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# Mapping literature infrastructure in Australia

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## Publication Details

W. Ommundsen & M. R. Jacklin 2008, Mapping Literature Infrastructure in Australia, A report to the Australia Council for the Arts' literature board, Australia Council for the Arts, Wollongong, 155p.

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# Mapping literature infrastructure in Australia

A report to the Australia Council for the Arts' literature board

By **Professor Wenche Ommundsen and  
Dr Michael Jacklin**  
University of Wollongong

July 2008

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## Executive Summary

This report, a partnership project co-funded by the University of Wollongong and the Australia Council for the Arts, presents findings from research into the literature infrastructure of Australia. 'Literature infrastructure' refers to the organisations within the literature sector that actively support writers and their work: state writers' centres, Varuna – The Writers' Centre, the Australian Society of Authors, literary journals, genre-based organisations, and writers' festivals. The study aims to determine where each organisation sits in the 'supply chain' of support and what contribution it makes to the literature sector as a whole: what services and opportunities are offered to writers, how it contributes to the training and development of writers, whether it contributes to readership/audience development or community engagement, the extent of its national/international reach and how well it is served by its operational, financial and governance model. The research also seeks to identify trends in the sector as well as gaps in the support currently available to Australian writers.

The study draws on both quantitative and qualitative data with regard to each organisation. Quantitative data has been supplied by the Australia Council and by the respective organisations. Qualitative material derives from one-hour interviews conducted with the directors, chairs and editors of twenty-four literature organisations. Together these provide comprehensive representation of the state of literature infrastructure in Australia today.

The report is structured in five parts with each of the first four devoted to a particular area of literature infrastructure. The fifth part offers observations of broad relevance across the literature sector and points towards possible measures for both the Literature Board and literature organisations to consider.

The four areas within the literature sector examined by this study are:

- 1) Key organisations
- 2) Literary magazines
- 3) Specialist or genre-based organisations
- 4) Writers' Festivals

The following outline draws attention to significant points emerging with regard to particular organisations within each of the four areas:

### **1) Key Organisations**

The most salient points with regard to current key organisations are:

- *Career-long support for writers:* all key organisations demonstrate through a range of programs opportunities for training, professional development and employment for new and emerging, mid-career and established writers.

- *Advocacy*: both professional associations and writers' centres aim to advance the interests of writers and support writers' efforts to gain a livelihood from their work.
- *Diversity of audience development initiatives*: writers' centres are engaged in diverse activities, both large and small scale, from literary readings at embassies to writers' festivals to book launches, promoting Australian literature and contributing to audience development.
- *Partnerships with publishers*: while not formalised by all key organisations, many have established programs in partnership with publishers aimed at manuscript assessment and development, with publications resulting. These partnerships are a significant contribution to the literature infrastructure.
- *Self-identification as 'peak bodies' for writers and writing*: a number of key organisations identify themselves (in their documents and on their websites) as peak bodies; others that do not explicitly claim peak body status nevertheless may perceive themselves as such.
- *Tensions between geographically proximate literature organisations*: claiming peak body status has economic repercussions for other geographically proximate literature organisations, due to competition over limited funding sources (state, federal, corporate and philanthropic).
- *Regionalism*: some key organisations located outside the Sydney-Melbourne regions consider themselves disadvantaged by their distance from major aspects of the literature sector. Not only do they perceive their access to publishing houses (concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne) as restricted, but they also see contact with the Australia Council as limited.

## 2) Literary Magazines

Points of significance with regard to literary magazines include:

- *Springboard for emerging literary talent*: all literary magazines covered in this study demonstrate their capacity to identify new literary talent and provide emerging writers with opportunities to publish.
- *Support for the literary*: all editors interviewed make the point that literary work – short fiction, poetry, literary essays – has lost ground to non-fiction, in terms of both readership and the material rewards for writers. Literary magazines, however, continue to deliver important support to the literature sector, through payments to poets and creative writers, and by maintaining a platform for creative work.
- *Professional development*: literary magazines provide opportunities for young writers to gain the skills and experience required across the literature sector, including editing, copy editing, proof-reading, and knowledge of publicity, marketing and distribution.
- *Extremely limited staffing levels*: although employment, internship or volunteer work with literary magazines may provide professional development opportunities, this particular component of the literature sector suffers from extremely limited staffing. Magazines often operate with less than two full-time staff positions, placing stress on individuals who are expected to perform beyond

their designated hours, and on the organisation which is consequently unable to maximise its potential.

- *Static subscription levels*: with the exception of *Australian Book Review* which has substantially increased its subscription numbers, literary magazines generally have a steady or static subscription-base. Most editors express concern in this regard and indicate that increasing subscription numbers remains a goal.
- *Digital delivery*: attitudes towards digital format or digital delivery vary substantially between magazines. A number of magazines are actively engaged in redesigning their websites, with the aim of drawing new readers. Others, however, indicate that digital delivery is not a current priority.
- *Regionalism*: as with some Key Organisations, regionalism plays a role in limiting the reach of certain magazines.

### 3) Specialist and Genre-based Organisations

The following points are pertinent to specialist and genre-based organisations:

- *Advocacy*: a primary objective of specialist or genre-based organisations is to affirm and support particular types of writing and the writers engaged in these areas. This involves audience development activities, employment opportunities, professional development and, in some cases, interceding with publishers on the behalf of writers (see Fremantle Children's Literature Centre).
- *Educational programming*: a major component of most specialist organisations examined in this study is their involvement in education. Schools' programming features largely, either in existing operations or, with newer organisations, in strategic planning.
- *Digital delivery*: the embrace of new technologies varies across specialist organisations, but a number demonstrate highly innovative application of technology to audience development, through interactive websites and online events.
- *Reliance on short-term, program-based funding*: specialist and genre-based groups appear most vulnerable to funding uncertainties, due to their dependence on short-term, program-specific funding. (This is discussed in detail in the Concluding Observations.)
- *Regionalism*: specialist and genre-based groups are particularly affected by the issue of regionalism. A number of these organisations position themselves as national in their representation, their activities, or their contributions to the sector. However, state-based issues (including state Arts funding, as well as perceptions of competition from other similarly-focused groups) impede nation-wide coordination of activities.

#### 4) Writers' Festivals

Significant points with regards to writers' festivals are:

- *Showcasing of Australian writing*: directors of all major writers' festivals agree that showcasing Australian writing and writers is their primary activity. As such, audience development is their major contribution to the literature sector. This occurs through attracting increasing numbers of festival attendees on the one hand and generating substantial media coverage on the other.
- *Opportunities for writers*: festivals contribute to the literature sector in the opportunities they create for participating writers. These include short-term benefits of performance fees and potential book sales, and longer-term benefits resulting from networking with writers, publishers and organisers of other festivals (national and international).
- *Schools' programs*: for three of the four festivals examined in this study, schools' programs were a significant part of their event. Festival directors see this not only as contributing to educational opportunities but also as long-term audience development work.
- *Collaboration*: most writers' festivals rely on complex networks of collaborations and partnerships. These include partnerships with corporations, educational institutions, government bodies and other literature organisations. Some involve cash contributions; many relate to in-kind support that is nonetheless essential. Financial reporting does not always acknowledge the extent or the significance of such collaborative support.
- *Competition for resources*: this study has found, in some cases, competition between writers' festivals and other similarly-located literature organisations over available resources. This can be a matter of competition over limited funding to support operations, a perception of restricted opportunities for local writers, or perceived restricted access to overseas writers.
- *Perceptions of limited support from the Australia Council*: as many writers' festivals have experienced substantial growth in recent years, so have their annual budgets. Funding from the Australia Council, however, has not kept pace and for some festivals Australia Council funding is now 2% or less of their total budget. Some directors question whether this level of support acknowledges the role of festivals in overall literature infrastructure.

#### 5) Concluding Observations

The fifth part of this report highlights key issues that have emerged from this research and that are perceived as impacting upon organisations across the literature sector. It also points to measures which may be considered by the Literature Board and the organisations concerned.

#### Sector-wide issues:

- ❖ Tensions between audience development on the one hand and skills and professional development on the other. Although potentially complementary, these two fundamental aspects of the literature sector can be, and often are, perceived as being disjunctive.
- ❖ Pressures relating to local/state/national agendas and priorities. Literature organisations with aspirations of national representation or reach are in some ways thwarted by state jurisdictions (and funding mechanisms), to the detriment of the literature sector as a whole.
- ❖ Competition versus collaboration. Across the literature sector, individual organisations are encouraged to compete for limited sources of funding. While this may promote innovation in some regards, in other ways it threatens the viability of important components of the sector, as groups with distinct objectives, programs and target audiences vie against sometimes dissimilar organisations for the same funding opportunities. Prioritising and rewarding collaboration and the sharing of resources could alleviate this to some extent.
- ❖ Reliance by many organisations across the literature sector on short-term program-specific funding. This emerges as a significant burden to the infrastructure as a whole, as organisations point out that a substantial proportion of resources are consumed in the process of applying for and acquitting small sum, program-specific grants, to the detriment of strategic planning.
- ❖ Stress on human resources. Literature organisations tend to operate with very limited staff numbers, placing significant pressure upon both individuals and organisations. Limited staffing results from limited funding and flows on to challenges in managing issues such as annual leave, succession planning, career development, and marketing.
- ❖ Challenges to the sector relating to digital delivery and new technologies. Writing, reading and publishing are undergoing transformations in relation to new media and alternative access and distribution mechanisms, creating considerable uncertainty while at the same time opening new opportunities to support writing and engage with audiences.

#### Measures for the Literature Board to consider:

- The proportion of grant funding directed to infrastructure – and to maintain infrastructure – should reflect the vital role that literature organisations play in fostering and sustaining Australia’s literary production.



- Provision of administrative support could be considered – through software applicable across the sector; through face-to-face consultation; through dedicated human resources made available to literature organisations.
- Assistance with marketing would benefit the sector – again, through access to software; through consultation; or through dedicated human resources.
- Assistance with audience/readership development could be achieved in a variety of ways: through subsidies for library subscriptions for literary magazines across states and territories; through coordination with state and territory education departments to facilitate the inclusion of literature organisations’ programs and materials; through broad international promotion of Australian writers and writing.
- Facilitation of national coordination should be a priority – beginning with support for annual meetings of directors of writers’ centres, writers’ festivals, children’s and youth literature organisations, poetry organisations.
- Mechanisms for developing formal partnerships could be considered between universities offering creative/professional writing courses and writers’ centres, genre-based groups and literary magazines and writers’ festivals.
- Collaboration at all levels should be rewarded: possibly factor collaboration into funding mechanisms and processes.

Measures for literature organisations to consider:

- Financial reporting needs to recognise and incorporate in-kind support.
- Annual leave commitments need to be met by organisations and staff.
- Formal strategic planning processes are essential.
- Succession planning should be addressed in the organisation’s strategic planning documents.
- The possibilities of new technologies delivering services and products to writers and publications and events to readers and audiences should be considered and pursued wherever appropriate.
- Collaborations and the sharing of resources with other literature organisations should be pursued whenever possible.

## Introduction

This report presents findings from research into the literature infrastructure of Australia. ‘Literature infrastructure’ refers to the organisations within the literature sector that actively support writers and their work: the Australian Society of Authors, state writers’ centres, Varuna – The Writers’ Centre, literary journals, writers’ festivals, genre-based organisations, etc. The study aims to determine where each organisation sits in the ‘supply chain’ of support and what contribution it makes to the literature sector as a whole: what services and opportunities are offered to writers, how it contributes to the training and development of writers, whether it contributes to readership/audience development or community engagement, the extent of its national/international reach and how well it is served by its operational, financial and governance model. The research also seeks to identify trends in the sector as well as gaps in the support currently available to Australian writers.

The research is a partnership project, co-funded by the University of Wollongong and the Australia Council for the Arts. It is led by Professor Wenche Ommundsen and assisted by Dr. Michael Jacklin, who has worked in co-operation with staff at the Literature Board of the Australia Council, and who has also conducted interviews with representatives of the organisations which are the focus of this study. The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Literature Board.

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government’s principal arts funding and advisory body. Its mission is to enrich the lives of Australians and their communities by supporting and promoting the practice and enjoyment of the arts. The Literature Board, which is part of the Council, aims to support the excellence, diversity, vitality, viability and distinctiveness of Australian literature. It does so by providing direct financial support to outstanding literary creators and grants to organisations that offer infrastructure support to the literature sector and income-generating opportunities

for writers. Infrastructure funding is offered to a number of organisations, centres, magazines and projects through a mix of funding models: core (triennial) funding, program funding, project funding. This report examines twenty-four of these organisations, providing a sample of current organisational structures, operational focuses, and the outreach of each organisation. This study also incorporates key views and concerns of the literature infrastructure organisations, as they arose in interviews with the directors, editors and chairs of these organisations. Of particular interest are their views regarding perceived points of stress in the current infrastructure, as well as their comments on the strengths of their respective organisations. Together the quantitative and qualitative data provide comprehensive representation of the state of literature infrastructure in Australia today.

The report will include data on and views relating to:

Key Organisations including:

- ACT Writers Centre
  - Eleanor Dark Foundation / Varuna – The Writers’ House
  - NSW Writers’ Centre
  - Northern Territory Writers’ Centre
  - Queensland Writers’ Centre
  - South Australian Writers’ Centre
  - Victorian Writers’ Centre
  - writingWA
  - Australian Society of Authors
- (Although invited to participate, the Director of the Tasmanian Writers’ Centre did not respond in time to arrange an interview and the Director of the Australian Writers’ Guild was unable to find time for an interview.)

Literary journals including:

- *Meanjin*
  - *Overland*
  - *Island*
  - *HEAT*
  - *Australian Book Review*
- (*Southerly* and *Quadrant* were also approached; the co-editors of the first were unavailable at the time of interviews; the editor of the latter did not respond.)

Specialist and genre-based groups including:

- Poets Union
- The Red Room Company
- The Australian Poetry Centre
- Centre for Youth Literature
- Fremantle Children's Literature Centre
- Express Media

Writers' festivals including:

- Melbourne Writers' Festival
- Brisbane Writers Festival
- Adelaide Writers' Week
- Sydney Writers' Festival

(Throughout this report, use of apostrophes with writers' centres and writers' festivals will follow that of the respective organisation, as appearing on its website and in its publications.)

## Key Organisations

### ACT Writers Centre

The ACT Writers Centre was established in 1994. It operated from a small room at the Griffith Library beginning in 1995 and employed its first part-time staff member in 1996. Two years later the Centre moved to the central Canberra location of Gorman House Arts Centre, where it continues to be housed.

Its current staffing is equivalent to 2.4 full-time positions, shared over three people. They are:

Director	Anne-Maree Britton (f-t)
Office Manager	Kimberley Gaal (0.8)
Communications Manager	Hal Judge (0.6)

The Centre also draws upon the assistance of volunteers for administrative tasks and special events such as the Canberra Writers Festival (see below).

Its Board comprises eight members. They are:

Chair	Trevor Stafford
Deputy Chair	Craig Cormick
Treasurer	Noelene Nelson
Members	Monica Carroll
	Sylvia Alston
	Michael D'Aprix
	Pat Stone
	Jennifer Woodhouse

Membership of the ACT Writers Centre has held steady at just over 900 since 2002. Current membership is between 920 and 940 members, with approximately 30 memberships expiring without renewal and 30 new memberships being attracted each month. In addition to its current membership, the Centre maintains contact with approximately 1000 expired members via weekly broadcast email, providing information regarding upcoming events and thus serving as a form of low-cost direct marketing for the Centre's activities.

The ACT Writers Centre has an annual budget of approximately \$250,000, with just over \$100,000 per annum coming from Arts ACT; \$34,000 per annum from the Australia Council in triennial funding, plus varying amounts of project funding (e.g. \$7,500 in 2006, \$11,000 in 2007, \$0 in 2008); and \$19,000 per annum from local government (down from just over \$24,000 in previous years). Approximately 30% of the Centre's income is self-generated. In 2007 the ACT Writers Centre sustained a loss of approximately \$13,000 and in the past eight years, only two years have resulted in an operating profit.

The ACT Writers Centre's mission is to support and promote writing in the ACT region. To this end it hosts approximately 40 workshops and 20 literary events per year, the majority in the ACT but with some activities in regional NSW as well. It provides employment for approximately 60 established writers each year, offers manuscript assessment services and mentorships, administers a range of literary prizes, distributes its newsletter *ACTWrite* 11 times a year, hosts in its Gorman House premises a diverse range of writers and readers groups holding weekly or monthly meetings, and organises the Canberra Writers Festival held in June each year.

In interview, Director Anne-Maree Britton explained that the Centre's structured range of annual operational activities is complemented by shorter-notice events that are organised as needs and opportunities arise. According to Britton, this responsive capacity is one of the Centre's strengths, with roughly 50% of the year's program embedded in the business plan, with the other 50% being adaptive and situational. This often involves partnerships and cross-promotional activities in which a writer engaged by another literature organisation is 'borrowed' for local events. Examples in 2008 include Sri Lankan author Nury Vittachi, who is participating in the Byron Bay Writers' Festival, being brought to the ACT for school events, and Australian author Margaret Wild, who is appearing at the University of Canberra, giving a workshop at the Centre. Britton pointed out that being located in the nation's capital had benefits for the Centre including collaborations with national institutions and literary events held at embassies, with a recent event at the

Egyptian embassy and invitations for similar events from both the Danish and American ambassadors.

While school and embassy events may be categorised as audience development, the Canberra Writers Festival in 2008 is oriented towards training and professional development. Britton explained that previous years' festivals, which had followed audience development principles based on a rationale of bringing in high-profile writers alongside whom local writers could gain exposure, had not achieved attendance targets. This year, therefore, the Festival's emphasis will shift to a focus on the craft of writing, with opportunities for local writers to gain advice on the mechanics of writing, creating a book proposal and approaching a publisher. There are pitching sessions in which selected writers can pitch their proposal to, in one session, a literary agent, and in another, a panel of editors, publishers and agents. Britton says that this shift in focus has resulted in greater local enthusiasm for the event, with increased media coverage leading into the festival, and – at three weeks prior to the festival – an average of 40 bookings per session, with 80 bookings per session expected (for 28 sessions).

When asked about the role of the Writers Centre in liaising between writers and publishers, Britton downplayed formal relationships or strategies, saying that writers tend to make their approach to publishers independent of the Centre's involvement. She went on to say that:

on the other hand, there have been three or four a year where we can say that we had something tangible to do with that. For example, a woman called Karen Viggers last month got published by Allen & Unwin and she came to various things of ours and sent off an application, got successful at Varuna through our programs, had her time at Varuna, had a much better manuscript, sent it off and got accepted.

Viggers' book is titled *The Stranding* and is now being promoted by Allen & Unwin through their Vivid Books website. This brief anecdote is a specific example of the outcomes of the networks of support existing between the State and Territory Writers' Centres and Varuna (see the following section on Varuna for further details).

Another example Britton gave of a writer benefiting from networks between literature organisations is one that resulted from an international festival directors' conference held last year in Sydney at the Australia Council offices. As part of that conference, festival directors shared recommendations of writers who had performed well and attracted audiences at previous festivals. Britton recounted:

I ran into Miles Merrill [poet] at the Sydney Writers' Festival last weekend and he said he was off to Canada, and when I asked a few key questions, I could trace that directly back to that hour-long session where we said who is good. He's since been offered gigs in Ubud [in Bali] and Canada as a result of us having him here [at a past Canberra Writers' Festival] and recommending him.

Here the anecdote illustrates a sharing of knowledge between writers' centres and writers' festivals (as many State and Territory Centres also host festivals) and the possibility of international opportunities for Australian writers through such knowledge-sharing networks.

Knowledge management emerged as a key issue for the ACT Writers Centre in regards to the current upgrade to their website. Britton has been director of the Centre for 12 years and sees her broad and detailed knowledge of the ACT writing sector as both a strength and a weakness for the Centre. "After 12 years I know everybody and I can find people for the most obscure jobs when employers want things," she said. Clearly, Britton's experience and contacts throughout the ACT are invaluable to the Centre; should she leave, however, the loss of that knowledge-base would be a blow to the Centre's capabilities. To overcome this, the Centre is developing their Invite-a-Writer service.

Britton explains:

What I want to do is get all this knowledge out of my head and onto our website so that someone else coming along after me, if they're asked, "Okay, who's a good freelance editor, or who can do this or that for me?" they can search and it's searchable in a whole range of genres. So you can search either by their name, or publisher, or genre, or work area, for example, researcher, or poet or freelance editor. It's not on our website yet; it's happening in the background here and it'll be up in about a week. It's taking over where our old website program called Writers' Register took off, but this time we'll be able to upload a picture of the person; we'll put their literary CV there; we'll put in a list of areas they're available for work in. And not



only that, but we will put in at the bottom feedback that we've got. [...] When the potential employer clicks on the link to contact this person it will actually come to us and for the first time ever we will actually put ourselves in the middle as a broker because, with all that knowledge, we were just passing people on and never making any money out of it. Not only that but it's solving a second problem, which was that the ACT government schools here are now asking our writers to have public liability insurance. So to get around that, we are being an employment recruiter, so we are saying we will send the person out, we will cover the public liability insurance and we will invoice the school. It's a little bit of extra work for me and it's only just taking off now. I've done two of them and we get 15%. And the third thing that it's filling the gap for is that there are no literary agents in Canberra. And there's only one small publisher.

Britton's comments here again suggest that a crucial role of the ACT Writers Centre is co-ordinating between writers and other organisations, whether businesses or schools, facilitating opportunities for employment and income, and putting writers in touch with audiences. The invite-a-writer web-page is now active and can be found at [www.actwriters.org.au/invite\\_a\\_writer.html](http://www.actwriters.org.au/invite_a_writer.html).

A final point is the ACT Writers Centre's reach to regional areas. The Centre has 140 members in regional locations and has run workshops in Jindabyne, Cooma, Yass and Crookwell as well as South Coast areas such as Bateman's Bay. This involvement in NSW locations has led to the Centre being invited to be part of the NSW LitLink program. At present, the Centre runs on average four regional workshops a year, organised in cooperation with regional Art and Cultural Development Officers. An example of a regional activity is a series of poetry workshops at the Cooma Correctional Centre auspiced by the ACT Writers Centre. Three workshops, with an initial participation of 8 prisoners, were run and included reading and writing exercises followed by receiving feedback on poetry produced.

The events and activities canvassed briefly here, ranging from its annual festival with attendances between two and three thousand, to readings at embassies and workshops in prisons, have been selected to give a sense of the diversity of the Centre's involvement in the promotion of writing across the ACT and regional NSW.

[Sources of information: ACT Writers Centre webpage at <http://www.actwriters.org.au/>;  
Vivid Books website at <http://www.vividfiction.com.au/default.html>; Key Organisations  
Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and  
Analysis (Excel Worksheet); ACT Writers Centre 2008-10 Business Plan; Interview with  
Anne-Maree Britton, 30 May 2008; [www.actwriters.org.au/invite\\_a\\_writer.html](http://www.actwriters.org.au/invite_a_writer.html)]

### **Eleanor Dark Foundation / Varuna – The Writers’ House**

Varuna – The Writers’ House was established in 1991 to provide, according to its  
Mission Statement: “a unique environment in which the best of Australian literature may  
be created; and to support it with rigorous development programs and ready engagement  
with the reading public, fellow writers, literary organisations and publishers.” It has a  
staffing equivalent of 2.5 full-time positions, 1 artistic and 1.5 administrative. It also  
employs 2 administrative staff on a casual basis and draws on the support of 10  
volunteers.

Creative Director	Peter Bishop
Executive Director	Madeleine Dignam

Its Board comprises 10 members, including:

Life President	Mick Dark
Chair	Gillian Appleton
Memb	Tracey Meredith-Marx
	Carolyn Swindell
	Gregg Borschmann
	Katherine Brisbane, AM
	Irene Stevens
	Dr Jeff Bateson

Varuna does not operate on a membership basis, although its Alumni program is in some  
measures similar, with alumni (open to writers who formerly benefited from a Varuna  
Fellowship, Residency, Writing Program, etc) paying yearly fees and in return accessing

benefits including professional development opportunities, paid consultancy work, eligibility for international exchanges, access to the alumni website and e-newsletter, discounts for residencies and waiver of application fees for Varuna programs.

Premises is all-important to Varuna, as its core programs, including the Varuna Fellowships and the various Residencies, all entail stays for writers of between one and four weeks at Varuna, the former residence of novelist Eleanor Dark and Dr Eric Dark. Varuna's aim, from its beginning, was to be a place where writers could retreat and have space and time to write, and for 48 weeks of each calendar year 5 writers live and work in residence. Executive Director Madeleine Dignam explained in interview the importance of place and the sense of support and community that writers find at Varuna:

The residential part of what we provide, which is based very much around the place and the house and where we are in the mountains, has got a very long history and it will always be one of the key foundations of what we do. So [almost] every week of the year, we have five writers here from all over Australia, and from all sorts of genres and all stages of development, here working on their book, their poetry, their play, etc. And that's something unique. We know that writers say that through being here they understand themselves as a writer; something particular happens here that breathes something into that creative life. People who know something about the arts know it's incredibly important for sustaining the development of work, and nurturing that. Because particularly now in Australia – perhaps it happens in other parts of the world – but in Australia particularly, the arts structure is small and the support for that is thin, really. And so, in a sense, for people to come to a place like Varuna and live and breathe their writing two weeks, three weeks, four weeks: that sustains people. That sustains people for a year. They make connections here that sustain their writing. They make networks with other writers, and they find pathways and points of contact that sustain them, particularly when they are at the beginning of their writing life. So I think that's unique. That's something that Varuna provides that no one else provides.

While the physical space of Varuna remains important, both Dignam and Creative Director Peter Bishop emphasise that a major contribution to literature infrastructure is Varuna's comprehensive and integrated set of programs that focus on manuscript development, helping writers over a period of time achieve a quality of work acceptable for publication. Bishop and Dignam point out that although creative writing courses have

burgeoned across Australia in the past ten years, available at universities, TAFE colleges and writers' centres and attracting growing numbers of students, actual pathways that facilitate a writer's movement through his or her first efforts, to a first complete draft, through multiple rewrites and editing, and on to contacts with publishers is rare. Dignam claims that a lot of writers say, "Well, there's lots of workshops, there's lots of courses you can do, and they inspire you at the time but there's no structure that comes after that." She and Bishop argue that what Varuna does best is provide that structure. In fact, they argue that the structure and pathways Varuna has generated, in strategic partnerships with writers' centres and with industry, are a crucial component of Australia's literature infrastructure.

Key to this argument is Varuna's involvement with regional Australia, in close collaboration with state-based writers' centres and with NSW regional writers' centres. The Varuna LongLines Program, funded by the Macquarie Group Foundation, and the LitLink NSW Regional Writers' Program, funded by Arts NSW, allow Bishop to travel to the eight writers' centres in NSW and the eight writers' centres around Australia and provide one-on-one consultations with approximately 18 writers in each location and offer advice on their manuscripts and the pathways that might be available to them. The focus of the program is on new and emerging writers and Varuna relies on the groundwork of the regional and state-based centres to select the best candidates for consultation – those whose work is of the highest standard in the region. For the best of these, Bishop will then recommend a pathway such as an application to the HarperCollins Varuna Awards Workshops. This is a program that gives 5 writers the opportunity to develop their manuscripts, working with a senior editor from HarperCollins over 10 days. There is also in planning now a Penguin/Varuna Scholarship, which will be exclusively for LongLines writers, and which provides \$5,000 to buy the writer time to work on her or his manuscript, followed by 20 hours of editorial time. While there is no guarantee of publication, Bishop and Dignam make the point that for regional writers, to have the opportunity to have their manuscript assessed at the highest level and receive feedback is a valued outcome in itself. For the publishers involved in these programs, their access to new voices and new talent, among whom may be writers who join the next cohort of

Australian authors, is likewise greatly valued. The extensive selection process involved, from the writers' centres recommendations, to the highly competitive Varuna programs, to those few writers finally chosen, ensures that publishers are presented with the best material from across regional Australia. It is the longevity of the relationships and networks, and of the programs (LongLines has been running for 8 years), that contribute to the quality of the works being assessed and the quality of the eventual published outcomes.

The process outlined above is an important one in the contemporary literature infrastructure and addresses a gap that resulted in the 1990s when publishing houses cut their editing and manuscript development resources. For some period of time, mentorship programs addressed this gap, but changes in funding strategies have meant that organisations can no longer apply for funds from The Australia Council for skills development or professional development programs. Some writers' centres have sought solutions by partnering with publishers, as Varuna has done (see forward to both the NSW and Queensland Writers' Centres). What needs to be emphasised is that the pathways that have now developed depend critically upon the quality input of regional and state-based writers' centres. Without their long-term fostering of writers, and their screening and filtering for quality, the supply-chain of fresh material from regional Australia and the delivery of quality works to publishers could not be sustained in the manner outlined.

Two further points need to be made. Varuna positions itself as a strategic component in the national literature infrastructure because of its extensive networks with writers' centres, as just mentioned. It fulfils an otherwise neglected area in the infrastructure, which, Bishop and Dignam argue, is predominantly based in Sydney and Melbourne. Considering the number and size of literature organisations located in these two cities, the point is difficult to refute. Bishop and Dignam argue that regional writers, disadvantaged by distance from the two centres of literature activity, depend on the writers' centres and Varuna to access opportunities to publish. But equally important, Australian publishing

also requires this conduit to regional voices to ensure diversity and regional representation in our national literature.

The second point is that of reporting of outcomes. An assumption of studies such as this is that outcomes can be measured, compared and evaluated. A basic outcome in literature is publication, which should be easily measurable. The difficulty facing writers' centres and organisations like Varuna, however, is that for the most part, they do not publish. While some writers' centres do publish anthologies, individual publications such as novels, selected poetry, short stories or plays are most often the works of individual writers whom these centres have encouraged and facilitated on their pathways to publication. Varuna, between the years 1999 and 2001, kept records of publications in which appeared an acknowledgement of the Centre's contribution, with 45 titles over this period crediting Varuna with some level of input to their success. Over recent years this record keeping has been difficult to maintain, due to small staff levels and a significant growth in the number of programs and events being run and the house at full occupancy all year. Varuna is at present completing some detailed research into the number of books that have been published in the last five years that acknowledge the contribution that the Centre's programs and residencies made to the development of the work. Bishop and Dignam both note that this is still a difficult task, as the time between a Varuna program and fellowship and the actual publication of the manuscript can be three, five or sometimes even as much as ten years. Similarly, directors of writers' centres can provide examples of writers' successes following involvement in their centre's programs; Viggers' experience with the ACT Writers Centre, cited above, is an example; yet, to the knowledge of this research team, writers' centres do not keep formal records of the extent of such outcomes.

In large measure, the difficulty relates to the time lag between an organisation's involvement and an eventual publication; it also relates to the multiple involvements of organisations over a period of years; it relates, as well, to the possibility that a writer who benefited from Varuna, for example, may in fact not publish, but teach others, who in turn publish. An exchange between Dignam and Bishop illustrate this:

MD: For example, the other day a writer said to us, “After I ran those series of workshops you invited me to run here, I’ve gone back and I’m now running workshops in my own community.” That to me is much smaller outcome, but very significant.

PB: That particular writer said that her book had been picked up by a conference on poetry by Australian teachers. Her book is not about poetry but it contains a lot of poetry and is about the experience of poetry in a young person’s life really. So she’s talking to that group of teachers. The crucial thing about teachers and poetry is to inspire them with precisely that enthusiasm that her book does. So there’s a difficulty in mapping exactly how far it goes. I could name lots of writers who may not even have published a book, but would say that Varuna was crucial to what they did. They may have published an essay say in *Griffith Review*, and they may still be working on their book. But books take a long time to come out sometimes. And there are quite a few books that aren’t books that the writer came to Varuna to work on, but the experience of working at Varuna is what gave them the next book.

