sorry that Molly is unable to join us at this AGM as she is currently overseas. We are not quite sure what we will do without Molly, but we are confident to know that she remains keenly interested in LDA and will be available for advice and counsel as we move forward as an association.

A personal note of thanks

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my colleagues on the Executive (Molly de Lemos, Ros Neilson, Elaine McLeish and Ann Ryan) who took over the duties of my role as President when my husband Kevin's health deteriorated markedly and I took a period of extended

leave to care for him. I am most grateful for their support and it made a huge difference to me and to Kevin, knowing that they were attending to my responsibilities. It is for this reason that I did not seek to continue as LDA President as my circumstances remain uncertain in terms of my capacity to fulfil the role. I am delighted that Elaine McLeish will step into the President's role and I hope to continue to serve the association as a Vice-President.

My colleagues on Council have been an inspiring group to work with and I thank each of them for their contribution to LDA over the past year. It has been wonderful to work more closely with them and to form new relationships as well as enjoy existing ones. I am also very grateful for the good wishes and support for Kevin and me as we traversed a difficult time.

I would also like to thank Bec Rangas, Geoff Ongley and Adrian Nolan for the support that they have provided to LDA and to me in my role as President, and personally. It has been very much appreciated.

It has been a tremendous honour to serve as your President over the past year and I am most appreciative of the opportunity. Thank you.

Dr Robyn Wheldall

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robyn Wheldall', written in a cursive style.

LDA President

October 2022