**President’s Report 2015-2016**

Fiona Lang



You are part of an august group – people with a passion for English teaching. In each of the schools in which I’ve worked, I’ve always been so impressed with the quality of the English staff. But in my role of management committee member and now president of The English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ), I have had the absolute privilege of working with a great many more who are part of this profession – in schools and within universities. Teaching is a noble profession and I like to think that English teachers stand very tall in this company.

Therefore, it is with pride that I stand here as your ETAQ president. We ‘do’ vital work with students in our classrooms and ETAQ’s role of supporting English teachers is equally vital.

Our secretary, Bronwyn Darben, has outlined the detail of ETAQ’s activities in the Secretary’s Report. There are some copies available and it can be found on our website for your reference. Today, I’ll share a few highlights.

**Membership**

Our membership is the core of our existence and individual membership has continued to grow in the past 4 years, up to 235 by the end of 2015. Student membership has almost doubled over the same period, whilst corporate membership has slightly reduced. The reach of our membership was, at the end of 2015, 2919, down slightly on the total for 2014. Interestingly, the number of recipients of E-pistles has increased strongly in 2015, sitting at 968 at the year’s end and 1038 currently.

ETAQ has continued its practice of assisting 5 members to attend the annual state conference and assisting with registration for the national conference in Canberra for 6 members. This will continue for the coming national conference in Adelaide from July 7-10. Great PD, great company and some lovely wineries await you in Adelaide. I’d certainly encourage all to attend. Early bird registrations close April 30.

ETAQ is only as strong as its membership and we encourage all teachers to support your organisation through continued membership personally and on a corporate basis.

**Professional Development**

2015 was a very strong year for attendance at PD events. The year started with a focus on reading with guest speaker Associate Professor Jackie Manuel at seminar 1. Seminar 2 turned its eyes on middle school with Professor Donna Pendergast. But at the state conference, we experienced an exciting dilemma – how to cope with expanding our numbers from our regular 210-250 to an event with 330 delegates? With Professor Bev Derewinka and John Marsden as our keynotes, early registrations told us we were onto a winning formula. Workshops needed to be expanded and repeated to accommodate the happy throng at the Bernadette Centre, the new building at Lourdes Hill College. We also included drinks at the end of the day supported by our sponsors. It was lovely to share the beautiful river views and contemplate our learnings.

English Communication was the focus of our after-school seminar and the year was rounded off with a literary breakfast sharing with journalist Sally Browne at a new venue, eves on the river. We are hopeful to be back at eves this year, confident that we will fill this venue with our 2016 speaker for the literary breakfast, Courier-Mail cartoonist, Sean Leahy.

Townsville had a strong year of events with Garry Collins visiting to present two different grammar days for our northern Queensland members. Anita Jetnikoff will be speaking there on April 23.

The Darling Downs also ran a series of successful events whilst the Cairns branch struggled in 2015. Currently, members in the Wide Bay are working on reinstituting their branch.

**Strategic planning**

2015 was the year where it became increasingly clear that ETAQ needed to set time aside for a thorough and far-ranging analysis of our plans for the future. We had pressing issues arising: matters of membership, best use of social media and sharing the resources of the organisation around the state. In response, ETAQ employed Jane Schmitt, CEO of the AMA, to lead a strategic planning day on February 27. Armed with the results of a membership survey, the management committee, as well as the presidents/reps from the Darling Downs, Townsville and Cairns, collaborated to design a plan to take us forward. We are very pleased with the result which will take us through to the end of 2019. It lays out for us our roadmap, a series of projects which we believe will build the quality of what ETAQ offers to its members.

Our biggest proposed change is to reconsider the structure of our committee in order to better use our collective talents to pursue our projects. Our committee of 17 is not the norm for governance nowadays and, as such, our committee is likely to be bringing to the AGM in 2017 a new structure with a smaller executive and stronger sub-committees which we think will better allow people to contribute. ETAQ already has formal committees for Professional Development and, now, Social Media. If you are interested in taking on a role within one of the subcommittees, please let me or anyone on the current committee know.

**Advocacy**

ETAQ focused on two main areas of advocacy for 2015, the changes to senior assessment and NAPLAN automarking. In response to the QCAA’s proposal to significantly change the senior assessment system, ETAQ conducted a forum for members around this at Seminar 1. Also, ETAQ responded, based on the results of this forum and the committee’s deliberations, to the survey asking for proposals around elements of the change. We advocated for a 30% quotient for the proposed exam (rather than 50%) as well as the need to maintain the strengths of the current panels.

ETAQ was represented on the QCAA’s Senior Assessment Working Group for English in semester one 2015 and has also been consulted around the setup of the trial of senior assessment membership. This year, the new Learning Area Reference Group for English (LARG) has a position on it for an ETAQ delegate. This place on the LARG is something ETAQ had in the past and Garry Collins has long been advocating for a return to this situation.

Nationally, the issue of auto-marking of NAPLAN writing from 2017 has become contentious. ETAQ, among others, has argued that whilst a machine can easily assess grammatical accuracy as well as a range of other technical elements of writing, it cannot yet judge meaning accurately or suitably. ETAQ has written to the minister, the shadow minister and ACARA to advocate to separate the auto-marking of writing from the other elements of on-line NAPLAN. Nationally, AATE is preparing for a broader conversation about the amount of double-marking of language conventions (through writing and through the Language Conventions Test) as well as the artificiality of the writing task as it currently exists.

With all aspects of advocacy, we urgently need the responses of our members to such issues as they arise. ETAQ wants to speak for you and strongly needs your responses to the big issues of the day – through emails or blogs on our website.

**Communication**

Communication continues to be an important element of ETAQ’s work. ETAQ’s Facebook account now has 243 members whilst ETAQ Epistles now reach 1038 recipients. *English Matters* is about to undergo a facelift and will come to you as an online newsletter from our next issue, as we adapt to what the technology can offer us. This will provide a more up-to-date product for members.

*English in Australia*, our national refereed journal, is also moving on-line in 2016 with ETAQ working towards just how this will be managed at state level for our members.

**Conclusion**

ETAQ remains very fortunate to have the talents of our administration officer, Trish Purcell, to support English teachers across the state. She brings a valued order and discipline to the careful stewardship of our money and resources but remains open to innovation, always in the best interests of English teachers. I’m sure all members would join me in thanking her for her contribution.

Many thanks to all the committee members for 2015-16. You have worked as a cohesive team to achieve important things for the benefit of members and your efforts are always very much appreciated. Thanks to Laura Cooke who is leaving us this year and welcome to Melissa Blacklock, who is our new committee member.

2015 was our year of planning. 2016 is our year of working on new projects as we prepare for 2017, our year to celebrate all that we have achieved, on behalf of our members, in the 50 years ETAQ has been operating. I look forward to working towards this celebration along with you, our most valued members.