



IRSEA NEWS

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IRSEA enriches the lives of retired Senior Educational Administrators through engagement, collegiality, friendship, and support while deploying its intellectual capacity and educational expertise for the betterment of public education in New South Wales, Australia, and beyond.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

KERRIE IKIN



Dear Members,

I am quite humbled to be writing my first *From the President* in what will be my third term as President of this wonderful organisation. I joined IRSEA on the same day that I retired in August 2013 and was quickly roped onto the IRSEA (or ARISSEA as it was then known) Committee.

I looked forward to joining ARISSEA as I had been receiving the Newsletters as a widow and before that had been aware of the collegiality and ongoing connection to the world of public education that ARISSEA provided for my late husband, Ron. I felt as though I was entering into a world of giants in the field. I believe I was the youngest member at the time and stayed that way for some time.

Happily, there are now a few members younger than me, but not enough. Expanding our membership has to be a high priority for the year ahead. Without new members, IRSEA cannot continue to flourish.

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Upcoming Meeting & Event:

Unique Meeting and Luncheon
Thursday, 11 June 2026
Castlereagh Boutique Hotel



I acknowledge and applaud the work of our current and past committee members, who have worked so diligently to: further strengthen our ties with the Department of Education; develop associate and honorary memberships; recognise outstanding service; develop Memoranda of Understanding with TAFE and the Public Education Foundation; develop our strategic plan; introduce social lunches in addition to our luncheon meetings; establish and maintain our website; continually upgrade the quality of our Newsletter; strengthen our welfare arm; establish a Fellowship for current senior educational administrators within the Department; and establish conference meetings in centres further afield than Sydney. I also acknowledge and applaud the hard work that office-bearers and committee members undertake daily to maintain and grow our Institute. I will not name each individually or single some out, because every office-bearer and committee member (past and present) has provided outstanding service to IRSEA and brought IRSEA to the position that it is in today.

And it is this position that I want to turn to first. We have been ambitious over the past few years. The networks and activities that

have been established have put IRSEA in a prime position to advance the cause of public education in a more ambitious way than we have tackled in the past. But to do this, we need to promote IRSEA, so that joining on retirement, is something every eligible senior officer does as their first task, if not the same day, at least within the first week of their retirement. I say this somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but in reality, once you retire, we often do not have any way of contacting you and rely on you contacting us.

So, I turn to you, our Associate Members. We are thrilled that you have joined in this capacity. We enjoy joining you at Public Schools Summits and Public Schools Hub and Spoke events and having you join us at our luncheons, often as our guest speaker. This year IRSEA needs to ensure that you want to join us with a full Membership on your retirement. If you have a date set for 2026 or are contemplating retirement this year, let us know. If we can make IRSEA more attractive to you, let us know your thoughts. Without you, IRSEA cannot continue to flourish.

Inaugural IRSEA Fellowship 2025

Last year, IRSEA launched its Fellowship for current senior officers. Two very worthy

recipients, Brett Stone, Leader Formative Assessment, and Tom Moth, Director of Educational Leadership, Mount Druitt Principal Network, are now part-way through their studies.

Brett is exploring the impact of Generative AI (NSWEduChat) on enhancing student writing. As part of his fellowship, Brett is undertaking study on Applied AI and Data Science Program through the Melbourne Institute of Technology (MIT). To date, he has completed the mandatory prework modules covering introduction to python coding, data science, and mathematical principles. In May, he will begin the 14-week course, including a capstone project.

Tom's research is examining the extent to which contextualisation of Stage 5 curriculum enables students of low socio-economic, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to 'see themselves' in their learning, and in turn, enhance their attendance and engagement. We can look forward to updates from both Tom and Brett in later Newsletters.

And don't forget, the Fellowship will be awarded again in 2026. Details should be advertised by the beginning of Term 3.



Annual General Meeting 2026

Having stepped into the role of President at this year's AGM, it is only fitting to briefly summarise the highlights from that day.

First, we were thrilled to welcome Laureate Professor Jenny Gore, University of Newcastle, at the AGM as our guest and delighted to bestow on her an Honorary Membership of IRSEA. As keynote speaker at IRSEA's inaugural 'Northern Gathering' in Newcastle in 2025, Jenny ensured this event's outstanding success. We look forward to our on-going collaboration.