This exchange alludes to another contribution that Varuna claims to make to Australia’s literature infrastructure, that is, professional development and skills enhancement in turn leading to a seeding of literature opportunities in regional communities. The first writer mentioned above had been given the opportunity to run a workshop at Varuna; this led to her gaining confidence to run workshops in her local community. Bishop and Dignam gave examples of this happening in regional Victoria (Malvern) and in regional Western Australia (Albany and Denmark). Recognition of this is important in terms of thinking beyond the narrow concept of a writer as a uniquely creative individual working in isolation, and developing an understanding of writing and literature as being produced through networks of organisations and individuals, through relationships and support mechanisms spread both geographically and over considerable time.

In short, Varuna contributes substantially to those networks, structures and processes that allow the creative individual opportunities to contribute to Australia’s literature in its diverse forms.

[Sources of information: Key Organisations: Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Interview

with Peter Bishop and Madeleine Dignam, 10 April 2008; email communication with Madeleine Dignam, 20 August 2008; Varuna – The Writers’ House webpage <http://www.varuna.com.au/index.html> ; Inez Brewer, ‘Varuna’s Writing Program’ *TEXT*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2001.]

## **NSW Writers’ Centre**

The NSW Writers’ Centre was established in 1991 and is housed in a restored Georgian mansion in the grounds of the Rozelle Hospital. The Centre currently has three full-time staff; they are:

Acting Executive Director	Arabella Lee [Marnie Power has replaced Lee as Acting Executive Director since the writing of this report]
Accounts	Alison Baillache
Membership	Ann-Marie Nolan

There is also a Property and Courses position, held by Ambra Sancin; this has been a three month contract position which will soon be terminating.

The Centre has a ten member Board comprising:

Chair	Máire Sheenan
Deputy Chair	John Dale
Treasurer	Emily Mann
Secretary	Jennifer Nisbet
Members	Camilla Nelson
	Alan Russell
	Susanne Gervay
	Gayle Kennedy
	Peter Manning
	Kathy Helidoniotis

Membership at the NSW Writers’ Centre has grown over the past nine years, rising from just under 2,000 in 1999, and just over 2,000 in 2001, to its present base of between 2,700 and 3,000 members. Acting Executive Director Arabella Lee explained that the Centre’s turnover of membership is substantial, with between 200 and 300 new members joining each two months and a similar number of memberships expiring.



The NSW Writers' Centre has an annual budget of nearly \$700,000. Approximately 25% of income is from government sources (\$103,000 from Arts NSW; \$51,000 from the Australia Council; \$15,000 from local government), with the majority of its income deriving from membership fees, income from workshops and literary events, sale of publications and from the hire of the building.

The premises occupied by the Centre contributes substantially to both the income of the organisation and its vibrant, creative atmosphere, according to Lee. The Centre manages the tenancy of the building, hiring out rooms to other arts organisations (Australian Screen Directors Guild); professional associations (NSW Guild of Bookbinders), studios to writers and meeting rooms for seminars, lectures and workshops. This arrangement is currently licensed through Arts NSW but in 2011 that license will be up for renewal. This is a matter of some concern because management of the grounds in which the building and the Centre are located is undergoing transition, with Rozelle Hospital moving out and the University of Sydney soon to make use of the property. What this will mean for the Writers' Centre is, at this point, uncertain.

In terms of its contribution to Australian literature, Lee explained that the NSW Writers' Centre aims at:

promoting Australian writing through giving people who want to write access to information about writing, as well as through our festivals and our magazine articles about Australian writing. So I think that's one of the key things that we do, in the broadest sense. But we're also a resource and information service for people who are writing. Anybody who wants to write can come to us, so we're contributing at all levels, perhaps someone who has never made any contact with anybody before about their writing will come to us because we have quite a high profile in NSW and ask us, "How can I get published? What can I do with my writing?" And so we can reach people right at the very beginning of their writing career and assist them every step of the way.

The Centre runs a year-long program of both professional and audience development, through workshops, courses and seminars, literary festivals (four in 2008), writing competitions, mentorships, and super sessions (one-on-one manuscript assessment and

pathways-to-publication advice), as well as hosting member-run writing groups, publishing and distributing its magazine *Newswrite*, and providing information and resources to its members both over the phone and via its website (an increasingly important point of contact, with tutorials now available online as well).

While many of the Centre's operations have been long-standing, a new development for 2007/2008 is the Blake Poetry Prize, a joint initiative by the Writers' Centre, the Blake Society, Leichhardt Council, and *Wet Ink*. A companion piece to the Blake Prize for Religious Art, the Blake Poetry Prize "has been established to link art and literature and to give Australian poets new possibilities to explore the nature of spirituality in the twenty-first century" [from the Blake Prize website]. The first prize is \$5000 and publication in *Wet Ink*. As well, all of the entries are being bound by the NSW Guild of Bookbinders and will be toured with the exhibition of religious art through South Australia later this year.

One of the Centre's ongoing strengths is its strong membership base and although, as stated above, there is a substantial rate of both new and lapsing members, there is also a significant and stable core membership maintaining long-term associations with the Centre. One aspect of these long-term associations is the writing groups hosted at the Centre. Lee explains:

Writers groups are free to join if you are a member. And they are one of the cheapest and most productive services that we offer. It really encourages people to take responsibility for their own writing development. Those groups are so productive. You see, some of them have been in a class, say six years ago; they've been continuing to meet every two weeks here at the Centre; they pay a very small fee to have the same room every Tuesday at 2 o'clock, or something, and then one by one they are getting published, you know. They're succeeding. They critique each other's work very strongly. They all are structured differently. Sometimes one person will present, or they will do a bit of a workshop, or they might just critique each person's work individually. I just love those writers groups. It's not a commercial exercise. It's a purely developmental exercise.

As an example of the relationship between writing groups and the Centre's programs of support and professional development, Lee referred to the experiences of Sam

Everingham:

He started about nine years ago here in a writing group. He said it was one of the toughest things he's ever done; it was really hard work, but he was in a writers' group for years and years. Then he did a mentorship with us, with Nick Bleszynski who is a screenwriter and has a couple books on bushrangers published, and he's just finished another book and is a continuing mentor of ours. And then Sam went on to... well, it took many forms; I think it started as a fiction book and it actually became a non-fiction book called *Wild Ride: The Rise and Fall of Cobb & Co* [Penguin Books, June 2007]. It was read on the ABC and now he's got another contract with Penguin and he's also ghost writing a book. But his development is the sort of pathway that we like. It takes a long time. There are various stages, but then your career takes off. But it was through the Writers' Centre that he got his start, really.

Former Executive Director Irina Dunn, in her final editorial in *Newswrite* (March 2008) lists numerous publication achievements facilitated by the Centre's programs or support, including Gayle Kennedy's 2006 David Unaipon Award winner *Me, Antman and Fleabag*, Sally Clarke's *In the Space Behind the Eyes: Donald R Stuart A Biography 1913-1983* (shortlisted for the 2006 WA Premier's Award), and Cecile Yazbek's memoir *Olive Trees Around My Table: Growing up Lebanese in the Old South Africa* (East Street Publications, 2007). Dunn writes: It is such successes that have lifted the Centre out of its 'amateur' status to become a professional organisation which has earned the respect of the Australian writing and publishing industries" (8).

The departure of Dunn, who had been with the Centre for 15 years, has initiated a period of transition. This is providing opportunity for the Centre to consider the restructuring of its staffing arrangements, to refresh its courses and programs, redesign its magazine, and possibly shift from the past focus on advice to writers on achieving publication to more sustained work on manuscript development. As part of the rethinking of staffing roles, the editorship of *Newswrite*, which previously had been the responsibility of the Executive Director, has now been outsourced. Angelo Loukakis, a freelance writer and editor who has been associated with the Centre since its beginnings, is now editor of *Newswrite*. The frequency of the magazine has also changed, from monthly to bimonthly;

its production values have been enhanced, and it now features commissioned articles by well-known authors. Significantly, in terms of support for writers, the new *Newswrite* will pay contributors ASA rates, whereas, previously, no payments were made for contributions.

In terms of a focus on the writing process and developing writing careers, Lee pointed out that the Centre works in partnership with UTS in providing courses that can be accredited towards a UTS degree. She says:

It's a great relationship for both of us because we have the UTS tutors here at the Centre at very reasonable rates. Our members have access to them in a way that they wouldn't at UTS and then it's also good for people who are wanting to develop their career as a writer because they want that stepping stone through the Writers' Centre into a professional degree in writing.

Lee also pointed to the partnership between the Centre and New Holland Publishers for the Genre Fiction Competition, the prizes for which in 2007 were mentorships and publication contracts. Maria Simms won first prize for her manuscript 'The Dead House' and, following a 20-hour mentorship, will see her book published in 2008. Lee mentioned that in conversations with Peter Bishop of Varuna, the suggestion has been made that "writers centres can actually become the place that publishers come to because we will develop writers to this stage and then publishers can come to us, because they know that we won't let anyone out, in a way, until they're ready." In working towards this, Lee wants to encourage a focus on quality of writing.

You see, everyone is very keen for publication. We're trying to pull people back and slow them down and get them to work and redraft and develop their manuscript before they go to a publisher. ... I would like to move away from publication to manuscript development and writing development and I think we need to change our programs to reflect that.

Another change that Lee would like to see is in terms of technology available to the Centre. Although more or less satisfied with the Centre's website, which has a Content Management System (CMS) that all staff members can use to make updates easily, Lee pointed out that the Centre is in need of a more up-to-date point of sale. She stresses the

gains that could be made if information from enquiries could be linked to MYOB (Mind Your Own Business) software and to the database and website.

And so that when people are members we'd have a history of all their workshops, history of their publications, and that's more useful for marketing purposes. At the moment we have that information, but the workshops aren't linked to the membership. It's crucial. We have all their details and we can contact people who have attended a particular workshop, but it could be streamlined and save us a lot of time and paperwork. One of the things that would be great if the Australia Council did, for instance, would be to fund the development of a system that membership organisations across the arts could use, instead of each of us going out and reinventing the wheel. That would save an enormous amount of money.

Technical support of this kind is something that a number of directors of writers' centres mentioned and in terms of investment in infrastructure, the streamlining or consolidation of administrative tasks – whether through new software or other implementations – would be a boon to the sector and would substantially free up directors' time for the programming, project and event organisation that they are expected to deliver.

To sum up what the NSW Writers' Centre contributes to the nation's writing culture, Lee said:

Look, I think we should always be encouraging support for the development of literature at all levels. So it's not just about publishing but about what Kate Grenville called the undergrowth. Writers' centres create the undergrowth, so we're just part of a whole network of things, an infrastructure. We're down here and some people grow up out of it, but otherwise it's very valuable undergrowth where a lot of exciting things happen.

This metaphor is especially interesting to a study which has been titled "Mapping Literature Infrastructure in Australia." Mapping evokes notions of terrain, landscape, and ecosystems. Understanding the contributions of each organisation to the literature sector as a whole depends upon a willingness to consider interdependencies as well as contrasts; the rhizomatic structures that operate from beneath may well be vital to the sustainability of the more high-profile components of a national writing culture.

[Sources of Information: *Newswrite* 177, February/March 2008; *Newswrite* 179, June/July 2008; NSW Writers' Centre website at <http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au>; NSW Writers' Centre Annual Report 2006 at [http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/html/s02\\_article/article\\_view.asp?id=525&nav\\_cat\\_id=152&nav\\_top\\_id=65&dsb=1513](http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/html/s02_article/article_view.asp?id=525&nav_cat_id=152&nav_top_id=65&dsb=1513) ); The Blake Prize website at <http://www.blakeprize.com.au/about/blake-poetry>; Key Organisations: Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Interview with Arabella Lee, 30 May 2008]

### **Northern Territory Writers' Centre**

The Northern Territory Writers' Centre began in 1993 as a community literature program and was incorporated in 1997. The Centre has two offices, one in Darwin and a second in Alice Springs, operated by three staff members, with a 2.2 full-time equivalence. They are:

Executive Officer	Sandra Thibodeaux (f-t)
Publicity/Office Manager	Dael Allison (0.8)
Project Officer (in Alice Springs)	Michael Giacometti (0.4)

There is also a bookkeeper employed one day per fortnight on a casual basis.

The Centre's Committee of Management comprise twelve members. They are:

President	Megan Nevett
Vice President	Christine Atkinson
Regional Vice President	Toni Tapp Coutts (from Katherine)
Public Officer	Shane Thamm
Secretary	Joanne Foley
Treasurer	David Morgan
General Committee Members	Andra Putnis
	Leonie Norrington
	Bronwyn Mehan
	Linda Wells
	Jessica Crockett
	Kin Leong

NT Writers' Centre membership has fluctuated over the past nine years, with 220 members in 1999, 265 in 2002, 200 in 2004 and 269 in 2006. Current paid memberships stand at 260 for 2008. Of these, 166 are in Darwin and Palmerston; 76 in regional NT; 18 are interstate. There are a further 62 non-financial memberships (for partner organisations).

The NT Writers' Centre's annual budget in 2008 is just over \$480,000, with more than \$370,000 of this coming from grants. Of this, the Australia Council contributes \$46,000 in triennial funding plus another \$34,650 in project funding. Approximately 16% of income comes from sources other than government funding. Executive Officer Sandra Thibodeaux made it clear in interview that this situation is a result of the very specific conditions of the Northern Territory:

We're more reliant on funding than some of the east coast organisations are because what we're doing doesn't result in great financial outcomes – we're stretched across a vast territory; we've got a small population base; all that sort of stuff. So, we're not money spinners yet, and we won't be for a while.

When asked, however, if this was a weakness of the organisation, Thibodeaux responded that rather than a weakness it was a challenge. "I'd call it a challenge because for me the financial bottom line is not the be all and end all. So there is a challenge there, but I look at it as an investment. Rather than wasting resources, we're investing resources."

According to the Centre's webpage, "The NT Writers' Centre provides support and development opportunities to enhance the capabilities, productivity and wellbeing of Northern Territory Writers." It does this through a year-long program of workshops, literary events, mentorships and manuscript appraisals, the hosting of writers' groups as well as the staging of the major literary festival Wordstorm and the regional festival Eye of the Storm, each held in alternate years.

The Wordstorm Festival, held in even years (with the most recent being in May 2008), is a significant contribution of the NT Writers' Centre to the Australian literary sector. The festival has a cross-cultural focus with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian writers

meeting in dialogue with writers from South East Asia. The 2008 festival saw some 80 writers in total participating, with 10 of those from South East Asia. Attendance figures for 2008 were not available at the time of writing this report, but the 2006 festival drew some 3,000 people to its events, including 600 students participating in the Festival's schools' program. In interview, Thibodeaux explained that events at Wordstorm were designed to attract diverse audiences. The 2008 Sea Change event (words meet fishing) and the Comedy Debate aimed to draw a broad range of spectators; the Poetry Slam drew a capacity audience of young people, and the Sport and Literature event, with William McInnes and Gideon Haigh, attracted sport enthusiasts who might otherwise not come to a literary festival, according to Thibodeaux. Emphasising the audience development aspect of the event, Thibodeaux says: "We always look at ways of pulling in different audiences as a way of educating people about a writers' festival."

The participation of South East Asian writers at Wordstorm is something that Thibodeaux hopes to see increase, as it provides an important opportunity not only for Australian audiences to learn about South East Asian writers, but also flows on to an exposure of Australian writers to Asian readerships. Following the 2006 festival, the NT Writers' Centre published *Terra*, a bilingual English-Indonesian anthology of short stories and poetry from participants at the festival. Thibodeaux reports that copies sent to Indonesia (400 out of a print run of 1,000) sold out quickly. She also reports that *Terra* has recently been chosen as a set text by a school in Bandung, Indonesia, for its International Baccalaureate Diploma A2 English course. The Australian response to *Terra* has been slower, Thibodeaux admits, with readers perhaps less interested in its bilingual format. She sees Wordstorm, though, as a slow educational process, opening up a two-way communication between Australia and its northern neighbours. In 2006 one writer from Singapore attended; in 2008 four from Singapore came. Thibodeaux comments that this is part of a long term effort towards developing literary relations. She says:

It's not financially rewarding to be doing what we're doing. We're not making money from it, and from the point of view of publishers and festivals, they don't always see the value of it. We're investing in this work. This will mean good things for Australian writers in the future because it's potentially a huge market. It's not a big money maker at the moment but in the future it may be. And it's more important than that. It's a political thing, creating that



sense of Australia being part of the South East Asian region rather than attached to Europe or the U.S. So that's going to be an important thing for Australian writers, to have access into those markets, and we're chipping away at those first steps. It'll also, conversely, be important for Australia to know what's going on in South East Asian literature and writers and we're doing that as well.

Another important aspect of the NT Writers' Centre's efforts is that of providing contact between Northern Territory writers and publishers from elsewhere in Australia. With only two publishers (IAD Press and Niblock Publishing) based in the Northern Territory, opportunities for face-to-face meetings with east-coast publishers are valued by writers and with this in mind the Centre in 2007 held a Meet the Publisher event, at which over 40 writers in Darwin and 22 in Alice Springs had the chance to present their work to representatives from UQP, Allen & Unwin, HarperCollins and IAD Press. The event was cosponsored by the Writers' Centre and the publishers. Two writers were invited to submit their manuscript for further reading, and another writer, Jennifer Mills, had her manuscript accepted by UQP.

Mills' experience at the Centre is a good example of the processes of professional development bearing success. In 2006 Mills was selected to participate in the Centre's Young and Emerging Mentorship program to develop her manuscript 'The Diamond Anchor'. It was this developed manuscript that then impressed UQP at the 'Meet the Publishers' event and it is now scheduled for publication in 2009. Thibodeaux explained that although the Australia Council no longer funds mentorships through organisations, the Centre continues to run its Mentorship program, offered free to up to three writers and rotating through a different genre each year. The focus in 2008 is illustration, as Thibodeaux says there are few illustrators in the Territory and she sees this as an area in need of development. (See a similar concern in Western Australia, below.)

The NT Writers' Centre is also currently involved in skills development with Indigenous writers with the aim of completing an anthology of work for publication in 2009 with IAD Press. This project has grown from writing workshops beginning in the Centre of the

Territory and then moving to the Top End and, therefore, including writers from many different Indigenous cultures. It will be a multilingual publication in English and Indigenous languages and will contribute to language maintenance and literacy outcomes, as well as fostering new creative writing.

Regional events for the NT Writers' Centre include work in schools in smaller towns and communities that seldom have opportunities to meet with professional writers.

Thibodeaux gave the example of an event in Ali Curung, an Aboriginal community 390 kilometres north of Alice Springs where playwrights worked with boys and young men between 12 and 17 years old to develop scripts. "These guys just got into it," Thibodeaux says. "They wanted to write their script; they wouldn't stop. The guest writers had to leave and they said, 'We're going to keep going, keep going.' And they just kept spinning out the next scenes. It is with the input of writers that students get it. They can then see the merits of literacy – because you can put your stories down. These stories are very important; you get to put your heart and soul into them and thus it's worthwhile to be reading and writing, as a means to an end. Students in all schools whether bush or city, they get to see that, and it's a very important part of our work."

When asked to sum up the NT Writers' Centre's key contributions to the nation's literary and writing culture, Thibodeaux stressed diversity and cross-cultural exchange:

We're bringing new voices to Australian literature, Northern Territory writers and, in particular, Indigenous writers. What we're also bringing to Australian literature is we're fostering close relationships with South East Asia which not many other people are doing. For Australia, it would also be an important thing to have a stronger Indigenous literary industry, and we're very much a part of that, particularly with this new anthology, but also in other ways. We're investing a lot of time and resources into fostering that industry. It's pretty hard to put it in a nutshell... I think we're cracking into new ground as a writers' centre, and unless we're doing it you'll never see the outcome. However, what we're doing will bear fruit in five years time. You'll see the benefits of what we're doing in contributing to diversity, fostering relationships with South East Asian writers and developing and promoting Indigenous writers and, also, our non-Indigenous NT authors.

[Sources of Information: NT Writers' Centre webpage at: <http://www.ntwriters.com.au/>; Key Organisations Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Interview with Sandra Thibodeaux, 28 May 2008; email communication with Thibodeaux, 15 August 2008]

## **Queensland Writers' Centre**

The Queensland Writers' Centre was established in 1990. Its current staffing is 2 full-time artistic positions, 5.5 full-time administrative and 2 part-time administrative positions. Salaried staff positions are shared over nine people. They are:

### Full-time

Chief Executive Officer	Kate Eltham
General Manager	Beth Flatley (Acting)
Membership Manager/WQ Editor	Katherine Lyall-Watson
Membership Officer	Angela Slatter
Marketing and Programming Coordinator	Julie Beveridge
Project Coordinator for Australian Writer's Marketplace (AWM)	Julia Jarman

### Part-time

Finance Officer	Terry Sheather
Editorial & Projects Assistants	Jane Humphreys Jodi De Vantier

These staff are supported by casual staff and 33 volunteers, whose contributions range from one day per week, to a few hours at events, as required, including:

### Casual

Workshop Coordinator	Cynthia Tait, Belinda Jeffrey
Regional Liaisons	Paul Oliveri (Cairns), Mandy Wildeheart (Townsville), Judy Couttie (Rockhampton), Cherie Curtis (Bundaberg)

Its Management Committee comprises twelve members. They are:

Chair	Theodora Le Souquet
Vice Chair	Dr Trevor Jordan
Treasurer	Tami Harriott
Secretary	Kevin Gillespie
Members	Sue Abbey

Greg Bain  
Anita Bell  
Chris Currie  
Katherine Delaney  
Kevin Gillespie  
Krissy Kneen  
Alison Lees

Membership in Queensland Writers' Centre has fluctuated over the past eight years, with a low of 1,871 members in 2002, and a high of 2,391 members in 2005. Its current membership is 2,300, up 13% over the last 12 months.

Queensland Writers' Centre identifies itself as the peak body within literature infrastructure in the state, "with close ties to government and the industry," and as "the leading provider of specialised services to the writing community of Queensland" [Mission Statement, from the website]. The staff figures above are an indication of its strong financial position. While its funding from the Australia Council is approximately the same as that received by the NSW Writers' Centre (just over \$50,000) or the Victorian Writers' Centre (see ahead), its income from its state government is significantly higher. In 2008, QWC will receive \$313,000 from Arts Queensland. As well, QWC's projected non-grant income for 2008 is \$462,300. Queensland Writers' Centre has also had a secure and stable premises in the Metro Arts Building in Brisbane since the late 1990s. The importance of a stable, accessible location for a literature organisation cannot be overemphasized. The impact of location on a writers' centre can be substantial (see ahead to section on the Victorian Writers' Centre), and other literature groups have faced similar difficulties relating to premises (see forward to Poets Union). In this regard, however, QWC has been fortunate. In interview, Kate Eltham indicated that although the current location has been appropriate for some time, projections for growth of the organisation mean that they are considering strategies to find new premises "more firmly embedded within the writing sector in Queensland," and hope that a decision will be made within one year.

In terms of its services and support to writers and writing, Queensland Writers' Centre aims to meet the needs of writers at all stages of their writing life and career development.

Their goals include:

- Developing knowledge, skills and employment opportunities for all Queensland writers.
- Promoting Queensland writers to local, national and international audiences.
- Increasing access to our services to diverse groups and that includes regional communities, and Indigenous writers and young writers.
- Creating successful commercial business units within the organisation that help bolster income streams and create sustainability for the organisation, and make it perhaps less reliant on grant funding.

To give a sense of how this last mentioned goal serves the needs of writers, Eltham in interview provided the example of The Australian Writers' Marketplace, which she termed "the commercial aspect of the organisation." The Australian Writers' Marketplace is both a print publication and a website which features a prominent link to the QWC Online Store, where users can find information relating to services and products and make online bookings and purchases. The AWM aims to be a one-stop information service, providing notices of upcoming competitions, literary events, workshops, and services for all stages of writing. It also is a guide to the writing industry, providing contact details for print media and publishing houses. The publication and website represent a significant income-stream, generating average annual income near between \$80,000- \$100,000. Eltham also referred to a new commercial project, currently under development, looking at preparing some of QWC's intellectual property for international export.

As well as the workshops and courses run by the Queensland Writers' Centre, ranging from "introductory level courses to selective programs that are designed to provide intensive development for advanced writers" (Eltham interview), which aim to fulfil the first of the organisation's goals (above), the promotional efforts of the Centre have had

success at state, national and international levels. Eltham gave two examples, the first a program from two years ago called 'Books from our Backyard,' which is:

a publication of a hundred Queensland writers and illustrators who are writing books for children, from prep to year 12 and it profiled each of those titles and gave information about themes and the content, you know, a synopsis, and also information about the author. It was sent to every single Queensland school as well as the NSW and Victorian curriculum bodies, and all the public libraries. The aim of that was to try and stimulate demand in the education system for more class-sets of Queensland books and also have more Queensland authors visiting schools because they're important income streams for authors, and those markets.

Eltham says that the project "generated about \$300,000 worth of income for the authors profiled in the book. The majority of that came through speaking engagements, but there were also a number of schools that took class sets of some of the books in the directory."

Internationally, QWC in collaboration with Queensland's economic development agency has developed the program Queenslandbooks.com which showcases the works of Queensland writers around the world. Showcases have been staged at New York, Los Angeles, Taipei, with another event scheduled later in 2008 for Canada. Eltham explained that "the goal of that project is to present Queensland books to publishers, literary agents, or film agents where international rights for those publications are still available and try and generate more income for those titles and hopefully more market sales as well." One example of success from the program is that Nick Earls' book *48 Shades of Brown* was picked up and produced into a film called *48 Shades*. This one deal alone resulted in \$30,000 worth of income for Earl. As Eltham remarked, "When it pays off, it pays off well."

The effort of Queensland Writers' Centre to engage with and meet the needs of regional writers has been an "aggressive focus" of the organisation over the past three years. Eltham acknowledges that regional services were something that "QWC probably didn't do well up until about 2002, or 2003." The QWC now delivers 40 events each year in 17 communities across the State, including regional centres such as Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, and Bundaberg, and remote communities including Cooktown,

Cunnamulla, Longreach, Emerald, Charters Towers, and Blackall. Included in this outreach are workshops, master classes, performance events, editorial consultancies and manuscript development programs. Also included are industry seminars such as one scheduled later in 2008 in Cairns, where QWC will “fly a major trade publisher and a literary agent up to do a seminar, which is a discussion panel, essentially, with a moderator and the opportunity for the authors to directly ask questions to those agents and publishers about their own manuscript.” This facilitating of direct contact between publishers and regional writers is of special significance (as the section on Varuna pointed out), allowing regional writers access to the critical advice of industry professionals, and providing the publishing industry with a glimpse of potentially new talents and diverse voices in Australian literature from outside the gravitational centres of Sydney and Melbourne.

Partnerships between writers’ centres and publishers are, in fact, a key area in which state-based writers’ centres (and Varuna, with its NSW LitLink and national LongLines programs) are contributing in important ways not only to the needs of writers, but also to the shape and the diversity of Australian literature. Queensland Writers’ Centre over the next three years will work with publisher Hachette Livre in providing residencies for 10 writers, drawn from across Australia, to develop their manuscripts in consultation with industry professionals. Also, the Centre has entered into an organisational mentoring agreement with Paper Tiger Media, in which QWC will assist them with strategic planning, financial administration, and addressing sustainability and, as part of their program for 2009 and 2010, Paper Tiger Media will be looking at publishing more Queensland writers.

Queensland Writers’ Centre also sees itself as a partner with government. Eltham emphasised that the Centre not only advocated with government and industry on behalf of its members but also sought a positive and close relationship with the Queensland government, such that “they see us as a partner with them in actually understanding what’s going on in the sector and develop the right policies and programs and funding to

address those issues. So where we can be a part of the conversation, we try to be as much as we can.”

In summary, the Queensland Writers’ Centre’s claim to be a peak literature body appears supported in terms of the strength and diversity of its services, its outreach, both regionally within Queensland and internationally in partnership with Queensland government bodies, and its important associations with industry, facilitating contact between publishers and writers in a variety of situations that have demonstrable benefits for the Australian literature sector.

[Sources of information: Key Organisations: Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); interview with Kate Eltham, 18 April 2008; email communication with Eltham, 18 August 2008; Queensland Writers’ Centre webpage, [http://www.qwc.asn.au/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.qwc.asn.au/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1) ; The Australian Writers’ Marketplace, <http://www.awmonline.com.au/about-us.aspx> ]

### **South Australian Writers’ Centre**

The South Australian Writers’ Centre was the first writers’ centre to be established in Australia. It began in 1985 with the aim of providing resources and support for all writers in the state. It currently has staffing equivalent to three full-time positions. They are:

Director	Barbara Wiesner (f-t)
Office Manager	Jude Aquilina
Communications Officer & Newsletter Editor	Rachel Hennessy
Finances Officer	Lesley Beasley
Librarian	Silvia Muscardin

Its Board comprises eight members. They are:

Chair	Sean Williams
Deputy Chair	Bronwen Webb
Treasurer	Mag Merrilees
Members	Helen Mitchell
	Anne Bartlett



Ashley Mallett  
Anna Solding  
Heather Taylor Johnson

Membership at the end of April 2008 stood at 1120 members and this has been fairly constant over the past nine years (e.g. 1,222 members in 1999; 1,128 in 2002; 1,123 in 2004). Approximately 16% of its membership is from regional SA.

The SA Writers' Centre has an annual budget of approximately \$280,000, with roughly 60% of that coming from government grants and subsidies. Arts SA provides just over \$115,000; the Australia Council contributes just over \$50,000 per annum in triennial funding; and in 2008, \$20,000 came from CAL (for the Centre's Youth Projects).

The SA Writers' Centre's aims to foster the development of writing culture in South Australia by:

- Promoting, encouraging and assisting writers and writing activities.
- Addressing and serving all members' writing needs.
- Acting as a resource centre for individual writers and organisations.
- Coordinating a state-wide program of writing activities.
- Lobbying for the improved status of all writers.
- Making writing more accessible to the general community.
- Liaising with other arts organisations.
- Encouraging innovative writing, including forms which challenge traditional boundaries and embrace new technologies.

As well as the broad range of writing courses, seminars, workshops and mentorships offered by most state writers' centres, the SA Writers' Centre has a strong emphasis on literary festivals. The South Australian Writers Festival, held biennially in the Onkaparinga region, is a joint initiative between the City of Onkaparinga and the SA Writers' Centre. The festival aims at audience development and many of its events feature a combination of literature, food, wine and music. In interview, SA Writers' Centre Director Barbara Wiesner explained that the Festival receives substantial financial

backing from the City of Onkaparinga, which flows on to writers who are paid ASA rates for readings, judging and participating in panels. In 2007, the city also paid for a publicist to promote the festival, resulting in over 100 articles and radio interviews and raising the profile of both literary culture and individual writers.

The annual Salisbury Writers' Festival is a joint project between the City of Salisbury, the SA Writers' Festival and the Salisbury Library Service. Wiesner says that in contrast to the South Australian Writers' Festival, the Salisbury event focuses more on skills development with more workshops for writers, and writing competitions. In 2008, the Salisbury festival will feature an opportunity for writers to meet with publishers. South Australia, like the Northern Territory, has few publishing houses and, Wiesner says, local writers are especially keen to "mix and mingle" with publishers and agents from interstate. For the 2008 Salisbury festival, the SA Writers' Centre has organised for representatives from Pan McMillan and Allen & Unwin, along with local company Wakefield Press, to talk to writers about current trends and areas of interest in Australian publishing.

A third festival supported by the Centre is Poetry Unhinged, again a partnership with the City of Onkaparinga. Its focus is both audience and professional development. In 2006 the festival drew 555 attendees to events such as 'Candles, Wine and Classics' and 'Poets and Pizza.' The 2008 festival will feature a poetry competition in which book-length manuscripts are submitted, with a first prize being publication through Seaview Press and Salmat printing. Wiesner pointed out that this is a substantial prize, as a single authored poetry publication is not easily achieved.

