

IARC President's Report

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by **John Mason, President International Approval and Registration Centre (IARC)**, Board Member Australian Garden Council, Principal ACS Distance Education, Publisher and Author.

Industry Update

The world has now removed many of the covid restrictions that have dominated our lives for the past couple of years, but we are left with a different world, economically, socially and in so many other ways. There are many factors at play, which have and will continue to impact the education industry (broadly) and in turn IARC (more specifically).

These factors include ongoing health issues, logistics and supply problems, war in Ukraine and climate change. Added to this, we have continuing technological change which has not slowed, despite the disruptions caused by these other factors. Increased volatility has thus become the norm in the wider world, and that includes the education industry.

The Current Status

Some of the impacts on industry include:

- Online education is reportedly grown by around 900% since the start of covid-19 pandemic. While some who have experience with online education have expanded; many others have become involved with delivering online, without being properly trained or experienced in the delicate differences between online and face to face education. Some new players have already crashed and burned. Others are learning and getting better. The state of play in online education is volatile and varied. Some online programs are very good and very stable, others are volatile and driven more by quick financial gain than by provision of quality education.
- Significant worker shortages, and sometimes critical shortages of skilled professionals have appeared in many industries. There is a shortage of tradespeople, health workers, and I.T. professionals in many countries. This issue may well have been brewing before the pandemic but has only been exaggerated since. Some reports for instance, suggest that there are only enough computer programmers looking for work, to fill 10% of the jobs available (in Australia). These shortages are exaggerated by reduced skilled migration and by people leaving professions. Many teachers for instance, found work outside of teaching over covid, during classroom lockdowns. Now we have fewer people in the workforce who have education experience.
- Ongoing risks of sickness is resulting in staff shortages in workplaces. For example when people get covid or the flu, a workplace may exclude them from coming to the workplace. Other workplaces that allow sick staff to come to work, can then find others get sick and stay away. Either way, the result is often there are fewer people attending the workplace than what was planned for.
- Financial pressures have been rising this year. The costs associated with providing an education service is increasing, and at the same time cost of living is increasing. Education businesses cannot easily increase income, because clients cannot easily afford increased costs. With increased pressure

on finding staff, it is becoming increasingly difficult to pay employees more to retain them. There is a financial crunch at play which is continuing to grow.

IARC Activity

IARC Remains Buoyant

In these volatile and uncertain times, IARC continues to remain strong. Over the past year:

- We have remained active on social media
- Committees have met via zoom out of both Australia and the UK
- Jade Sciascia, Melina Tuminello and Sandra Eberwein have done a stellar and very professional job in managing the website and social media, newsletters, dealing with correspondence, membership management, the Centre's financial obligations, development projects and attending to all other operational issues.
- Membership levels remain strong with the following changes over the past year:
 - 6 new members
 - 2 expired members
- Our financial position has remained stable with an increase of 7% growth in cash assets in 12 months. (This % does not include a further \$2.9k outstanding from accounts receivable).

Over the 2021-22 period, IARC has been even more active than over the previous year – we have seen a significant increase in interest in membership which we could assume is symptom of the increased numbers of online education businesses. We have grown our membership by 8%.

Over the past year, the IARC office has increased human resources. We have also identified the needs for increased IT programs to support our business. We opted to implement *Airtable* - a low code platform for customising workflow and customer relationship management – which enabled us to move our records management and data online. We have also opted to use SOC 2 Type II compliant smart forms with *Jotform* for increased efficiency, productivity, and security. These two systems have enabled us to improve many aspects of the Centre's workflow; the use of these systems will continue as we utilise their integration capabilities to embed payment widgets and other apps into our operations. These are an extremely affordable way to meet our customers needs and expectations.

Summary of Membership

We have a total of 81 members – this includes all categories of membership. Full fee-paying members, honorary members, and subsidiary memberships. This is 8% increase on membership from the 2021-22 membership year.

- We **approved six new members**.
- We **rejected zero** applications.
- We **lost two members** (reasons: business closure and debtor termination).
- We terminated the **one** membership.
- We wrote off a total of \$330 from debtors.
- There is **one nonfinancial member, with membership inactive and on hold**, due to business restructuring and takeover.
- There are **nine** members non-financial for the current year.
- There are four prospective member applications being worked on at present.
- There are a further two new members anticipated to be approved through the ACS Affiliations Network agreement.
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Final Thoughts

In closing, I want to revisit the reason why IARC was established. As a founding member I recall working with Peter Derig, Fay Chamoun, Carmel Thompson and Katie Freeth to respond to what we saw as a need to have an affordable, credible way of recognising the quality of an education enterprise in any country, irrespective of whether they were operating within or outside of government, industry or other mainstream systems. We recognised the importance of supporting diversity and innovation in education; and understood that sometimes other recognition systems, despite good intentions, were inadvertently diminishing innovation and diversity.

With warmest wishes,



Mr John Mason



Quality for Excellence in Education