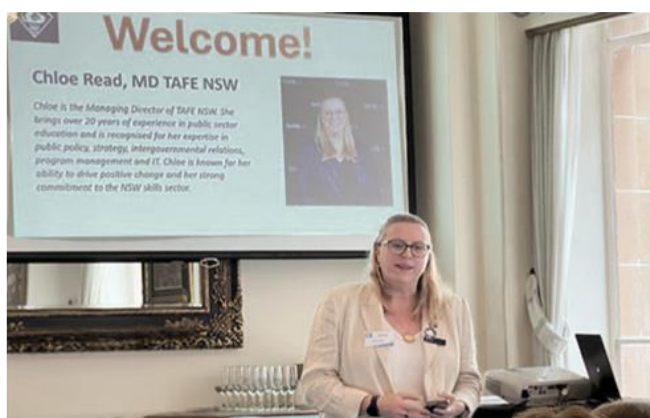


Janina Sulikowski outlined Jenny's outstanding contribution to educational research in quality education and leadership, and her advocacy for the critical role of public education in building an equitable society. The importance of Jenny's work is reflected in her amazing record of success in being awarded some \$38 million in research grants since 1992. Jenny has driven work on Quality Rounds and Quality Teaching, and she established the Quality Teaching Academy in 2020. Jenny has been Dean of Education and Head of the School of Education at the University of Newcastle from 2008 to 2013. In 2017, she received the Australian Council of Deans of Education award for outstanding contributions to education reform. In 2018, Jenny was awarded the Paul Brock Memorial

Medal for outstanding contributions to social justice and evidence-informed policy, practice and research. She has been formally appointed as Visiting Professor at the University of Oxford. Her achievements were recognised through the award of an AM in the Australia Day Honours List in 2024.

Chloe Read, Managing Director of TAFE NSW, was our keynote speaker. As outlined by Lindsay Wasson, Chloe has been open in discussing the potential links between TAFE and finalising the MOU that will bring the two organisations closely together. With the involvement of more people from TAFE as one of our joint goals, we believe that together we can work to promote public education both at the school and post-school levels.

In her address, Chloe emphasised her belief and commitment to education as the great equaliser, stating that a quality education has to be available to all. Public Education provides that without recourse to income or standing. This applies to school and post-school options. Chloe explained that TAFE is about providing pathways for all without a filter on social position or wealth; it is about providing quality education with quality accreditation.



Chloe acknowledged that TAFE has been under challenge in recent years, somewhat in a wilderness, as the push to privatise training

was pursued as part of government policy. But TAFE is now rebuilding its options and profile. Its public standing is on the rise.

Chloe acknowledged the strength in a 'unity of voices': TAFE and IRSEA, a voice that could provide 'thought leadership'. As we have found in IRSEA, Chloe was also of the opinion that highly qualified and committed officers do not want to retire from involvement in education and she saw IRSEA providing a welcome vehicle. Chloe expressed the view that a number of TAFE officers approaching retirement will see IRSEA as a welcome organisation for social connection with committed colleagues and provide an opportunity to positively influence educational provision in NSW.

Lindsay presented Chloe with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of IRSEA. We certainly look forward to ongoing collaboration with TAFE.



With the election of office bearers for 2026, I want to personally welcome Lila Mularczyk, who will be a great asset to the committee. I also want to thank Graham Dawson and Eric Jamieson who are stepping down from the committee for their dedication and exceptional work.

On a sad note, we acknowledged the passing of many: Ron Pickles, Brian Gillett, Denis

O'Neill and Chris Evans this year and last year Ken Dixon, Eric Flood, John Hoy and Tony Re. A moment's silence in memory of these valued colleagues was held.

I want to encourage as many of you as possible to attend our next luncheon meeting on Thursday 11 June at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel. The guest speaker will be the well-known author, Candice Fox.

I look forward to a very productive year ahead.

Kerrie Ikin

IRSEA President

May 2026

Photos from the Annual General Meeting Luncheon – March 2026



NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS

RAEHEL MCCARTHY, DEL AND IRSEA LIAISON



Raechel McCarthy is the Director, Educational Leadership, Lake Illawarra North Principals Network. Raechel plays an important role in liaison between IRSEA and the Department. In this article she reports on important and exciting developments in public education.

Hi all!

I'm looking forward to connecting with everyone at the next luncheon on 11 June in Sydney.

Last week, I attended the Secretary's Roadshow in Goulburn, which provided a valuable opportunity to hear from the Deputy Secretaries about the work underway across their divisions.

Daniel French – Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategic Priorities

This division is progressing work in response to the recent Distance Education Review, including initiatives to expand subject choice for senior students. Updated website advice is now available to support Stage 6 subject resourcing. Other priorities include reducing school workload by simplifying access requests for support classes and developing a "one student plan" approach. The division is also addressing concerns around excessive screen time, noting that Australian students reportedly have some of the highest screen usage rates globally. This work has informed both the student mobile phone ban and broader social media restrictions.

Mark Barraket – Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes

Two of the 100 new NSW Government preschools have now opened, with the remaining 98 on track to open by Day 1, Term 1, 2027. The importance of this work is reflected in current data showing that only 56% of children begin school developmentally on track, with rates for Aboriginal children below 40%. Mark's team

has also established a *Brighter Beginnings Hub* and aims to double the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Preschool Services.

