

AHISA 25 YEARS

1985-2010



Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia



Association of Heads
of Independent Schools
of Australia



Foreword

In times of rapid change we can often find ourselves driven by the immediacy of the present and imminence of the future. It is all too easy to forget the wisdom accrued from our past or lose our sense of shared history. AHISA has chosen to mark its 25th year by reflecting on its story and, because as an organisation our business is about humans – about Principals and the students, staff and families in their school communities – and because our values are human values, we have chosen to tell that story through those who have served as AHISA National Chairs.

AHISA is a national organisation, with national aims and a national agenda, and it is the national story that is presented here. It is important to recognise, however, the role of the state and territory Branches in this work and the huge contribution through them that AHISA has also made to Australian schooling at state and territory level. The work of all the many, many members of AHISA who have contributed so much to the organisation and who have not been named here must also be acknowledged.

The key to understanding the story of AHISA is to recognise that what AHISA is, what it does and how it has evolved all result from human values and aspirations. In the last 25 years AHISA has developed dramatically. It has moved location, changed its legal structure and refined its professionalism as an organisation, yet its core energy and aspirations still flow from the synergies created by a collective of aspiring, highly principled, autonomous educational leaders who generously serve and support each other and, at the same time, humbly seek to learn from each other.

To be an effective organisation when you are an association of passionate, autonomous leaders all with diverse views is not without challenge. That AHISA has managed this in all its 25 years – and, arguably, often managed it with great if unsung glory – is because its members hold in common the belief that the education of young people matters, and that educational leaders have a particular role and responsibility in delivering to young people an education that will make a real difference in their lives.



Simon Murray

*AHISA National Chair
2009-11*

Simon Murray is Headmaster, St Peter's College, SA. He was Headmaster, Canberra Grammar School, ACT from 1998 to 2010 and Headmaster of Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School, WA from 1991 to 1998.

Our story also shows that AHISA's evolution as an organisation is not separate to the wider story of Australian school education. Our past is very much linked to how we have both contributed to and responded to that larger story. Certainly we see our future as continuing to contribute to it and, we hope, continuing to help shape it. ■

CELEBRATING **25** YEARS

The National Story

AHISA is an organisation with a venerable pre-history. It formed from the amalgamation of the Headmasters' Conference of Independent Schools of Australia (known as HMC) and the Association of Heads of Independent Girls' Schools of Australia (AHIGSA). Both of these organisations had their own long histories, with their earliest Australian roots dating to the first half of the 20th century. Both were culturally influenced by their antecedents in the British independent schools sector and together brought to AHISA a rich inheritance from a long tradition of excellence and high standards in school education and leadership.

The increasing number of coeducational independent schools in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s and recognition of common interests best met through combined action set the context for amalgamation. Both HMC and AHIGSA had already moved closer through shared sessions at back-to-back national conferences and joint meetings at state level, making amalgamation a more tenable concept than the establishment of a third organisation for Heads of coeducational schools. The trumping of common experience and purpose over individual difference was to become a distinguishing characteristic of AHISA.

'We spent about 10 years wooing each other,' recalls Nigel Creese, then Headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School and a member of the joint working parties on amalgamation over that period. 'As I remember it HMC were doing the wooing; the women were very cautious. By the time the issue went to vote at the 1983 Conferences in Brisbane the decision to amalgamate was pretty near unanimous.'

AHISA is formed

Amalgamation was formalised at a joint Amalgamation Conference at Canberra Grammar School, ACT from 25-30 August 1985. Dr Maxwell Howell, then Chairman of HMC and Kathleen McCredie, President of AHIGSA, jointly chaired a meeting of the two organisations at which both were wound up, a constitution for AHISA adopted and Nigel Creese, then secretary of HMC, elected as the first AHISA National Chair.

A press release issued on the merger noted that the objects of AHISA 'emphasise the Association's wish to contribute to the education welfare of all children in Australia, and to consider and respond to governments' decisions and actions which affect the education of those in both government and non-government schools'. These objects still inform the business of AHISA.