It is interesting that festivals feature so prominently in the Centre's activities, given that Adelaide also hosts its own Writers' Week, a literary festival with a significant international reputation. Wiesner explained, however, that SA Writers' Centre is not on particularly good terms with Writers' Week because of the perceived lack of support given by Writers' Week to SA writers. Wiesner pointed out that out of more than 60 guest writers at Writers' Week in 2008, only 4 were from South Australia. She also

criticised Writers' Week for its lack of cooperation with other literature organisations, particularly in its unwillingness to lend out its participating writers. In one sense, then, the Centre's focus on festivals is an attempt to address the first of these issues, that of providing opportunities for audience development for SA writers.

The SA Writers' Centre also has a strong commitment to its youth activities, and especially its Young Author Nights. Three of these are run each year, in Adelaide, Noarlunga and Salisbury, drawing up to 450 students from years 5 to 7, who are given opportunity to read their work aloud in small groups, each led by a prominent children's author. The event promotes both reading and writing amongst young people and, according to Wiesner, about \$2,000 worth of books are sold at each event. Wiesner explains:

We'll have about 170 kids who come and read their work aloud in 17 small groups each led by a children's author. We also publish a printed program with photos and bios of these authors along with a list of their publications, and we have a bookseller there with their books on the night. The program goes out to every child that comes and every school; there are usually about 50 schools involved, so all their teachers get copies. We encourage them to make sure they have these authors' books in their libraries. And this event is growing; we used to run only one a year in the city; now we run three in different regions.

Funding for this program, however, is in question. After many years of small injections of funding from a variety of sources, the Centre was provided with \$50,000 from the Telstra Foundation to establish the program over two years in regions other than the city. This was followed this year by \$20,000 from CAL to continue the events. Wiesner says she is trying to interest the SA Premier's Department in supporting the Young Authors' Nights as they relate to the Premier's Reading Challenge Program, but at this stage such support is uncertain.

Wiesner's discussion of this concern – the uncertainty of funding for the Centre's youth activities – raised an issue which is common across the literature sector in terms of its provision of services and activities to support writing. Not only writers' centres, but also literary journals and genre-specific organisations have had to struggle with the reality that

no funding body is excited about entering into an agreement of recurrent funding. Corporate sponsors are attracted to short-term, high-profile projects. Government funding bodies are more likely to support longer-term delivery of activities, but they too prefer innovation and growth.

The Youth Activities at the SA Writers' Centre has been, in fact, a long-term process of delivering a suite of projects. Outlining the Centre's approach over the years, Wiesner explained that over ten years ago they began helping young writers achieve publication by sponsoring a Young Writers' Page in *dB Magazine*. Once a month the Centre paid for a page devoted to poetry, short fiction and cartoons by young writers.

We had three young writers who acted as selectors and editors, and every month they'd get together, look through submissions, and provide feedback and information about local organisations to contributors. Then we realised that there were a number of names that kept cropping up in the published work. There were writers who stood out, who regularly submitted and were published. We then invited them to be a selector on the committee when others left. So that was another level of development in their own career as writers. We also ran a Writers' Cafe, where we invited people to read and we incorporated these young writers there as well. So there was a really nice flow-through. This helped them develop a CV of their writing credits which they then used to get funding from arts bodies. In fact, the SA Youth Arts Board had a couple of fellowships for writers but they had to prove that they were serious about their writing. Now how do you do that if there are no opportunities? The young writers therefore used a lot of our opportunities in their justification. Now I can look back and see quite a few top writers who went through this process: novelists James Bradley and Matt Rubinstein, both full-time Sydney-based authors have been guests at Adelaide Writers Week; Tim Sinclair, a published poet who works at the Australian Society of Authors; Finn Kruckemeyer a successful playwright now living in Tasmania; Bel Schenk the Artistic Director of Express Media in Melbourne; Adelaide based Aidan Coleman and Amelia Walker both have published collections of poetry. All these writers began through the dB Young Writers editing process when they were 18 or 19 and now they are in their 30s and doing incredibly well.

Wiesner says that funding for this ceased about six years ago. "The reasoning was that we'd applied for the same amount of money for the same program for the last six years and they said, 'Can't you think of something more innovative?'"

Wiesner's reflections here, and the institutional memory which supports them, are helpful in understanding the complex and not always apparent ways in which writers' centres provide pathways and support for writers – writers who after some years may go on to achieve writing careers and substantial publication. They are also helpful in appreciating the challenges of providing such a wide range of services and support, while dependent upon shifting and in some cases unpredictable funding sources. Some programs can run on a cost-recovery basis; some operations can return a profit; others, such as the suite of youth activities above, rely primarily on subsidy. Core funding, as almost every writers' centre director pointed out, allows for very limited staffing, which in turn limits opportunities to seek out new or alternative sources of funding, a double-bind that can result in frustration and organisational stress. Other centres referred to the difficulties of servicing annual leave; Wiesner pointed out that at the SA centre accrued time-in-lieu is a concern. "Wear and tear on staff" and the constant pressure of seeking out new funding for activities and services that have proven successful over time and that make ongoing contributions to reader/writer engagements are sector-wide issues.

The SA Writers' Centre, with its limited staff, continues to run a state-wide program of events, a year-long calendar of professional development workshops and seminars, a series of literary festivals, a partnership with Varuna in which SA writers gain skills and professional development opportunities through the LongLines program and manage a venue as well as respond to daily enquiries from people coming in off the street to ask about writing. Some want to write their life story; others are asking on behalf of a parent or grandparent. "We're very meticulous in serving those types of enquiries," Wiesner says. "These are our clients, too. This is what we're here to do: to support writers and writing."

[Sources of Information: SA Writers' Centre webpage at <http://www.sawc.org.au/>; Key Organisations Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key

Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Interview with Barbara Wiesner, 28 May 2008; email communication with Wiesner, 18 August 2008]

### **Victorian Writers' Centre**

The Victorian Writers' Centre was established in 1989. It currently has a staff equivalent of 3.4 full-time positions, spread amongst eight people (in 2007). These are:

Director	Joel Becker
Office Administrator	Sonya Soares
Administrative Assistants (casuals)	Naomi Morrison (Sept-Nov, 2007) Helen Papadimitriou (Dec, 2007)
Publications Officers	Robyn Deed and Eva Matthews (co-editors of Victorian Writer)
Program Manager and Finance Officer	Mary Napier
Bookkeeper	Graham Archer

It also draws upon volunteers for its events, competitions and office operations, as well as the assistance of two marketing interns (in 2007, Gerardine Gannon and Fran Lebroy).

Its Committee of Management comprises nine members, with a Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer, Secretary/Public Officer, and five others. These are:

Chair	Chris Thompson
Deputy Chair	Suzanne Walker
Treasurer	Joel Plotnek
Secretary/Public Officer	Fran Madigan
Committee Members	Antoinette Daley Jill Blee Zoe Dattner Annie O'Hanlon Ian Robinson

Membership of the Victorian Writers' Centre has increased over the past five years, from 1,971 members in 2002 to 2,505 members in 2007, with each intervening year showing steady growth. One contributor to membership growth has been the cooperative relationship between the Centre and various educational institutions in Melbourne. For

example, Chisholm Institute, a TAFE college, pays for its students of professional writing and editing (between 180 and 200 students) to become members of the VWC.

Operations have also shown continued growth over this five year period, both in metropolitan Melbourne events and in outreach to regional Victoria through partnerships with regional writing groups. The 2007 Annual Report indicates a growth in events in that year of approximately 15 %, with 200 events hosted, 15 book launches, 38 meetings of writing groups, 10 monthly readings of the Melbourne Poets Union, 15 lectures delivered or forums participated in by the Director, public information sessions provided for Creative Writing courses at Universities and PWE, and the Doris Leadbetter Melbourne Poetry Cup held with 45 readers.

In interview, Director of the Victorian Writers' Centre, Joel Becker, explained that a significant issue for the Centre has been its physical location, with three moves since its founding, and with another extremely significant move planned for 2009. Its first move, from its original premises in Fitzroy to space provided by Arts Victoria in North Melbourne's Meat Market building, was problematic and resulted in a deterioration of programs, due largely to the physical constraints of the building and its environs. In 2002 the VWC moved from the Meat Market to its present location in the Nicholas Building in central Melbourne, one block from Flinders Street Station. This move saw a "massive" growth in programs due in some measure to the improved location, amenability and access; however, the move initially brought financial hardship due to the increased cost of rent. This contributed to four years of deficit for the Centre, a situation which has now turned around with 2007 seeing a surplus of \$23,540 for the Centre. In 2009, the Victorian Writers' Centre will move again, this time to become part the new Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas located at the State Library of Victoria. This new Centre will also house the Australian Poetry Centre, the Melbourne Writers' Festival, the Emerging Writers' Festival, and Express Media, while the Centre for Youth Literature will continue in its current premises within, and association with, the State Library. Thus, Becker indicated in interview, the physical proximity of these various writing and reading organisations will bring benefits:

JB: The idea is a number of organisations that have similarities, cross-overs, common interests, by physically being together they can determine what resources they want to share, and here we're down to the administrative stuff: common reception...

MJ: Photocopiers perhaps.

JB: Exactly, but keep their separate identities, and it's essentially: 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.' And I think this would absolutely be the case. I know that partnerships will develop. Ideas will develop by me passing Rosemary [Cameron] in the corridor and saying, "Look, I'm thinking about doing something. I don't have the resources to do it myself and we wouldn't attract the six hundred people on our own but doing it in partnership with you, maybe getting a bookshop involved, we can make this work." And that applies not only to those kind of big-event lectures but also to running workshops. So I think this is a really significant point in our history – this shift over to the new premises

This new Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas is an important development in literature infrastructure, not only for Victoria but also, potentially, for the nation, as the Australian Poetry Centre aims for national representation and implementation of poetry-related programs. The Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas is, at the very least, an interesting model of how small organisations might be brought together and benefit from proximity, developing synergies and partnerships, potentially sharing resources and possibly sharing both audiences and creative artists for projects and events.

Other significant developments for the Victorian Writers' Centre relate to their publication *Victorian Writer* and their soon-to-be-released updated and renovated website. In May 2005, the VWC's newsletter *Write On* became *Victorian Writer*, a transformation which was more than just a name change. While the new publication continues to keep members informed of the Centre's activities, the shift from newsletter to magazine has meant that *Victorian Writer* no longer relies on reprints of articles previously published elsewhere, as was previously often the case. The magazine commissions and publishes new material, with each issue thematically focused. The April, 2008 issue is subtitled 'Instruments of Science' and features an interview with Sue Woolfe, contributions from a range of science broadcasters, and shorter pieces by well-known writers on science in genre fiction such as crime, comics and science fiction. In terms of service to writers, then, the Centre's journal provides not only information for members, but also space and



opportunity for established writers to write about writing. Although no payments are made to contributors to the magazine at this stage, Becker says payments are a longer-term goal.

As well, the Centre's website is being rebuilt in 2008 by Inventive Labs and will feature a Content Management System that will allow for easy and prompt updating of material, in contrast to the existing webpage which "required a lot of technical expertise to make changes," according to Becker. The new website is under construction and will be rolled out in early September of this year.

In addressing the question of to what extent and in what manners the Victorian Writers' Centre services the needs of writers, Becker explained that the Centre contributed to the professional development of writers at all stages of a writing career through a variety of services, including:

- Workshops, seminars and master classes for new, emerging, and established writers, with 200 events hosted in 2007.
- A manuscript assessment service, which grew 15% in 2007, building upon a 50% increase in 2006. As the service is fee-based for both members and non-members, these increasing numbers indicate that demand for this service is substantial.
- Provision of studio space for writers at Glenfern, a National Trust (Victoria) building where six studio spaces are let out to writers for periods varying from two weeks to 12 months. Three more studios have permanent tenants, with the Australian Poetry Centre occupying two, and Iola Mathews, the Centre's writer-in-residence occupying the remaining studio. All of these Glenfern Writers Studios are administered by the Victorian Writers' Centre. 2007 saw an overall occupancy rate of approximately 90%. The rationale for this program is one recognised by all literature infrastructure organisations: that a basic requirement for writing to occur is the availability of time and space for the writer to create. Glenfern Studios provides space for a number of writers to write in a conducive atmosphere.

- Provision of information and referrals to writers and writing-focused organisations. Telephone, fax and email enquiries total more than 75 per day, on issues relating to access to publishing, copyright and contracts. Queries often come from writing or educational organisations seeking professional writers or editors for employment and in these cases the VWC will offer the names and contact details of a range of qualified persons for the position(s).
- Provision of employment opportunities for writers. The VWC through its courses, events and services draws on the skills of writers from Victoria and from across Australia, thereby providing employment and income opportunities for a significant number of professional writers. Also, through its role as intermediary (mentioned above) the VWC facilitates in the placement of writers and editors in employment.

The regional outreach of the Victorian Writers' Centre is one aspect of the organisation that is acknowledged as requiring ongoing expansion and support. In interview, Becker explained that at present the VWC provides financial support for regional writers centres to hold workshops, or to assist with regional writers festivals. As well as financial support (approx. \$10,000 per year), the VWC participates in regional activities by giving talks or running workshops, or by consulting with regional groups to determine how the VWC can assist their activities in regional areas with matters such as promotion. Regional membership is subsidised (\$38 regional per individual compared to \$58 standard) and represents just over than 18% of all memberships (469 out of a total of 2505 members as of January 2008). Becker also says that the VWC is in discussions with a representative of a philanthropic trust in an effort to secure funds to allow for continued development of the VWC's activities with regional writers' groups. If successful, this could lead, in 2009, to a 'Writers-on-the-Road' program in which two or three writers travel to regional Victoria, with stops in several locations en route to give talks at schools, participate in public events, and meet with local writers' groups to discuss writing issues, thereby engaging both readers and writers in regional/remote areas. (In email communication subsequent to his interview, Becker indicated that this 'bequest' will amount to approximately \$30,000 to be allocated to the 'Writers on the Road' program and a range

of other programs including a mentorship, a year-long residency at Glenfern, and possibly a LOTE project.)

In summary, the Victorian Writers' Centre seems to have come out of a period of 'endangered' financial well-being, turning a four-year period of deficit to a position of surplus in 2007, with increasing membership and services, the addition of Glenfern Writers Studios, a planned move in 2009 to new premises where the Centre will share both proximity and (potentially) administrative resources with other peak literature infrastructure units, and a target of expanding its reach to and involvement with regional Victoria.

[Sources of information: 2007 Annual Report Victorian Writers' Centre; Key Organisations: Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Interview with Joel Becker, 16 April 2008; Victorian Writers' Centre webpage at <http://www.writers-centre.org/> ]

## **writingWA**

The Western Australian state writing organisation, writingWA, has its origins in the position of WA State Literature Officer, which came under the auspices of the Fremantle Arts Centre in 1993. In 2000 the SLO position was transformed into the WA State Literature Centre, which drew on a membership base of individuals. In 2005 this changed again, shifting from individual memberships to group and organisational memberships. In 2006 the WASLC relocated to the State Library of WA and became writingWA.

There are two full-time staff at writingWA. They are:

CEO  
Finance & Communications Officer

Sharon Flindell  
(This was held by John Hart, who resigned at the end of 2007)

In 2007, there were also two contract positions:

Poetry Research & Development	Lucy Dougan
Strategic Planning Consultant	Annemie McAuliffe

and two casual employees:

Secretarial support	Connie Honczarenko
Bookkeeper	Gaylene Daley, Daley Bookkeeping

The Board of writingWA comprises 10 members. In 2008 they are:

Chair	Delys Bird
Deputy Chair	Janine Drakeford
Treasurer	Renato Sansalone
Secretary	Russell Bresland
Members	Margaret Allen
	Tanya Dewhurst
	Andrea Selvy
	Michelle Kosonen
	Mary-Anne Paton
	Terri-ann White

Membership in writingWA, as indicated above, is comprised of organisations working in the literature sector. These include writers' centres and groups, West Australian publishers, WA libraries and industry associations and organisations. There are currently 75 financial members, with roughly two-thirds metropolitan and one-third regional. Two memberships (in 2007) were from interstate.

In an email response to questions from this study, CEO Sharon Flindell wrote that:

writingWA is concerned with promoting, supporting and developing West Australian writers and writing and so in this sense our efforts and membership base are very much state-focused. However, to achieve our vision, writingWA also reaches beyond the State boundary to network and where possible collaborate with national institutions and industry bodies.

writingWA has an annual budget of between \$250,000 and \$300,000, with approximately 90% of income coming from government grants or philanthropic

sources. Of this the Australia Council provides just over \$46,000 a year in triennial funding and up to about \$11,000 a year in project and other funding.

writingWA defines itself in its constitution as the peak body in the state's literature sector. As such, it plays a coordinating role amongst the state's many literature organisations and groups. Its services include:

- Ongoing provision of information, advice and individual consultations
- The Regional Development Programme which coordinates funding and facilitates arrangements for writers in libraries, supports country writing groups and coordinates annual funding for Western Australian writers to participate in regional writers festivals in WA.
- The Writers on the Road series of tours bringing writers to regional and remote communities in WA.
- The promotion and coordination of the T.A.G. Hugerford Award, a biennial award for an unpublished work of fiction by a WA writer who has not published previously in book form.
- A Publisher Training Programme (2006-2008, funded by CAL) providing increased access to professional development and training courses run by the Australian Publishers Association
- The annual promotion of West Australian publications and coordination of related author events in conjunction with the Premier's Summer Reading Challenge
- A range of forums, seminars, workshops and other professional development activities delivered annually in collaboration with member organisations and other partners.

Through these services, writingWA aims to:

- increase employment and income opportunities for emerging, established and mid-career writers
- improve infrastructure support for individual writers, and provide support as appropriate to member organisations operating within the sector
- coordinate effort across the sector and increase opportunities for shared access to resources

- promote Western Australian writing in local, national and international marketplaces and pursue new market/audience development opportunities.

With the name change for the organisation in 2006, significant attention has been given to rebranding. This has included a redesigned website, writingWA signage, corporate brochures, templates for stationary and other print and electronic material. Marketing of writingWA relies heavily on electronic media for provision of information regarding services and products. The organisation's e-newsletter is sent out to 830 recipients and the website statistics show an average of 317 visits per day with an average length of stay of 7.1 minutes. As well, staff attend to an average of 53 telephone, email or visitor enquiries each week. This is a significant increase (1,652 in 2006 up to 2,757 in 2007), indicating a degree of success in efforts to raise the organisation's public profile.

As well as the established programs and activities listed above, in 2007 writingWA undertook a number of new initiatives including a Poetry Action Plan, two Indigenous Illustration Workshops and the Talking Books program. The Poetry Action Plan included a research and development component in which practicing poet Lucy Dougan conducted an audit of resources and opportunities available for the writing, performance, publication and promotion of poetry in Australia. This has now been posted on writingWA's website and provides a readily accessible resource base for anyone involved in poetry from beginner to professional levels. Another aspect of the Poetry Action Plan was the piloting of a Poets in Schools day, held in collaboration with All Saints' College. A poetry slam was followed by a series of workshops and readings conducted by 6 WA poets. Also piloted was a Poets in Libraries program. Response to this, however, was minimal, with only two libraries participating. The program is being reoffered in 2008. Finally, as part of the Australian Poetry Slam 07, writingWA managed the WA participation, with 92 performance poets competing in 5 WA heats, drawing a capacity audience of 1200 people and ABC Stateline coverage.

The Indigenous Illustration Workshops were an outcome of consultation through writingWA's Publisher Focus Group, in which WA publishers noted difficulties in identifying or accessing appropriate illustrators for picture books with Indigenous content. writingWA coordinated two workshops in 2007 for 24 Indigenous visual artists, and of these four are now engaged with Magabala Books on illustration projects.

The Talking Books program was another new initiative in 2007, with four book-club-like events held at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Each event featured one or more WA authors and average attendance across the four events was 45 people.

When asked to comment on any impediments to writingWA maximising its services, Flindell identified two major concerns. The first of these was financial. The ongoing Writers on the Road program has received funding for the past 10 years (indicating, apparently in contrast to the point made regarding the SA Writers' Centre's challenges of meeting funding requirements for established programs, that some longstanding programs do receive sustained support). However, Flindell points out that this funding has remained static at \$34,500 for the entire 10 years. She also points out that the program actually models one of the 'Priority Themes' of the recent 2020 Summit – that of bringing art into schools by introducing practitioners in residence. Moreover, while funding for certain programs has remained static, WA's economy has experienced enormous growth, with upward pressure on costs and salaries. This means that writingWA's salaries budget has fallen far behind standards for the state, impacting on the organisation's competitiveness for human resources.

The second factor was geographic isolation in regards to the nation's literature infrastructure as a whole. As noted in previous sections, in many aspects literature infrastructure are concentrated in the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan regions.

Publishing houses are one example but, as Flindell points out, this concentration or focus also applies to government agencies. Flindell writes:

Our lack of access to agencies such as the Australia Council increases the challenge we face to effectively communicate/advocate for the specific needs and circumstances of practitioners working in Western Australia. The Australia Council's current east coast-centric approach disadvantages practitioners outside the belt. A recent example of this was provided by the Literature Board when it decided to discontinue funding to mentorships, masterclasses, etc. The after-the-fact rationale that writingWA was given to justify this decision did not reflect any real understanding within the Literature Board of West Australian conditions. Additional examples can be found in the delivery of the Story of the Future events – none of which have made it to WA.

Flindell goes on to note that organisations such as APA, ASA, CAL and ArtsLaw are all based in the eastern states, making sustainable consultation and collaboration difficult and, therefore, limiting writingWA's opportunities to contribute to national networks or pursue development opportunities for its member organisations beyond WA's borders.

Finally, in response to this study's question regarding suggestions for improvement to the nation's literature infrastructure, Flindell made the following points:

- Invest in strategies that build or improve linkages among and across organisations and reward cooperation.
- Ensure equitable service delivery across all states.
- Invest in international market development.
- Develop strategies that reward booksellers for increased promotion of Australian publications.
- Invest in writers as mentors within the education sector.

[Sources of Information: writingWA's webpage at <http://www.writingwa.org/>; writingWA Annual Report 2007, at <http://www.writingwa.org/about/annualreports/>; Key Organisations Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Email responses to interview questions from Sharon Flindell, received 13 May 2008]



## **Australian Society of Authors**

The Australia Society of Authors was established in 1963 to promote and protect the rights of Australia's authors and illustrators. Its current staffing level is the equivalent of 4.4 full-time positions, spread amongst 6 people. They are:

Executive Director	Jeremy Fisher (full-time)
Business Manager	Jill Dimond (4days)
Training/ Professional Development Coordinator	Kris Clarke (3days)
Membership Officer	Emma Dallas (full-time)
Communications Officer	Tim Sinclair (4days)
Legal Officer	Susie Bridge (1day)

The ASA is run by its Executive Director under the direction of a Chair and an elected Committee of Management of fourteen members. The Committee of Management is elected annually and is responsible for making major policy decisions and setting directions. Committee members have responsibility for portfolios in their area of interest or expertise, including Indigenous issues, contracts and lending rights. State representatives act as contact points for members in their state and territory. [From the ASA website, 'About' page.]

Foundation President	Dal Stivens
Chair	Anita Heiss
Deputy Chair	Rob Pullan
Treasurer	Nicholas Angel
Executive Member	Georgia Blain
Executive Member	Frané Lessac
Executive Director	Jeremy Fisher
Committee of Management	Nicholas Angel Georgia Blain Gail Cork Hazel Edwards Libby Gleeson Anita Heiss Margot Hilton

Elizabeth Hutchins  
Ann James  
Frané Lessac  
Robert Pullan  
Bruce Russell  
Robyn Sheahan-Bright  
Terry Whitebeach

#### State Representatives

ACT	Francesca Beddie
NT	Helen Pavlin
Qld	Robyn Sheahan-Bright
SA	Elizabeth Hutchins
Tas	Bronilyn Smith
Vic	Hazel Edwards, Ann James
WA	Frané Lessac , Bruce Russell

#### Portfolio Holders

CAL/Lending Rights	Georgia Blain, Libby Gleeson
Comics/Graphic Novels	Jozef Szekeres, Julie Ditrich
Digital and Online	Gail Cork
Illustrators	Ann James
Indigenous	Jared Thomas
Isolated Writers	Terry Whitebeach
Freedom of Expression	Rob Pullan
Freelance Rates	Margot Hilton

Executive Director Jeremy Fisher explained in interview that, although staff of the Australia Council had suggested that ASA's current Board structure should be reconsidered to reduce the number from fourteen, he maintains that "in those fourteen there are the skills and expertise represented and coming directly from the membership. That's not going to change as a result of a suggestion that modern organisations do things better, with a Board of seven appointed from outside."

The issue of governance is pertinent, of course, to all of the literature organisations under consideration in this study, with considerable variation in numbers of Board or Committee members across organisations. Numbers of members in turn may indicate the efficiency or unwieldiness of decision-making processes. They may also, as Fisher argues,

reflect the complexity of issues relevant to those processes. In terms of transparency, however, ASA is one of only a few literature organisations examined in this study that has its governance policy and annual reports available in pdf files on its website for public download.

Membership in the Australia Society of Authors has been steady for some years, averaging around the 2,950 mark. One issue facing ASA is that its membership is ageing and, according to Fisher, it is somewhat difficult to attract younger members. This is related to the perception of benefits provided by ASA over the course of a writer's career. For those writers just emerging and struggling to get published, ASA membership may seem an unwarranted expense. But once writers are faced with contract negotiations, or later in their careers issues such as Public Lending Rights, the benefits of ASA in terms of professional advice and advocacy become more important. Attracting younger writers, though, is a challenge that Fisher acknowledges and ASA makes efforts to promote itself by participating in literary festivals across Australia and in talks held through Writers' Centres to increase awareness of its campaigns and services.

The issue of ageing membership has not impacted upon ASA's financial situation, which continues to be robust, largely due to subscriptions. ASA's main source of income is membership subscriptions, accounting for 68%, followed by grants at 14% (with just over \$52,000 from the Australia Council in triennial funding), then donations, interest and royalties, publication sales and advertising, services, seminars and other income. ASA has returned an operating surplus for eight consecutive years and ranks among the strongest, financially, of literature's Key Organisations.

In terms of its service to Australian writers and writing, the Australian Society of Authors is a peak body, representing, promoting and protecting the professional interests of Australia's literary creators. Advocacy is at the forefront of ASA's operations, with the overall objective of striving towards authors and illustrators gaining a living from their creative work. When asked to identify ASA's key contribution to the literature sector, Fisher responded:

I think the key contribution is establishing benchmarks by which we can measure that people are living from what they're writing. If you can't live from it, you can't really create. And so from our earliest gestation back in 1963 we've been concerned essentially that authors can live off what they're writing. Now that's got to be a major contribution, as nebulous as that might sound, that people can be writing and creating a literature that we can all read.

From ASA's website, the organisation's listed activities are:

- Setting minimum rates of pay and conditions for writers and illustrators.
- Publishing books, contracts, papers and lists for emerging and establishing writers.
- Maintaining a trust fund to defend the rights of copyright holders.
- Lobbying governments at all levels to promote authors and illustrators professional interests in areas such as copyright, moral rights and taxation.
- Representing its membership to policy-making bodies and on the boards of copyright collecting and lending rights agencies.
- Working with arts organisations, booksellers, publishers, writers' centres and literary agents on campaigns and research projects.
- Coordinating special interest groups for children's writers and illustrators, academics, Indigenous writers, isolated writers and translators.
- Organising ASA panels at literary festivals.
- Conducting and contributing to research on issues concerning Australian literary creators.
- Assisting its members through its Benevolent Fund.

The first of these, the setting of minimum rates of pay and conditions for writers and illustrators, is one that came up in this researcher's discussions with representatives of almost all the organisations covered in this study. While all were aware of the ASA's priority of ensuring Australian literary creators receive a minimum rate of pay for publications and speaking engagements, some were not aware of exactly what those rates were, and many expressed disappointment in admitting they were unable to pay ASA rates for all of their programs. All, however, stated that their long-term aim was to be able to pay writers ASA rates for all engagements, whether they be publications in the organisation's journal, delivery of courses and workshops, or participation in events and

festivals. Fisher pointed out that adequate remuneration for participation in festivals is a current ASA priority:

One of our campaigns at the moment is to ensure that writers' festivals are paying the fees that we set down for that. Some of them argue that they don't have sufficient money, but if they don't have sufficient money to pay the writers, then why are they putting on a writers' festival, particularly when they are underwritten – many of them – by the Australia Council as well?

This is, arguably, a matter that should receive attention across the literature infrastructure sector. All organisations report that funding is extremely tight for all projects, but if the literature sector's key advocacy group has an established minimum rate, presumably that rate should reflect not only what the providers (creators) need to earn a living, but also what the market can bear. Since all the literature organisations depend to some extent on mixes of government funding, this issue of standard rates for creators contributing to literature organisations should be somehow built into funding models and the application processes. At the moment, financially healthy organisations pay ASA rates for almost all activities, while some groups, especially those whose grants were smaller than requested, struggle to achieve this aim. Does this mean that the rates are too high, or the funding model inadequate, or the resources of the financially smaller organisations restricted to such an extent that a basic tenet of the sector – a fair financial return to literary creators – is not always tenable? Overall, this seems to be an issue worth pursuing.

A key challenge facing the literature sector in Australia, according to Fisher, and a key concern of ASA, is the transformation occurring in educational publishing relating to the push to digital delivery. In ASA's role as advocate for creator's rights, this issue represents the largest area of conflict. While educational publishing may appear to be outside the scope of the core concerns of the Literature Board, in that it does not deal directly with the creation of literary works, Fisher argues that the current transformations are an industry-wide concern:

It may not seem like a literature argument, but it becomes a literature argument when you think that of the whole of Australian publishing, about a third of it – a third of it in 2004 anyway, I don't know what the circumstances are now – was made up of educational publishing. Now that was \$500,000,000. If you lose that \$500,000,000 – and it really is disappearing

because there's no reason for schools and universities to buy print-based materials; they can get that online, and pedagogically and for many other reasons that's a good thing to do. But publishers to save their own profit margins have been making harsh and more onerous contracts for anyone that's involved in that. There's both pluses and minuses in that because authors, if they are savvy, can probably work the digital supply channel in that area much better than they can if they are trying to sell something in the fiction market, for example. They can set themselves up to supply a couple of institutions with material and do that in a way that the institution is more than happy to participate in a remunerated way. So in many ways the role of the author is going to be enhanced. But in the process of the publisher disappearing, in that sense, it is becoming quite a tense situation. And there's no model anywhere, if you take away a third of the Australian publishing industry, what happens to the rest of it? Most people ignore that educational third, I mean they don't see it as connected, in the sense that it's providing a support for a lot of what else happens.

None of the other literature groups contacted raised this issue directly, but it is worth signalling here as having potentially significant consequences for Australian publishing and therefore Australian literature.

As well as through its advocacy, the Australia Society of Authors services writers and the literature sector through its mentorship program, which it has maintained in spite of funding being no longer available from The Australia Council for this service. The program is now funded by the Copyright Agency Limited, which provides \$50,000 allowing ASA to offer 20 mentorships this year. There were 508 applications for these 20 places, a figure which Fisher says demonstrates the demand for this service. Outcomes, in terms of publications resulting from mentorships, are greater than 50%, but Fisher supported the comments made by Peter Bishop at Varuna with regard to the length of time involved in the publication cycle and the difficulties in capturing all the relevant data. ASA is currently updating its records of publications flowing on from mentorships and expects results significantly better than 50%. An additional benefit to writers participating in mentorships through ASA is an arrangement for subsequent appearances at schools and at writers' festivals, for which the writers receive payment.