Laura Milkins – representing Martin Graham, Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement

The recent Staff Development Day focused on diversity and inclusion and resulted in improved teacher understanding of disability and student adjustments. The division is also working towards automatic access to integration funding for kindergarten students.

Lisa Harrington – Deputy Secretary, School Infrastructure

A new "Simplifying A-Z Guide on Assets" has been developed for principals, along with a Principals Toolkit website for new builds, which will later expand to support existing schools. The department has also invested \$6 million into High Potential and Gifted Education infrastructure projects across selected schools.

Jeremy Kurusz – Acting Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform

Jeremy oversees the work of Kate Stephens and the Enrolment and Transitions Team. Three networks are currently receiving intensive support to improve enrolments as part of a pilot initiative. The division also plans to expand the Education Pathways Program and strengthen the knowledge and understanding of careers advisers, particularly regarding future workforce opportunities.

Mel McCabe – Chief Operating Officer

Current work includes:

- Digital Field Services Officers supporting schools
- Rollout of EdConnect online and callback services for IT, payroll and HR support
- A refreshed digital strategy
- Ongoing cyber security improvements

- Laptop rollouts
- Introduction of EduChat (AI) on the department intranet

Deb Summerhayes – Deputy Secretary, Public Schools

Deb acknowledged ongoing work to improve school transport connections and the quality of teacher housing. Homeschooling is now managed within Public Schools to ensure compliance with child protection requirements while also supporting parents to explore alternative educational provisions. Efforts are also underway to improve processing times.

A key focus remains on amplifying student voice — “not just those in blazers,” but ensuring all students are heard.

Sean Ruming – Chief People Officer

Sean outlined:

- The rollout of the staffing officer model providing greater support for principals in navigating employment of new staff
- The doubling of health and safety advisers in the field

Murat Dizdar – Secretary

Murat called for continued principal support in several key areas:

- NSW continues to lead state education systems in attendance, though not yet compared with the private sector
- Maintaining a strong focus on positive student behaviour and implementation of the new Behaviour Code
- Proactive responses to bullying through the NSW Anti-Bullying Framework, including the two-day response requirement and mobile phone ban
- Greater system support for schools in managing parent behaviour
- Continuation of the *Plan for Public Education* into the 2028–2031 cycle with the same strategic pillars

- Growing confidence in public education, reflected in both the People Matter Employee Survey and Department of Customer Service community surveys, which showed almost a 10% increase in confidence between 2022 and 2026 — while recognising there is still more work to do in regaining market share

Overall, it was a highly informative roadshow that highlighted the significant work being undertaken across the Department to improve educational outcomes for students. I was also surprised and honoured to receive my 30-year teaching certificate from our Secretary. I am feeling very old!



Warm regards,

Raechel McCarthy

IRSEA/Department Liaison

COMMITTEE REPORT UPDATES

Treasurer's Update: Ray Gillies

IRSEA finances are sufficient to meet current commitments

The IRSEA Society Account has a balance of \$10,682.54. 2026 IRSEA receipts include members' subscriptions of \$2,490. We have forwarded donations received with subscriptions and from collections at meetings to Stewart House (\$2,847) and to the Public Education Foundation (\$973). We received \$2,170 members' payments for the March AGM and paid \$2,364 lunches and venue costs. Other expenses have been IRSEA NEWS \$96.66, postage \$68, and NSW Fair Trading fee \$57. Our Term Deposit is valued at \$11,134.16 (maturing 14 July 2026).

Annual subscriptions are now overdue

If you have not yet paid your annual subscription of \$30 for 2026, please send your payment as soon as possible.

Ray Gillies
IRSEA Treasurer



Secretary's Update: Brian Davies

At the 2026 Annual General Meeting in March, your new Executive Committee for 2026-27 was elected. The committee is:

Committee position	Office holder
President	Kerrie Ikin
Immediate Past-President	Lindsay Wasson
Vice-President	Lindsay Wasson
Vice-President Strategic Directions	Gerry McCloughan
Secretary	Brian Davies
Treasurer	Ray Gillies
Newsletter Editor	Michael Murray
Membership Officer	Gerry McCloughan
Welfare Coordinator	Kerryanne Knox
Luncheon Coordinator	Lindsay Wasson
Charity Contact	Alan Laughlin
Public Officer	Ray Gillies
Committee Members	John Allsopp Jeff Bruce Kim Fillingham Lila Mularczyk David Riordan Janina Sulikowski Irina White
NSW Department of Education Representative	Kay Rigas

Congratulations to all those members. It is wonderful to see the strong number of members who are willing to help with the running of our organisation. If you are interested in attending a meeting as an observer, please don't hesitate to get in contact with me. The next executive meeting is on 31 July.

The Committee has already had its first meeting. One item discussed was the next luncheon meeting which will be held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel on Thursday 11 June. It is very important that members please note that this varies from our usual timing. Firstly, it is on a Thursday instead of the usual Friday so that members who have regular commitments on a Friday are more likely to be able to attend. Secondly, it is in June instead of May so that there is a more even spread of meetings throughout the year. The booking slip for the meeting is on page 19.