Nigel Creese recalls that the work of the first AHISA Standing Committee, or governing body, elected for the period 1985-87 was dominated by the need to ensure the fledgling association was up and running effectively, both nationally and through its state and territory Branches. Bill Dickinson, then Headmaster of Scotch College, Perth and AHISA's first Secretary, had produced a draft constitution. As well, a draft guide to policy and practices was prepared by Tony Rae, then Headmaster of Newington College, NSW for discussion at Branch level. This covered issues such as the relationship between the Head and the school governing body, procedures for the appointment of the Head, the Head's emoluments and conditions, appointment of staff, guidelines for looking after new teachers and award of scholarships.



Nigel Creese AM

AHISA National Chair
1985-87

Nigel Creese was Headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School from 1970 to 1987 and Acting Headmaster of Beaconhills College, Vic in 1989. He was Headmaster of Christ's College, NZ from 1963 to 1970.

'I believed in this new organisation called AHISA. I'd been on the amalgamation working parties for nearly 10 years. It was a slow wooing. We wooed each other by having joint meetings and doing things together. Finally the union was consummated.'

VALE

Bill Dickinson AM

AHISA National Chair
1987-89

Bill Dickinson was Headmaster of Scotch College, WA from 1972 to 1997. He died on 2 May, 2006.

Bill Dickinson was held in high regard by his AHISA colleagues. He is remembered for his tremendous contribution to AHISA, as its first Secretary and then as National Chair and as the shaping hand of the organisation's first constitution, its first photographic booklet of members and the first Handbook for Heads. It was under Bill Dickinson's chairmanship that an AHISA secretariat was first established.





‘AHISA is an organisation with aspirations, but it exists primarily for the benefit of Heads.’

Over time this evolved into the AHISA Handbook for Heads, now published on the AHISA website as a series of separate advisory documents.

‘AHISA is an organisation with aspirations, but it exists primarily for the benefit of Heads,’ explains Simon Murray, presiding AHISA National Chair. ‘That focus has been consistently maintained throughout our history, through the resources we produce for Heads and aspiring Heads such as the Handbook documents, through individual and collegial support nationally and at Branch level and through the professional development offered in our conference program.’

It is expected that all AHISA members will attend the AHISA Biennial Conference.

‘I regarded the Biennial Conference as one of the really big responsibilities of my chairmanship,’ recalls Dr Ruth Shatford, AHISA National Chair in 1991-93. ‘Apart from networking, the conference was an opportunity for us as Heads to in-service ourselves in a broad way. It needed to be a time for Heads to be challenged, refreshed and personally expanded.’

Diversity and common purpose

While the new association was swift to establish and progress its core business, amalgamation also highlighted core differences in the membership.

Dr Judith Hancock, AHISA National Chair in 1995-97, recalls that a key issue for Heads at the time of the amalgamation and for some years after was the significant difference in terms and conditions for the appointment of

male and female Heads. The issue became more complex as more married women were appointed as Heads.

The new association also brought together Heads equally passionate in advocating either single gender or coeducational schools. Dr Ruth Shatford recalls that debate over single sex versus coeducation was a live issue during her chairmanship. The different levels of government funding available to schools were a further tension. ‘We wanted to ensure the association worked collaboratively, so that it genuinely gave support and scope for people’s sectional interests,’ she says. ‘It needed everyone to be mindful of our differences and committed to supporting each other in spite of them and through them. I think overall we did fairly well.’

The award of scholarships has been a recurring item on the agenda for meetings of AHISA’s Standing Committee, and is at times hotly contested at Branch level. While AHISA produces guides to policy and practice for members it is not, however, a regulatory body.

Barbara Stone, AHISA National Chair in 2007-09 says that the tension between collegiality and competition among AHISA members has never weakened the organisation. ‘It is not realistic to expect that we would achieve an environment where there isn’t a tension between collegiality and competition. What is more important is that we agree overall that there is a greater good. The way AHISA manages the dynamic between collegiality and competition is therefore to make explicit that we share an understanding of leadership that relates to making a difference in other people.’

Focus on autonomy

Emerging as an issue from AHISA's earliest days were criteria for membership. Bishop Greg O'Kelly, AHISA National Chair in 1989-91 recalls that many members were of the view that AHISA's strength lay in containing its size. 'There was a concern that the collegiality among members, which was seen as the greatest benefit to members, could be overwhelmed by sheer numbers and a multiplicity of ethos and philosophies.'

