

Chair of Director's Annual Report, 2020

Trish Douglas, Chair, Australian Geography Teachers Association Limited

This has certainly been a year to remember and certainly one highlighting the importance of the study of Geography. We began the year with our *usual* range cyclones, bushfires, storms and drought. However, the COVID-19 pandemic added a huge challenge not only for us in Australia but globally. Teaching this year has certainly been different and we have had to adapt and respond quickly to the 'new normal'. AGTA has been no different; our Board meetings this year have had to be held via Zoom due to restrictions with interstate travel, meaning that our usual robust and lengthy discussions and sharing of information has been reduced somewhat. In addition, most Affiliates have had to hold their usual conferences and professional development activities online and/or postpone these events. However, geographers are a resilient lot and the learning experiences we have gained will stand us in good stead into the future.

In 2020, we welcomed several new Directors to the Board due to changes in the various Affiliates. As per our Constitution, Presidents of each member state or territory Affiliate are automatically appointed to the Board. Additionally, each Affiliate has a nominated Board member. Since each Affiliate has slightly different timings for their annual general meetings, Board membership changes throughout the year. The current list of AGTA Directors is maintained on our website. AGTA Executive for 2020 consisted of myself as Chair with Joanne Wegener (SA) as Deputy Chair. Dr Grant Kleeman (NSW) fulfilled the roles of both Treasurer and Immediate Past Chair and Anna Griffin (WA) continued as Secretary. Anna has announced she will step down from the Secretary role after having served for the past three years in this position. I sincerely thank her for all her work in this essential position.

AGTA's representative work

AGTA has an important role in representing geography teachers on a range of national committees to ensure that the voice of geography educators in schools is heard. Thank you to the following people who have represented AGTA at meetings involving the following organisations:

Australian Alliance of Associations in Education (AAAE): Trish Douglas;
Institute of Australian Geographers (IAG): Susan Caldis;
Australian Academy of Science's National Committee of Geography: Grant Kleeman;
Australian Geography Competition: Julie Davis and Shane Albertson

We also continued to invite a representative of the Institute of Australian Geographers to attend our Board meetings as an observer in order to maintain links with the tertiary sector.

Major Board activities in 2020

The following actions have been undertaken this year:

- Continued promotion of geography and its relevance to STEM and digital technologies:

In March Susan Caldis was selected as one of 16 Science & Technology Australia STEM Ambassadors to work, together with their local MP, to help bridge the gap between science and government in Australia.

Dr Grant Kleeman and Susan Caldis have planned two symposiums focussing on Geography and STEM. Funding for these was determined at the AGTA Board meeting in

June. Panel session speakers will include Professor Michael Solem: Co-Director, National Centre for Research in Geography Education, Texas State University and Senior Advisor for Geography Education to the American Association of Geographers (AAG); Dr Karen Joyce: Education Director, She Maps and Senior Lecturer, James Cook University; Dr Kate Selway: Senior Lecturer, Macquarie University; Ms Kimberley Parnis: teacher Marist Brothers College, Dundas.

Symposiums will be held as repeat sessions on Tuesday 27 October and Tuesday 3 November. Each symposium will be a 3-hour event, co-chaired by Susan and Grant, held via zoom, and an invitation-only on this occasion. There are plans for a broader audience event to occur during 2021 as part of further action around the Geography and STEM recommendation.