The committee also discussed regional and social meetings. The Newcastle meeting is planned for 30 and 31 October. The date for the Illawarra meeting is yet to be fixed. Social luncheons in Sydney are currently planned for July and October.

Please note, that if you would like to contact me on any issues, then use secretary@irseas.org.au. There were some slight issues with the email in April but it is now functioning properly. Apologies to anyone who had trouble reaching me.

Brian Davies

Secretary (secretary@irseas.org.au)

Public school students shine at the Proudly Public! Force for Good Awards

The 2026 Proudly Public! Force for Good Awards were held at Sydney Town Hall on Monday 4 May, celebrating the achievements of NSW public school students, teachers and principals. The ceremony, featuring scholarship presentations and musical performances by public school students, was hosted by the Public Education Foundation.

See the article by Alan Laughlin, Charities Coordinator, for more information and pictures



IRSEA Charities Roundup: Alan Laughlin

PUBLIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Monday 4 May was a very special night: the Public Education Foundation celebrated its Scholarship Awards presentations at the Sydney Town Hall.

The evening was a celebration of so much that is exemplary in public education. The scholarships covered all ages and most geographic parts of the state, the entertainment was outstanding, and the speakers recognised the extraordinary contributions of public education to both individuals and the broader progress of our society.

IRSEA was represented by Lindsay Wasson, Alan Laughlin, Lila Mularczyk, David Riordan and Gerry McCloughan. Our organization was recognized in speeches from the stage by both Secretary Murat Dizdar and Dr Manish Amin, the CEO of the Foundation.



The MC for the night was well known actress Ada Nicodemou and the keynote speaker was Jennifer Robinson, one of the world's most respected human rights lawyers and advocates. Jennifer recounted her education at Bomaderry High School and the lasting contributions and impact of her teachers. Secretary Murat presented, as always, an outstanding affirmation of the quality and contribution of Public Education. Another speaker of particular note was Hala Ramadan,

now the foundation principal of Wilton High School. Hala is a Harvard scholarship recipient and 2020 Premier's Community Service Award winner. The entertainment on the night by so many talented public school students was outstanding.



The scholarships presented that night covered the full spectrum of needy children from across the state. It was particularly moving to see so many students representing rural and remote indigenous communities and students with refugee backgrounds. These scholarships provide financial support to ensure students can stay at school, engage fully in all activities and have the materials and equipment to take advantage of all that their public schools offer. It is noteworthy that the PEF has awarded over \$4m in scholarships since its creation in 2007. It is also of note that the PEF awards scholarships to mid and early career teachers and principals to pursue further education and training. The funding for the PEF comes from many partners including Teachers Health, NSW Teachers Federation, Teachers Mutual Bank, NSW Government and many individuals. The IRSEA logo was proudly on display as a supporter in the program for the night.

The Public Education Foundation exemplifies all that is good in public education where children are provided with that special help to take advantage of life's opportunities. IRSEA is proud to partner with the PEF to support children and teachers in our public schools.



Stewart House has now entered its 95th year of operation and remains our primary charity. It continues to offer its outstanding 12-day program, providing each cohort of children with a consistent and supportive residential experience. Needy students come from both metropolitan and regional areas. However, it must be said that funding remains a major challenge and the new CEO Paul Somers and the Board are reviewing ongoing funding programs.

The major source of funding comes from some 6,500 staff contributing through the salary contribution scheme. Unfortunately, this generous commitment does not cover the costs of running Stewart House. The annual budget is significantly in the red. Fundraising remains a continued challenge. Support from IRSEA members through donations and raffles is greatly appreciated. Your help through your personal contributions is invaluable.

The Board of Stewart House is planning a fundamental, operational and financial reset to ensure Stewart House is a thriving and growing program in its centenary year in 2031. A "95 for 95" appeal is being launched. This aims to raise \$950,000 through strategic partnerships with corporate and philanthropic groups. Partnerships will range from "Centenary Builder" (\$4,750) to "Centenary Architect" (\$95,000). IRSEA will be meeting with the CEO and Board members to determine how we can best contribute to this challenging, but essential, funding program.

Friends of Stewart House (FOSH)

The Friends of Stewart House is a group of ex-Department of Education employees (ex-teachers, principals and IRSEA members) who engage in regular

and enjoyable social events that raise money toward Stewart House.