The tension between what some National Chairs describe in terms of inclusivity and exclusivity of membership is perennial in the organisation. A contributing issue, of how to extend support to newly appointed Heads at schools not yet meeting the membership criteria (such as offering upper secondary education), was resolved by creating a category of provisional membership. The larger issue of membership is always referred for resolution to a core principle, that AHISA is an association of Heads who, while working within the strategic framework of the school governing body, have considerable autonomy.

'The shape of AHISA's membership is always a live topic and an entirely appropriate discussion in our 25th year,' says Simon Murray. 'We are now considering if membership of AHISA might be a powerful way to promote Principal autonomy as a model of leadership for effective schools, within the context of how best to serve the needs of those Heads who already meet current membership criteria.'

Simon Murray says that while diversity in the membership must always be a point of tension in the organisation, it is also recognised as bringing breadth and

depth. 'Our history shows we can embrace quite disparate educational approaches. We have always moved cautiously on membership criteria because we do not want in any way to weaken the collegial support that is a key function of AHISA or the informal collaborative mechanisms that contribute so much to our strength as an organisation.'

Contribution and collaboration

While its membership is anchored in autonomous leadership, AHISA's story shows that collaboration and contribution are strong organisational values that inform both its internal and external action.

At the same time it moved to meet the challenges faced by any fledgling organisation and the challenges particular to an association of Heads who are competitors as well as colleagues, AHISA also quickly established an external focus. By the end of its first two years it had already contributed to public debate and policy development in education through submissions covering quality and equality in education, teacher education, the education of girls, the education of the gifted and talented, overseas students and schooling in rural Australia. It had also sought ways to form relationships with the government schools sector in terms of teacher education and curriculum development and collaborated with Principals in the government sector through the Australian High Schools' Principals' Association.

AHISA today enjoys strong relationships with the Australian Primary Principals Association, Catholic Secondary Principals Australia and the Australian

Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ AM

AHISA National Chair
1989-91



Bishop Greg O'Kelly was Head of Saint Ignatius' College, SA from 1978 to 1981 and from 1994 to 2006. He was Headmaster of St Ignatius' College, NSW from 1982 to 1993.

'The great benefit of AHISA is to be able to talk through educational leadership issues with colleagues who all agree on the value of what they are doing and are seeking to do it better. You're not sitting down with people you've got to convince.'

Dr Ruth Shatford AM

AHISA National Chair
1991-93



Dr Ruth Shatford was Principal of Tara Anglican School for Girls, NSW from 1980 to 1999.

'Because we were autonomous Principals we had more freedom to initiate cross-sectoral exchanges, for example the Alliance of Girls' Schools. The other side of the autonomy coin is responsibility – enormous responsibility – and it was accepted.'

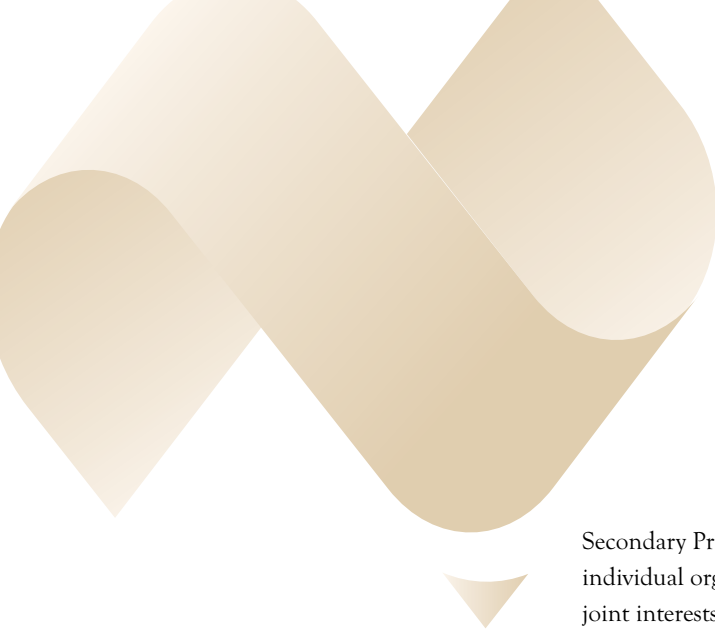
John Moody AM

AHISA National Chair
1993-95



John Moody was Co-Principal of Pembroke School, SA when it formed from the amalgamation of King's College and Girton Girls' School in 1974, until 1979. He was Headmaster of Guildford Grammar School, WA from 1979 to 1996.

