

## Chair's Report - 2021 Annual General Meeting

**Anne Johnstone, PESA Chair, delivered the following Chair's report:**

It's my great privilege to share with our members the achievements of your Association during 2020.

Of course, it is important to recognise these achievements were in the context of a very challenging year for our world. The outbreak of the virulent COVID-19 virus which evolved into a global pandemic early in 2020 - and which continues today - presented profound challenges locally and globally. The impacts on the health and livelihood of so many have been devastating. This of course has also generated significant concern about the long term community health, wellbeing and societal impacts this pandemic might bring.

From a school perspective, we have also seen the greatest disruption to education in our lifetime with lockdowns, school closures and the consequent prolonged periods of isolation of students, staff and families.

However, our teachers and school leaders have been heroic in rising to the challenge, pivoting and devising virtual learning experiences and opportunities for connection for students and staff in offering continuity of education remotely from home.

Our students have inspired us with their willingness to persevere during these tough times and lean in to the challenges, with support – and our families have rallied... and we did make it through 2020 with many new skills and lessons learned together.

So 2020 was indeed a challenging year, and those challenges of course continue even now.

However, these challenges also served as a reminder of the importance of prioritising wellbeing and doing all we can to promote good mental health. It reminded us of the profoundly important role schools play in the fabric of our society and how uniquely well-placed schools are to offer a sense of connection, belonging and a host of protective factors to promote wellbeing for young people, school staff, families and broader communities. The year also reminded us of how much we can achieve when we work together and harness strengths in community.

Certainly, 2020 reinforced that the work of PESA and all working to help promote flourishing is more important now than ever.

The year began with planning for our 2020 Conference, which was to take place at ICC in Sydney. The event featured an outstanding program with world class speakers and a very special venue. Regrettably, as the event drew nearer it became apparent that with limitations enforced by the Australian government on in-person gatherings, we would be unable to run the event as planned. With the health and safety of our delegates our primary priority, and government directives on gatherings changing almost daily, we took the difficult decision to cancel our conference on very short notice.

This meant a significant financial impost for PESA, with registration fees refunded to delegates and sponsorship funds returned to our sponsors. A number of expenses were unable to be avoided, such as our conference manager's non-refundable fee, which resulted in a net financial loss to the Association. While this was unfortunate, we were very careful to manage our affairs in the weeks leading up to the conference, and in doing so were able to avoid other far more significant costs, such as the ICC venue fees. I would like to particularly credit the skilful work of our CEO in these important measures.

I know businesses across Australia have been significantly affected by the onset of the pandemic, and PESA was no exception. The annual conference is historically one of PESA's principal revenue activities each year, and the loss of this revenue, whilst unavoidable, was most disappointing. I know some of you were concerned about the financial viability of PESA at the time we cancelled the conference, but we were fortunate that prudent management meant our exposure was limited and our financial situation remained stable.

Our state chapters were also impacted by the pandemic. Our chapter committees are comprised of dozens of hardworking volunteers across the country, many of whom were grappling with school closures and pivoting to online

learning, and for this reason our chapters moved into hiatus during much of 2020. Our chapter events also raise revenue for PESA, as well as driving membership, and this revenue stream was also significantly reduced during 2020.

It was however, pleasing to see many of our chapters returning to business – almost – as usual, towards the end of the year, with online and some live events being run, to important offer professional development and vital opportunities for connection and reconnection. I thank our Chapter chairs and committee members for their dedication and invaluable hard work.

In the face of this ‘new world’ presented to us by COVID-19, PESA worked to support our members through sourcing and collating high quality COVID-19 support resources which were made available via our website. This was regularly updated to ensure members had access to evidence-based resources and supports. We thank Berry Street, St Peter’s College, Mt Barker High School, Ravenswood School for Girls, Geelong Grammar School, Newcastle Grammar School, AB Paterson College, Gungahlin College and the Langwarrin Positive Education Network who recorded videos sharing their strategies to support wellbeing through the pandemic to assist our members.

We were pleased to make the online PESA Positive Education Guide available free of charge to our members early in the year, which would normally have entailed an annual subscription fee. The Board took the view that this was an appropriate step to support members in the face of the challenges thrown up by the pandemic.

A significant achievement for 2020 was the finalisation of our first update of the PESA Positive Education Guide. A number of additional sections were added to the guide also. We thank everyone who has contributed to the Guide, which continues to be a significant collaborative project.