Please consider these fun social events that may be of interest and help us support Stewart House:

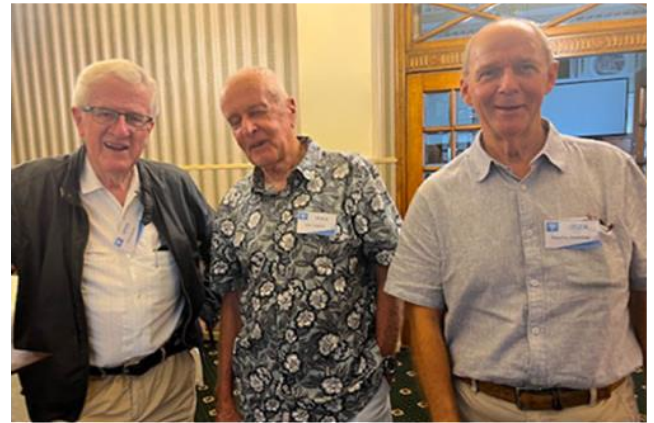
- Luncheon at Doyles Restaurant Watson's Bay, on 23 June.
- Christmas in July, Strangers Restaurant, Parliament House, 14 July.
- Lunch at El Mesa Restaurant, Greek Taverna, Woy Woy, 24 September, come by train, a great way to travel.
- High Tea, Breakfast Point Country Club, 19 November.

There will also be a Xmas wine sale of quality Leogate Estate wines closer to the end of the year.

If you would like to attend any of these please let me know and I can provide further information. (alaughlin21@optusnet.com.au), OR, check out the Stewart House website and go to Friends of Stewart House.

Alan Laughlin

IRSEA, Charities Contact Officer



Photos from the pre-luncheon gathering at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel – March 2026



DO NOT MISS THIS STUNNING EVENT!

Luncheon with **Candice Fox**, International Best-Selling Crime Fiction Writer

Be regaled, excited, entranced, enraptured and inspired by Australia's greatest crime-fiction writer and international best-selling author, Candice Fox.

Candice will be guest speaker and raconteur extraordinaire at our Luncheon on Thursday 11 June in Cellos Grand Dining Room at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel/Masonic Club. The entire Luncheon will focus on Candice so general business will be dispensed with for this unique event.



Who is Candice Fox?

Candice Fox was born in 1985 in Bankstown into what she describes as 'an eccentric family'. Her father was a prison parole officer and her mother a wild-life rescuer and foster mother to some 140 children while having 7 of her own.

Candice attended Picnic Point Public School and Picnic Point High School and credits her public education in South-Western Sydney as the rock upon which her success is based.

She served in the navy; has two undergraduate and two post-graduate degrees; has taught in high school and lectures at university level.

In 2014 she began her life-long passion for writing novels - and with extraordinary success.

Her first novel, *Hades*, won the **Ned Kelly Award for Best First Novel**. The following year she won the **NED Kelly Award for Fiction** with *Eden*. So, back-to-back Ned Kelly Awards! Unheard of!

Her success is incomparable. With distinctive creative voice and cinematic writing style - tight, graphic and dialogue-driven - Candice has won a number of **Ned Kelly Awards**, **Davitt Awards for Best Adult Crime Fiction**, achieved **#1 New York Times Best-Selling Author** status, and collaborated on 8 novels with the great American crime fiction writer, James Patterson. She has also been interviewed by Richard Fidler on ABC's *Conversations* a couple of times and published a number of podcasts.

Two of her novels *Crimson Lake* and *Redemption Point* were adapted for the ABC television series, *Troppo*. She continues with TV adaptations to this day.

Since 2014, she has published some 21 novels and reached a global audience of millions. She is a phenomenon - authentic, brilliant, funny, and so, so, articulate.

You will be amazed by Candice Fox.

Others have been amazed too and praised her accordingly:

Jane Harper: 'Fascinating, compelling page-turner'

Jane Caro: 'Edge of your seat from the first word'

James Patterson: 'A bright new star of crime fiction'

Lee Child: 'Sign me up as a big-time Fox fan!'

Ian Rankin: 'Top of my must-read pile'

So, to quote Molly Meldrum, "Do yourself a favour" and come to the Candice Fox event. Your life will be so much the better for it!

Lindsay Wasson



MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTION: KEEPING UP WITH TECHNOLOGY – SYD SMITH

How are you faring with technology these days? Do you need your grandchildren to help you with your iPhone? When the computer lets you down, who do you go to? How good are you when dealing with your Smart TV? And do you have Spotify now and a stack of DVDs that you don't play anymore? Some of these issues have affected me for sure but it wasn't always like this. It's a problem of today, not from my past.

In my early teen years, and even earlier, I was obsessed with radio. I could put a crystal set together in no time, fiddle with old, discarded radios and get them to pick up different bands beyond the normal AM. And I was even able to listen on my radio to phone conversations long before we had mobiles. Some wealthy people even then had a phone in their car and were connected by the old PMG from the car phone to the normal telephone network. I had this frequency to pick up those conversations.

My interests went well beyond that of course. I had an imaginary radio studio in my bedroom and read the news and played music on a wind-up gramophone with some old 78 RPM records that I obtained from a Brisbane radio station. For a short time, I was under the illusion that I would become a radio announcer one day until I realised my voice was completely inadequate for the role.