This issue of supplementing authors' incomes is a matter that Fisher would like considered by funding bodies such as The Australia Council. Fisher has been suggesting a partnership program between arts funding bodies and industry that may see creative writers employed part-time in business to contribute to that business's writing needs, for example, the writing of its annual report, or the organisation's newsletter. Fisher says:

I'm looking at the idea of 'Writers in Residence' or writers working in organisations, maybe some co-funded thing, or maybe the organisation gets some special status, a payroll tax benefit or something, for being able to have a writer on staff. Not necessarily full-time, but to build up, first of all, that writer's skills in other areas. In a period when they've just published their novel and they've got no other creative ideas, they can be working on annual reports and that sort of writing that corporation needs. So that the writer has got some income coming in, even if the writer is only working, say, half the week in that role and the other half is working on their creative writing. There's a whole model that would allow them to live and create, and put other stuff back into the workplace.

Fisher emphasises that 'multi-skilling,' or creative writers deriving income from a variety of writing tasks, is not a new idea. Whereas other organisations such as writers' centres apply the same principle in their efforts to employ writers as workshop leaders and public speakers, Fisher's suggestion is more lateral and may find some purchase within the business sector if a workable incentive or funding mechanism were designed.

This suggestion is indicative of the position ASA occupies in the literature sector, mediating between creative workers, industry and government to achieve sustainable outcomes for those most directly responsible for the nation's literature: its writers and illustrators.

[Sources of information: Key Organisations: Revised Programs and Budgets 2008; Literature, Key Organisations: Financial Data and Analysis (Excel Worksheet); Interview with Jeremy Fisher, 8 April 2008; ASA website, 2006 annual report, ASA Governance Policy at <http://www.asauthors.org> ; Jeremy Fisher, 'The Professional Author: Researching Creativity and Reality' *TEXT*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2006]

## Literary Magazines

### *Meanjin*

*Meanjin* is Australia's second oldest literary magazine. Its first issue was published at Brisbane in 1940 (just a few months following the first issue of *Southerly*). *Meanjin* moved to Melbourne in 1945 when the University of Melbourne offered to publish and manage the magazine. The magazine, from its inception, published a diverse range of Australian and international writers, both established and newly emerging. The journal has had a tumultuous history and has faced financial hardship and crises on numerous occasions. Most recently, the magazine made national news in 2007 following the University of Melbourne's decision to "spill" the existing Board, a result of intense disagreements over a proposal that the magazine's administration and distribution be taken over by Melbourne University Press. Then-current editor Ian Britain argued that the take-over would severely impact upon the magazine's independence and that the changes also threatened the print-based existence of the magazine, with the possibility that *Meanjin* might become exclusively a web-based journal. In February, 2008, Britain was replaced by Sophie Cunningham as editor of the magazine, and *Meanjin* moved premises into a shared, open-plan office space with Melbourne University Publishing (MUP).

*Meanjin* staff comprises two part-time positions (a total of 1.2 full-time). They are:

Editor	Sophie Cunningham
Office Manager	Mary Kennedy

At present the only other editorial position is:

Poetry Editor	Judith Beveridge (\$3,000 per year)
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There are a number of freelance positions including:

Design and Production (typesetter)	Chase and Galley (Jeremy Wortsman and Stuart Geddes)
Editorial Consultants	Richard McGregor Nicola Shafer Natalie Book
Website Manager	John McLennan



There are also two interns, each of whom contributes one day (unpaid) per week. Volunteers are also being currently recruited.

The editor of *Meanjin* will now report to Melbourne University Publishing CEO and Chief Louise Adler, and the Board of MUP. The magazine also has an Editorial Advisory Board. Its members are:

Professor Kate Darian-Smith  
Dr Mark Davis  
Angela Woods  
Emeritus Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe  
Associate Professor Deb Verhoeven  
Michael Webster – manager of Bookscan  
Professor Ken Gelder  
Laura Carrol  
Louise Adler

This Advisory Board was responsible for developing a Charter of Independence to provide structure for the relationship between *Meanjin* and MUP.

*Meanjin* receives a program grant of \$35,000 per annum from the Australia Council. This funding level has remained basically the same since the mid-1990s, except for a brief period when funding was reduced to between \$20-25,000. This funding is directed towards payments to contributors.

In interview, Sophie Cunningham raised an issue regarding staffing that is common among literary magazines, and with literature organisations overall. The extremely small staffing levels, a reflection of the budgetary restrictions under which most literature organisations operate, mean that issues such as annual leave for salaried staff are quite problematic. *Meanjin*'s previous editor, Ian Britain, said in interview that he had taken leave only once in the six years he was editor. Cunningham says that her office manager hasn't had a holiday in the past two years. This apparently personal matter of who has or who hasn't taken annual leave is, in fact, a structural problem, with minimal staff meaning that any one person's absence impacts significantly on operations. Cunningham

mentioned that she would like to restructure the positions at *Meanjin*, so that the office manager role became one of deputy editor, thereby overcoming the separation of editorial and administrative responsibilities, which in larger organisations may be more appropriate, but in a smaller one can be a disadvantage. Further to this is the issue of succession management, potentially a concern for numerous literature organisations in which so much responsibility for daily operations rests with one or two people.

The 'small' or 'little' nature of literary magazines is an issue that has received substantial commentary in Australian literary studies over the decades. A review of literary magazines in the 1990s, resulting in significant restructuring of funding, including a cut of nearly 50% to *Meanjin*, prompted a flurry of articles, appearing in *Meanjin*, *Ulitarra*, *Australian Book Review*, *The Age* and others. In this coverage, the role and contribution of literary journals to Australian literature and culture was debated, touching on issues such as their perennially low circulation on the one hand and their critical importance in providing a platform for new writing on the other. In the intervening ten or twelve years, the issues remain the same, the one significant addition being the possibilities of digital delivery and the potential, thereby, to increase readership.

It was, as mentioned above, the matter of web presence or delivery that was a substantial factor in the latest reconfiguration of *Meanjin*. Former editor Britain was concerned that the take-over by Melbourne University Press would involve pressures to deliver the magazine wholly on-line, leading to the demise of the print-based journal. In interview and in subsequent email communications, Britain made the point that he did not object to an online presence, nor did he believe that an online format would be inherently in opposition to the print version. However, he says, there was pressure from some members of the Board to follow the online route exclusively, and to this he objected. Cunningham, in interview, explained that although decisions regarding format have not yet been reached, a major responsibility during her editorship of the magazine will be the on-line component. Like Britain, Cunningham stresses that an on-line presence for the journal will complement the print form. Importantly, an on-line presence will assist with boosting readership, particularly among younger (under 35 year-old) readers. She explained that

she had two goals for the online journal. First will be web-availability for selected contributions to the current issue. These could be supplemented by on-line forums, in which readers and authors could interact, creating “a very lively on-line space.” Second is accessibility to the entire *Meanjin* archive. Cunningham says that she would want the archive to be open-access, so that a Google search by anyone, anywhere, might turn up a relevant *Meanjin* article from past years, the text of which would then be fully and freely available. Cunningham admits, however, that the MUP Board may not agree with her goal of open-access. She also recognises that the digital archive will depend upon a successful funding application (somewhere between a one-off amount of \$50,000 and \$100,000) to cover design, implementation and scanning costs. She mooted the possibility of a partnership with other journals and a funding body such as The Australia Council to establish a “digital warehouse” for Australian literary magazines.

To the question of how *Meanjin* serves writers and contributes to the literature infrastructure in Australia, both Britain and Cunningham were in agreement on the long-established role of literary magazines providing a springboard for the launching of new literary talent. Although it has been suggested that, with the turn away from short stories by new or emerging writers in favour of novels as a first publication, literary magazines may no longer be serving this springboard function, Britain provided three compelling examples from *Meanjin*. Alice Pung, author of *Unpolished Gem* (2007), first came to Britain’s attention when her submission by the same title arrived in *Meanjin*’s “slush pile” of unsolicited material. Recognising its quality, he published it in the magazine’s first issue for 2002, *On Biography*, and put her in touch with the publisher Black Inc. who subsequently published her memoir. Azhar Abidi, a Pakistan-born author living in Australia for ten years, had been trying unsuccessfully to interest Australian publishers in his work. He then submitted an extract to *Meanjin* and Britain, again recognising new talent, accepted his work for publication and put him in touch with an American agent – an agent’s agent, actually – who got Abidi an agent, who immediately got him a contract with Penguin America for his book *Passarola Rising*. “This took six weeks,” Britain said. “Six weeks. In this country it had taken him ten years to get nothing. [...] And Azhar has gone onto his second novel and is well into his third.” As another example, Britain says,

I don't think I can claim so much credit for this one, but you'll see in my last issue, *Eternal Summer*, an acknowledgement of Tony Ayres, whose film *The Home Song Stories*, which last year won all these awards in Berlin and everywhere else, actually started out in life as a *Meanjin* essay. So I'm very thrilled and Tony very generously said afterwards that in a way by my pulling this out of him – he'd certainly had the idea in his head – but in a way by commissioning him to do it, it was the first sort of substantial treatment of what later became this internationally acclaimed film.

The three examples Britain offers are all works that have either won or been short-listed for awards, emphasising that literary journals such as *Meanjin* continue to provide an important platform for quality new work. Regarding the third of these, Cunningham pointed out that Ayres' had already made several films, including a full-length feature film, and that his work has been supported by publishers, film bodies and the Australia Council for some considerable time and, therefore, *Meanjin* is but one of a number of organisations that provided assistance and recognition. Cunningham made the additional point that in terms of pathways for creative writers, publication in *Meanjin* or other literary journals is a critical career step, in that it then allows a writer to apply for grants which will provide financial assistance allowing for the completion of further publication-quality work.

The issue of outreach, or the extent to which *Meanjin* reaches national or even international readerships, relates to both subscriptions and distribution. Current subscription breakdown, provided by Cunningham, indicates that roughly two-thirds of its subscription-base is Victorian, just over one-sixth is from interstate, and just less than one-sixth is international. The magazine has national distribution, through Pan-Macmillan, but Britain, in interview, expressed considerable frustration with the limitations of distribution, some relating to delivery times, some relating to lack of opportunities for over-the-counter sales. As an example, Britain says he was

shocked at the ABC bookshops who refused to stock *Meanjin* because their commitment was to a similar periodical which they partly sponsor, even though we had very good relations with the Margaret Throsby Show, and with Radio National. We were featured quite heavily and we thought there was every reason for ABC to carry *Meanjin* – this is not just for commercial reasons but for good intellectual reasons – and yet the ABC shops for whatever reasons would not stock us.

While not directly addressing this issue of diversifying its points-of-sale, Cunningham agrees that “there is a tension between the needs of a large distribution warehouse that works with thousands of titles and the needs of a small quarterly journal,” involving issues such as deadlines, on the one hand, and the low prioritising of bookshop orders of one or two copies (typical for literary magazines) on the other. Cunningham says that she has had discussions with Pan-Macmillan and aims to improve the journal’s record of meeting the distributor’s deadlines. She also says that the radical redesign and use of colour and illustration should help to attract an increased, and younger, readership, while hopefully retaining the journal’s longstanding subscribers. Regarding international distribution, with each current issue, over 150 copies go overseas to libraries and to individuals. When asked about increasing this overseas reach, Cunningham emphasised that improving the website to provide a more interactive on-line presence and downloadable current content as well as access to archived material will, she hopes, boost the journal’s international reach. While the redesign of the online component of *Meanjin* is a crucial development, Cunningham says that 90% of her day is devoted to the running of the print journal, and it is this which remains most important.

*Meanjin*, then, is undergoing significant transformation, and while retaining its commitment to a literary focus, aims to build its readership and, through digital delivery and a vibrant on-line presence to complement its print format, renew the ways it engages with and contributes to Australia’s literature.

[Sources of information: Acquittal Report submitted to the Literature Board, April 2007; “Meanjin,” AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource; Interview with Ian Britain, 11 April 2008, Canberra; email communication with Britain, 22 August 2008 Interview with Sophie Cunningham, 16 April 2008, Melbourne; email communication, 20 August 2008]

## *Overland*

*Overland* began in 1954, emerging out of the earlier publication *Realist Writer*, a bulletin of the Melbourne Realist Writers Group, under the editorship of Stephen Murray-Smith. Originally supported by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Murray-Smith's prioritising of aesthetic over ideological criteria for the selection of writing led to a break between the magazine and the CPA in 1958. Through the decades, *Overland* has maintained its commitment to the literary while engaging in social debate and examining the interrelations of culture and politics. Issues appear quarterly and in 2008 the magazine is run from a small set of offices on the edge of Victoria University.

*Overland* has two part-time staff and a number of both contract and unpaid staff. They are:

Editor	Jeff Sparrow (p-t)
Editorial Coordinator	Alex Skutenko (p-t)
Associate Editor	Kalinda Ashton (unpaid; receives a small gratuity)
Fiction Editor	Nathan Hollier (unpaid)
Reviews Editor	Rjurik Davidson (unpaid)
Poetry Editor	Keri Glastonbury (unpaid)
Proof-reader	David Hudson (contract)
Designer	Les Thomas (contract)

The magazine has an eleven member Board, comprising:

Chair	Dr Ian Syson
Deputy Chair	Jenny Lee
Deputy Chair	Richard Llewellyn
Secretary	Alex Skutenko
Treasurer	Andrew Leggatt
Members	Jeannie Rea
	Dr Fiona Capp
	Professor John McLaren
	David Murray-Smith
	Nita Murray-Smith
	Jeff Sparrow

*Overland* receives a program grant of \$50,000 per annum from the Australia Council. This amount has been static since 2004, prior to which the funding was \$40,000 per annum. This funding is directed towards payments to contributors. Operational funding is derived from Arts Victoria, while Victoria University contributes the premises from which the magazine operates, plus some computer support.

For the past eight years, *Overland* has maintained a close relationship between its quarterly publication and its public lecture series, with its issues typically structured around a feature essay derived from, or relating to, a previously delivered lecture. In 2008, these will include a debate between Peter Craven and Ken Gelder on the current state and future of Australian literary culture (an event held at the Sydney Writers' Festival), and a lecture in November by Antony Loewenstein. These lectures will appear in subsequent issues of the magazine. As well as political, social and cultural critique, *Overland* continues its support for creative work, publishing short fiction and poetry in each issue, while its reviews section is devoted exclusively to Australian publications, covering the output of the major publishing houses as well as the smaller presses and some self-published works.

In interview Editor Jeff Sparrow explained *Overland's* distinct contribution to Australian literature by pointing to the shift that has occurred in the cultural capital attached to literary production:

If you go back to the earlier issues of the magazine, one of the things that stands out is the much greater cultural capital – and indeed material value – attached to the production of short stories or poetry. Publication in a literary journal was something which all kinds of writers aspired to, whereas today we're in a situation where non-fiction pays so much more and so many newspapers and other publications publish non-fiction essays of the kind that were once *Overland's* bread and butter. So I think that has changed what we do quite significantly. Given that, one of the things that we do that no one else much does is not simply that we orient ourselves to emerging writers – because there are lots of publications that talk about doing that – but also I think we see ourselves orienting towards people who are politically outside the mainstream as well. I think that's something we do in a way that no other literary magazine in Australia does. So not just those who are emerging in the sense that they're trying to establish themselves in a career, but those who for

various political reasons are outside the mainstream of cultural production in Australia. And we see them as kind of our core readership, I suppose.

Sparrow's comments reference Mark Davis's article, "The Decline of the Literary Paradigm in Australian Publishing," which was first published in *HEAT* in 2006, but also relate to Davis's more recent piece, "Literature, Small Publishers and the Market in Culture," which had just appeared in *Overland* at the time of this interview. The argument is one that was echoed by almost all the editors of literary journals interviewed for this study. As the market demand for non-fiction displaces publication opportunities for literary production, especially in regards to short stories, poetry and literary essays, the work of literary magazines in maintaining support for writers in these genres becomes increasingly important.

The role and relevance of literary journals in Australia's literary and cultural life is a matter to which *Overland* devotes considerable energies. As well as the *Overland* lectures delivered at high-profile events, the journal participates throughout the year in a range of activities aimed at engaging audiences across age groups and communities. In 2007 it presented events at Melbourne's Emerging Writers' Festival and Newcastle's Young Writers' Festival, organised seminars at universities and TAFE colleges, gave talks at libraries and presented broadcasts with community radio and television stations. Sparrow explained that this high level of community engagement is an expected component of what a literary magazine is and does:

In the same way that a fiction writer today cannot simply write a book, think it's great and send it off to a publisher and that's it – they have to work, they've got to get out there and do the festival circuit, give a good back story, they have to have a nice photo of themselves, they've got to do in-store appearances – well, we have to do all those sorts of things. This is how the literary magazine has to function these days. You have to establish a profile through publicity, through putting on forums, lectures, seminars.

This need for a constant public presence and community engagement in a variety of forums led Sparrow to comment on the increasingly important role of digital technology and a web-presence for the magazine. Sparrow comments that although *Overland* works



towards increasing its profile through events this will not necessarily lead to increased sales:

People aren't going to say, "Oh, *Overland* is putting on this interesting forum. I'll go to the bookshop and look for *Overland*. What they're going to do is Google, and the website is then going to be their first port of call, and so one has to work out what to do with this. The question is increasingly that *Overland* is going to have to be more than a print journal. *Overland* is going to have to be the entirety of these things, of which the print journal is simply the most important part. But exactly how that fits together is still a work in progress.

Sparrow speculates on whether the subscription-based model for literary magazines is one that will be sustainable in the long-term. Almost all editors of literary journals in Australia remark upon their magazine's aging readership. In regards to attracting younger subscribers, Sparrow says:

I'd be surprised if there were a great proportion of young people who subscribe to magazines in the traditional way of cutting out a clipping and posting it off and all the rest of it. I think this is a model that's worked for a considerable period of time, but does seem to me that it's gradually coming to the end of its road and it's not altogether clear what's going to replace it. When you compare subscription numbers to literary websites and the huge number of hits that they get, well, there is this question: How long will we keep doing the things we have been doing? This is not a terrible scary thing. There are these new opportunities that are opening up for literary magazines like *Overland*: we just need to find the model that works for it.

*Overland* has received funding this year from Arts Victoria towards developing its organisational structures and, with this support, a rethinking and redesign of the magazine's webpage is currently underway.

Two other initiatives of *Overland* should be noted. The first of these is its 2008 project to attract submissions for a full-length novel, with the intention of publishing the work as an issue of *Overland* in 2009. "Everybody knows the situation for young Australian novelists is just awful," Sparrow says, "just awful for literary novels and first time publication. We're doing this thing where we're publishing a full-length literary novel, partly to highlight that." The journal's webpage notes that this is not a competition, that submissions will be accepted throughout the year and that when an acceptable novel is

found, *Overland* will publish it. Sparrow says that the response so far has been “astonishing,” with a submission (the first 10,000 words of a completed novel) a day arriving at the *Overland* office. With this initiative, *Overland* not only wishes to draw attention to the difficulties facing unpublished writers, but also seeks to prompt thinking and debate regarding alternative forms of literary production.

The second concern for *Overland* with regard to the literature sector is the continued predominance of male writers. Sparrow says that a quick survey of literary magazines recently led him to think seriously of the gender imbalance, particularly in non-fiction. “In poetry, in short fiction it’s not so bad,” Sparrow says, “but when you start talking about non-fiction particularly, politics or history, it’s overwhelmingly male. There are so few young women writing in the field of politics. Particularly, the more polemical you become, the less women are involved in it, which is really quite striking. That’s something that we’re trying to overcome.” When asked what strategies *Overland* had to address this, Sparrow indicated that it meant soliciting contributions in this area of writing from women writers as well as encouraging further editorial participation, especially by young women. Partly, however, this issue is particular to *Overland*, which as Sparrow admits, has been perceived as being “associated with a blokey kind of culture.”

Finally, with regards to impediments, Sparrow, like other editors of magazines and directors of literature organisations, raised the matter of funding and the application process. In a comment similar to Barbara Weisner’s remark about the need to constantly demonstrate innovativeness, Sparrow compared the funding application process to an escalation of expectations that risks becoming untenable:

It forces you into a kind of an arms race, where you have to promise ever-more-wonderful things that you are going to do in order to get the money and then you find yourself locked into doing these things. To put it another way, in order to get the money you need in order to function, you are forced to apply for things that will get you the money, even if they are not the things that you’d prefer to do in the ideal world. So, you are driven by their priorities rather than your priorities.

Partially, the comments relate to a sector-wide frustration with the short-term nature of funding and the difficulties this creates for organisational matters such as staffing, as well as the challenges it poses for both marketing and strategic planning. In relation to this point, Sparrow gave the example of *Overland* not being able to go to the Adelaide Festival this year because at the time the festival's program was being finalised, the magazine's budget was still uncertain.

Literary magazines are facing a period of transition and challenge, undoubtedly. *Overland* is well aware of the challenges, and is delivering content in both its hard copy and its lectures and debates that ask audiences to consider the role of literature in Australian culture and the forms literary culture will take in the future.

[Sources of Information: 'Overland,' periodical record at AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource at <http://www.austlit.edu.au>; Mark Davis, "The Decline of the Literary Paradigm in Australian Publishing," *HEAT* 12 (New Series, 2006):91-108; Mark Davis, "Literature, Small Publishers and the Market in Culture," *Overland* 190 (Autumn 2008): 4-11; *Overland* webpage at <http://www.overlandexpress.org/>; Interview with Jeff Sparrow, 14 April 2008]

### ***Island***

*Island* began in 1979 as the *Tasmanian Review*, a literary magazine established to feature Tasmanian writers. In 1981, the publication shifted its editorial policy towards a more national focus and renamed itself *Island Magazine*. The magazine ran under this title until 1989, when a change in editorship (with Cassandra Pybus taking the position) also resulting in a shortening of the title to *Island*. The quarterly magazine has maintained its national coverage of contemporary literary writing while continuing to publish and support Tasmanian writing as well.

*Island* has just one part-time staff member:

Editor

Gina Mercer

who is paid for 27 hours per week and, she says, “I do everything from admin, to the subscription database, to editing, the whole lot.”

The magazine lists a number other positions (unpaid or contract), including:

Poetry Editor	Adrienne Eberhard (current) James Charlton (immediate past)
Subeditor	Stephen Edgar
Proofreader	Cedric Mackey
Design	Lynda Warner
Layout	Beverly Waldie

It has a Management Committee of eight members, including:

Chair	Norman Reaburn
Treasurer	Candace Weatherly
Members	Bernard Lloyd
	Esther Ottaway
	Greg Lehman
	Lindsay Broughton
	Elle Leane

*Island* from 2006-2008 received just over \$36,000 per annum in triennial funding from Arts Tasmania, and between \$28,000 and \$30,000 per annum from the Australia Council as a program grant. It also receives approximately \$6,000 per annum from the University of Tasmania, through its Cultural Activities Committee, and rent-free office space in a building on the edge of the university’s campus.

*Island* aims with each issue to offer a balance of writing from established and emerging writers, and a balance between Tasmanian and interstate writers. Each issue carries work by some 30 writers and usually about a third of those are Tasmanian. This mirrors *Island*’s subscription base, which is also roughly one third Tasmanian, with two-thirds interstate subscribers. A very small proportion of subscribers (2-3%) is from overseas. *Island* has a print-run of 1,200, with subscriptions of around 800 and over-the-counter sales of another 200. This subscription level has been relatively static for at least the past eight years. *Island* currently has three promotional offers to raise subscriptions: one is a

premium subscription (which provides two copies of the magazine - one to gift and therefore promote the magazine - plus the subscriber's name printed in each issue); the second is a reduced rate for a gift subscription along with regular subscription; and the third is a bundle deal, with subscriptions to *Island* and *Overland* offered together at a reduced rate. *Island* carries some advertising in each issue, but this generates very little income as most of it is with partners or through contra deals.

Similar to other literary magazines, *Island* subscribers are generally in the upper age bracket. In interview, Gina Mercer commented on the challenge of attracting younger readers. Like the editors of other literary journals, Mercer is currently giving attention to the role the internet will play in the delivery or format of *Island* and considering its possibilities for attracting younger readers and writers. *Island's* current webpage provides the list of contents for current and back issues (though only to issue 96, 2004), and each has links to selected articles (generally four: one essay, one poem, one short fiction piece and one review) which are retrievable in full-text. The site has no search function, however. With regard to renovation to or innovation within the site, Mercer explains that she has recently and successfully applied for funding from Arts Tasmania (one year's funding has been granted at this stage) to develop an online journal within *Island's* website that will be devoted to the work of emerging writers and will provide open access to all its material:

This would be an on-line segment of the journal. It would come out quarterly, as *Island* does, and each issue would be accessible for free from the website. It would have one artist, an emerging artist, whose art work would feature so that each issue would look different. We would invite emerging writers to submit poetry, fiction, or essays to a certain date. We would like to employ an emerging editor. Editing, as I discovered, is a curious career. In places like Tasmania there are not obvious career stepping stones or professional development opportunities for people who might be terrific editors. So part of this idea was to have a site that was specifically for emerging writers and it would be edited by an emerging editor who would be mentored by me. I also discussed this with the Society of Editors in Tasmania and they were interested in providing some kind of mentoring component. They didn't have cash to put into it, unfortunately, but they would provide some support, depending on the needs of the editor. That way the emerging editor would get input and advice from more than just one person. So we would advertise it as

a mentorship, a stepping-stone for someone who's looking into this kind of profession.

Mercer's suggestion for an emerging writers/editors literary site within the website of *Island* is somewhat similar to the youth project described by Barbara Weisner as running in South Australia some years ago, except in this case appearing within the new technology and format of digital delivery, to which young readers and writers increasingly turn. This emerging writers' platform within *Island*, therefore, would not only provide skills development for young writers, it would also work towards audience development in the crucial younger age bracket.

Mercer sees this proposed emerging writers' site as articulating well with creative writing courses offered at numerous Australian universities. She raised the possibility of flyers being distributed in creative writing courses, drawing attention to the opportunities to publish, with the new site building upon the established reputation and reliability of *Island* as a magazine of quality literary writing. Importantly, the site must be open-access.

I think younger writers and younger readers commonly don't have lots of cash. But the idea behind this is that you're building an affiliation, when it's free, and hopefully they become loyal subscribers when they get older. Which sounds very commercial but, you know, I know as a writer myself, if a magazine was the first place I ever got published, that does build a sense of loyalty towards that brand, that name. And hopefully as writers go on in their careers and get income, then they would want to continue supporting it, so that *Island* could continue to provide opportunities for younger writers. I see it as a long term investment to build the brand and build loyalty.

Mercer has other plans for building brand recognition for the magazine. Except for an event at the biennial Living Writers' Week, *Island* does not currently host or organise lectures, readings or debates, in contrast to *Overland* which, as discussed in the previous section, invests significant staff time and resources towards such profile-building events. To begin, Mercer says she would like *Island* to run an annual lecture series:

GM: For example, we could have a lecture or panel in Hobart, as part of Living Writers Week maybe as a high profile event and get the Minister to come to that. But I'd also like to have it as a series of five events and have one in Stanley and another one in Launceston and another one in St. Helens and

build our regional profile. I think it would be helpful and likely to be productive.

MJ: That would feed into subscriptions, one would think.

GM: Yes, definitely. So readings, a lecture series, and literary lunches are very popular in Tasmania. As a writer I did a dinner reading as part of National Poetry Week a few years ago and some of the old-timers in the poetry ranks said, "Oh, it's too expensive and you won't get anyone." Well, we had more people than we could fit. We set a maximum of 30 and we had 40 people who wanted to come, so we had to turn people away. So I think there is a real hunger for a lot of those things, particularly in the regional or remote areas. But again, we need funding and administrative support to help organise it, because it's quite a lot to set all that up.

MJ: That sounds like it would possibly be a great opportunity for partnerships with wineries.

GM: Yes, exactly. And there are heaps of really beautiful restaurants in Tasmania. And one of your other questions was what strategies could government agencies implement; well one of them is one is that there is a lot of money from governments pumped into things like exporting Tasmanian cheeses and salmon and wine and so on. I think it would be really useful if the literary world did the same thing. Tasmania has this amazing depth of fabulous writers living there. Many of them, as well as being great writers, are excellent performers. We should put some investment into exporting them as a Tasmanian product: overseas and interstate, and it could be tied in with food promotions: for example, have a literary lunch, eat Tasmanian salmon, drink Tasmanian wine, and the entertainment between courses would be three Tasmanian poets reading terrific work. I see that as something that would be really good, if we could get into promoting the product, as it were, as an export commodity.

The major impediment to any of this becoming a reality, of course, is funding. Mercer explains that *Island's* strength – its reputation for reliability and quality – may actually be a liability in terms of attracting new funding.

In some quarters, I worry that we might be misperceived as being like the old aunt in the grey cardigan; that we're seen as too reliable, too predictable, and therefore not sexy and new. And therefore not worthy of more funding, that we're not doing anything surprising or even capable of doing anything new and surprising. That kind of reputation for reliability and quality (the grey cardigan is pure merino), whilst it is a major strength, could also be a weakness, in the minds of funding bodies and within the community. Because *Island* has had a presence in Tasmania since 1979, sponsors don't go, "Wow, let's support *Island*". We're just part of the landscape. At present there's no buzz attached to giving *Island* \$20,000. My sense is that for some time now we've been funded to stagnate. We're funded to stagnate: just to do what we

do and be that steady, refined aunt in the grey cardigan. But there doesn't seem to be the will to fund us to flourish, which is what I'm pushing for. I'd really like to see us have enough funding to expand and flourish and develop as a brand.

Again, Mercer's comments echo those of many others in the literature sector. Current funding keeps existing levels of activities and projects going, but just. Mercer says, as a part-time staff member, and as the only paid staff member, she simply cannot take on new initiatives, or devote time to marketing, or corporate or philanthropic sponsorship, when every one of her 27 hours per week is needed to prepare the current issue of *Island* and get it out to subscribers.

[Sources of Information: *Island* website at: <http://www.islandmag.com/index.html>; 'Island,' periodical record at AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource at <http://www.austlit.edu.au>; Interview with Gina Mercer, 26 May 2008; email communication with Mercer, 19 August 2008]

## ***HEAT***

*HEAT* first appeared in 1996 aiming, according to its founding editor Ivor Indyk, to inject vitality into the state of Australian literary quarterlies and bridge the gap perceived between academic and mainstream writing. *HEAT* was designed from its beginnings to appear more as a book than a periodical, with hopes of breaking into the mainstream market. (The book format and design is a model that other literary magazines in Australia have since followed, e.g. *Meanjin*, *Southerly*.) There were also plans in 1999 to market *HEAT* internationally; these encountered significant difficulties and for a brief period the magazine did not publish. *HEAT* (New Series) began in 2001, with two issues per year, increasing to three issues in 2007.

*HEAT* currently has an editor and seven assistant editors. They are:

Editor	Ivor Indyk (0.5)
Administrative Editor; Poetry and Fiction	Fiona Wright (0.4)
Poetry	Lucy Dougan



Non-Fiction  
Copy Editor  
Melbourne Editor  
Special Projects  
Academic

Sarah Kanowski  
Richard Lever  
Antoni Jach  
Adam Aitken  
Kathleen Olive

Of these, Indyk's salary is paid for by the University of Western Sydney, where he is Whitlam Chair in Writing and Society. Wright's salary is also paid for by UWS, out of funds from Giramondo Publishing, which publishes *HEAT*. Olive is Senior Research Officer in the Writing and Research Group at UWS and as such devotes a portion of her time to *HEAT*. The remaining assistant editors are paid on a freelance basis.

*HEAT*'s Editorial Advisory Board comprises nine members. They are:

Adrian Martin  
Anna Couani  
Martin Duwell  
Kevin Hart  
John Vallance  
Cassandra Pybus  
John Sutherland

*HEAT* has an annual budget of approximately \$137,000. It receives funds from the NSW Ministry for the Arts, as well as support from the University of Western Sydney and Sydney Grammar School. In 2008, it will receive \$45,000 in a program grant from the Australia Council for three issues of the magazine. Almost all of this amount will go towards contributors' fees.