In 2020 we also offered the Guide in hard copy for the first time, offering our members a choice as to the format that suited them best. Sales of the guide have been steady since its release.

PESA membership as at December 31 2020 totalled just over 1050 across the individual, institutional and student categories, which was a small decrease from the 2019 end of year membership of 1200. This was disappointing but not unexpected, as often our conferences bring in hundreds of new members, and with the cancellation of the 2020 conference this new membership was not gained.

In addition, the pandemic brought financial uncertainty to many schools, and many experienced a freeze on all ‘non-essential’ spending, which also impacted membership growth.

Members continue to comprise educators and school leaders from the independent, government and Catholic sectors, as well as academics, health professionals, parents, charities, philanthropists and other community members committed to an evidence-based approach to school community wellbeing. Most PESA members hail from Australia, with the balance based abroad including UAE, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Japan, New Zealand, USA, Singapore, Thailand, and China.

In 2020, in accordance with the PESA constitution, Leonie Abbott, Joanne Alford and I, as Member-elected Directors, retired by rotation at the end of AGM and our positions on the Board fell vacant.

In addition, Charlie Scudamore retired from the PESA Board from 20 October.

Leonie Abbott and I were reappointed to our Board, and David Bott and Emma Grave were appointed our Board as member-elected directors.

I wish to formally note our farewell to Joanne Alford and Charlie Scudamore from our Board in 2020. Joanne was appointed a PESA director in 2017, and Charlie in 2015. Both have been outstanding contributors to our Board, faithfully serving our association with wisdom and generosity. On behalf of the PESA Board, our gratitude for the important roles Joanne and Charlie have played in the growth and development of PESA.

In 2020, we were joined by Simon Martin and Robert (Bob) Easton, as co-opted directors, and they have been excellent contributors to our board, bringing a wealth of business, financial and philanthropic expertise to their roles.

I am also so grateful Warren Symonds, our Deputy Chair, Simon Murray, our retired founding chair, and Lindsay Oades of course continue on our board and I thank them for their excellent ongoing contributions.

I wish to express our deepest gratitude to our current and retired members of our Board for their dedicated service. All have fulfilled their roles with altruism and wisdom. I am humbled to be part of this fine group of leaders.

A significant change in the governance of PESA also took place in September 2020 was my assuming the Chair role from our founding Chair, Simon Murray who stepped down from this role after many years of outstanding service.

As those of you who attended our 2019 AGM would know, I did pay tribute then to Simon Murray for his pivotal contribution to the founding of PESA. Simon’s enthusiasm for, and commitment to, a national association that would

bring together and serve the Positive Education community of practice were steadfast. Under Simon's leadership, our association grew, as did our reputation as a national exemplar peak body.

We deeply grateful for the generous contribution Simon has made to our association over many years.

PESA has continued its relationship with two key bodies – IPEN (International Positive Education Network) of which I am proud to serve as Deputy Chair. We also continue our relationship with IPPA (International Positive Psychology Association). PESA representatives, including Warren Symonds, Marita Hayes-Brown, Leonie Abbott and I, were pleased to present via video at the IPPA World Congress in 2021 which was an excellent opportunity to raise PESA's international profile.

On behalf of our board, I would like to warmly thank our outstanding, vibrant and dedicated Marita Hayes-Brown who continues to lead this association with excellence!

PESA's staff comprises our full-time CEO, Marita Hayes-Brown, who has served in this role since 2016. We also continue to employ Kylie Edgar, our casual administration assistant, whose role principally involves responding to member queries and maintaining the membership database. Matt Smith continues in the role of content coordinator, and is charged with the responsibility of sourcing resources for distribution to the membership. We thank all Kylie and Matt for their significant contribution to PESA.

All PESA staff work remotely and this allows us to keep our running costs low. This was crucial in 2020 and of course this year, with the pandemic impacting on revenue.

PESA again rolled out Australia's Positive Education Day in November 2020, with schools across Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Germany, Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore participating. Donations raised from the day have been aggregated with the balance of funds raised during the 2019 Positive Education Day, and applied towards providing scholarships for a number of teachers from disadvantaged schools to attend the PESA National Conference in 2021. We thank all participating schools and those who donated on the day.

Well, it is an honour to lead this very special association and on behalf of the PESA Board I thank our members for their support and commitment to wellbeing in our schools and communities. Thank you for making such a positive difference – you are such an inspiration to us and the work you all do is so very meaningful, transformational and enduring. Certainly your contribution in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our youth, your colleagues and the community is more essential now than ever.