Nevertheless, this did not stop me racing into the 2GB and 2UE studios to be part of the audience for such

programs as Teen Time, (hosted by Keith Walsh) and Rumpus Room (hosted by Howard Craven and Len London). At one time I became announcer of the week and was invited to be part of a group, anchored by Howard Craven and the actress, Wendy Blacklock, to comment on up-and-coming hit tunes. Howard Craven, of course, was Charlie Chuckles who used to read the Sunday comics on 2UW.



Many of you will remember that this was the golden age of radio. Everyone listened to such stars as Bob Dyer, Jack Davey, Mo McCackey, Willy Fennell, John Dease, Smokey Dawson and to those never-ending serials like *Superman*, *Biggles*, *Hop Harrigan*, *Mrs Obbs* and *When a Girl Marries*. With the arrival of TV in 1956 some of these stars survived but many were replaced by a new band of performers. With TV came the new Admiral brand sets which required new skills for viewers. Snowy pictures, ghost images, flickering interruptions and static required fiddling with aerials. All of these I learned to master until we had the new coloured TVs in 1975.

In 1966 I was a young staff member at Gynea Bay Public School, a rather unique place led by Vic Spongberg, the most innovative principal I have ever worked with. Television was barely a decade old, yet Vic had convinced his P & C to fund a closed-circuit TV system throughout the school. Every classroom was connected, and a special room was set aside for a studio. Using the specialist skills of certain teachers, lessons were beamed to the appropriate classrooms. This served two

purposes: one for the televised teacher to demonstrate his/her different teaching strategies to the rest of the staff, and the other to motivate students to learn from a new medium. My role was to conduct a weekly current affairs program in which main news items of the week were discussed followed by a quiz session involving two students on camera. Doug Wilkinson, a teacher on the staff, had the camera skills and experience to set up all the teaching resources (including sound and vision) for each lesson. Later he, with a partner, set up Miranda Hi Fi. The ABC also had an interest in what Gymea Bay was doing and made several visits to see and get new ideas. It was at this time they began their school TV program, *Looking Behind the News*. The wonder of these times was it demonstrated that teachers were using their creativity to implement the curriculum, a good principal was free to innovate, and the external media were able to feed off, and learn from, a school-based educational development.

Many years later, thanks to Ken Boston, I was seconded to Radio National at the ABC. A childhood interest combined with my educational experience was put to practice by using the recorded programs of ABC Radio and demonstrating how they could be used in schools. At that time Radio National recorded their programs on cassette tapes and listeners could phone in and ask for copies. My task was to review these programs, identify their level of support to specific curriculum areas, and alert relevant curriculum officers in the Curriculum Directorate. Invitations were sent out to each curriculum officer to visit Radio National and meet the ABC program officer where they could discuss their programs relevance to students' learning. Many of the tapes related to Geography, Health, History, Science, Technology and the Arts. The idea was for students to use the tapes in school libraries for listening. Regrettably, technology changed again not long afterwards. Cassette tapes were replaced by DVDs and podcasts became the new trend.

Perhaps one day we could once again contact Radio National and see if there is an economic and efficient way to use their valuable curriculum resources?

Teachers are clever, innovative people and can transfer their interests into their work successfully.

Syd Smith

You may have your own story to tell of how your hobby, obsession or background enabled you to make your career satisfying and successful. If so, please contact the Editor at michaeljfmurray@gmail.com . It would be wonderful to hear from you.



MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTION:

AN OPTION FOR AS YET UNFULFILLED RETIREMENT YEARS?

DR JIM SCOTT

This article proposes that postgraduate study—including a PhD—can be a high-value way for retirees to resolve unfinished professional questions while generating evidence that is useful to their field. My research into the efficacy of two NSW science-education interventions on teaching practice and student scientific literacy after more than a decade of implementation settled my curiosity about their impact. I had deep involvement in the development and implementation of both interventions, the later one in the first decade of my retirement (2005).

I was accepted into the PhD (thesis) course at UTS at the end of 2012; handed my thesis up for assessment in August 2018 and was awarded my doctorate in May 2019.

The first of the two interventions related to curriculum expectations for assessment-for-learning practices (Years 7–10 Science Syllabus introduced from 2003) to be used as a means of producing independent learners. The second invention was the mandatory Year 8 ESSA assessment program designed around the Structure of Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) model. Feedback to schools on student performance was expected to help teachers adapt their teaching to deliver on syllabus expectations (the first intervention).

My research questions were to investigate the impact of these two “interventions” on:

- teaching practice
- student acquisition of scientific literacy, and
- achievement of “learning how to learn” skills by junior secondary students in the government school sector at the end of their four-year compulsory science course.