The focus of *HEAT* is on the literary. Unlike some other Australian literary magazines which have adopted a topic or theme focus for each issue, *HEAT*'s single criterion for selection of material in any one issue is quality of writing. Editor Ivor Indyk emphasised in interview that "our criteria are purely in terms of the writing, not word length, not topicality, not theme or anything like that." *HEAT* also has an art feature in most issues (with colour reproductions sponsored by Sydney Grammar School). It also publishes translations of work by overseas writers.

Indyk's point above regarding word length is important in terms of *HEAT*'s contribution to Australia's literary economy. *HEAT* often publishes quite long contributions, not only in the forms of essays and short fiction, but also in poetry. The magazine publishes sequences of poems or single long poems of up to 20 pages. Indyk makes the point that for such substantial contributions, a poet would receive in payment the equivalent of a typical advance for an entire book of poetry (approximately \$500). "So in one publication in *HEAT* they can get as much for three or four poems as they get for a whole book," Indyk says. "So in that respect *HEAT* is, I think, valuable especially for poets." Indyk makes the same point with regard to essayists:

For genres that are non-commercial – the essay for example – we pay 20 cents a word minimum. We can go higher if we really want the piece. So for a 5,000 word essay writers get \$1,000 or \$1,200. For a 10,000 word essay – because we go that high – it can be \$2,000 or \$2,500. There aren't many magazines that are going to publish a 10,000 word essay and certainly no newspapers are going to do it. If we [Giramondo] publish a collection of essays in book form, it's like poetry, we sell about 500 copies, because the genre is completely unfashionable as a collection. So writers can get paid more for one essay in *HEAT* than they can get for a collection of 10 essays in book form. So in that area we're fulfilling a very important function.

For young writers of fiction *HEAT* is valuable not only in terms of payments, as above, but also with regard to applications for Literature Board grants. This is a point made by Sophie Cunningham in respect to publication in *Meanjin* as well, and indicates an important role served by the literary magazines: they provide both a platform for publication for emerging writers and an important pathway to further support for their writing. The magazines, in this sense, act as assessors, obviously, or gate-keepers perhaps. Editors identifying quality work amongst their slush pile of submissions and publishing it provide a filter-function for subsequent funding application processes, not in the sense of limiting those future applications, but in the sense of marking as distinct those with a record of acceptance in magazines such as *HEAT*.

Indyk refers to precisely this when he says that literary magazines are actually contributing to the Literature Board's task of selecting the work of the best Australian writers and supporting them:

In terms of infrastructure, I think we're dispensing the Literature Board's funds for them. We have received over half a million dollars in the last 11 years, and most of that has been to *HEAT* because we get about \$40,000 a year, and virtually all that goes in contributors fees. So we're actually doing the Literature Board's work for it. They give us the 40,000 but we do all the work in terms of selecting, editing, publishing, paying and then accounting for what we have done. So I think that's an aspect of the economy that has to be taken into account, because we are administering all that for free. Do you know what I mean? We don't charge them for administration or disbursement. ... But there is another fundamental difference. The Literature Board gives out its money – direct grants to writers – for work that is to be written – it hasn't been written yet – whereas we're paying for work that has already been written. I think more attention should be paid to that second kind of funding than the first because at the moment the vast majority of the funds goes to the first kind. I think there's a strong argument for reversing those priorities and, actually, giving a greater proportion of the funds for work that has already been written. The important difference is in terms of the self-esteem of the writer. You know, funding in advance creates all sorts of problems: guilt, shame at not coming up with the goods, the need to make all sorts of excuses to the Board, to oneself and that sort of thing. But there's a real dignity and pride in receiving a cheque for \$1,500 [for work completed] and if a greater proportion of the funding was directed towards this sort of funding then we could pay more too. We could even double the rate, and then the writers would really have something to be pleased about.

Indyk's point here is extremely important and applies not just to literary journals but across the sector to all organisations reliant on program funding from the Literature Board. Many other organisations consulted in this study have raised the issue that program funding, which stipulates that all or the majority of funds be disbursed to writers, artists and performers, does not allow for the managerial and administrative costs in organising and carrying out the programs. While this arrangement fulfils the Board's priority of directing funds to writers, it overlooks the issue of the sustainability of the infrastructure upon which the production of literary writing depends.

Literary magazines like *HEAT* also serve an important role in the literature sector as a training ground for young editors and the next generation of literature professionals. *HEAT* acknowledges the contributions of a half a dozen editorial assistants; their involvement in the magazine provides professional development from which both they as individuals and the sector as a whole benefit. Most literary magazines also provide

opportunities for internships. In 2007 Michael Mohammed Ahmad was an intern with *HEAT*; he has also edited the publication *Westside 08*, featuring the work of young and emerging writers from the Western Sydney region. Indyk remarks: “That’s an evolution that’s occurring under the influence I suppose of *HEAT*, not that I’m influencing it directly; he’s influencing it himself, by virtue of seeing other examples of how it’s done.” This example is not uncommon, or necessarily particular to *HEAT*. It does demonstrate, however, that literary magazines provide more than just payments to writers; they perpetuate a literary culture.

A strength of *HEAT* – and, again, Indyk makes the point that this is the case for other literary magazines – is its collaborative ethos. As well as the support from the University of Western Sydney, which is vital to the magazine, *HEAT* has had successful partnerships with the Goethe Institute, the Alliance Francaise, the various Writers’ Festivals at which *HEAT* has organised events, and the ongoing partnership with Sydney Grammar School which, apart from the cash contribution towards the colour reproductions in the magazine, has also hosted readings and events at its central Sydney venue and paid for advertising these events.

When asked about recent *HEAT* events, Indyk admits that this is one aspect of the magazine that has diminished in recent years, especially since the establishment of Giramondo Publishing. In earlier years each issue of *HEAT* was launched in either Sydney or Melbourne, and the magazine hosted a lecture series and readings, as other literary magazines have done and continue to do to raise their public profile. Indyk attributes this tapering off of public events to two things: the first is that any events now held tend to be to promote Giramondo (to which, after all, *HEAT* is integral as one of its publications); the second perhaps relates to the view that Indyk expresses regarding the readership for literary publications such as *HEAT*. He points out that subscriptions to *HEAT* have been static at around 1,000 since its first year of publication (1996). This indicates, he says, that there is a core constituency that reads and supports literary writing, but this core constituency does not grow. In contrast to other editors who express the

intention to increase their subscription-base, Indyk says that “if you dedicate yourself to the literary then you commit yourself to a small readership.” He says:

It’s not as if there is a large public constituency for literary events and they are not being reached. There just isn’t a large constituency. I’m actually resigned to the idea of a minority culture; a very small coterie of readers. The assumption that you have to have a large audience in order to perpetuate or transmit cultural values is wrong. When you look back over the people who have been responsible for transmitting or renovating the culture, they are very few.

Indyk reports that, with regard to Giramondo, he has been told by a marketing professional that there is nothing to be done that he is not already doing to gain greater public awareness and increase sales. Giramondo’s readers, he says, are not going to be the readers of *Women’s Weekly*, or listeners to 2GB. And, he says, “that all suggests that you just play to your constituency and you don’t worry about increasing it.” Indyk qualifies these comments on the relatively static subscription levels by pointing out that with each subscription renewal round the magazine loses a quarter of its existing subscribers while gaining an equal number of new subscribers. Therefore, although subscription appears static in terms of overall numbers, its composition is quite dynamic. Over ten years, he says, *HEAT* has attracted almost three times as many expired subscribers as it has current subscribers.

One aspect of the magazine’s circulation that Indyk would like to see improved is its reach to readerships outside the Sydney and Melbourne regions. The majority of *HEAT*’s subscribers come from NSW, with a strong Melbourne representation as well, but it attracts few subscribers from other states. Indyk blames this on the regionalism which operates throughout the literature sector as a whole, and is not particular to literary magazines. One possible remedy to this, according to Indyk, would be a federally supported scheme, perhaps through the Literature Board, to subsidise library subscriptions. Indyk says that the NSW Ministry of the Arts, for example, has a subscription subsidy scheme, under which 100 regional libraries receive *HEAT*. Breaking out of NSW and into other states in the same way would increase exposure and readership dramatically, but as libraries come under local council jurisdiction and funding,

and therefore under state responsibility, the suggestion is problematic. If audience development, however, is considered seriously, a relatively small investment in nationwide library subscriptions for literary magazines such as *HEAT* could bring significant returns in increasing exposure and readership. Although this may contradict Indyk's previous comment regarding a fixed constituency for literary writing, it is an idea worth pursuing.

In terms of audience development and constituencies, Indyk made a similar point to one raised by Gina Mercer, editor of *Island*. He acknowledged that there was a significant potential readership-base in the cohorts of students enrolled in the many university creative writing courses. Unlike *Island*, *HEAT* has no immediate plans to reach out to these students via a renewed web presence. Indyk says that the present webpage is functional, including content listings for past issues, but that resources – time especially – were not available to change the site at the moment.

A final aspect of audience development relevant to *HEAT* is that of overseas readers. As mentioned earlier, *HEAT* features occasional international writing. Although the Australia Council does not support contributors' fees for overseas writers, it does support fees for translators of overseas work and thus *HEAT* is able to include such material. Indyk says that because of this *HEAT* has gained a good reputation internationally and in the past he was able to persuade the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade into taking subscriptions for 50 embassies; this, however, was short-lived. Indyk is certainly not alone in expressing the hope that Australian literary journals could become available overseas.

[Sources of Information: '*HEAT*,' periodical record at AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource at <http://www.austlit.edu.au>; *HEAT* website at <http://www.giramondopublishing.com/heat/index.html>; Acquittal to the Australia Council for Program Grants 2007; Interview with Ivor Indyk, 5 June, 2008; email communication with Indyk, 14 June and 10 October 2008]

## **Australian Book Review**

The *Australian Book Review (ABR)* is Australia's oldest literary review, established in 1961, publishing until 1973 – when the magazine ceased operations due to financial hardship related to production costs – and being revived in 1978, and publishing continuously since then. In April 2008 *ABR* published its 300th issue (titled *300 Not Out*). *ABR* seeks to provide comprehensive reviews and critiques of Australian books and literary culture and maintains that in the current media landscape, where the column space for literary review is shrinking in the popular press, *ABR* plays an essential role in reviewing the full breadth of Australian literature and in fostering a robust critical exchange between Australian readers and authors from all disciplines and genres.

The *Australian Book Review* has a staffing equivalent of 2.5 full-time positions shared amongst three people. They are:

Editor	Peter Rose (0.8)
Deputy Editor	Rebecca Starford (1.0)
Office Manager	Lorraine Harding (0.7)

As well, the magazine has two interns who each contribute 1 day per week (unpaid). *ABR* also draws on the assistance of volunteers.

The *ABR* Board comprises nine members:

Chair	Morag Fraser
Treasurer	Peter McLennan
Members	Tracey-Jane Christie Anne Edwards Colin Golvan Paul Hetherington Craig Sherborne David de Vaus Ian Donaldson Anna Goldsworthy

Editor Peter Rose, in interview, commented – as did other editors – on the small staff upon which literary journals rely. Having three staff, compared to *Meajin*'s two, or *Island*'s one, *ABR* is able to have both a deputy editor and an office manager; however, whereas *Meanjin* can now rely on the marketing resources of MUP, the *Australian Book Review* must depend upon its core staff for duties, and fresh ideas, related to marketing and promotion. As these will be key to *ABR* achieving its long-term goals (increasing subscription-base, attracting further advertising revenue and improving rates of pay for contributors – all to be discussed below), the Board is now discussing the appointment of another staff member whose role will be marketing, public relations and website development. Rose says this appointment will be either 0.5 or 0.6 of a full-time position.

In regards to how the *Australian Book Review* contributes to the literature sector, three broad points can be made. These relate to the provision of opportunities for both critical and creative writers, the fostering and sustenance of a critically sophisticated readership, and the growth and professional development of a skilled body of literature workers.

The first of these is the foundation of what *ABR* is and does. Its webpage makes the point that “(w)ith its national title, scope and readership, this monthly magazine is committed to highlighting the full range of critical and creative writing from around Australia.” In interview Rose said that, for writers of criticism, *ABR* provides “a rigorous, sophisticated and sympathetic editorial environment in which to publish, gives them decent space in which to outline their views about books, and pays them as reasonably as we possibly can.” In 10 issues over the course of a year, *ABR* publishes between 240 and 250 Australian writers. *ABR* has provided data from its 2006 issues, showing the contributors with their state (or if overseas, their country) of residence. The figures show that while Victorian writers dominate with 120 contributors, most other states are represented, with 49 from NSW, 19 from South Australia, 18 from the ACT, 12 from Queensland, 6 from WA and 4 from Tasmania. There were no contributors that year from the Northern Territory; there were 4 contributors residing overseas (NZ, PNG, USA and UK); while five were not identified by residence. Not only is there some geographic spread in contributors but also new critical writing is solicited, through the *ABR* Reviewing



Competition (worth \$1,000). ABR thus provides a diverse range of critical voices, from well-known to emerging writers, with little repetition of contributors in any one year. Payment to these writers is a minimum of \$25 per 100 words, with key commissioned writers receiving nearly twice this amount.

For the creative and scholarly writers whose work is the focus of ABR's reviewers, Rose says that the length of ABR reviews means that their writing can be engaged with, thought through, and evaluated with a depth and seriousness not possible in the shorter review space usually offered by the popular press. While the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Saturday literature coverage would reach a far greater number of readers, ABR's influence is "on many levels disproportionate to its actual audience," according to Rose. "Often it's the ABR review that authors wait for and can worry about, or be delighted in, if it's a good one." Also in terms of creative writing, ABR runs a poetry prize each year (with first prize worth \$4000) and publishes a number of original poems in each issue, paying \$150 per poem. As well, the magazine offers the Calibre Prize, worth \$10,000 and funded by CAL, for an outstanding essay on any non-fiction subject.

The second point, that of fostering and sustaining a critical reading culture, is something that Rose emphasised in interview: "Access to good criticism is very important. I think the availability of extended criticism is very significant in contributing to a fostering of an intelligent readership for good Australian writing. Writers need active, questioning, sophisticated readers." His argument is that ABR is fulfilling a role that is increasingly being abrogated in the popular press, in which space for book reviews has often been reduced to 400 or 500 words, and is frequently promotional rather than critical. Thus, he argues, ABR, with its 2,000 word reviews, provides a service to the nation's literature and the nation's readers not being delivered by other publications. Rose also makes the point that ABR has significant readership in regional Australia. Results from a recent readers' survey (in 2006, the first to be carried out by ABR), show that 25% of respondents were from non-metropolitan areas. Lastly, this critical reading culture is enhanced through ABR's series of public events and lectures, which Rose says are held predominantly

outside of Victoria. Lectures have been given in Adelaide (where ABR has a second office at Flinders University), in Canberra and in Sydney.

Thirdly, in the area of professional development, Rose forwards an argument also made by Ian Britain. Although the paid staff of literary magazines is small, volunteer staff numbers are significant and *ABR*, like most other literary magazines, has internships in which tertiary students from creative writing or literature programs work one day per week at the magazine. Editors with years of experience, like Rose and Britain, maintain that the volunteer system is beneficial to the literature infrastructure as a whole, in that it provides broad-ranging, practical experience for those who may become the next generation of literature professionals. Rose emphasises the high editorial standards of *ABR* and his hope that these standards have been instilled in those volunteers who have participated in *ABR*, many of whom, Rose says, have gone on to find paid work in the publishing industry. The Deputy Editor, Rebecca Starford, who is the only *ABR* full-time staff member, came from this volunteer background.

Like most other literary magazines covered in this report, *ABR* would like to increase its subscription-base. Unlike a number of other literary magazines, however, *ABR* has made significant gains recently. When Rose became editor in 2001, the subscription-base was 1,200. Currently, subscriptions are at more than 2,300 and Rose aims to reach 3,000 by the end of this year. This will be partially achieved through an aggressive marketing drive aimed at renewing subscribers. Previous campaigns had focused on new subscriptions, neglecting renewals to some extent because of the typically steady high rate of renewals. A current campaign, however, sees renewing subscribers able to gift a six-month subscription to a friend (or a 12 month free subscription with a renewal of 2 years). Rose explains that this has been very successful in boosting short-term cash-flow, with many subscribers renewing early to take advantage of the offer. The real test will come, he admits, when these free subscriptions run out and the newly introduced members decide whether to continue with paid subscriptions.

For *ABR*, the target of increased subscriptions is linked to the target of attracting increased advertising income. In 2007, *ABR* earned approximately \$75,000 in advertising; this year the budget is for \$80,000. Rose says that although a subscription-base of 3,000 would be a significant gain, the long-term target is 5,000, as this would mean that high profile corporate advertisers such as Qantas or the leading banks would then be attracted, which in turn could raise advertising income to \$100,000. If this were achieved, Rose says, two things could happen. Another staff member could be hired, and writers could be paid more for their contributions. He reiterates that at present *ABR* pays fairly, but said that this was probably below ASA rates. It was certainly below rates paid by the Murdoch and Fairfax publications, and significantly below the rates of high circulation journals such as *The Monthly*, with reportedly pays a dollar a word. Rose also points out that in the seven years he has been editor of *ABR*, payments to contributors have increased from \$55,000 to \$110,000.

An important point to make in terms of *ABR*'s funding is its recently established Patrons' scheme. As this was being planned, it was decided to include in the readers' survey a question asking if subscribers would consider becoming patrons of the magazine and providing financial assistance. This produced a 12% positive result, indicating sufficient support for the scheme, which was implemented in 2007 and generated \$25,000 income. One year after launching this scheme, *ABR* has 16 paying patrons. Rose also points out that the concept of cultural philanthropy, which already plays a significant role in the support of the performing arts such as opera and ballet, could have an equally important role in literature, if literature organisations, funding bodies such as The Australian Council, and philanthropic organisations were to coordinate strategies.

Two final points will be mentioned briefly here. One is the role of digital media. Rose explained in interview that the website, while recently refurbished, will not under his editorship become a substitute for the print-based magazine. The current website offers full text for four or five reviews from the print copy, gives advance notice of reviews in upcoming issues and of *ABR* competitions and events, lists locations around Australia where *ABR* can be purchased over-the-counter, and has on-line subscription form. It

provides a blog contributed to by *ABR* staff and interns, and has a comprehensive listing of past issues back to 1997, with some full-text available. (Unfortunately, this archived content is not serviced with a search function.) Rose says: “This editor doesn’t see the magazine going solely on-line. I hope there will always be a physical *ABR* but that will be for others, and other generations of readers to decide really.”

The second of these final points concerns overseas readership. This is one area that Rose would like to see improved. He says that although subscriptions within Australia have doubled under his editorship, international subscriptions have been more or less static. (In recent months there has been a slight fall, attributable to the increased strength of the Australian dollar, which makes *ABR* dearer for Americans in particular.) While unsure of how this might be changed, he is open to ideas that would see increased overseas promotion of Australian literature and an international awareness of the important role of the *Australian Book Review* in evaluating, analysing and critically appraising the nation’s literature.

[Sources of Information: *ABR* website at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/>; Acquittal report to The Australia Council for 2007; ‘Australian Book Review,’ AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource; *ABR* editorials from 2006-2007; Interview with Peter Rose, 16 April 2008; email communication with Rose, 27 August 2008]

## Specialist and Genre-based Organisations

### Poets Union

The Poets Union was formed in Melbourne in 1977. It is now based in Sydney. Its current membership is 594 and this number has been stable for some years. This membership is largely NSW-based (391), but there is significant membership in Victoria (74), and a spread of members through all other States (ACT 29; SA 28; QLD 26; WA 18; TAS 16; NT 6). It also has six overseas members: 3 in the UK and 1 each in Thailand, Switzerland and Portugal.

Poets Union is run by volunteers, supported by one part-time administrative position and one creative position:

Office Manager	Jutta Sieverding
NSW Poetry Development Officer	Martin Langford

Its 2008 Committee comprises:

Chair	Brook Emery
Treasurer	David Musgrave
Minutes Secretary	Rosemary Huisman
Public Officer	Anna Kerdiyk Nicholson
Young Poets Portfolio	Angela Stretch
Editorial Committee	Margaret Bradstock
	John S. Batts
	John Sheppard
	Thomas Thorpe

The Poets Union webpage states that the organisation “is motivated by a desire to bring the love for words and ideas into the outside world. We organise readings, workshops, tours, and festivals all round the country.” Poets Union puts considerable effort into its national reach, with partner events held during its biennial national poetry festival in cities across Australia. The 2008 festival, for example, will see concurrent panels staged in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Its national reach can also be seen in the fact that applicants for Poets Union fellowships come from around the country.

The events and operations of Poets Union include:

- Whiteley Poetry Readings (monthly)
- Poets on Wheels Tour (annual)
- National Poetry Festival (biennial)
- Publication of an anthology of members poetry (biennial)
- Publication of *Five Bells* (quarterly)
- Publication of newsletter Two and a half Bells.

The Whiteley Poetry Readings were first held in 1998 at the Brett Whiteley Studio in Surry Hills, following a period when readings had been held at shifting venues in the Newtown and Erskinville areas. What began as a one-off invitation resulted in a regular venue for the event beginning in 1999, and in the nine years since there have been over one hundred poets reading and performing their work. Audiences are regularly 30 or more people, with occasional events drawing up to 50. Each event features a guest poet, followed by an open-mic session which draws between 10 and 20 readers. The digital notice board 'Sundays @ 2pm' on the Brett Whiteley Studio website lists upcoming guest poets. Featured in May 2008 will be Judy Johnson, whose verse novel *Jack* won the Victorian Premier's Prize in 2007. As two of Johnson's books are reviewed in the April 2008 *Australian Book Review*, her appearance at the Whiteleys is a significant literary event. Payments to poets for these events have varied, depending on the funding available each year. In 2007, the Sydney City Council provided funding which allowed Poets Union to pay Whiteley readers ASA rates. That particular funding is not available in 2008 (indicative of the reluctance of Sydney City Council to fund ongoing programs) and so payments will be smaller.

Poetry on Wheels is one of the longest running and most successful of the Poets Union programs, with the first tour running more than 15 years ago. Three poets are selected following a public call for applications. The poets must be Poets Union members and residents of NSW. The tour then travels (usually by train) to regional NSW (with a five year cycle of North Coast, West, North West, South Coast and South West NSW),

visiting schools, holding public readings, and running workshops. In 2007, the tour visited Coffs Harbour, Lismore, Bangalow, Kempsey, Lake Macquarie, Toronto and Newcastle giving five public readings, five community workshops, and three school workshops. In the latest issue of *Five Bells* (Summer 2008), Brook Emery writes: “Previous tours have provided the impetus for the formation of poetry groups and publishing ventures and from the 2007 tour we already know that Lismore High School will be editing and producing a publication of the poems presented in the workshop” (22-23).

A major event for the Poets Union is the National Poetry Festival. In 2006 the Festival’s Sydney events were held over two days at Sydney Grammar School, while across the country 37 parallel events took place in all capitals and regional locations, including 27 around NSW. Poets from around Australia and from overseas participated in the Sydney events, with 30 new works created, 70 artists paid, 120 artists and art-workers unpaid and 650 publications sold. Attendance at the Sydney Festival was 70 for the opening night party, 120 day-passes for Saturday, and 200 day-passes for Sunday. While these numbers are not large, Emery argues that the festival and its parallel events around the nation are an important contribution to the nurturing of public engagement with the poetic arts. He also maintains that poetry appreciation is a complex skill that takes years to acquire and events such as the festival, and seminars in poetic literacy (which will be held in lead up to the 2008 Festival), foster such appreciation.

It should be noted that Poets Union is very aware of the need to negotiate “a sometimes awkward path between access and excellence.” NSW Poetry Development Officer Martin Langford, in an email communication, explains:

our members represent the whole spectrum from beginners to some of the most highly regarded poets in the country” and “we have to provide services for our members. On the other hand, if we are to act as one of the public faces of poetry, we also have to make sure that we make our argument for verse with work of the highest quality. With this in mind, it might be pointed out that the Union has made a deliberate attempt to curate its events with as much research and expertise as we could.

To illustrate the quality of Poets Union events, Langford also points out that the Judith Wright Lectures, in which senior figures address topics of their choice, are an initiative of Poets Union. Lectures so far have been given by Dorothy Porter, Noel Pearson, Peter Goldsworthy, Fay Zwicky, and this year by Bruce Dawe.

Publications are another important aspect of the Poets Union, with its newsletter, quarterly journal and anthologies providing opportunities for poets to publish their work and for the writing of poetry to be reviewed, discussed and analysed. Emery makes the point that given the general paucity of opportunities in this sphere of literary writing in Australia, the journal *Five Bells*, especially, makes a substantial contribution to the literature infrastructure. In the most recent issue (Summer 2007/2008), for example, 16 poetry publications were reviewed making the journal essential reading for anyone teaching or researching Australian poetry. Lack of sufficient funding, however, means that no payment for writers is possible at this time.

Another important focus of Poets Union until recently has been the provision of Young Poets Fellowships for outstanding poets aged 18 to 30. These fellowships included mentoring, workshops, publication and reading opportunities for successful candidates and were a significant piece of structural support for creative writers working in poetry. The Australia Council's decision to cease funding for mentorship-style programs has meant that support could not be offered this year, although other funding sources are being sought for next year.

In terms of the Poets Union contribution to literature and literature infrastructure, Emery focused on the upcoming Poetry Festival:

The festival is going to be called State of Play: Contemporary Poetry Now and the focus is going to be on the poetics, aesthetics and craft of contemporary poetry. The way we've arranged the readings is, for example, we've paired emerging poets who've just got one book out with very experienced poets. Specifically we're having panels called 'State of Play' in which the panelists are asked to talk about their conception of contemporary poetry but to concentrate on the craft, the poetics of it. We've got a similar panel running at the Sydney Festival, then the panel at the Australian Poetry Festival in September. For that panel I've got one NSW representative, one



Queensland representative and one Tasmanian representative. As well as the actual panel, we'll have expanded papers from all of those that we'll publish in a double edition of *Five Bells* next year. As a lead-up to the festival we're having a seminar workshop on poetic literacy, and contributions to that similarly will appear in *Five Bells* and the Judith Wright Memorial Lecture which Bruce Dawe is going to give this year. So given the state of critical writing about poetry, and the state of reviews in the country, we think that that issue of *Five Bells* will be a substantial contribution to serious thinking about the poetry.

A significant issue for the Poets Union, however, has been the uncertainty related to its physical location. Jill Dimond writes in "The Poetry Lover's Gift" in the most recent issue of *Five Bells*:

Over the three decades since it was founded, the Poets' Union has met in people's homes, in Cleveland Street cafes, at the NSW Writers' Centre and, most recently, in offices at the rear of Balmain Library.... Last year the Union received notice that it would have to move out because Balmain Council plans to extend and renovate the Library (15).

In interview, Emery explained that the Poets Union has since moved to premises provided by Sydney City Council, and while they are grateful for the space, it is not optimal, as it is one small room, with nowhere for storage of the Union's materials or resources. Emery says he is speaking to the City of Sydney about providing a Poetry Centre, "a permanent home for poetry in Sydney." This would be a long-term goal and would be negotiated with other poetry groups in the city, including those at universities. The stability offered by secure, well-located premises should not be underestimated. The example of the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas at the Victorian State Library, where the Australian Poetry Centre is soon to be relocated along with other literature organisations must seem like an ideal for the Poets Union, whose resources currently are stored under members' houses.

Another area of stress for Poets Union, as Emery explained in interview, is the perennial uncertainty of funding. Poets Union depends on Arts NSW and the Australia Council for funding to run its programs. The Arts NSW funding has been steady, but amounts received from the Australia Council are less certain. "For example," Emery says:

the Festival budget that I've got from OzCo this year is not enough for me to run it; even with money that comes from the door it's not enough for me to run it. We've got an application to CAL, which we'll hear back from in a couple of weeks, which will help fund it. So if we get that I can relax a little bit. If we don't get that my anxiety levels will stay high.

In an email communication (22 April, 2008), Emery advised this research team that the CAL funding application was unsuccessful. As the National Poetry Festival is arguably the Poets Union's most significant event, with a genuine national reach, the impact of such uncertainty so close to the event must be considerable. Emery realises that his anxieties are shared by many in the literature sector, given the limited funding to be shared across the range of organisations. He says:

I actually think the staff of OzCo and the staff of Arts NSW are brilliant. They save our bacon constantly and are helping us constantly. I have absolutely no quibbles about what they do, and who they fund and how they fund. But I think the way forward for us would be a little more certainty for us over a three year period, so that we genuinely could plan ahead, instead of putting in an application in October that we hear about in January, for something that we're going to organise and call for applications in February.

When one considers that these sorts of anxieties are in fact the yearly routine for small literature organisations, it is not surprising that another concern is succession planning. This was mentioned briefly in the context of literary magazines where staff numbers are so small. It is also an issue in organisations which, although they may have a substantial membership, actually have low participation rates in management and committees. Jeremy Fisher at ASA mentioned that his Board was not satisfied with an election participation rate of ASA members of 15%. Emery in the context of Poets Union is concerned about the age composition of his membership and the lack of younger people coming forward to take positions of responsibility on the Committee. He says:

What we'd like to be better at is succession planning, moving people through and getting them to take on more responsibilities. That's hard. I'm 58. Most people are about my age, some are in their 40s, some are older than me. I'd really like to see the people in their 30s and 40s taking the position of chairperson. I'd be very happy to relinquish that. I hope that will happen. It hasn't happened for the last few years.

It is not uncommon across the literature sector, and especially in small organisations, which in many ways – as Mark Davis writes in his recent article in *Overland* – operate outside the market economy, for individuals to hold the same position for many years. While there is little that funding bodies can do to address this, the organisations themselves through their Boards and Committees of Management should be making more of a priority the issue of providing skills diversity and development and professional pathways, which would contribute to succession planning.

[Sources of Information: *Five Bells: Seasonal Poetry*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Summer) 2007-2008; Program for ‘Between! The Fifth Australian Poetry Festival’ 2006; Acquittals for ‘Between!’ and Interstate Poetry Festival Events, 2006; Interview with Brook Emery, 7 April 2008; email communication with Emery, 22 April 2008; email communication from Martin Langford, 22 August 2008; Mark Davis, “Literature, Small Publishers and the Market in Culture,” *Overland* 190, (Autumn), 2008.]

### **The Red Room Company**

The Red Room Company began in 2003, having developed from a Sydney-based community radio show, which started two years previous, to grow into an Australia-wide network of poets and poetry supporters. The Red Room Company’s aims are to create, promote, publish and distribute quality Australian poetry and, in doing so, engage and educate the public about poetry.

The Red Room Company’s webpage states: “Through a range of forms such as radio, new media and live performance we broaden the public's definition of and experience with high quality Australian poetry. Our projects focus on commissioning new Australian poetry and developing imaginative contexts in which this poetry can be creatively and critically explored.”

The Red Room Company has one full-time staff member:

Artistic Director

Johanna Featherstone

Featherstone's salary has been funded in total by a philanthropic body; however, this funding expires in October of this year. Also employed by The Red Room Company, on a contract basis for individual projects are:

Researcher (Sponsorship, Media, Audience Development and Poetry)	Fiona Wright
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and

Chief Researcher and Assistant to Artistic Director	Bonny Cassidy
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Payments for Wright and Cassidy come from funding for the individual projects in which they are involved.

