



**The
Australian
Association
of
Special
Education
inc.**

*Quality
education
for all*

**AASE National
Handbook
Number 1**

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**HISTORY
OF
AASE**

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1.1 A Brief History of the Australian Association of Special Education Inc

By the end of the 1960s there were, in most states, organisations, predominantly of teachers, established often on a categorical basis, which provided a focus for teachers' work in teaching, professional development and mutual support. As resources for special education increased in the early 1970s, and as the needs and rights of handicapped children (as they were then known), became more widely recognised, many of these disparate groups amalgamated into state-wide organisations. They were still providing categorically delivered services but recognising the common orientations and methodologies of the discipline of special education. These state-wide teachers' organisations saw themselves as professional associations, although they admitted interested and enthusiastic persons from other fields, including parents, lecturers, academics, counsellors, consultants and administrators.

From 1974 onwards the value of a national body devoted to the advocacy of quality education services for persons with disabilities, learning difficulties and behaviour disorders was perceived by leaders of several of the state associations. Some of these were John Burge (Qld), Des English (Vic), Heather Martin (NSW), John Callanan (Vic), Warren Fairfax (NSW), and Jeff Bailey (Qld). After much discussion and sometimes lengthy debate it was decided to form the Australian Association of Special Education (AASE) in 1975 and an inaugural conference was held in Brisbane in 1976 with chapters in each state and territory. AASE would be a national, independent, broad-based, non-categorical association with a three tiered structure: national, chapter and branch.

AASE was established not as a professional association but as an advocate and lobbying organisation which also provided high quality professional services to its members and other. Its flagship publication, *The Australasian Journal of Special Education*, was first published in 1977.

The association holds an annual conference and is governed by a council representing all chapters which meets at least twice yearly to develop policy and strategies for securing quality service in special education. Conferences have been held as follows:

YEAR	VENUE	THEME	PRESIDENT
1976	Brisbane	<i>Parents and Professionals - a New Partnership in Special Education</i>	Des English
1977	Melbourne	<i>Cognitive versus Behavioural Theories</i>	Warren Fairfax
1978	Sydney	<i>Life without Labels</i>	Peter Rankine
1979	Adelaide		John Burge
1980	Canberra	<i>Responding to Need: Special Education in the 1980s</i>	John Burge
1981	Melbourne	<i>IYDP and Beyond - Devolution - Disintegration, Dissipation or Development</i>	John Burge
1982	Perth	<i>A Better Education for all Exceptional Children. Some principles for special education in the eighties. Where do we stand?</i>	Paul Duerdoth
1983	Brisbane	<i>Exceptional People: A Lifetime Commitment</i>	Paul Duerdoth
1984	Sydney	<i>Living and Learning Together</i>	Mary-Helen Martens
1985	Launceston	<i>Models of Cooperation</i>	Mary-Helen Martens
1986	Adelaide	<i>Responding to Expectations</i>	Mary-Helen Martens
1987	Melbourne		Heather Martin

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1988	Sydney		Heather Martin
1989	Auckland		Heather Martin
1990	Canberra	<i>Australian Achievements in Special Education</i>	Heather Martin
1991	Brisbane	<i>Crossing Boundaries - Present Realities - Future Possibilities</i>	John Elkins
1992	Perth	<i>Challenge for Change: Reform in the 1990s</i>	John Elkins
1993	Melbourne	<i>Quality Outcomes: a Showcase for Education</i>	Louise Blue
1994	Adelaide	<i>Partnerships in Teaching & Learning</i>	Louise Blue
1995	Darwin	<i>Forging Links</i>	Louise Blue
1996	Hobart		Jan Foot
1997	Brisbane	<i>Embracing Diversity</i>	Jan Foot
1998	Canberra	<i>Making It Work</i>	Jan Foot
1999	Sydney	<i>Excellence in a New Century</i>	Wendy Castles
2000	Perth	<i>Drawing Us Together</i>	Wendy Castles
2001	Melbourne	<i>Unity & Diversity Within Special Education</i>	Wendy Castles
2002	Adelaide	<i>Building on Strengths</i>	Bernard Knight
2003	Darwin	<i>Balancing Cultures</i>	Bernard Knight
2004	Hobart	<i>Behaviour – Whose Choice?</i>	Bernard Knight
2005	Brisbane	<i>Making Meaning: Creating Connections that Value Diversity</i>	Bernard Knight
2006	Canberra	<i>Learning Together: Leading Practice in Inclusive Education</i>	Bernard Knight

In 1988, AASE sponsored the Australia Disability Achievement Foundation which aims to promote educational opportunities for people with disabilities which will assist them to achieve their occupational, social and personal goals in life. The foundation, through the “Kids Can’t Wait” program provides financial grants to children and adults with disabilities to enable access to educational programs, specialised equipment and/or specialised support. Since 1990 almost \$28 000 has been awarded to students with disabilities. While AASE chapters, branches and individuals currently carry out most of the fundraising, sponsorship from the corporate sector is vital for the continued existence of ADAF.