The claim for significance of this research was supported by an invitation to present in 2017 at the European Science Education Research Association (ESERA) annual conference in Dublin in 2017 which I attended. At the time of my application to present, the only settled aspect of my research was the methodology for it. My

wife accompanied me to the conference, and we enjoyed a two-month holiday in Ireland and Scotland as “bookends” to my presentation.

To assess impact, I used a mixed-method design involving quantitative analysis and qualitative case studies to test and interpret what the numbers suggested.

A regression of ESSA results across NAPLAN-based predictors of ESSA performance was employed to isolate the scientific literacy component of student performance from reading and numeracy skills students brought to the ESSA.

Schools across the state were then ranked (from 1 to 394) using the scientific literacy results produced by the regression. The value of residuals, expressed as marks per school averaged over four years (2011-2014), above or below expectation, ranging from +2.68 to -2.50, were used for this purpose.

Three groups of 85 schools were collated from the top, middle and bottom ranked schools and labelled as well above expectation (WAE), at expectation (AE) and well below expectation (WBE) schools. Expectation being relative to the predicted ESSA result.

The numbers from this process provided no evidence about the science teaching students were exposed to in the two years leading up to the ESSA test. That evidence was gathered from science teacher responses to an online survey seeking responses to items:

- about the scope and use of ESSA related feedback
- about the understanding and scope of SOLO use to inform science teaching and assessment
- teacher impressions of how often they provided learning opportunities related to five dimensions of formative practice derived from the literature review component of my PhD work.

Separate links to the same online survey were provided to schools in each of the three groups. Responses were sought from individual science teachers. Returns from teachers were collated by group and analysed using ANOVA software and compared to assess the significance (statistical) or otherwise. Survey returns were anonymous unless teachers opted to identify themselves to obtain more information or to express interest in being invited to take part in a case study. 102 (of 254 invitations) returns spread across the three groups were received by the closing date.

I purposefully selected and invited 18 schools to participate in case studies. The invites went to two selective schools, two regional schools and two co-ed metropolitan schools in each of the three groups. All but two schools (both in the AE group) accepted those invitations.

A selection of findings is outlined below.

- **School types and context:** The top 19 schools by ESSA results were selective schools, but they appeared across the residual-ranked list (from 9th to 376th), indicating that “high results” and “value added” were not the same thing.
- **Provincial schools:** Provincial schools were 35% of the lowest 85 schools by ESSA results, yet were 56% of schools in the WAE group by residual ranking.
- **Use of ESSA resources:** Teachers in WAE and AE schools were significantly higher-frequency users of ESSA resources to improve teaching than teachers in WBE schools.
- **SOLO model uptake:** Teacher understanding and use of SOLO was low and did not differ meaningfully across WAE, AE, and WBE groups.
- **Formative practice frequency:** Across five dimensions of formative practice, WAE (and sometimes AE) teachers reported statistically different frequencies (three dimensions) of use than WBE teachers; two dimensions showed no statistically significant between-group differences, but WAE/AE were higher across all five.
- **Student-led self-assessment:** WAE teachers reported more opportunities for explicit student self-assessment, but these opportunities were infrequent and not significantly different from AE and WBE teachers.

- **Most distinctive practice in case study WAE schools:** The standout common practice was explicit “writing to learn” instruction embedded in teaching (science departmental and/or school-wide programs), consistent with research evidence on the power of formative instruction reported in the literature.
- **Limits:** There was insufficient reliable data to make credible findings about students’ acquisition of “learning how to learn” skills by the end of the four-year course.

Reflection

For retirees with an unresolved professional question, this case shows what “scratching the itch” can look like when it is pursued with academic rigour: a clear problem, credible methods, and findings that can inform real decisions. The personal investment of time and money is significant, but the payoff is a contribution that is evidence-based, shareable, and still connected to the work that mattered in your career.



The ultimate commitment to life-long learning...

Fact File:

Mature students engaged in post-graduate education in Australia

- Participation of Australians over the age of 60 in postgraduate studies is a growing, yet niche, trend driven by "baby boomers" aiming to upgrade skills, change careers, or pursue personal interest. Women, in particular, are seizing opportunities for education they may have missed earlier in life.
- The motivation for older students to engage in higher education varies. Some are transitioning to teaching or consultancy before full retirement. Others are moving from more physically demanding work to knowledge-based roles. For many, the study fulfils a need to maintain or improve cognitive function, social engagement and personal development.
- Barriers for older Australians to take up higher education include the 'digital divide' and financial constraints. Flexible, online and part-time delivery models can facilitate participation.
- The Australian higher education sector is seeing a record surge in domestic applications for 2026, creating a favourable environment for mature-age returners.
- More information available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/education-and-skills>

2026 Hunter-Central Coast Gathering

EARLY NOTICE

Last year in June, IRSEA held its first and highly successful regional event at the Apollo International Hotel, Charlestown.



In 2025, we had many Sydney-based members travelling north for the weekend to catch up with our northern colleagues. We were all delighted with the hotel's fine food and facilities.