The Red Room Company's webpage, 'Who We Are,' lists 9 other Board members. They are:

Director	Libby Davidson
Director	Elliott Wheeler
Director	Henry Ergas
Alternate Director	Jane Thorn
Director	Julia Burns
In-House Designer & Illustrator	Sandra Krumins
Special Objects Curator/Designer	Tamryn Bennett
Moving Image And Video Consultant	Andrew Garrick
Education Consultant	Tony Britten

In interview, Featherstone explained:

I set it up specifically as a company because I like to reclaim that word. I love the idea of a company of poets, not a business company. And with a company, just legally, you can have a smaller body and board. You don't have the same demands as an organisation, and that to me is very important for The Red Room Company in that there's just different members that you can or can't have, the role of the treasurer is different, all of those things, and I've notice

what makes The Red Room Company different is that it is not a huge State-run organisation. It's not meant to have a huge board, and lots of staff. Partly because I think that just ends up costing too much, and doesn't allow you to create interesting projects as quickly.

She also explained that The Red Room Company does not have membership per se. Rather, according to Featherstone, The Red Room comprises anyone who chooses to engage with the Company in any way. People can join the email list and receive notification of upcoming events, they can volunteer to assist at live events, or come as audience, but there is no list or record of members because there is no membership fee and no membership benefits.

The emphasis on easy access for events (and preferably free access) relates to the Company's focus on imaginative, innovative and perhaps challenging presentations of poetry in public places. Operations for The Red Room Company consists of projects that are, for the most part, performed live or exhibited for a period of time, recorded on audio or video/film, and then archived on the Company's website, from which they are downloadable, as well as being distributed via community radio. Each project features original poetry, commissioned especially for the project from poets who apply to participate and are then selected by a committee. Featherstone stresses that ensuring quality contributions is a priority, as she sees The Red Room Company's projects having a life far beyond their brief period of public performance or exhibition, via the archive and, as has already happened for some poems, subsequent re-publication in anthologies.

Two examples of the innovative and performative nature of The Red Room's projects are the Toilet Doors Poetry from 2006 and the 2008 project titled Pigeon Poetry. In Toilet Doors Poetry, six illustrated Australian poems were displayed "across a mix of Qantas domestic terminals, Greater Union and Village cinemas" (from the webpage). The webpage lists more than thirty suburbs across the country where the poems were exhibited at cinemas. The current Pigeon Poetry project is described on The Red Room Company's website thus:

Eight Australian poets from city, regional and rural areas nationally will write an original poem to fly in a NSW pigeon race. The poems are to be strapped

to the ankle of a professional racing pigeon to home along the NSW South Coast. The poets, none of whom will have previously worked with The Red Room Company will attend the race and read to a live audience. A virtual form guide will be invented for the project's duration to document the race details online as well as the history and form of the pigeons, the poets and their poems. Spectators and participants will have the opportunity to take part in a 'sweep'. The race will be filmed from a 'pigeon cam' perspective, revealed on the Race day. This project will team up with local pigeon associations and take a unique look at the relationship between sport, poetry and gaming. The project was partly inspired by the work of Australian poet, Robert Adamson, who is one of the 8 poets in this project and the only poet directly invited to participate.

The webpage currently features a short video of June and Graham Davidson with their racing pigeons, and Graham reciting from Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country.' The project was launched at the Domain in Sydney on 14 April, with a reading by Robert Adamson and a pigeon demonstration. The launch was briefly covered by the *Sydney Morning Herald* in its Saturday 'Spectrum' section, 19-20 April, 2008. The project is not funded by The Australia Council (due largely to the 'sweep' component), but sponsors for individual pigeons are being recruited, with Reuters funding one pigeon at this stage.

It is this innovation and effort to promote a wider public engagement with poetry, as well as the encouragement of new poetry, that Featherstone sees as The Red Room Company's strength. She says the Company's key contribution to contemporary Australian literature and culture is:

Providing an alternative to what's already here. That's what it was set up for, and that's what it will continue to be. So, by that I mean all of our projects change each time we do them, so there's a freshness to them that I think is lacking from anything else to do with poetry today. I think The Red Room's great contribution is its support for young, new and emerging poets and writers, not just in publishing their work and via the education program which is fast developing, but as a nurturing environment.

The education program which Featherstone mentions here is, along with projects and the archive, a third component of The Red Room Company. 'Papercuts,' as the education program is titled, was piloted in 2007 in four NSW high schools. The pilot will continue in 2008 with three NSW schools and one from Victoria participating, with further expressions of interest being sought. The program applies the Red Room project

approach to the classroom, with poets and artists encouraging students to create poetry in engaging ways. Students have the option of performing and recording their poems, as well as looking at digital publication and distribution. The current 'Papercuts' webpage features feedback from students, information on the schools and participating poets, and an audio recording of an ABC interview covering the Mt Carmel school's involvement.

The challenges facing The Red Room Company are, as with the Poets Union, the uncertainty of funding, making it difficult to plan events in sufficient advance. As indicated above, the Artistic Director's salary is currently funded by a philanthropic body. All projects are funded through individual grants which cover the fees paid to the commissioned poets and the administrative and creative support personnel required. Arts NSW does not currently fund The Red Room Company. Featherstone is well aware of the limited funds available, both on the state level and nationally, for the support of the arts in general, literature specifically, and poetry especially. She expressed some concern about the number of poetry-focused groups applying for funding and the possible overlapping of applications for similar programs or projects, suggesting that closer collaboration could be achieved:

When I talk about collaboration, that's important because, I think to the detriment of poetry, or maybe even Australian literature, there's a lot of proliferation of ideas in terms of applying for grants. So, for example, I know another poetry organisation is trying to set up an education program. I know because they asked me if they could use some Red Room materials, which is really difficult. But there has to be a way to collaborate; there has to be a way forward there. So, making sure that the same sorts of arts bodies don't apply for the same sort of grant is really important.

Featherstone's point here raises an issue signalled earlier: the difficulties raised when groups which may be primarily based in one state need to conceptually position themselves as national in coverage to meet funding criteria. National outreach, or national authority in a particular genre or specialised area of literature certainly needs encouraging: first, to provide access to opportunities and support in regional and remote communities, as discussed previously in this report; and second to provide co-ordination amongst similarly-focused literature organisations and avoid duplication of efforts, or competition for limited resources. The first of this is happening; the second is less evident.

To sum up The Red Room Company's contribution to literature infrastructure, the Company has over the past 5 years organised and presented 14 unique projects in which new poetry has been created and performed for audiences in venues around Australia. It has built up a substantial archive of recordings of poets involved in Red Room projects, all freely available on the web, and broadcast via community radio stations. It has also initiated an education program aimed at stimulating interest in and creative engagement with poetry in school children, beginning in NSW and Victoria, with intentions of extending the program nationally.

[Sources of information: The Red Room Company website at <http://www.redroomcompany.org/default.php>; Susan Wyndham, 'Undercover,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, (19-20 April, 2008) 'Spectrum,' p. 28; Interview with Johanna Featherstone, 8 April 2008;]

### **Australian Poetry Centre**

The Australian Poetry Centre is a very recent addition to the nation's literature infrastructure, being launched in June 2007. The Centre grew out of the work of the Poetry Australia Federation, under Ron Pretty. Through the efforts of Pretty and the Poetry Australia Foundation, negotiations began with Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) to provide a seeding grant to establish a national poetry centre. CAL provided \$140,800 over two years to initiate the Centre. The Australian Poetry Centre is housed at Glenfern, the historic building once the home of Arthur Merric Boyd. Glenfern, a National Trust property, also has studios managed by the Victorian Writers' Centre (see the section on VWC above).

The Australian Poetry Centre currently has two staff members with the equivalent of 1.3 full-time positions. They are:

Director

Teresa Bell (0.3)



Administration

Paul Kooperman (0.5)

There is also a Publications Intern (unpaid) from Melbourne University.

Earlier this year (at the time of interview) the position of Director was 0.8 full-time equivalent. Also the position of Publications Officer was a paid position (0.4), held by Bridie McCarthy. Also, in advance of the Poetry Festival in Castlemaine in April, two other staff were employed for one day per week each.

The Board of the Centre has 10 members. They are:

Chair	Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe
Deputy Chair	Dr Robyn Rowland AO
Treasurer	Fiona McNabb
Secretary & Public Officer	Lyn Hatherly
Members	Grant Caldwell (ed. of <i>Blue Dog</i> )
	Michelle Borzi
	Adrian Snodgrass
	Catherine Bateson
	Damian Fisher

with

Patron of the Australian Poetry Centre

John Clarke

The Australian Poetry Centre has on its website two listed objectives. They are:

- To strengthen the presence and profile of Australian poetry within Australia and overseas; and
- To promote the writing, reading, and appreciation of poetry as an integral part of personal and community life.

Towards meeting these objectives, the Centre will:

- contribute to policy development in government, corporate, educational and community agencies
- support the publishing, distribution, marketing, and reviewing of poetry
- advance the writing of poetry and the better understanding of poetry in schools and universities, and also in the wider community
- establish networks and links between writers, readers, publishers, and poetry-related organisations in Australia and overseas
- present, participate in, or support forums such as websites, readings, festivals, conferences and journals

[from the Australian Poetry Centre's website]

The Australian Poetry Centre positions itself as a national coordinator and advocacy body, bringing together, in the words of Chris Wallace-Crabbe, “the many scattered energies of poetry” as they presently exist in Australia. In interview, Wallace-Crabbe explained that the Centre’s key contribution to the Australian literature sector was “giving a focus to the production of poetry, publishing of poetry, reading of poetry, and audience for poetry by having something centred and being able to gather skills. And when an option of something happening comes in, we’ll be able to say, “Well, A and B can do that. We’ll have them at our fingertips.” Wallace-Crabbe and Director Teresa Bell admit that there are a number of extant poetry organisations but because they are based in different states there has been some perceived rivalry. “We just want to say let’s look at what’s happening everywhere, rather than be geographically specific about who’s doing more or what,” Bell says.

Wallace-Crabbe was careful to emphasise the national representation of the Centre. *Blue Dog*, the Australian poetry magazine (which began in 2002 under the Poetry Australia Foundation and was edited by Ron Pretty until 2007) is now run by the Centre and has editors in every state and territory. Having grown out of the Poetry Australia Foundation, the Australia Poetry Centre attributes about 200 of its approximate 500 membership to the previous organisation. Of these, just over 50% are in Victoria, with significant membership in NSW, the ACT and WA, and representation in the other states and the NT. One of the Centre’s major activities is a national poetry festival which the Centre intends to hold in a different regional town, in a different state or territory and with a different curator each year. A national liaison group with a representative in each state and territory will nominate poets for participation in the next festival. Further, Wallace-Crabbe explained, the Centre is working in partnership with Varuna to run the New Poets Program, a residential and mentorship program, supported by the Myer Foundation, for four regional poets – meaning poets not from Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane, again contributing to the Centre’s national outreach.

The core programs of the Centre are the publication of *Blue Dog*, the organisation of the Australian Poetry Centre Festival, a major residential poetry workshop, the provision of

online workshops and monthly salons held at Glenfern. *Blue Dog*, as mentioned above, is dedicated to the publication of Australian poetry. Members of the Centre receive the magazine and on top of this are another 120 subscribers, bringing total subscriptions to around 520. The current print-run is 700, and *Blue Dog* is sold over-the-counter as well at Readings and Gleebooks. A membership survey when the Centre was formed indicated that *Blue Dog* was highly valued by members as an important publication opportunity. The 2008 festival, held in April in Castlemaine, featured 26 poets from around Australia, plus four international poets. Although nearly half the poets were from Victoria (7 from Melbourne and 7 regional), all other states and territories had one or more poets participating. Feedback from poets and visitors to the festival appear on the 'APC Buzz' page of the Centre's 'Zest e-magazine,' with many commenting on the festival being the best they had ever attended. The residential poetry workshop, mentioned above, is a series of seminars and workshops run over eight days and held at Bundanon (the former property of Arthur and Yvonne Boyd) in NSW. In 2008 there were 4 poets leading workshops for 20 others selected to participate; the year before saw 6 poets working with about 50 others. In 2009 this residential workshop is planned to be held at the University of Wollongong, with intentions to hold it in other states in coming years. The Centre also offers online workshops, providing a 10 week session of discussions and consultations for up to eight poets per session. Lastly in its regular programs, the monthly Salon held at Glenfern features a Victorian poet along with a national or international poet reading and discussing their work. The June Salon featured Kathryn Lomer from Tasmania and Judith Bishop from NSW and was preceded by voice workshop with Harry Laing (who was a Poet on Wheels in 2006; see the section on Poets Union). As well as these core programs, the Centre has participated in the Melbourne Writers Festival in 2007 with its installation 'House of the Tragic Poet' (which also featured at the Castlemaine festival), and in 2008 with four poets working with filmmaker David Rozetsky on a poem about Melbourne to be shown on outdoor screens at Federation Square.

Another area that the Australian Poetry Centre intends to prioritise is its contribution to poetry in education. Board member Catherine Bateson has designed a program of resources on CD-ROM for the teaching of poetry in schools that the Centre hopes to

distribute and sell around the country. The Centre also hopes to contribute to the teaching of poetry at universities. When asked to clarify this, Wallace-Crabbe explained:

Actually, we want to target two kinds of things in universities. We want to reinvigorate the teaching of, the study of poetry, as well as the writing of poetry. If you look at some of the universities, the teaching of the history of poetry, and the close reading of poetry has become unfashionable. Lots of kids want to write it, but they'd prefer not to read it. And so, we would like to feed into both those sides of university teaching: the traditional teaching of poetry in literature courses, and the creative writing programs.

Bell also raised the possibility of internships with the Centre for students undertaking tertiary level study focusing on poetry. As well, an updated website with additional educational resources is due to be launched at the end of June this year.

Like the Victorian Writers' Centre and Express Media (discussed in a following section), the Australian Poetry Centre has been included in the plans for the new Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas to be housed at the State Library of Victoria and planned for opening in late 2009. As well as taking advantage of the proximity of other literature organisations, the Australian Poetry Centre is keen to enjoy increased space which will allow them to properly house their poetry library, which is currently being developed at Glenfern.

The Australian Poetry Centre, however, faces significant challenges. The most immediate of these is its source of ongoing core funding. The start-up grant from CAL was for a two year period and will run out at the end of 2008. Future support, in terms of covering costs for administration and salary for staff, has yet to be determined. Both Bell and Wallace-Crabbe made the point that achieving project funding to pay poets and artists was not a problem. Their problem is finding funds "to actually keep the office running and pay the rent." The difficulty is partly due to being an organisation which aims towards national representation and coordination. This means that state governments are only interested in supporting events located in within their borders, or supporting state artists travelling interstate. Bell and Wallace-Crabbe gave the example of the Bundanon workshops. Although organised by the Australian Poetry Centre, the workshops are auspiced by the

Poets Union because, as this latter organisation is based in Sydney (although also claiming national representation), it can apply to the NSW Ministry of the Arts for funding to run the event at Bundanon. Similarly, when the Poets Union has its National Poetry Festival in September, the Australian Poetry Centre will be advising and assisting with the Melbourne-based events. While this sort of collaboration is positive and – as other groups have pointed out – essential to literary organisations survival, it also demonstrates that the schism between state and federal funding is a significant obstacle to any organisation intending national reach.

Finally, this state-federal funding issue impacts significantly on the time necessary for grant application and acquittal. Bell commented that for any one event the Centre might have to write six different funding applications, with each funding body emphasising particular priorities, making the reporting and acquittal process extremely time consuming. Wallace-Crabbe supported Bell's comments saying,

To produce an application to get a grant takes so many person/hours and, unless it's substantial you are in danger of having used up a large proportion of it in bureaucratic form-filling. And I'm not pointing the finger at Ozco or anything like that, but any kind of grant application takes time and planning and decision-making and then waiting for the funding body's decision.

When this administrative burden is compounded by multiple applications for individual events, as Bell indicates, the stress experienced – not just at the Australian Poetry Centre but generally across the literature sector – may well be understood.

[Sources of Information: *Blue Dog: Australian Poetry* vol. 6, no. 11; Australian Poetry Centre website at <http://www.australianpoetrycentre.org.au/>; Interview with Teresa Bell and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, 15 April 2008; email communication with Bell, 21 August 2008]

### **Centre for Youth Literature**

The Centre for Youth Literature is located within the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne. It was originally known as the 'Youth Literature Program', based at the

Victorian Writers' Centre in 1991. This moved in 1992 to St. Martins Youth Centre, where it remained until 1998. In that year it changed its name to the Australian Centre for Youth Literature, and then moved in 1999 to the State Library of Victoria, where it has become a fully integrated program and resource of the Library. Its name was abbreviated to Centre for Youth Literature in 2005.

The Centre for Youth Literature has a staffing equivalent of 2.8 full-time positions. These are spread amongst 4 people:

Reader Development Manager	Paula Kelly (0.4)
Program Coordinator	Mike Shuttleworth (full-time)
Web Manager	Lili Wilkinson (0.6)
Program Officer	Susan McLaine (0.8)

The Centre for Youth Literature is part of the Learning Services Division of the State Library of Victoria. Learning Services is a division within the Directorate of Community, Learning and Public Library Partnerships. The affairs of the State Library of Victoria are governed by the Library Board of Victoria, which is subject to the direction and control of the Victorian Minister for the Arts.

The total budget for the Centre for Youth Literature is about \$500,000, with approximately \$30,000 of funding coming from The Australia Council for program support. The Australia Council funding was directed towards expenses for writers participating in the Centre for Youth Literature's real time events for teenagers, young people and professionals in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, as well as the online presentation of Australian writers (fees for 'in residence' writer-bloggers on the Insideadog website).

The Centre for Youth Literature's aims are listed on its website as:

- providing a focus for the development and promotion of youth literature in Australia, and a forum for dialogue, exchange and professional development in the field.

- encouraging reading for pleasure and well-being amongst young people aged 10–18 years, and raising the level of community awareness of reading as a key activity for young people.
- providing a vehicle for the documentation of Australian youth literature and supporting the work of Australian authors for young people.

In interview, manager Paula Kelly explained the Centre's three areas of strategic focus:

Really the purpose of the Centre for Youth Literature is to promote youth literature and to engage young people in reading. It's really about delivering a suite of programs to young people directly; it's about designing and delivering professional development programs to librarians and teachers, and parents for that matter, and it's about developing information tools and on-line tools that will provide information and encourage collaboration, both from young people to young people, so peer to peer, and as well as professional to professional.

These three areas – programs, professional development, and on-line tools – comprise the core operations of the Centre.

Amongst programs to encourage young people to read for recreation are Booktalkers for Teens in which authors meet with students to talk about books, reading and writing. Bookgigs are offered on site at the Library as well as on the road across regional Victoria, in which a director and a group of young actors present dramatisations of books to engage young readers with a combination of interactive theatre and reading. Workshops provide opportunities for teenage readers to meet and talk to writers about the processes of writing and sharing their reading experiences.

Professional development is aimed at teachers and librarians, providing events keeping professionals informed of current developments in the publishing of youth literature, providing guidance in the selection of books for classroom sets, advising on how to encourage teenage boys to read, and workshopping the teaching of creative writing with teenagers.

Events are held at the State Library of Victoria, at other city venues and schools in Melbourne, at outer Melbourne schools and libraries, and across regional Victoria. Figures for 2006 show that a total of 67 events held by the Centre for Youth Literature

attracted a combined audience of 7,273. In Melbourne audience numbers were 4,125, in outer-Melbourne 907, and in regional Victoria audience numbers were 2,241. Numbers such as this indicate, at least, the strong demand for the services provided. In interview, Kelly stressed that the most important aim was providing opportunities for young people to come into contact with books in a positive and fun environment: “The question for us is: how can we create things that are so compelling that people want to come a play with us? That’s kind of the underlying essence of it.”

Kelly also offered statistics from a pilot program the Centre ran in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education, called Boys, Books, Blokes and Bytes, aimed at determining whether direct intervention based on engagement, action and relevance could change the attitudes towards reading amongst adolescent boys. A four month program was run in two disadvantaged areas, with events which would bring boys and their fathers or a significant male figure together to meet authors. Kelly explains:

We designed a program that was a partnership between the school, the public library and the home, and looked at how we could engage families in reading, and get boys excited about reading. We incorporated young adult authors like David Metzenthen, Archie Fusillo, and Michael Hyde, involved sports journalists, and male actors and had the boys working around telling stories. So it wasn’t about ramming reading down their throats. It was about asking the questions around how do you tell a story, how do we share stories? How do you move to the fact that books are really stories? We had footballers come out and work with us as well, so we had guys from the Western Bulldogs, and we had Glen Manton, who is a wonderful advocate for reading sharing his enthusiasm and experience as a reader with the boys.

At one event Kelly recalls author Archie Fusillo saying to the audience: “I want to congratulate you. I’ve never been in a room before in my life with 70 boys and their dads to talk about reading. This is pretty cool stuff.” Kelly says that comparisons of pre and post surveys of boys’ reading attitude showed that the biggest impact was in year nine boys, where there was a 30% increase in positive attitudes to reading. This is an indicator, Kelly says, of the potential for real change that intervention can bring.

The third core area of operations for the Centre for Youth Literature is the development of on-line tools to foster and encourage reading amongst young people. The main



platform for this is the Centre's website, Insideadog, launched in 2006. The site's name is taken from a quote attributed to Groucho Marx: "Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside a dog, it's too dark to read." The website was created as a direct response to the Young Australians Reading report of 2001, funded by The Australia Council, which found that young people wanted to find out about books on-line, and they wanted peer-to-peer recommendations. Insideadog, then, allows young people to post book reviews, features interviews with nearly 40 Australian authors, and hosts a monthly writer-in-residence who submits a regular blog to which readers can respond. The site's popularity has been enormous with latest statistics showing over 800,000 user-sessions. As opposed to 'hits,' a user-session measures a twenty-minute stay on the site. Kelly reports that the greatest traffic is between four and six pm weekdays and on Saturday afternoons, indicating that young people are coming to the site by choice (and not simply being directed there by classroom activities).

Interestingly, the site functions not only to expose young Australian readers to Australian books but also serves to bring international readers into contact with Australian literature. An important attraction of the website is the Inky Awards, the nation's first teenage-choice book award, inaugurated in 2007. The Golden Inky is awarded to an Australian book and the Silver Inky to an international book. As Kelly explained, a by-product of having an award for overseas titles is that overseas readers of those titles come to the site and are lured into contact with Australian books. While outcomes at this stage have not been assessed, the principle here is the same as the Centre's other activities: "Do something compelling enough and people will want to come and play with you." What happens when that play brings young people into contact with new Australian books has to be positive in terms of supporting the nation's literature.

When asked about concerns for the future, however, Kelly responded by turning attention to funding:

In terms of The Australia Council, I think that's a tricky one, because I know that we had a reduction from last year's funding, only a slight reduction, but nevertheless a reduction, from \$31,000 to \$28,000 this year. And I did write back to The Australia Council to say that this would have an impact. Yes, we

are growing the funding, but we are growing the outputs enormously. So whilst our partnerships are fundamentally important to growing it, it doesn't reduce the fact that you need some core funding, in terms of program delivery – because we get good core funding now from the State Library to provide the staffing – the Australia Council doesn't provide the money for that. It just provides the program money. So it's to pay artists. All of it goes straight into promoting Australian artists – getting them here and paying them. So that's a fundamental piece of information around The Australia Council funding and how important it is for us. We can't pick that up from anywhere else. And that then allows us to leverage further, when you've got significant partners on board, when you've got that kind of core program funding, or artist funding, from the Australia Council it helps to bring in other partners. So that means a lot to us. It's really important.

Although the Centre for Youth Literature is not in the state of funding uncertainty faced by the other specialist organisations looked at in this paper, Kelly felt it important to keep the issue of funding foremost in mind, and in terms of other areas of youth literature in which the Centre could work, she stressed that any new initiatives undertaken would need to be supported first by funding. The Centre's activities are funded by a combination of State and Federal (through the Australia Council) monies as well as through partnerships with other organisations including philanthropic and corporate sponsorship. The publishers are a significant resource and support to the Centre in its work.

One initiative that Kelly thought was of strategic importance was the creation of a national reading agency:

What I'm talking about is a national, professional organisation. I think the Centre for Youth Literature has taken the responsibility for doing that in some ways, so we've done that in the creation of the website and the provision of our information and expertise in the articles that we write and the conference presentations that we give. But our actual delivery of programs... to do that more broadly than just in Victoria, first, we would need a lot more of a funding base to do that. To do that in other states would also take close partnerships with other State Libraries and organisations, or some kind of mandate for us to do that because at the moment we've got sort of a caveat around Victorian delivery, with the State Library focus.

Kelly's comments indicate, once again, that the establishment of a national organisation – in this case one focusing on reading; with the previous two organisations it was poetry-based – is made problematic by the tensions between state and national delivery of

services and infrastructure. Kelly is surely correct in making the case for a national agency for reading. In the April, 2008 Newsletter of the Centre for Youth Literature is a piece titled “Why We Need a National Advocate for Reading,” which points out that both the United States and the UK have national advocates for reading for young people. The article also points to declining reading standards in 15-year-olds in Australia and then emphasises that early intervention and providing positive reading experiences and contexts can have dramatic benefits. In terms of the nation’s literature infrastructure, providing the support, the funding, the policies and the programs that will foster enthusiasm for literature and situate reading as “a creative and valued leisure activity” (5), whether it be print-based or on-line, amongst Australia’s next generation of readers ought to be foundational.

[Sources of Information: Acquittal report for Centre for Youth Literature’s 2006 programs; Interview with Paula Kelly, 14 April 2008; email communication with Kelly, 30 August 2008; “Why We Need a National Advocate for Reading,” *Centre for Youth Literature Newsletter*, No. 1 (April) 2008; Woolcott Research. *Young Australian Readers: From Keen to Reluctant Readers*. Melbourne: The Australian Centre for Youth Literature, 2001.]

### **Fremantle Children’s Literature Centre**

Fremantle Children’s Literature Centre was established in 1993. It is located in the restored Fremantle Prison Hospital and comprises five galleries, a workshop, offices, archives and a three bedroom apartment. The Centre’s aim, as stated on its website, is to “make literature more accessible in a rich, happy, stimulating environment and provide a focus for all those interested in children’s literature, bringing together students, teachers, parents, authors, illustrators and specialists in the field.”

The Centre has seven staff members, four of which are full-time. They are:

Director:	Lesley Reece
Senior Education Officer/Curator:	Kylie Powell

Education Officer/Curator:	Jenny Doust
Registrar:	Mailee Clarke
Administration Officer:	Margarita Rodriguez (p-t)
Administrative Assistant:	Sally Witherspoon (p-t)
Curator:	Margaret Eaton (p-t)

The Centre's Board comprises:

Chair	Lesley Reece
Secretary to the Board	Mailee Clarke
Members	Muriel Barwell
	Peter Forrestal
	Ron Gorman
	Pat Johns
	Deborah Lisson
	Robin Smith
	Chris Cook
	Sue Reus
	David Axworthy
	Yvonne Wilcox

Fremantle Children's Literature Centre runs interactive workshops for students from pre-primary through to tertiary level education at its premises in Fremantle. It also travels to communities throughout the metropolitan region as well to regional and remote communities, bringing the Centre's three education officers and/or writers and illustrators of children's and youth literature to schools throughout WA. The Centre's schools' program in 2007 saw some 32,000 students engage with children's and youth literature. The Centre also runs professional development seminars for teachers, librarians, writers and illustrators; it has an authors and illustrators in residence program; it participates in children and youth literature events interstate; and it acts as advocate for children and youth literature writers and illustrators on both the state and national levels. Approximately 50% of the Centre's funding comes from state and federal funding bodies; the remaining 50% is raised by the Centre through fees for services.

Integral to the Centre's workshops are the exhibitions of the process by which picture books have been created: including original ideas, drafts and correspondence between author, illustrator and publisher; and the original illustrations used in the focus books and the preliminary illustrations and material that contributed to the published images. The

teaching of visual literacy is as valued as the traditional focus on and understanding of the literary. The centre works with a range of publications by authors and illustrators from across Australia. Examples include work by Shaun Tan, Gary Crew, Marc McBride, Margaret Wild, Liliana Stafford, Leigh Hobbs.

When asked to explain the Centre's key contribution to the nation's literature sector, Director Lesley Reece answered:

Our key contribution is the affirmation of the importance of children's and youth literature; our aim is to nurture readers and writers, children and youth readers and the writers of the future. To nurture their understanding of how great books are created is one of the ways that we do that, obviously. The opposite pole of that is to nurture the creators of children's and youth books – the writers and illustrators – to assist them in every possible way: One, to assist them make a living and, two, to act as advocates for them and their careers. So, it's saying that children's and youth literature is just as important as any other form of literature. I would probably argue more so, because it is absolutely crucial to the development of so much within. You know, it's a recognised thing in the education system that kids who love reading do well and that's what we help to nurture.

The Centre's travelling exhibitions and workshops visit rural and remote communities around WA. As an example, Reece offered:

Kylie has been this week at Montrose, which is a school which has got about 95% migrant children in it. I think this is her ninth year that she's gone there. She goes there for four days each year. She's built into their literature/literacy program. And each year she takes the travelling exhibitions out there. We load up our vans – it's like a travelling circus. We take boards to mount the exhibitions on; we take mountains of books because booksellers never get out to these places. Kylie's got three different exhibitions out there at the moment.

The Centre also runs a Youth Literature Program which focuses on encouraging creative writing in secondary students. This began in response to a request by the Australia Council to conduct a survey of youth attitudes towards and interaction with literature. The Centre organised for approximately 120 students to come to the Fremantle premises to engage with authors and illustrators and then complete a survey on their experiences,

attitudes and needs in regard to literature. One outcome, according to Reece, was that the students requested more opportunities to meet with like-minded students (“nerds like us”) and be given opportunities to write. As a result, in the following year the Centre arranged for 100 of the same students to participate in skills-based writing workshops led by youth literature authors and Centre Director Lesley Reece on four separate days. Since then the program has continued, with three sessions per term: one with a new group, a second with a continuing group, a third as a masterclass for students who have completed two or more previous sessions. Requests to produce a similar program in regional areas have resulted in the Centre now offering this program in Geraldton, Albany and Bunbury, with hopes of extending to Kalgoorlie, Broome, and possibly Karrartha or Port Headland. It should be emphasised that the program is for students with aptitude for writing, meaning that a limited number are selected and invited from individual schools. All together over 100 schools now participate in the program.

As Reece indicated in her comment regarding key contributions, the Fremantle Children’s Literature Centre plays an active role as advocate for authors and illustrators. In terms of support for writers and artists, as well as the employment opportunities provided through the Centre’s programs and opportunities for book sales in conjunction with workshops, the Centre has recently been involved in negotiations with publishers over author and illustrator concerns. A major cause for concern, Reece says, is the trend of international publishing houses taking over smaller publishers of children’s and youth literature. Some Australian authors who have numerous titles published with the smaller publishing houses have now been told that many of their previously published books will be remaindered. Reece refers here specifically to Hachette Livre taking over both Hodder and Lothian publishing houses. Reece says that, “people like Gary Crew, Libby Hathorn, in the past twelve months with this Hachette Livre take-over, have had a dozen or so books each remaindered. That’s their back-list.” The effect on authors, she says, is catastrophic, as it is perceived as “a total devaluing of their entire careers.” In detailing the Centre’s role as advocate for authors in this position, Reece explained:

LR: Now with several of those we have mounted a very strong campaign to keep those books in print and have been successful, saying that we require

them for our work and that they should be considered classics and not be remaindered.

MJ: Can you give me specific examples of that?

LR: Specific examples: *Luke's Way of Looking*, that's Matt Ottley and Nadia Wheatley. *Mrs Millie's Painting*, that's Matt Ottley. We're fighting a battle at the moment to get *Old Ridley*, which is [Gary] Crew and [Marc] McBride, and *The Kraken*, again Crew and McBride, republished.

MJ: Are those out of print at the moment?

LR: Yes. With the others, we were successful in getting a limited re-edition. We're fighting now to ensure that continues. Also what we do, when authors get that dreadful email, they are given the option to buy their books for two or three dollars; what we do to help the authors is that we agree to buy on from them at at least double what they pay, so they can buy more for their own stock. That's a major role we play, but also we don't have the money to finance that.