1.2 Inaugurating Associations

The Associations that co-operated to form the Australian Association of Special Education in 1975 were:

- The Association of Special Teachers of Victoria
- The Queensland Special Education Association
- Special Class Teachers Association (South Australia)
- New South Wales Association of Special Education Teachers (ASET)
- Tasmanian Association for Teachers of Exceptional Children
- Western Australian Association of Special Education
- Northern Territory Association of Special Education
- ACT Association of Professionals Concerned with the Handicapped

1.3 AASE Retrospect and Challenge

Mary-Helen Martens, President, Australian Association of Special Education: Adelaide 1986

In celebrating ten years of the Australian Association of Special Education it is perhaps worthwhile and timely to reflect, not only on the progress and achievements of the Association, but also to consider the challenges which will face us in the next decade.

No retrospective look at the Australian Association of Special Education would be complete without a brief sketch of the history of the Association.

By the early seventies there was a growing national movement in special education and the Karmel Committee had emphasised the need for growth and cohesion of special education in Australia. The newly formed Schools Commission established an advisory group of special educators and it was from these discussions that the benefits which could emanate from national policy and discussion became obvious. In June 1975, a meeting was organised in Melbourne, which brought together representatives of teacher groups involved in special education in all states. There were delegates from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, ACT, Tasmania and Western Australia. It is interesting to note that these original groups were mainly teacher organisations and by title (at least) teachers of special classes, rather than special education.

The meeting was successful in achieving its aims and a decision was made to form a national association to be called the Australian Association of Special Education. A draft constitution and a set of aims were written - AASE was born!

Barrie O'Connor from Queensland was elected the President of an interim Executive. An inaugural conference and Annual General Meeting were planned when it was proposed to formally adopt the Constitution and elect the first formal Executive. The first National Conference was held at Mt Gravatt in September 1976 - the program, even by today's standards, was excellent. The theme "Parents and Professionals - a New Partnership In Special Education" is as relevant now as it was then.

At the Mt Gravatt Conference, the first AGM was held, an Executive elected and the Constitution of the Association was adopted. Des English from Victoria was elected as the Inaugural President of the AASE. Des has been one of the driving forces towards the instigation of the initial 1975 meeting and had been a leading special educator in Victoria for many years. The 1977 conference and AGM were planned to be held in August at the Phillip Island Conference Centre with the theme being based on the Cognitive Versus Behavioural Theories Debate. The death of Des English, just prior to the conference, saddened everyone. However, I believe it strengthened our resolve to ensure that AASE continued to work towards enhancing the education of those with special needs. The work of Des English, a man of vision, integrity and sincerity, is commemorated with the presentation of the Des English Memorial Lecture at each Annual Conference.

May 1977 saw the publication of the first issue of the Australian Journal of Special Education with Dr Jeff Bailey as the Inaugural Editor. As Jeff stated in that first edition:

This Journal, which is the official publication of AASE is intended initially to promote a spirit of community among Special Educators in all parts of our country. As well as promoting this esprit de corps, the journal aims to provide a venue for Special Educators to publish articles of merit and value on the teaching of special children.

The journal has continued to provide a forum in which special educators can express ideas and share their expertise and experiences with their colleagues.

In 1978, with Warren Fairfax from New South Wales as President, the third National Conference was conducted in Sydney. The theme, "Life Without Labels" investigated the process of categorising and labeling as it related to the delivery of services. It was at about this time that an intense debate was occurring re the style of membership of AASE - who should or should not belong. Basically the issue was whether AASE should be a broadly based interest group open to anyone prepared to abide by the Constitution or should it be a narrowly based group concerned only with teachers who work in special education. This debate was to continue for some time. At the AGM in Sydney it also became clear that AASE needed a more detailed policy and direction. Sub-committees were formed to investigate policy, finances and the Constitution.