Many have asked for the gathering be held later in the year to allow more to attend, and so we are planning this year's event to be held over **Friday 30 and Saturday 31 October 2026**.

As for last year's gathering, we intend to include a **Social networking dinner** on Friday 30 October, 6:00-8:00pm, with a more formal **Luncheon meeting** on Saturday 31 October, 11:30-2:00pm.

Our goal is to provide opportunities for retired, semi-retired and yet-to-be-retired senior educational administrators and their partners based in the greater Newcastle and north NSW to come together, catch up and share experiences, as well as hearing a terrific presentation from a notable speaker.

PLEASE SAVE THE DATES

MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW

IRSEA enriches the lives of retired Senior Educational Administrators through engagement, collegiality, friendship, and support while deploying its intellectual capacity and educational expertise for the betterment of public education in New South Wales, Australia, and beyond.

A Unique Meeting and Luncheon



Thursday 11 June 2026

@ Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, 169 Castlereagh Street, Sydney

11:00am for the 11:45am meeting

In a coup for IRSEA members and guests, one of Australia's greatest crime-fiction writers has agreed to be special guest and speaker for our June meeting.

We are delighted to announce that we will be hearing from none other than . . .

Candice Fox, International Best-Selling Crime Fiction Writer

Since 2014, Candice has published some 21 novels and reached a global audience of millions. She has won back-to-back Ned Kelly Awards for Fiction; Davitt Awards for Best Adult Crime Fiction; achieved #1 New York Times Best-Selling Author status; and collaborated on 8 novels with the great American crime fiction writer, James Patterson. She has been interviewed by Richard Fidler on ABC's *Conversations* and has published a number of podcasts. Two of her novels, *Crimson Lake* and *Redemption Point*, were adapted for the ABC television series, *Troppo*. She continues with TV adaptations to this day.



Candice is a product of public education in NSW, graduating from **Picnic Point Public School** and **Picnic Point High School**, and she credits her school education in South-Western Sydney as the rock upon which her success is based.

This will be a unique event and so we are meeting in the **Cellos Grand Dining Room** of the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel. We will suspend our general business to allow Candice to bring her unique perspectives on, and insights into, the value of public education as the progenitor of her literary career and of her passion for the written word as the great conveyor of gripping, elegant, intelligent and compelling narrative.



COME, enjoy our usual networking and collegiality along with alternate drop main, with dessert and coffee/tea . . . and tantalizing raffles to support our charities.

We guarantee a magnificent IRSEA event so, members and guests, please join us for more **conviviality, fun and inspiration.**

This occasion will be a wonderful opportunity to introduce new potential members, so please consider inviting past colleagues from Schools and or TAFE to experience what IRSEA offers for retired senior educational administrators.

Please book straight away on the form (over) to ensure you do not miss this special event!



Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators

IRSEA Meeting Booking

Come and join friends and colleagues for our Guest Speaker and Luncheon at

Castlereagh Boutique Hotel (169 Castlereagh St, Sydney 2000) on

Thursday, 11 June 2026

11:00-11:30am – Pre-meeting gathering and refreshments on Level 2,

11:45am-2:30pm Guest Presenter and Luncheon – Cellos Grand Dining Room (Level 4).

Please return the booking slip below and make payment for the lunch meeting by **Monday 1 June 2026**.

BOOKING SLIP

Name (please print):

.....

Guest's name/s (if applicable):

.....

I have transferred OR enclosed my payment of **\$70.00** (or additional for my guest/s @ \$70.00 per head) for the above listed to attend the IRSEA luncheon, 11.00am for 11.45am, at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel which includes a 2-course main meal with bread roll, coffee and tea.

Please indicate in the space provided if you require a special meal.

Meal type Number required

I agree / do not agree (cross out one) that photographs of me in professional or social situations may be published in IRSEA media and publications, including newsletters and on the website.

Signed: Date: Phone no.

NOTIFICATION and PAYMENT OPTIONS ~ Payment by direct deposit/bank transfer is preferred.

- Payment by **Electronic Funds Transfer** - Details are:
BANK: Commonwealth Bank of Australia
BSB: 062300

ACCOUNT NUMBER: 10466684

ACCOUNT NAME: Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators (IRSEA)
YOUR REFERENCE: Your **Surname, Initial,** and **'Meeting'**
- Email or message your booking slip to Ray Gillies, IRSEA Treasurer, at **rcgillies@yahoo.com.au**
 [Phone images or scans are acceptable]
- If paying by cheque**, please make the cheque payable to *Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators*, or *IRSEA* and cross it **'Not negotiable'**. Mail your cheque and booking slip to:
Ray Gillies, 79 Albyn Road, STRATHFIELD, NSW 2135

For further information or notification, please call or text Ray on mobile: 0412 763 242

NOTE: Money cannot be refunded for cancellations made after **Friday 5 June 2026**