At several points during the interview, Reece returned to this issue indicating that it is a major source of stress in the children's literature sector. It should also be noted that the Centre's self-contained apartment is often provided, without charge, to authors or illustrators who find themselves in difficult circumstances. These residencies at the Centre allow writers and artists time and space to create new works and Reece gave numerous examples of authors reaching the end of a three or six month stay with multiple new projects underway or completed. "But," she says, "we've never had any funding whatsoever for that role of cherishing these people." She also says, though, "What people don't understand is that we – my team, but also the wider community – by us doing this we get it back a thousand-fold. We see that their creativity is able to continue and nothing is better... there's no better reward for what we do than that."

A final aspect of the Centre's contributions to the literature sector is its interstate participation in the dissemination, teaching and appreciation of children's and youth literature. Reece regularly attends the Somerset Celebration of Literature in Queensland where this year she gave the keynote address and ran a workshop on using Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* in the classroom. Also in Queensland she attends the biennial Ipswich Children's Literature Festival where she works with students and provided professional development for teachers. She has similar involvement in the Northern Territory:

In Darwin we've started a program at the Northern Territory Library, based at Parliament House with Anne Devenish. We pioneered that last year and we went up for a week. I took three author/illustrators with me. We between us workshopped stacks of schools and we did professional development for teachers and librarians on the weekend. We did an evening for the general public in the library at Parliament House. We also did professional development for those adults who wish to write and illustrate children's books. We did a whole Saturday; three different workshops with three different libraries, with three of our top people on what we call Sharing Their Craft, which the Australia Council partially funded.

Reece has also been active in a coordinating capacity, liaising with other state-based organisations or with individuals interested in establishing children's literature centres in other states; in this context she gives the example of Libby Gleeson in NSW visiting the Fremantle Centre in support of her efforts to initiate a NSW centre. Reece also explained that there is an initiative to organise a nationally coordinated approach. Towards this, key participants will be meeting this year, likely at the Melbourne Writers Festival, to discuss possible approaches. Reece's comments here echo those of Paula Kelly at the Centre for Youth Literature in Melbourne, regarding the need for a national reading agency. These two centres are well placed to contribute substantially to such an initiative.

One major challenge, or obstacle, for the Centre, according to Reece, is its reliance on program funding. She illustrates this with reference to funding for the Youth Literature Program, described above:

For example, we have \$43,000 a year for three years from the Copyright Agency, plus \$20,000 a year for three years from the State Public Education Endowment Trust, for our Youth Literature Program. This is the nurturing of talented writers all around the State that we do. But that runs out next year. We had it first last year; it runs this year and next year. It's an outstanding, fabulous success. It's wonderful; accolades from all around the world: fabulous, unique, inspirational. But the money is project money. It finishes, and then we won't be able to do it. So, the weakness is in the lack of substantial recurrent money to allow us to be able to keep doing what we've proved we can do. When we were set up, we were set up as a project of national significance with a brief to set up a model which could be used around Australia. We've fulfilled that time and time again. So, I guess the weakness for us is that too much of my time and energy has to go on this constant battle for money. And I guess after 16 years I really believe now we've earned our place as a major artistic organisation.



As so many other organisations have pointed out, literature infrastructure – whether in the form of state-based writers’ centres, literary magazines, or specialist organisations such as the Fremantle Children’s Literature Centre – being dependent on short-term program funding, and that from a mix of state, federal and philanthropic bodies, limits, in the long-term, the capacity of the sector to strategically plan; it also significantly consumes, in the short-term, staff-time in complex and multiple grant application and reporting obligations. Those, like Reece, who have been engaged in the literature sector for more than a decade, all report that the current model with the demands it places upon directors of literature organistaions is not sustainable.

[Sources of Information: Fremantle Children’s Literature Centre website at <http://www.fclc.com.au/index.html>; Interview with Lesley Reece, 21 May 2008; telephone conversation with Reece, 18 August 2008]

## **Express Media**

Express Media was established in 1983 (in advance of the 1985 International Youth Year). Through the years it has worked to provide opportunities for young people to become involved in print, radio and television. It now focuses on providing opportunities for young writers and artists to display their work through exhibitions, performances, online projects and through *Voiceworks*, the only national Australian publication dedicated to the work of writers and artists under the age of 25. *Voiceworks* is written, edited, and produced entirely by young people.

Express Media has part-time three staff, equivalent to 2.2 full-time positions. They are:

General Manager and Co-CEO	Emily Andersen (0.8)
Artistic Director and Co-CEO	Bel Schenk (0.8)
Voiceworks Editor	Ryan Paine (0.6)
	[Paine is finishing in September 2008, when Tom Rigby will take on the editor’s role]

It should be noted that 2007 was a year of some turnover in staffing at Express Media, with Emily Andersen taking over in May from previous General Manager Esther Anatolitis. The position of Artistic Director has been through two changes recently, with Rohini Sharma resigning in October 2007, Melissa Delaney beginning in November but resigning in 2008, and recently replaced by Bel Schenk.

Express Media's Management Committee has also experienced significant turnover in members. Its current members comprise:

Chair	George Dunford
Treasurer	vacant
Secretary	Joanne Bowers
Other members	Lili Wilkinson
	Jess Friedmann
	Matthew Van Hasselt
	Ben Barnett
	Freda Lisgaras
	Michael Williams
	Bryce Ives

The Patron of Express Media is John Marsden who provides support for the annual John Marsden Prize for young writers.

Express Media receives the majority of its funding from Arts Victoria (\$125,000 in 2007). Australia Council funding in 2007 included \$12,000 for publication and promotion of *Voiceworks* and \$8,000 towards Express Media's participation at the National Young Writers' Festival in Newcastle. In 2007, Express Media experienced a net loss of just over \$10,000. This is attributed to a number of factors, including the provision of staff annual leave being entered on the balance sheet (it had not been entered in previous years), and budgeted targets for workshop income not being reached (due in some measure to the staff turnover noted above).

Express Media's Mission Statement is: "To be Australia's peak organisation for the creation, development and promotion of young writers and text-based artists." It aims to meet the needs of young writers and artists from high school through to university and

TAFE, as well as those of young people not in formal education. As of May 2008, Express Media has 826 current members. Of these, 501 are from Victoria, 131 from NSW, 81 from Queensland, 35 from WA, 29 from SA, 28 from ACT, 20 from Tasmania and 1 from the Northern Territory.

Among the services and programs that Express Media provides for young writers and artists, *Voiceworks* is identified by Artistic Director Bel Schenk as being key. Having a quarterly magazine devoted to the work of young people, edited and produced by young people and distributed nationally is a significant contribution to the nation's literature infrastructure. The magazine provides both publishing opportunities and professional development and, as has been raised with regard to other organisations, such opportunities are crucial in establishing career pathways for young people in the literature sector.

Both Schenk and General Manager Emily Andersen would like to see the readership of *Voiceworks* increase and they especially hope to raise the profile of the magazine in schools. Currently *Voiceworks* is held in only 30 school libraries nation-wide, and the majority of these are in inner-city Melbourne. To improve its coverage, Express Media are undertaking a schools campaign. Andersen explains:

So the aim in 2008 is Victoria, and then in 2009 and 2010 we'll go out to the other states. It involves us doing a big, really strategically targeted mail out of *Voiceworks* to schools with information about Express Media and what we can offer them. We're really looking at our school subscription package to make sure it's got heaps of benefits. We're also going to be promoting our workshop program where we go into schools and give workshops, which is currently running but not enough people know about it. Part of that is – with first step being Victoria – aligning what we do to the VELS, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. But then when we go wider we'll be adapting that to all the other states and hopefully the national curriculum and showing the schools that we're really relevant to what they're doing.

Another initiative with regards to schools is a project currently underway with the Le@rning Federation, an organisation which develops free online curriculum content for Australian and New Zealand schools. Express Media, in partnership with the Le@rning Federation, is selecting 30 pieces of writing and art that have been published in

*Voiceworks* and will use those as a basis for learning resources which schools will be able to access. As well, the project will use five young writers to produce educational notes to supplement the *Voiceworks* material and thereby gain experience in educational writing. “It’s pretty exciting for us,” Andersen says, “because it’s two-fold. One is that we’re promoting *Voiceworks* in schools and getting young people’s work in schools and then there’s the opportunity for our writers to learn this particular sort of writing.”

A third effort to increase the profile of the magazine is through launches followed up by *Voiceworks* reading groups. This is a project, funded by the Myer Foundation, in which Express Media will arrange meetings four times a year (to coincide with the launch of each issue) aimed at under 18 year-olds providing them with the opportunity to meet *Voiceworks* writers and discuss reading interests and writing practices. Again, this will begin in Melbourne, but it is intended to be extended to other locations.

Finally with regard to *Voiceworks*, distribution is soon to be handled by Selectair, which also distributes *Australian Book Review* and *Wet Ink*. Schenk and Andersen pointed out that although, with this distributor, there will be an increase in costs, there will also be the potential to reach a larger market. For example, Andersen says, Selectair distributes to Borders bookshops, and while there is no guarantee Borders will stock *Voiceworks*, at least it will be a possibility.

Other aspects of Express Media’s operations include its John Marsden Prize for poetry and short story or first chapter. There are two age categories: under 18, and 18 to 24, and winning entries in each category are published in *Voiceworks*, as well as receiving cash prizes. Second and third place winners and those with honourable mentions are published on Express Media’s website. In 2007 the competition attracted 242 submissions, with entries from all states and territories (although 49% were from Victoria). The prize is donated by Marsden, with whom Express Media staff work closely to select the shortlist and winners.

Apart from Voiceworks, Express Media delivers a range of services and programs. It organises an annual conference for editors of student newspapers from across Australia (NEWS – National Editors’ Workshop and Skillshare). In 2007 there were 37 participants from 3 states. Express Media also is a major partner of the Emerging Writers’ Festival in Melbourne, which in 2007 drew 2,246 people (tripling its audience numbers from the previous year). Workshops, as mentioned above, are an important aspect of Express Media’s operations, with 17 workshops delivered in 2007. These included projects on zine making, comic making and magazine production. Buzzcuts is another writing and publishing opportunity. In this, young writers provide daily reviews of events during the Melbourne Fringe Festival, aired on a number of Melbourne radio stations, appearing in *Beat* magazine and on the Buzzcuts website. Mentorships have been an important aspect of Express Media’s programs and in 2007 these were provided in partnership with Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, giving young writers the opportunity to work on catalogue pieces and write reviews for *Artlink* magazine.

One major change ahead for the organisation is its planned move to the State Library of Victoria where it will join other literature organisations as part of the proposed Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas, discussed previously in this report. Andersen and Schenk’s comments on the move agree with those of others whose organisations will be relocated (planned for 2009):

BS: I think it will be amazing in terms of networking with other literature organisations. It’ll be lot easier to talk to them without having to make appointments. And for the literature community as well, having all the organisations in one space will make it easier for everyone, including any writers that come to the Centre who can be directed exactly where to go.

EA: I think, too, the possibilities of joint partnerships and pooling of resources will maximise what we do. I think for us it’s important that whatever space we get we make it really youth friendly.

BS: So it’s not intimidating for any young writers to come and be amongst the Melbourne Writers’ Festival and any other organisations.

Among possible partnerships facilitated by the move, Andersen and Schenk hope to increase their interaction with the Victorian Writers’ Centre, with the suggestion of youth memberships for the Centre, or joint memberships between the two.

As should be clear, Express Media has a significant profile in Melbourne and has established a reputation for providing quality writing opportunities and skills development for young people. Its claim to be the peak body for young writers is, as Schenk acknowledged in interview, “more about our aim in the future. We aim to be the organisation where a young person will come to when they have any queries about writing or they want to get involved in writing activities.” To achieve peak body status, Express Media will need to continue its efforts towards national coverage. The schools initiatives outlined above will assist this, especially if school libraries subsequently take up memberships and subscriptions. In terms of other marketing strategies, both Andersen and Schenk say that they would appreciate some support from either the Australia Council or Arts Victoria, even in terms of professional development to provide Express Media with skills and knowledge that would assist them in raising the organisation’s profile. As with so many other organisations, Express Media knows it delivers quality services yet it simply lacks resources to make those services more widely-known.

[Sources of Information: Express Media 2007 Annual Report; Express Media Strategic Plan 2008-09; Interview with Emily Andersen and Bel Schenk, 27 May 2008; email communications with Emily Andersen, 27 August and 2 September 2008]

## Writers' Festivals

### Melbourne Writers' Festival

The Melbourne Writers' Festival was established in 1986 as a joint initiative between the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts and the City of Melbourne. Its aims were:

to raise awareness of the importance of the contribution of writers and their work to Australian society and also foster and encourage interest in literature generally, especially amongst the young. It was to provide a forum for intellectual and cultural debate on a local, national and international scale.  
(From the Festival's website 'About Us, History of the Festival' webpage)

By the mid-to-late 1990s the Festival was the second most significant in Australia (after the Adelaide Writers Week), but then went into a period of financial hardship and, by 2005, the Festival had debts of over \$120,000. In that year a new director was appointed: Rosemary Cameron, formerly the director of the Brisbane Writers' Festival. In the two years since, Cameron and the Melbourne Writers' Festival staff have brought the Festival out of debt, expanded the number of events, increased ticket sales, and this year the Festival will be moving to a new central Melbourne location.

The current staff for the Melbourne Writers' Festival includes 4 full-time positions, one part-time salaried and one part-time in-contra, two contract positions, and numerous volunteers:

Festival Director/CEO	Rosemary Cameron (f-t)
Festival Manager	Helenka King (f-t)
Festival Administrator	Louise Angrilli (f-t)
Associate Director	Steve Grimwade (0.6)
Corporate Development Manager	Megan Dench (f-t)
Marketing Coordinator	Leanne Cutler (0.4 in-contra)
Volunteer Coordinator	(soon to be appointed)
Festival Production Manager	Paul Davies, Paul's Presentations (contract)
Festival Publicist	Magda Petkoff, Purple Media (contract)
Volunteers	100-150

The Board of the Festival comprises:

Chair	Jan McGuinness
Vice Chair	Maree Davidson
Treasurer	Bernard Marin
Public Officer	Nick Ruskin

Committee Members	Caroline Cornish
	Brett Miller
	Jack Moshakis
	Michael Webster
	Morrie Schwartz

There are four sub-committees including:

- Marketing sub-committee
- Fundraising, sponsorship & patrons sub-committee
- Venues and strategic plan sub-committee
- Board succession sub-committee

The Melbourne Writers' Festival is a ticketed festival and so a crucial measurement of its success is its attendance figures, not only in terms of its popularity but also in terms of its financial viability. Since Cameron became Director in 2005, attendance numbers have increased substantially, climbing from 34,000 to 35,000 in 2006, and to 40,000 in 2007. In terms of ticketing, most sessions are priced around \$18 and keynote events are \$32 per ticket. Income from ticket sales actually slumped from \$330,000 in 2005 to just below \$290,000 in 2006, possibly due to the introduction of a new program of free events. However, income from ticket sales surged again in 2007 to reach over \$400,000, for a 43% growth for the year.

Core funding from the Australia Council remained steady over these years at \$25,000; on the other hand, core funding from the City of Melbourne and from Arts Victoria has grown. The City of Melbourne raised its funding from \$25,000 to \$35,000 (now risen to \$37,000), and funding from Arts Victoria has increased substantially, from \$40,000 in 2006 to \$140,000 in 2007, with additional one-off grants of \$70,000 in 2005 and 2006 and \$100,000 in 2007 (to match funding for any sponsorship raised, capped at \$100,000).



Together, the invigorated ticket sales and the funding increases have contributed to the Festival moving from its 2005 position of substantial debt to its current, relatively healthy state, with cash reserves at \$90,000.

The Festival is normally held over the last 10 days of August. In 2007 the Festival held more than 270 events involving 37 international authors, more than 200 Victorian authors, and 65 Australian authors from interstate. These events included one-on-one interviews with authors, panel sessions, keynote addresses, debates, workshops and master classes. During the festival, nearly \$250,000 worth of books were sold.

Book sales are a significant aspect of literary festivals, but Cameron, in interview, stressed that it is not the immediate sales so much as the wide-reaching media coverage that festivals generate that are so important. Cameron says:

I think the most important thing we do is we drive media coverage. We had our media coverage valued in 2006 and it was found we had over 6 million dollars worth of media coverage. Sydney's has been valued at over 12 million. I think from the publishers' point of view, writers' festivals are all about media coverage. Book sales are important but really probably not as significant on a national scale. So that's what it comes down to in the end, the media coverage we can generate. And writers' festivals ... I know this sounds cynical in a way... but writers' festivals give validity to what would otherwise be seen as a PR author tour when a new book comes out. So we're adding gravitas to that somehow.

Writers' festivals are also about networking and this, Cameron says, is what the Melbourne Writers' Festival does for Australian authors. "I think we're seen by publishers internationally as a good place to send authors, so we have an international profile. That's important for the Australian writers who we invite. It's all about putting them in a larger context. It's introducing them to international publishers, agents, other writers, creating a network for them." Cameron admits that until recently the Melbourne Writers' Festival was not particularly helpful for emerging writers, with the emphasis, rather, on established-profile authors. "I've been trying to change that," Cameron says. "I think we work quite well with a lot of emerging writers now. We do special events that

focus on new writers but we also try to incorporate them, so if you've got a star author, you'd match them up with an emerging writer and introduce new voices to our audiences. So, I think that is one thing that festivals can do, and I think that's a very important role for festivals – helping to establish new voices.”

Another significant aspect of the Melbourne Writers' Festival is the Schools' Program. The Festival is spread over two weekends and in three days (Monday to Wednesday) of the intervening week, schools programming attracts over 8,000 attendances and is seen as an integral aspect of the Festival. In 2007, 42 events attracted students not only from metropolitan schools but also from regional Victorian cities such as Warrnambool and Mildura, as well as from towns across the border in NSW.

The issue of premises and location has been raised a number of times in this report with regard to several of the organisations discussed. The Melbourne Writers' Festival faces two significant changes with regard to its location. The first of these is its move for this year's Festival, from the Malthouse Theatre where the Festival has been held since its beginning, to new venues at Federation Square in the centre of Melbourne. One of the reasons for the move is simply to be able to grow audience numbers. The venues clustered around Federation Square will provide more audience space than is possible at the Malthouse Theatre. Also, being just opposite Flinders Street railway station means that the new location will be easily accessible and this will help to draw new audiences. As well, the City of Melbourne is an important partner for the Festival and it was keen to see the Festival relocate to Federation Square. The move also means that ticketing will be fully controlled by the Festival, with a new ticket and Festival information booth to be located at the Square.

The second change will see the offices of the Festival move from their present location, next to the Malthouse Theatre, to the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas in a wing of the State Library of Victoria, a move planned for 2009. The advantages of this new Centre for the literature organisations involved have been discussed previously. Cameron agrees that the new Centre will be a vibrant place and, for the Festival, it will mean

taking advantage of performance spaces there to stage literary events throughout the year, co-presented with its present partner Readings bookshop. This will help maintain the Festival's profile over the course of the year and assist with staying in contact with its audience base and hopefully attracting new audiences.

Marketing is an issue that Cameron returned to throughout her interview. She emphasises that the Festival's attendances can continue to grow, but that improved and varied marketing will be required. She explained two marketing projects that will soon be running in partnerships with the Australia Council and Arts Victoria. The first of these involves the Mosaic market analysis computer program, which works with socio-economic data to identify market characteristics in micro-units of 20 houses. Cameron says, "We could never afford to use something like that in a million years, but with The Australia Council and Arts Victoria making it available to certain arts organisations we can map our existing audiences and then see where similar audiences are and target our marketing to those audiences, or if there is a new audience that we want to target, we can know where that is." A second initiative with The Australia Council and Arts Victoria is Test Drive. Cameron explains: "Test Drive is a UK marketing thing, which is about using up unused capacity and promoting it to people who have never been to that art form before. So they're developing a website and we'll provide, for example, unused tickets to give away free to people in the hope that they become writers festival aficionados and come back year after year."

When asked about concerns she might have, either for the Festival, or for the broad state of the Australian literature sector, Cameron moved to issues relating to technological change and the current uncertainty in the publishing industry. She pointed out that the Festival's two major corporate sponsors have been *The Age* and Readings bookshops. Until this year, *The Age* was a naming-rights sponsor, contributing to the Festival in both cash and kind. This year its cash contribution of \$60,000 was withdrawn – although Cameron says that its in-kind contribution (advertising and promotion) was increased to an equivalent or greater value. The larger point she wanted to make, however, was that these sponsors would undoubtedly be affected by industry-wide change:

The writing and publishing industry, as I'm sure you are aware, is on the brink of major changes and no one quite knows where it's going to go. And a lot of it is about digital content delivery. And so people are making wild predictions and most of them are fairly depressing. It's quite a depressing outlook. And for us, our two major sponsors when we started this were *The Age*, a newspaper, and a bookshop. Newspapers are already going through a huge change in the way their readership is much more affected than book publishing at the moment, but I think it is indicating the way that book publishing will go. You know, encyclopaedias and textbooks are already dropping off the twig, so taking that into consideration, we thought, what does this mean for the Writers Festival?

As part of the Festival's thinking its way towards these industry-wide changes, it has with the Australian Business Arts Foundation (ABAF) started on a ten year visioning project, looking at where the festival wants to be in the next decade, and involving focus group research with all stakeholders, including current audience members, future audience members who have never been to the festival before, publishers, major sponsors, media partners, funding bodies, authors, and volunteers who work on the festival. Looking towards the future, and with regard to digital delivery in publishing and its impact on festivals, Cameron wonders: "Are we going to end up becoming a digital festival, say? Or does it mean that if there is a lot of digital delivery around that people would then really value the face-to-face, the writer-in-the-flesh aspect of festivals in a way that they may not get elsewhere?"

[Sources of Information: Jason Steger, "New Looks, New Ideas, But Some of the Same Debts," *The Age*, 29 July, 2006; "A 'Very Social' MWF," *Bookseller + Publisher*, vol. 86, no. 4, (October) 2006, p. 10; "A Fine Farewell," *Bookseller + Publisher*, vol. 87, no. 4, (October) 2007, pp. 14-15; Interview with Rosemary Cameron, 15 April 2008; email communication with Cameron, 15 August 2008]

### **Brisbane Writers Festival**

The Brisbane Writers Festival is an annual event, held over five days in September at the State Library of Queensland. It evolved from the Warana Writers Weekend, which began in the 1960s and expanded in 1985 to become the Warana Writers Week. In 1996, the

event became an incorporated association and changed its name to the Brisbane Writers Festival. The Festival has a strong schools' program, a regional component and since 2006 a significant online presence. The Festival positions itself as a peak arts body which, as its website announces, "brings the world of writing and ideas to Brisbane, and showcases the best of local, national and international writing to Brisbane, and to the world." In spite of the Festivals' significant growth in the past two years, it currently faces serious financial difficulties, according to its Director, Michael Campbell.

The Festival has three full-time staff members and an additional three people in contract positions in the period leading up to September. Staff members include:

Festival Director	Michael Campbell (f-t)
General Manager	Mark Collier-Vickers (f-t)
Administrative Co-ordinator	Charis Holt (f-t)
Schools' Program Manager	Jane O'Hara, Molly Palmer
Volunteers Co-ordinator	Joanne Tindale
Publicity Consultant	Kate McMurray
Volunteers	130 (in 2007)

The Festival's Management Committee in 2008 are:

Chair	Dr Jonathan Fulcher
Deputy Chair	Michael Owens
Treasurer	Justin Walsh
Secretary	Eleanor O'Gorman
Committee Members	John Birmingham
	Sue Gough
	Madonna Duffy
	Kate Paynter
	Sue Abbey
	Frances Rossberg
	Shay O'Hara-Smith

In 2007, total revenue for the festival was approximately \$1,150,000, with cash revenues of \$702,000. This represents a 14% increase on the previous year, which had also achieved an increase of 22% over 2005 revenue. The increased revenue in 2007 was primarily attributable to a 55% increase in festival sales and a 32% increase in sponsorship. In 2007, corporate sponsorship from 83 different partners represented 50.8%

of the Festival's budget. However, in the same year the Festival experienced a 12% decrease in grants income. The Queensland State government provides 20.8% of the budget and the Australia Council contributes 2.2%, or \$25,000. As well, the City of Brisbane provides \$26,000 or 2.3% of the Festival's budget.

With regards to funding, in interview Festival Director Michael Campbell pointed out the disparity between the level of support the Brisbane Writers Festival receives from the City of Brisbane and that provided to the Sydney Writers' Festival from its city. The City of Sydney is a major supporter of the Sydney Writers' Festival, providing \$260,000 per year in cash (ten times the level of support Brisbane gives to its festival). Campbell says that although he has been lobbying the City of Brisbane, so far he has not had success.

Campbell also gave considerable emphasis to the matter of peak body status. Campbell's view of what constitutes a peak body relates primarily to a commitment to the promotion of excellence and has a relationship to audience development. This was addressed directly in interview:

MJ: So you see the peak body being identified as that more in terms of audience engagement.

MC: Yes, and when I say audience, I mean audience in the broadest sense of the word, that is, audiences at events as well as readers. Now with audience engagement, a mandate for festivals – and I have good relations with the other festivals, Melbourne and Sydney – festivals are showcasing organisations. We also provide workshops and masterclasses. We bring in the best writers in the world, in Australia, in Queensland, and showcase them. And we do the 'best.' We do the 'best' emerging. We provide a tiered structure so there's emerging and mid-career writers as well as the well-established. It's the conversation across those various levels of experience and points in a career that we do, both for the writers themselves, and for the audience. So, I think that's what we do. We provide input back into the writing community through workshops and masterclasses from the best writers that are available. And we provide a livelihood to the writers through the publicity and marketing that we do.

Campbell also ties the claim to being the peak body for literature in the state to the Festival's association with the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. He explains:

There's a relationship there because a number of the awards are for unpublished work. They get published by UQP and then, as part of the

supporting nature of what we do, I program them within the Festival. For instance there is poetry, the Thomas Shapcotte Award [Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize]; there's short stories; there's the David Unaipon Award for Indigenous Literature. So this is just one example of our commitment there to helping emerging writers.

Certainly the prestige associated with major literary awards such as the Queensland Premier's Awards and the Festival then featuring the winning writers within its program adds to the argument which links the concept of a peak body to the promotion of excellence.

It is interesting to compare the understanding of peak body status expressed here to that which arises in regards to state writers' centres. It is worth recalling that the Queensland Writers' Centre also positions itself as the peak body for literature in the state, emphasising its ties to government and industry and its advocacy role in supporting the interests and needs of writers across the state, at all stages of their career. Apart from the Queensland Writers' Centre, few other of the state-based centres explicitly refer to themselves as peak bodies, at least on their website documents. The one other is writingWA which, with its organisational membership and its coordinating role amongst these member organisations within the literature sector in WA, appears to warrant the descriptor. In interview, ACT Writers Centre Director Anne-Maree Britton also said she believed her organisation to be a peak body, emphasising the ACT Writers Centre's efforts as advocate for writers, and supporting the literature sector in the ACT by putting interested groups and individuals together. She described the Centre as "the hub of a wheel" in fulfilling its coordinating function, a description to which other writers' centres, including Queensland Writers' Centre, would subscribe.

On the other hand, it should also be acknowledged – as the discussions of writers' centres in the earlier section of this report attempted to bring to attention – that writers' centres also contribute to the fostering and celebration of excellence. Contributions to excellence are made over a period of many years, as young and emerging writers are given the support and development they require to produce literary works, many of which are also award winning. Gayle Kennedy's *Me, Antman and Fleabag*, which was the 2006 David

Unaipon Award winner, is but one case in point, as the section above on the NSW Writers' Centre has explained.

The Brisbane Writers Festival has, like other major literary festivals, experienced significant growth. The festival has recently moved from being a free event to being a 'mostly free' event, which means that just over 50% of events are free, with just under 50% ticketed. In spite of this, audience numbers have increased sharply, from approximately 19,000 in 2005 to 25,500 in 2007 (with roughly the same number in 2006).<sup>\*</sup> Campbell pointed out that due to financial constraints, the program for 2007 actually included 25% fewer writers and events, yet audience numbers remained the same. This was in some measure due to the scheduling of the festival, in 2006 changed to fall in the school term, thus allowing for a successful schools' program. Campbell says that in 2006 the 4,000 places for school children were booked out in two days. In 2007 this was increased to 10,000 places and this too was booked out within days. In the Festival's 'Word Play' schools' program for 2008, events run over three days and include authors such as John Marsden, Leigh Hobbs, Jackie French, Anita Heiss and Sam Wagan Watson.

Book sales at the festival have doubled in the past two years, as has publicity, both nationally and internationally. The Festival is covered by the ABC who broadcast presentations with writers from the Festival and the Festival program is distributed by *The Australian*, and therefore has national reach. In 2007 the Festival gains substantial coverage when one of the Festival's invited writers, Palestinian-born UK citizen Abdel Bari Atwan, author of *The Secret History of al-Qa'ida*, experienced delays in being granted a visa. The story was reported internationally and Campbell recounts that he was with Atwan when Atwan received a call from the Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister saying that he'd heard he was at the Brisbane Writers' Festival. The Foreign Minister then asked Atwan, "Was there anything about Australia he should know about?"

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<sup>\*</sup> In email communication subsequent to the writing of this report, Campbell reported that in 2008 audience numbers reached approximately 32,000, representing a 20% growth in spite of 10% fewer events (due to funding constraints).



Despite the growth – in profile, in audience numbers, in corporate sponsorship – the Festival’s financial situation remains precarious and staff are stretched to capacity. Campbell returned to this point several times over the course of the interview, stressing that although corporate sponsorship has grown, the fact that it is spread over 83 partners means that staff time is consumed in servicing these relationships. He gave the example of missing out on funding for a program because of lack of information, or time to access information:

For instance the Australian Council has this year sponsored a workshop and masterclass program and industry program very similar to the one I’ve been running up here for the past three years. But I didn’t know that that was on the cards and that we were eligible. And then I’ve been told that it’s a one-off and it will all be changing in July. So in terms of their haphazard approach, one of the difficulties – and this goes back to resources – because we are so under-resourced, I as the director am so busy I’m not in a position to capitalise or follow up on opportunities like this, or even find out about this information early enough, and talk with people early enough and often enough to be of benefit for the organisation.

In terms of Australia Council support, Campbell also commented on the Visiting International Publishers program, which he said has recently been limited to Sydney and Adelaide. He would like to see Brisbane and Melbourne Festivals also eligible to participate. Finally, he asks:

If the festival is seen as having a place in the federal infrastructure and if they think it has an important role, is \$25,000 per annum adequate to that level? Is that reflective of the Festival’s role and contribution? And if something is unequal, something should be done. One of the interesting things in this is that we get our money from project funding. And we’re on annual funding every year, and having to apply and justify these exhaustive kinds of funding applications and acquittals that have to be done, which is a different form from the State, so all figures have to be rejigged. It would seem to me that we should be part of the triennial funding if we are important to the nation’s infrastructure for writing.

This is the crux of the matter under investigation in this study, at least with regards to the Australia Council’s funding decisions: which organisations contribute substantially enough to the national literature infrastructure to warrant receiving triennial funding? Which organisations are the key organisations? Can the contributions of a writers’

festival be weighed against those of a state writers' centre? These are questions for the Board itself to decide. What this study indicates, though, is that an overall funding regime with very limited access to multi-year grants is causing stress across the literature sector.

