

LDA AGM Introductory comments from incoming president September 18, 2021

I would like to take just a few minutes to make some comments about your incoming Council and our vision for LDA.

We are committed to *Learning Difficulties Australia* continuing to pursue its mission of assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research, both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

LDA has a long and proud history of supporting and advocating for students with learning difficulties and, in our view, it is essential that this continues and continues to develop. LDA also has an important role to play in ensuring *all students* are the beneficiaries of effective instruction across the spectrum of educational settings. To do this we have to impart knowledge about effective practice to teachers everywhere.

We, of course, want to see the very best evidence-based instruction employed in every classroom. Apart from being what every student needs, it is most important that students with learning challenges are in environments that will support and consolidate the gains that they make as a result of more individualised and specialised support.

The expert knowledge of specialist educators is critical for students with learning difficulties to succeed in every educational setting. LDA is firmly committed to sharing this expertise with others as there are students with learning difficulties in every classroom. Knowing how to support students with learning difficulties is, it follows, the business of every teacher.

But even with the very best instruction in the classroom, there will always be a small percentage of students who require additional, often more intensive, support. LDA is committed not only to providing this support directly via our LDA consultant network but also by helping to ensure that there is an understanding of evidence-based practice across Tiers 1, 2 and 3 in a Response to Intervention framework. This includes promoting approaches that are complementary across the tiers of instruction that a student with learning difficulties may encounter.

One of the very encouraging things that has been occurring over recent years is that evidence-based approaches to teaching are being taken up by increasing numbers of teachers. LDA's activities have no doubt contributed to this. We can be rightly proud of the impact that our organisation has had.

We have seen, particularly over the last couple of years, and in some ways aided by the COVID19 pandemic, a strong and rapid growth of teacher organisations that have attracted thousands of followers in a relatively short period of time. This is a cause for great celebration. The amount of free professional development that has come out of these movements is extraordinary. Of course, our own LDA has contributed strongly in this area with excellent offerings in professional development – including the enormously popular upcoming 6 session Science of Writing course –and the Wednesday Weekly Webinar series. These initiatives have been very well received and have also resulted in a growth in LDA membership.

There is evidence of a turning tide but there is also a great deal still to be done. We believe that LDA has a distinctive place in the evidence-based educational landscape. We want to help build that awareness and those skills that are needed to best support our most vulnerable learners, wherever they are educated.

As well as reaching out to others in the educational community, our association has a responsibility to nurture, encourage and nourish its own members. The brilliant work in the publications area of LDA – the Bulletin and the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties – is another distinctive and important way in which LDA achieves this purpose. The recently released new LDA website is also a fantastic resource for members and non-members alike.

I would like to add our thanks to the outgoing Council, some of whom have served LDA for many, many years. We acknowledge and applaud the work that has been done in a number of ways to increase teacher awareness of best practice instruction and how to do this in classrooms around Australia.

Your new Council also has a great deal of breadth and depth. We are classroom teachers, special educators, speech pathologists, academics, researchers as well as being experienced in running both not-for-profit and commercial organisations. Together we also have a great deal of **LDA experience**, as well as some being new to Council. There are a great many people with exceptional skills within LDA committed to its mission. This expertise should continue to be harnessed in the context of a collegial, respectful and strong organisation. In so doing, others may continue to join our number.

We will be asking for others to join the Council to ensure we have all of the knowledge and skills that we need to continue the great work of this association. We are keen to have more classroom teachers working at the Tier 1 level join Council, so if you are interested in serving on Council please do get in touch. Although we come from a variety of backgrounds, we share a strong belief in the organisation and the importance of the purpose that it serves.

Before I finish, I want to acknowledge Bec Rangas. As many of you will know, Bec is our very busy and very talented Administrator at LDA. A great deal of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure that all that needs to be done is done. The incoming Council would like to say a big thank you to Bec for all her help in this transition phase and we very much look forward to working with her in the future. Thank you, Bec.