- Continuation of website development for the active promotion of geography and its links to careers in order to encourage student uptake of the subject. The sub-committee involved - Anna Griffin, Rowan Harris and Joanne Wegener – have a clearly outlined program and continue to work on this project. I thank them for their work on this initiative.
- Trish Douglas and Lorraine Chaffer produced a paper putting the case for *Geography: mandatory till Year 10*. This was provided to the Board for further distribution via Affiliates.
- Anna Griffin, Steve Hawkins and Trish Douglas submitted a response on behalf of AGTA to the Education Council *Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training* chaired by Professor Peter Shergold AC.
- AGTA wrote a letter of support for The Institute of Australian Geographers bid to host 2028 International Geographical Congress in Australia in Melbourne; this bid was successful and our support was greatly appreciated
- Trish Douglas represented AGTA at the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment Schools stakeholder forum held via Zoom in September (next one to take place in November)
- Trish Douglas, Susan Caldis and Dr Grant Kleeman have liaised with Terry Gallagher, Senior Manager, Australian Curriculum Review from ACARA regarding the review of the Humanities and Social Science (HASS) Australian Curriculum. The review of the learning area, including History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Economics and Business aims to improve the F-10 Australian Curriculum by refining, realigning and decluttering the content of the curriculum within its existing structure, as well as ensuring it is underpinned by the education goals of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019). This will be vital ongoing work for AGTA. Our understanding is that Terry will be consulting with AGTA for feedback on a regular basis prior to draft changes being produced for public comment.

AGTA Resources

The AGTA series of textbooks, *Geography skills unlocked*, *Geography literacy unlocked* and *Geography fieldwork unlocked*, continue to sell well across Australia. All publications have been reviewed most favourably with pre-service teachers finding them a particularly valuable resource (and available for them at a special package discount price). AGTA is indebted to Dr Grant Kleeman for all his work in relation to these textbooks. The publication of these resources continues to provide an essential income stream for our organisation.

Student Geography competitions/activities

AGTA continues to be involved in a joint initiative with the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ) in the running of the annual Australian Geography Competition. This competition helps raise the profile of geography both within schools and at a national level. In 2020, the competition was significantly impacted by COVID-19. Some schools were able to complete the test but others, particularly those in Victoria who faced extended periods of remote learning, were unable to take part even though the Australian Geography Competition Committee extended the date for return of answer sheets.

The top performing students in the competition are usually invited to participate in Geography's Big Week Out (GBWO) which forms the basis of selection for representing Australia in the International Geography Olympiad. However, the Big Week Out event scheduled to be hosted by the Geographical Association of Western Australia and the iGeo event scheduled for Istanbul, Turkey were cancelled for 2020.

Thank you to Shane Albertson and Julie Davis from the AGTA Board who have made a significant contribution to the Australian Geography Competition Committee this year to ensure the strengthening of the relationship between AGTA and RGSQ.

Geographical Education

Geographical Education (ISSN 2204-0242) is the professional journal of AGTA and is on the DEST Register of Refereed Journals. The journal was published in print form until Volume 25, 2012. Since then the journal has been published in a digital format and is available on the Association's website.

Contributions of varying length are invited, with a maximum of 5,000 words for major articles and research reports. Shorter articles of 2,000 words, featuring classroom strategies, reflections on particular issues and practices in geography teaching, in-service education workshops, and comments on previous articles are especially welcome.

In 2020, Dr Terri Bourke and Dr Rod Lane have continued in the roles of Journal Editor and Geoffrey Paterson has continued in the role of Reviews and copy editor. We thank them all for their valuable contributions.

Geographia

AGTA's newsletter *Geographia* is used to update the broader membership on the activities of AGTA and its state and territory-based Affiliates. This vital role was filled again this year by Julie Hearnden. Her work in producing this high quality document is much appreciated.

Website

Once again, huge appreciation to Rob Berry for his continued excellent management of this vital form of communication for our organisation.

AGTA Conference 2021

The next AGTA Conference will be hosted by the Tasmanian Geography Teachers Association in Hobart Wednesday 29 September to Friday 1 October 2021. The venue will be the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Thank you to Karen Caporelli and Debbie Claridge who have taken on the vitally important role of joint conference convenors. We look forward to seeing the program for the conference plus the pre- and post-conference activities which we envisage will attract many attendees from all parts of Australia and beyond. I am confident that all Affiliates will publicise this event and support via encouraging their members to attend.

Thank you

On behalf of the Board, thank you to those involved in AGTA's operation over the past year. Particular thanks to fellow AGTA Executive and the Board members for their work in the past year. This has been a much more challenging year than normal so the efforts of everyone are even more appreciated.

I am confident that AGTA will continue to play a significant role in the strengthening of geographical education across the country into the future.

Trish Douglas

AGTA Chair, 2020