A closing point regarding the Brisbane Writers Festival is one that speaks to the qualities of literary festivals in broad terms, and their role in the literature sector. When asked about the role of digital delivery for writers' festivals, Campbell responded:

What happens at the festival is that for five days that written word is put aside for a moment so that you can delve deeper into the writer and reader relationship, live. Then you can pick up the conversation through their work, and not next week, or next month, or next year, but for a lifetime. One's experience of meeting a writer face-to-face, hearing their voice, understanding their perspective, to be able to ask questions, to be able to directly engage actually makes an enormous difference to the context of the writing for their whole reading life, their approach to the writer's writing. I think that's an invaluable experience. I can see it when that happens to kids. It changes people's lives because writing is the communication of experience and passions, through the craft of text.

Digital delivery, Campbell says, can never compete with this face-to-face experience. The Brisbane Writers Festival does make use of digital delivery to some extent, allowing its participating writers to engage with audiences in regional and remote locations in Queensland, and Campbell says this is a great success. However, he sees the digital delivery of writers to Brisbane audiences as having "limited appeal," though an online archive as a supplement to the festival would have value. This is something Brisbane is not yet able to do, again, because of lack of funding, but Campbell is hopeful it may eventuate.

[Sources of Information: Brisbane Writers Festival website at <http://www.brisbanewritersfestival.com.au/>; interview with Michael Campbell, 16 May, 2008; email communications with Campbell, 18 August and 10 October 2008]

## **Adelaide Writers' Week**

Adelaide Writers' Week was established in the 1960s as a part of the biennial Adelaide Festival of the Arts. It is a free event, held in March in the Pioneer Women's Memorial Gardens and is one of the world's pre-eminent literary festivals. In 2008, Adelaide Writers' Week had 37 Australian authors participating and 23 international authors. There were over 90 sessions and audience numbers exceeded 100,000.

Adelaide Writers' Week has two year-round staff. They are:

Executive Producer	Rose Wight (f-t)
Project Officer	Lyn Wagstaff (0.5)

As well, there are three contract positions for varying periods leading up to the festival:

Book Tent Manager	Richard Dall
Consultant	Kathy Paxinos
Site Manager	Neil Simpson
Production Coordinator	Brianna Meldrum

Members of Adelaide Writers' Week Advisory Committee are:

Chair	Richard Hosking
Program Advisor	David Malouf
Committee Members	J. M. Coetzee
	Penelope Curtin
	Katharine England
	John Harwood
	Jason Lake
	Michael Meehan
	Kathy Paxinos
	Nick Prescott
	Rose Wight
	Gerard Windsor

Adelaide Writers' Week has an annual budget in excess of \$500,000. Of this, the Australia Council provides funds covering payments and travel for Australian writers presenting at Writers' Week. In 2007, Australia Council funding was \$50,000. Rose Wight, Executive Producer of Writers' Week, was reluctant to provide further budget breakdowns, apart from explaining that overall corporate sponsorship is organised by the

Adelaide Festival and Writers' Week enters into no separate corporate arrangements. She also explained that although Writers' Week was a free event, significant revenue is derived from book sales. The Book Tent at Writers Week is run by the organisation itself, and profits from sales are returned to Writers' Week. Again, Wight was reluctant to provide figures, but said that tens of thousands of titles were sold at this year's event.

When asked to describe how Adelaide Writers' Week distinguishes itself from other literary festivals in Australia, Wight emphasised the literary nature of the program. "It's a true literary festival. That's one of our strengths. It's a way we define ourselves in Adelaide. We are a literary festival," she says. Wight calls Writers' Week a "curated event," a description she attributes to David Malouf, a member of the Advisory Committee. By curated Wight means that considerable thought has been given to the selection and invitation of writers to ensure both diversity and quality. In contrast to other literary festivals which have increased their number of events, Wight says Adelaide Writers' Week

is not about being big. We haven't expanded it. We've stuck to solo sessions, the meet-the-author, and discussions where there is a group of writers talking about something the committee think is an underlying current, or something that their work has revealed they're interested in, or could talk about. I think it's a program where you can see a lot of thought, maybe because it's compact. I don't know, when I look at programs with lots of events, I'm overwhelmed. I can't imagine; it's just too big for me.

Wight's comment about keeping Writers' Week compact has several implications. Not only are the number of events fewer than at other festivals (compare Sydney and Melbourne), but also other types of programs common to literary festivals are not run at Adelaide Writers' Week. For example, a schools' program was part of Writers' Week until 2004 but it was not run in either the 2006 or 2008 programs. Wight says her decision to discontinue schools' programming was due to falling attendance. She reports that in the past two Writers Weeks schoolchildren are now attending the main sessions. Another program common to literary festivals but absent from the Adelaide event are masterclasses given by the visiting writers. It may be recalled that Michael Campbell's explanation of the Brisbane Writers' Festival's role as a "peak body for writing" included

the way the Festival supported local writing through the delivery of masterclasses by the best Australian and international writers. When asked why Adelaide Writers Week does not feature masterclasses, Wight explained that the organisation would need to contract another agency to run such a program, as she did not have the staff or resources to manage it. She also said that, in fact, asking writers to give masterclasses could be a “barrier” to their coming. On the other hand, Wight indicated that three writers from this year’s Writers’ Week gave talks to university students in creative writing courses, going some way towards providing engagement with the local writing community.

These issues relate to the tensions existing between Adelaide Writers’ Week and the South Australian Writers’ Centre, mentioned previously in this report. SA Writers’ Centre Director Barbara Weisner pointed to the relative neglect of South Australian writers by the festival and the unwillingness of Writers’ Week to lend out its writers (to give masterclasses, for example). Closely following this year’s Writers’ Week, the tensions became public, with South Australian writer Stephen Orr criticising Writers’ Week in an opinion piece on the ABC website, raising the point of the festival’s neglect of South Australian writers, the further point of Writers’ Week not paying ASA rates for writers, and its lack of engagement with regional areas. In the ‘Comments’ section following the piece, Chair of the SA Writers’ Centre’s Board, Sean Williams supported Orr’s criticisms and pointed to disputes between Writers’ Week and other literature organisations. With regards to the payment of ASA rates to writers, Wight acknowledges that Writers’ Week falls short in this regard, but says that providing airfares (economy) and accommodation for writers from around Australia and from overseas means that the budget will not stretch to paying ASA rates. Both Australian and international writers are paid a one-off speaking fee. Wight also makes the point that most writers are very pleased to be able to appear at Writers’ Week as no other festival in Australia allows them to reach an audience of 2,000 or more people at one reading session.

In terms of sector-wide concerns for literature infrastructure it is interesting to note that the situation existing in Adelaide between Writers Week and the Writers’ Centre bears some resemblance to circumstances in Brisbane, although perhaps, in a sense, inverted. In

Brisbane, power in terms of financial resources currently locates with the Queensland Writers' Centre, with the substantial support it receives from Arts Queensland. In Adelaide, power seems to reside with Writers' Week in terms of its access to high-profile writers and large-scale audiences, and its alleged reluctance to share these assets with other literature organisations. As in the Queensland context, the situation in Adelaide also relates to perceptions of peak body status for the representation and promotion of literature. Although the South Australian Writers Centre does not use the term 'peak body' on its website, its mission statement emphasises its coordinating role between writers and literature organisations. In his ABC article, Orr does refer to SA Writers' Centre as "the state's peak organising body for writers." In the interview conducted for this study, Wight did not refer to Adelaide Writers' Week as a peak body for literature infrastructure, but emphasised that Writers' Week has always aimed at raising the profile of writers and providing opportunities for audiences to engage with the best writers from around Australia and from overseas.

Another issue of significance for literary festivals is the role of digital technology. Wight is generally unenthusiastic about digital delivery, but says that a number of events at this year's Writers' Week were recorded by Slow TV, which has since made them available as podcasts on *The Monthly's* website (with links from the Adelaide Writers' Week website). This is interesting in terms of Michael Campbell's comments regarding the Brisbane Writers' Festival current inability to record and archive due to lack of resources. As Slow TV features talks from both this year's Adelaide and Sydney Writers Festivals, free to download, it could be a possibility for the Brisbane Festival as well.

Finally, in terms of literature infrastructure support, an important event at the 2008 Adelaide Writers' Week was the Visiting International Publishers (VIP) program. This was referred to earlier in this report in the section on the Brisbane Writers' Festival. The VIP program promotes rights of sales of Australian works to overseas markets. In 2008, 16 representatives from international publishing houses participated. Publishers were from the UK, Germany, The Netherlands, Canada, India, the USA, China and Switzerland. Wight explained that these VIP meetings are industry sessions, having no

public component, although there was one public session titled ‘Directions in British and Australian Publishing’ with three of the publishing representatives from the UK participating. The VIP program is especially significant, however, in gaining international exposure for Australian writers at the event and in the past has led to significant outcomes in the promotion of Australian literature and its sales overseas. In terms of showcasing Australian writers and writing, it is not surprising that literary festivals in other cities (such as Brisbane) would like to have a similar opportunity.

[Sources of Information: Interview with Rose Wight, 27 May 2008; telephone conversations with Wight, 18 August 2008; Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts website at <http://www.adelaidefestival.com.au/>; Slow TV on The Monthly’s website at <http://www.themonthly.com.au/tm/video>; Stephen Orr, “Risking Exodus: The Sorry State of Festivals,” ABC Online, 14 March 2008, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/03/14/2189879.htm>; ‘Visiting International Publishers 2008,’ Australia Council for the Arts website at [http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/the\\_arts/projects/visiting\\_international\\_publishers\\_2008](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/the_arts/projects/visiting_international_publishers_2008)]

### **Sydney Writers’ Festival**

Sydney Writers’ Festival began in 1997. It is an annual, week-long, mostly free festival held in May at Walsh Bay, along with events in regional centres including Wollongong, Newcastle and Katoomba, and suburban locations around metropolitan Sydney. Sydney Writers’ Festival has grown dramatically in recent years, both in terms of sessions and writers and in terms of attendance numbers. In 2007 approximately 87,000 people attended, making Sydney Writer’s Festival one of the largest literary festivals in the world (third largest behind Hay-on-Wye and Edinburgh), according to Artistic Director and Chief Executive Wendy Were.

Current staff for the Festival include six people, one of whom is part-time. They are:

Festival Director & CEO

Dr Wendy Were (f-t)

Associate Director & Business Development Manager  
Operations Manager  
Marketing & Audience Development Manager  
Administrator  
Administrative Assistant

Lisa Torrance (f-t)  
Annette Alderson (0.7)  
Linly Goh (f-t)  
Stella Collier (f-t)  
Libby DeVenny (f-t;  
began in November  
2007)

The Festival employs a number of contract staff for varying periods. In 2008, they were:

Publicist  
Publicity Assistant  
Volunteer Coordinator  
Production Coordinator  
Photographer

Andy Palmer  
Wendy Canning  
Linda Goodman  
Justin Nyker  
Prudence Upton

The Festival is also supported by numerous volunteers each year. In 2008 there were over 250 volunteers.

The Festival's Board comprises ten members. They are:

Chair  
Members

Sandra Yates  
Rowena Danziger  
Paul Donovan  
Peter FitzSimons  
Stephen Loosley  
Shona Martyn  
Tim Peach  
Michael Sexton  
Annette Shun Wah  
Bret Walker  
Roger Wilkins

Sydney Writers' Festival has an annual budget of approximately \$2,000,000, of which the Australia Council contributes \$20,000 or 1%. The core funding bodies are the City of Sydney (\$260,000) and the ArtsNSW (\$240,000). Although the Festival is a largely free event, ticket sales are an important source of revenue. As well, the Festival has a number of corporate and philanthropic sponsors. In-kind support is also factored into the budget.

The 2008 Sydney Writers Festival comprised 346 separate sessions involving more than 450 writers from Australia and overseas. Of these, about 50 were international, 70 were from interstate, and the remaining were from Sydney or NSW. At the time of this report,



attendance numbers for 2008 were not yet available, though Artistic Director Were predicts that last year's record numbers will be surpassed, based on the increases in available venues (with Pier 2/3 being utilised at Walsh Bay).

When asked to identify the strengths of the Sydney Writers' Festival, Were focused on its inclusiveness:

We have historically presented, and still do present, more than half of our events free. The Festival is only eleven years old and the fact that it's now, we believe, the third biggest festival of its kind in the world is a testimony to its growing audience base. It keeps growing every year, exponentially, and I think a lot of that is because it has a sense of access and democracy to it that invites people to participate in it. I often use the metaphor of a Town Hall and I think that that's how this festival operates in a lot of ways. So people don't feel it's an elitist festival, they don't feel that it's just a festival for writers – as some people think writers' festivals are – or a festival for readers. People actually feel that it is a forum where they can actively be involved and participate.

Were pointed out that the inclusiveness of the Sydney Writers' Festival is also due to its expansion beyond the literary:

I think the extension of the definition of writing has also been very important and it doesn't necessarily involve a dumbing down or anything like that. It's recognising writing excellence across genres. I've noticed that some of the other festivals have a focus particularly on creative fiction or poetry; we include those, and this year we had a huge poetry stream, but I do think that the non-fiction programming has been a strength for Sydney as well, not only in the kind of opportunities it opens for discussion and debate, but it also invites audiences who perhaps would not otherwise attend a writers' festival. So our number of male attendees is very high, in comparison to audiences at other festivals, not just Australian ones but international ones. We also have a very strong and growing youth audience, which is quite noticeable.

A third aspect of this inclusiveness is the Festival's programming in regional and suburban locations. There were sixteen regional events this year, including 'Celebrating the Voice,' a program of readings by Indigenous writers being hosted at four South Coast locations. Twenty-two events were held around suburban Sydney, ranging from a showcasing of young writers from Western Sydney, to former Premier Bob Carr speaking of his love for reading at Penrith City Library, to a panel of Filipino-Australian writers

discussing their work. Were explained that the regional and suburban component of the Festival represents a significant investment of resources; Arts NSW provides \$10,000 towards costs but the real costs of the events are more than five times that, Were says. In spite of this, the Festival intends to maintain the regional program. Were explains:

It's a philosophical belief that the Festival reach as many people as possible, and that people shouldn't be disadvantaged from participating just because they happen to live a couple of hours out of Sydney. Also we want the festival to be as wide-ranging as possible and some of those events that are specific to those centres have an amazing quality to them that you would not be able to achieve in Sydney, in terms of the cultural demographics. So that's a valuable part of the program.

Like festivals in Brisbane and Melbourne, Sydney Writers' Festival includes a significant schools' program. There are two full days at Sydney and two at Parramatta for primary and secondary school years, with multiple authors participating in each, and with three of the four days selling out. As well there were numerous workshops and masterclasses in writing for children, with several of these hosted at the NSW Writers' Centre. Another aspect of the Festival's engagement with education in 2008 is the Writers Talk program, a partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Training. Interviews were conducted with Australian and international writers and the videos are now available on the Writers Talk website for students to access, with teaching notes and additional resources provided. Were explained that this sort of partnership clearly has mutual benefits. The Department of Education utilises the resources brought together by the Festival to create a product attractive to students and encouraging their engagement with reading and writing. For the Festival, it is an opportunity to engage with a young audience and raise brand profile. "I think it's really important for kids to know that the Festival is for them. And I want them to be participating from an early age," Were says.

Internet access to interviews with writers post-festival is not limited to material aimed at students. The Sydney Writers' Festival, like Adelaide Writers' Week, allows Slow TV to record events which are available soon afterwards through *The Monthly's* website. ABC Radio National's The Book Show and ABC Fora also broadcast and podcast Sydney

Writers' Festival events. The Festival's website provides links to all three. This raises the associated issue of digital delivery of writers to the festival and unlike some other Festival directors, Were expressed (qualified) support for the possibility. Sydney has made use in past years of satellite links; in particular Were referred to an event in Dubbo in which students could interact with writers in Sydney for the Festival. This is the sort of digital delivery that Michael Campbell said has been so successful for the Brisbane Writers' Festival. However, whereas Campbell was lukewarm to the idea of writers located overseas appearing at the Brisbane festival via digital delivery, Were is more receptive. Plans were in place to use LongPen – which uses video conferencing and a remote signing device allowing geographically-distant writers to interact with individual audience members – for the 2008 Festival. Although these arrangements fell through at the last moment, Were says she does not discount some form of digital delivery in the future. "I think that digital delivery is important," Were says, "particularly as more and more writers, for mostly reasons of environmental concern, are cutting down their long-haul flying. Also, if you rely on people who are physically able to travel, you cut out a whole swag of talented and gifted writers who would like to be able to interact with Sydney audiences. So I think we'll continue to do that, but whether it's with Longpen, I don't know...."

As the largest writers' festival in Australia in terms of the number of Australian writers participating, Sydney Writers' Festival delivers significant benefits to the nation's literature sector. The most important of these is raising the profile of Australian writers with the general public. Were emphasised the inclusiveness of the Festival (as discussed above), and the growth in audience numbers in recent supports her claim that the Festival is reaching demographic sections not normally attracted to writers' festivals. This audience development work will – it is hoped – flow on to increased readerships and growth in book sales. As Rosemary Cameron pointed out in her interview, however, book sales are not necessarily as important as the media coverage generated by a Festival. Were stated that the media coverage generated by the Sydney Writers' Festival has been independently valued in excess of 12 million dollars, double that of the Melbourne Writers' Festival. As well as substantial print reporting, radio and television interviews

with writers at the festival receive prominently coverage, thus extending the profile of Australian writers. A further benefit to writers is that the Sydney Writers' Festival website, according to Were, "is regularly trawled by international directors. I'm regularly called upon by my international contacts to ask me about Australian writers and ask me for recommendations. So participating in the Festival has an ongoing benefit for writers."

Although the growth of the Festival has been substantial, Were expresses concern at the declining level of support received from the Australia Council. She claims the support from the Australia Council Literature Board has fallen by 50% in the last three years and she pointed out that although Sydney Writers' Festival provides more opportunities for Australian writers than any other festival, it receives less in Australia Council funding than the Melbourne or Brisbane festivals. In interview she wondered whether this outcome indicated that Sydney's grant applications were deemed less adequate, or whether perhaps it was in response to the expansion of the Festival beyond strict definitions of the literary. She also speculated that perhaps Sydney Writers' Festival was being penalised for success. Throughout the interview, Were returned to the point that the Festival's recent years of growth have generated an unexpected problem:

Because Sydney Writers' Festival has this big profile and it is regarded as one of the major cultural events, there is an expectation that we have the resources and the wealth of an event like the Sydney Festival, which is simply not true. We always do our best to present it as professionally as possible and it's a beautiful thing that it looks good, but a lot of it is done with smoke and mirrors.

Were claims that this perceptual problem extends to philanthropic organisations which she says are mostly reluctant to support an event and an organisation that appears to be succeeding well enough on its own. She also gave the example of the media being surprised that they weren't invited to an opening night party. "We can't afford to do it," she says, "but there is that expectation that as a major cultural event we will have all those trappings."

As did the directors of other literature organisations, Were explained that the core funding received provides for a bare minimum of staff. Sydney Writers' Festival operates

with a staff number roughly equivalent to the other major Australian festivals, but in comparison to overseas literary festivals, Were says, the number is low. She points out that a number of administrative tasks entailing significant responsibilities and skill are being given to volunteers, a less than desired situation but necessary, she says, to cope with the volume of work. Administrative matters such as annual leave have been mentioned several times in this report and Were indicates that leave is an issue at her organisation as well. The previous director received a substantial pay-out for untaken annual leave and was criticised by the Board for having allowed it to accumulate. Other organisations have referred to this same issue as a source of budgetary stress.

A final point in relation to Sydney Writers' Festival is one that is relevant to the entire literature sector: the importance of collaboration. Throughout the 26 interviews conducted for this study, collaboration and partnerships have emerged as commonalities. In an environment where funds are scarce and where the broad aims of contributing organisations are similar – the support of Australian writers and writing – collaboration is an imperative. Were outlined the many collaborative relationships engaged in by the Festival: collaborations with universities, sharing writers for events on campuses or, in one case, a university preferring to sponsor an event at the Festival's main Sydney location; collaborations with the many cultural centres around the Sydney region which hosted Festival events; collaborations with writers' centres – including Varuna and the NSW Writers' Centre – to host events and to share writers for masterclasses; partnerships in education, as outlined previously, and in technology; as well as corporate partnerships which often provide crucial in-kind support. As mentioned earlier, Sydney Writers' Festival has realised the importance of including in-kind support which off-sets real costs in the annual budget and now does so. The matter came up when corporate in-kind support providing big screening of events was not renewed leaving a gap of \$25,000 and meaning – because it hadn't been factored into the budget – that big screens could no longer be provided. Formalising the recognition of such 'real cost' in-kind support through financial reporting processes as well as in the usual acknowledgements (on web-pages or printed documents such as programs) is critical, as Were points out. It not only assists with contingency planning but also more accurately represents the full economic

value of events or undertakings. As so many other organisations spoke at length regarding the importance of collaborations – from literary journals, to writers centres, literature centres, and festivals – it is not only worth considering mechanisms or processes that will accurately measure these inputs but it may also be worthwhile for funding bodies to formally endorse such support, by acknowledging its role in sustaining the sector, and by rewarding those organisations that maximise collaborative engagements.

The objective across the sector is the same: to support Australian writers and writing. This occurs through the provision of skills-based programs and initiatives such as workshops or writers groups in metropolitan and regional locations; through the recognition of excellence in competitions, awards and prizes; by maintaining diverse opportunities to publish; by stimulating income-generating potential such as teaching, speaking and performing opportunities; through audience development endeavours at festivals, whether they are of regional, national and international stature; and through reader-focused programs that work, often in conjunction with the educational sector, to foster and develop the readers and the writers of tomorrow. Writers do not work in isolation; they depend upon a complex infrastructure that is in some ways robust but in many other ways quite fragile and precarious. This report has highlighted areas of strength and sites of stress across the sector. The Literature Board of the Australia Council, with its mandate “to support the excellence, diversity, vitality, viability and distinctiveness of Australian literature” will need to consider how best to bolster, encourage and support those organisations that together comprise this infrastructure.

[Sources of Information: Sydney Writers’ Festival website at <http://www.swf.org.au/>; Writers Talk website at <http://www.cli.nsw.edu.au/cli/WritersTalk/index.htm>; Interview with Wendy Were, 2 June 2008; email communication with Were, 18 August 2008]

## **Concluding Observations**

From this research, a number of issues emerge that warrant ongoing deliberation. These concluding observations are intended to draw attention to challenges and concerns widely experienced across the literature sector. These are followed by a number of measures that the Literature Board may wish to consider in its planning and provision of support for literature infrastructure, as well as several measures which literature organisations themselves may choose to pursue if they are not already doing so.

The first of the sector-wide issues is the tension which may be perceived between audience development on the one hand and skills and professional development on the other. Although potentially complementary, these two fundamental aspects of the literature sector can be, and often are, perceived as being disjunctive. On the micro-level, this disjunction is at times experienced by individual organisations and the public responses to their programming. A number of writers' centres spoke of their festivals being aimed towards one or the other of these two goals, with either audience or professional development being more appropriate, depending upon location and duration of the festival. Determining the best weighting in any one context can have a crucial bearing upon the success of an event. The potential for disjunction also exists in terms of the perceptions of one literature organisation towards another. Those organisations which focus predominantly upon the celebration of established talent and achievements of excellence tend not to recognise as relevant the priorities of organisations which devote more resources to fostering the skills of new writers. This leads, in some cases, to lack of cooperation or lack of engagement between organisations. Further, the perceptions of funding bodies can be influenced by this potential disjunction. Events which draw audiences of thousands and generate national media coverage can overshadow the significance of programming directed towards fewer participants and requiring long-term commitment. Clearly, both the celebration of excellence in audience-focused events and the nurturing and support of diverse new writing talent are essential to the health and vitality of the literature sector.

A second issue common across the literature sector is that of pressures on organisations resulting from conflicting national and state priorities or jurisdictions. This is evident in the lack of national representation in some aspects of the sector while in other areas there is a duplication of bodies claiming national representation. Organisations devoted to children's literature, for example, note the need for national coordination amongst the many state-based groups, some of which have a long track record while others are only now being established. In poetry, as this report has discussed, there is significant overlap in intended national coverage between groups, and yet each group faces the challenge of implementing a national program across states and territories with diverse funding mechanisms. Other organisations note that state support facilitates their reach into regional areas, but ends at state borders, with limited opportunities to gain comparable funding in other states due to the physical location of their office or centre, whether in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne or Perth. This applies to support for literary journals as much as it does to poetry tours or writers' residential workshops. A further state/federal issue is that of the coordination between literature organisations' programming and education departments in the various states. While some organisations pointed to successful cooperation with state education departments, and others reported successful national reach, still others lamented the difficulties encountered in their particular contexts. National facilitation of the wide spectrum of educationally-focused literature programming is an enormous challenge, but one that equally would be of enormous benefit.

While allocation of support for literature infrastructure through a competitive grant system promotes and rewards excellence and innovation, it may also contribute to stress being experienced as dissimilar organisations with distinct objectives and operations vie for the same, quite limited, funding opportunities. This reflects, of course, the reality that funding is inevitably limited; yet the efficacy of a children's literature organisation competing against a state writers' centre for key organisation status is questionable, when core funding awarded to one comes at the expense of that same core funding being lost by the other, when each serve quite different areas and priorities of the literature sector. As a result of this structurally reinforced competition, organisations are, on the one hand,



encouraged to defend their available resources (either access to writers or access to audiences). On the other hand, the process encourages organisations to match or claim to improve upon programs or operations performed by similar groups, with the ‘arms-race’ outcome referred to earlier in this study. Again, while the situation potentially encourages innovation, it can also result in duplication of outcomes and dilution of resources. A mechanism within the grant application process that acknowledged collaboration, partnerships and the sharing of resources might go some way towards relieving the stress this system produces.

Another aspect of the funding process that is causing stress is the reliance by many literature organisations on short-term program-specific funding. Across the sector, organisations point out the inefficiency of a system in which considerable staff time is expended upon the application and acquittal writing process, often to such a degree that the time and resources consumed in the effort to win small-sum grants come close to equalling the total amount gained by the grants. Not infrequently one literature program will require more than half a dozen grant applications to various funding bodies, with diverse objectives and with little overlap in reporting criteria. Directors, chairs and editors across the sector are one in their voicing of concern for the sustainability of literature activities given the disparate, frequently shifting and perennially uncertain funding mechanisms that need to be negotiated in order to stage literature events. The most immediately evident outcome of this process is the extreme difficulty of strategic planning within the literature sector.

A related concern is that of stress upon human resources. This report draws attention to the very limited staffing levels of most literature organisations. Literary magazines frequently operate with less than two full-time staff positions; most writers’ centres operate with less than three full-time positions; writers’ festivals featuring hundreds of events and drawing tens of thousands of audience members are held together by a handful of people. While it is admirable that these organisations continue to provide quality programs and products with so few people, they do so because the individuals involved perform beyond their designated hours, and they are often assisted by interns and

volunteers working in capacities beyond those expected in other sectors. As a consequence, not only are the individual employees at risk of overload and stress; the well-being of literature organisations is also threatened. Limited staffing, a result of limited funding, flows on to organisational challenges in managing issues such as annual leave, succession planning, career development, and marketing. It is significant that most organisations considered in this study commented that marketing efforts simply were not possible given their current staffing levels. The remark of one magazine editor that current funding was actually funding ‘to stagnate’ is pertinent in this regard. It should be noted, however, that this is not the situation for all organisations and the few exceptions point towards the benefits that may be realised when sufficient funding and staffing are achieved.

Finally, a set of challenges common across the literature sector relates to transformations occurring with regard to digital delivery and new technologies. This report has highlighted the many forms in which new technologies are being applied to the production, distribution and consumption of literature, including the changes occurring in educational publishing, the role of online components for literary magazines, online courses from writers’ centres, the digital presence of writers at festivals or the digital archive of their presence and the digital archive of poetry and its performance. Approaches to new technologies vary widely amongst the organisations examined: some have embraced the new and are exploring its possibilities for increasing readers and audiences and generating income; others point to funding shortfalls or technical difficulties which impede their engagement with digital formats; and still others appear reluctant to engage. What is clear, however, is that reading, writing and publishing are undergoing changes that each component of the literature infrastructure must address and respond to creatively in order to maintain the viability of the sector.

Turning to measures which the Literature Board may wish consider in delivering support to literature infrastructure, the most important of these are:

- The proportion of grant funding directed to infrastructure – and to maintain infrastructure – should reflect the vital role that literature organisations play in fostering and sustaining Australia’s literary production and reception.

- Provision of administrative support could be considered – through software applicable across the sector; through face-to-face consultation; through dedicated human resources made available to literature organisations.
- Assistance with marketing would benefit the sector – again, through access to software; through consultation; or through dedicated human resources.
- Assistance with audience/readership development could be achieved in a variety of ways: through subsidies for library subscriptions for literary magazines across states and territories; through coordination with state and territory education departments to facilitate the inclusion of literature organisations’ programs and materials; through broad international promotion of Australian writers and writing.
- Facilitation of national coordination should be a priority – beginning with support for annual meetings of directors of writers’ centres, writers’ festivals, children’s and youth literature organisations, poetry organisations.
- Mechanisms for developing formal partnerships could be considered between universities offering creative/professional writing courses and writers’ centres, genre-based groups and literary magazines and writers’ festivals.
- Collaboration at all levels should be rewarded: possibly factor collaboration into funding mechanisms and processes.

And, finally, while this report recognises that many literature organisations are already undertaking several, or most, of the measures below, the implementation of each of the following across the sector is worth consideration:

- Financial reporting needs to recognise and incorporate in-kind support.
- Annual leave commitments need to be met by organisations and staff.
- Formal strategic planning processes are essential.
- Succession planning should be addressed in the organisation’s strategic planning documents.
- The possibilities of new technologies delivering services and products to writers and publications and events to readers and audiences should be considered and pursued wherever appropriate.
- Collaborations and the sharing of resources with other literature organisations should be pursued whenever possible.

## Appendix – Interview Schedule

Brook Emery	Poets Union	7 April, 2008, Sydney
Johanna Featherstone	The Red Room Company	8 April, 2008, Sydney
Jeremy Fisher	Australian Society of Authors	8 April, 2008, Sydney
Madeleine Dignam and Peter Bishop	Varuna, The Writers' House	10 April, 2008, Katoomba
Ian Britain	<i>Meanjin</i> (former editor)	11 April, 2008, Canberra
Jeff Sparrow	<i>Overland</i>	14 April, 2008, Melbourne
Paula Kelly	Centre for Youth Literature	14 April, 2008, Melbourne
Teresa Bell and Chris Wallace-Crabbe	Australian Poetry Centre	15 April, 2008, Melbourne
Rosemary Cameron	Melbourne Writers Festival	15 April, 2008, Melbourne
Joel Becker	Victorian Writers Centre	16 April, 2008, Melbourne
Peter Rose	<i>Australian Book Review</i>	16 April, 2008, Melbourne
Sophie Cunningham	<i>Meanjin</i> (current editor)	16 April, 2008, Melbourne
Kate Eltham	Queensland Writers' Centre	18 April, 2008 (telephone)
Michael Campbell	Brisbane Writers' Festival	16 May, 2008 (telephone)
Lesley Reece	Fremantle Children's Literature Centre	21 May, 2008 (telephone)
Gina Mercer	<i>Island</i>	26 May, 2008, Katoomba
Emily Andersen and Bel Schenk	Express Media	27 May, 2008 (telephone)
Rose Wight	Adelaide Writers Week	27 May, 2008 (telephone)
Sandra Thibodeaux	NT Writers' Centre	28 May, 2008 (telephone)
Barbara Weisner	SA Writers' Centre	28 May, 2008 (telephone)
Arabella Lee	NSW Writers' Centre	30 May, 2008, Rozelle
Anne-Maree Britton	ACT Writers' Centre	30 May, 2008 (telephone)
Wendy Were	Sydney Writers' Festival	2 June, 2008, Sydney
Charlotte Wood	Author	2 June, 2008, Sydney
Ivor Indyk	<i>HEAT</i>	5 June, 2008, Bankstown