With the election of Peter Rankine from South Australia as President, the 1979 conference was planned for Adelaide. The South Australian group was very small and the effort of organising the

Conference had left virtually no time to devote to the National Association. It was obvious that the nexus of the Conference going to the state of the President and being the culmination of a Presidential year had to be broken. This was, in a sense, a landmark decision, because now the President and the Executive were freed to devote their energies to the development of the Association.

The first real signs of progress towards a National identity were evident at the Adelaide Conference. The National Council began to tackle the issue of unity. There was strong support that the Association needed to be truly unified. The loose affiliation which existed did nothing to enhance the Association's capacity to be accepted as a national voice in special education. It was also in Adelaide that the Association adopted its first policy statement. These statements were a mixture of philosophies, practices and ideas drawn from special educators throughout Australia. The policy resolutions emphasised education for all children. Educational programs in appropriate settings were suggested and "appropriate" was defined. The role of parents, family and other professionals and teachers was outlined. The issues of accountability, early identification and intervention, of continuing education, of teacher education, the range of services and labelling were also addressed. The adoption of this policy was a milestone.

The Executive of the Association moved to Queensland in 1979 with John Burge elected President. With the 1980 Conference planned for Canberra, the Executive were able to devote their time to issues of concern nationally. The 1980 Conference "Responding to Need: Special Education in the 1980's" focussed on accountability and few of those who attended will ever forget the excellent papers presented by Professor Robert Strom on shared accountability and the opening address by Her Excellency Lady Cowen. It was during this conference that the Executive met with the Federal Education Minister (then - Mr Wal Fife) and the Opposition Shadow Minister (Senator John Button). These discussions were fruitful and demonstrated that AASE could be recognised nationally by policy makers. This initiative has been well maintained and the Association enjoys an excellent rapport with the present Minister, Senator Susan Ryan. The Association, through these early initiatives, has moved closer towards becoming accepted as an authoritative voice with worthwhile opinions which can contribute at a Federal level.

Within the National Council of AASE the debate re the structure and membership of the Association continued. Council finally agreed that a cohesive national association was essential, thus a new Constitution should be drafted which would allow a restructuring of AASE into the format of a national body, state chapters and local branches. A Constitution sub-committee was asked to produce a draft constitution. We are all indebted to the then National Executive (John Burge, Ron Parry and Stuart Stieler) for the enormous amount of time and effort which they expended to produce what is the basis of our Constitution today.

The 1981 National Conference was conducted at Mannix College in Melbourne. It was appropriate that it was here in Melbourne, where AASE began six years earlier, that the new Constitution was adopted. The theme of the Conference focussed on the decentralisation of special education services and it was perhaps appropriate that the Association was also moving in that direction. With the adoption of the new constitution by the National Council, all that remained to be achieved re the new structure was for each State to formally adopt the constitution and become a State Chapter of the National Group. Hence the change of name for all State Groups to, for example, AASE - New South Wales Chapter. John Burge was the first President to stand and be re-elected for a second term of office and in fact, it was not until January 1982 that Paul Duerdoth from Victoria took office.

The period from 1982 to 1984 was one of consolidation. All states established chapters and members began to identify with AASE as their National Association. Successful conferences were conducted in Perth in 1982 and in Brisbane in 1983. It was in Brisbane that teacher education (in-service and pre-service training) became the hot issue. Resolutions were presented to the total Conference for ratification regarding the special education content in all teacher education courses. AASE began to address national issues in a more organised manner. Contacts were pursued at a Federal level and an identity began to emerge.

The 1984 National Conference in Sydney was opened by Senator Susan Ryan, the Minister for Education, who has continued up to the present day to show an interest in the Association and an empathy for its policies. Mary-Helen Martens from the ACT was elected President and is currently serving her third term of office. The location of the National Executive in Canberra has ensured easier access to both the Federal Minister for Education and the officer of the Commonwealth Schools Commission. The Association has responded to all major reports pertaining to special education within Australia and has, I believe, slowly established a credibility with political decision makers and senior public servants. This is evidenced by the fact that it has been recommended that there be AASE representation on the National Advisory Body on Special Education and on the state Committees which will provide consultation and advice to the Commonwealth Schools Commission Special Education Programs. This is, I believe, a major achievement and one I have dreamed of, as I stated at the National Conference in Launceston, in 1985.

I believe in the Australian Association of Special Education and I dream of the day when we will be a voice to be listened to and respected. I dream of the day when we will no longer have to fight to see a Minister, no longer fight to be heard. I dream of the day when our views will automatically be sought.

A small part of the dream is becoming a reality.

The 1985 National Conference held in Launceston was aptly titled "Models of Cooperation". For a Chapter the size of Tasmania to organise such a highly stimulating and successful conference, an enormous amount of dedication and cooperation on the part of all had been required. 1985 was also a time of intense activity for the Executive in responding to the plethora of reports which were released on special education across Australia. The advocacy role of AASE continued.

"Responding to Expectations", the theme of the 11th National Conference in Adelaide, provided all special educators with the opportunity to reflect on their philosophy and objectives in the light of current expectations and developments. The expectations which we face as special educators come from diverse sources and we are constantly faced with change. The nature of special education itself has changed dramatically over the last two or three decades. We therefore have to be aware of the changes and how best to respond and initiate if we are to be accountable.

Other major aspects of the Association's development have included the establishment of Interest Groups - The Special Education Tertiary Educators Interest Group and the Special Education Computer Interest Group. The expertise and consultative capacity of these two groups is virtually limitless and will, I believe, provide a focus and direction for lobbying and projects in the years to come. AASE has commenced networking with other associations and organisations with an interest in the welfare of those with special education needs. It is envisaged that joint statements could be made on specific issues. AASE advocacy and lobbying power will only come from its ability to coordinate action on educational issues. Our strength lies in our expert membership, in our specific brief, ie education; and in our structure which allows branch or state issues to be addressed either locally or from a cohesive national lobby.

The gold issue of the journal is a celebration of ten years of AASE. We do, I believe, have cause to celebrate. However, we must not allow ourselves to feel complacent. What legacy do we want the Australian Association of Special Education to provide for those children and adults whom we represent? What are the challenges which lie ahead of us?

The challenges for AASE over the next decade are multi-faceted and perhaps fall into two main areas:

service to members

service to the children and adults with special education needs whom we represent.

Members of AASE expect the Association to provide a forum for the communication and sharing of philosophies, research and practices which are relevant to the education of persons with special needs. The Association must provide practical support to its members; it must be seen as some remote or insular group of people based in Canberra or wherever, who do not really know or care about the practicalities of special education. The strength of the Association lies in its structure, which allows and in fact encourages the involvement of members at a local level. Branches and Chapters

must strive to empower members by creating opportunities for professional interchange, mutual support and constructive criticism. Professional growth and a positive self concept do not just miraculously occur overnight. In fact, in special education, stress, despondency and burnout are more the norm. AASE has a responsibility to ensure that all members gain personally and professionally from belonging to the Association. The challenge, therefore, is to ensure active participation from all members by providing opportunities for involvement, opportunities for growth in knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is true to say that the more one is involved in an organisation, the more one gains from it. Therefore, AASE must encourage active involvement from all members - each member must believe that they have something to contribute and something to gain from belonging to AASE. We have the structure to really provide something worthwhile for members, to ensure that members develop professionally, to ensure that they are supported by their colleagues - are we meeting those needs? Meeting the needs of individual members is a challenge for the next decade.

AASE is expected to provide the support and the advocacy to assist those with special education needs to overcome what is often their powerlessness. This has been and will continue to be the challenge. We must continue to be the authoritative voice on education matters for these persons. We must enunciate our strength, emphasise our education brief, and convince people of the enormous expertise and potential within AASE.

Our advocacy role must always be to the forefront of our minds. Thus it will be essential that links with policy makers are not only continued but strengthened. AASE should strive to use its resources in the most powerful and meaningful way. Collaboration with other associations on education issues will be essential if the quality of education issues will be essential if the quality of education for those with special needs is to be enhanced. AASE has the strength, the ability to coordinate on specific issues and must therefore continue to liaise with these associations. AASE must maximise its effectiveness, its voice. We cannot necessarily always act alone. Part of the challenge is to prove to others that we speak competently and clearly; that we act responsibly and that we are knowledgeable in the field of education.

The challenge is there for us all. How we respond, and the effectiveness of the Australian Association of Special Education in meeting the challenges ahead, depends on the dedication and commitment of all members.

1.4 Relationships with Other Organisations

Since its inception in 1975, AASE has worked assiduously to establish a highly regarded credibility in special education, reflecting research and best practice in the field.

AASE, as a national broad-based, independent, non-categorical association in special education, is called upon from time to time to co-operate with other bodies that purport to have similar aims and objectives. In deciding whether to co-operate with such bodies, AASE must satisfy itself that those bodies' aims and methods are congruent with AASE policy and practice. AASE will also take note of the present and past reputations and credibility of such organisations. At no time can AASE allow its core policies and values to be compromised, for some apparently beneficial short-term alliance.