'An issue was the corporatisation of schools, which has been embraced too readily, especially in the use of key performance indicators for the appraisal of Heads. Schools are financial enterprises, but they are very different from an accounting firm or a clothing manufacturer or a retail shop.'



Contribution and collaboration drive the direction of much of AHISA's external focus.

Secondary Principals Association as individual organisations and through joint interests in Principals Australia. AHISA provided the executive and secretarial support to help establish Principals Australia (then known as Australian Principals' Associations' Professional Development Council or APAPDC) and today is the nominated representative for Principals' associations on the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

AHISA's interest in contributing to school leadership also crosses national boundaries. Since 1998 it has been a member and now serves on the Council of the International Confederation of Principals.

AHISA also seeks to make the practical wisdom of its members and best practice in members' schools available to all Australian school leaders through contribution at conferences and through the pages of its biannual journal, *Independence*. Attendance at AHISA's biennial Pastoral Care Conference is also open beyond members' schools.

Finding a national voice

While contribution and collaboration drive the direction of much of its external focus, AHISA also seeks to influence the development of school education in Australia.

The will to contribute and influence is an inherited trait. Members of HMC and AHIGSA were instigators and leaders in founding the Junior Schools' Conference (now Independent Primary School Heads of Australia), the Bursars' Conference (now Association of School Business Administrators), state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), the National Council of

Independent Schools (NCIS, now called ISCA, the Independent Schools Council of Australia), the Australian College of Educators and the Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria (IARTV, now known as the Centre for Strategic Education).

It was then not unusual for Heads to be consulted directly by governments about proposed policies in education as the Commonwealth first felt its way into what constitutionally is the preserve of the states and territories.

Consciousness of the need for a 'national voice' was expressed in AHISA's first years. 'We believed there was a lot we could – and should – be saying about education,' recalls John Moody, AHISA National Chair in 1993-95.

The establishment of a secretariat in Canberra was considered as early as 1986 when AHISA was invited to share space in NCIS House. It was then 'too early and too expensive'. Instead, the organisation continued to be run out of the school offices of the AHISA National Chair and Secretary until the volume of work led to the establishment of a part-time secretariat 'in the photocopying cupboard' at the offices of IARTV in Melbourne. Nigel Creese, who had by then retired from Melbourne Grammar School, was appointed as part-time Executive Officer.

AHISA's developing program of conferences and the need for assistance for AHISA working parties and sub-committees then led to the appointment in 1991 of a part-time Assistant Executive Officer, Harry Macdonald, another former member who had been Headmaster of The Peninsula School in Victoria.

The impending retirement of Nigel Creese and Harry Macdonald in 1995 coincided with a growing awareness

of the need to invest in modernising the secretariat's operations. A full-time Administration Manager (Rosalind Christie) was appointed, accommodation in IARTV's Mercer House in Melbourne was refurbished and the secretariat computerised and connected to the internet. Dr Judith Hancock recalls that one of her goals as National Chair was to create an identity for AHISA. 'We needed a logo and a letterhead that proclaimed who we were,' she says.

Towards the end of 1999 Hazel Day, a former member who had been Principal of PLC, Perth was appointed Executive Assistant to the AHISA National Chair. This position was designed to support the educational needs of Standing Committee and members, enable closer connections with other educational associations and help AHISA elevate its profile as a peak educational body through well researched and professionally presented submissions.

AHISA moved confidently into the new millennium with a professionally structured secretariat supporting a full national program of work informed by the values of collaboration, contribution and collegiality.

AHISA was at the same time refining its organisational structure. In 1993 the composition of its Standing Committee was changed to ensure representation of each Branch by at least one member. This reflected the constitutional and political realities of schooling provision in Australia and at the same time served to enrich dialogue at the national level while feeding a national perspective back to Branch discussions. 'This meant the Branches could together act nationally and also handle common issues in a common way,' recalls John Moody.

While AHISA was formed as a national body, its Branches reflect the diversity of school regulatory arrangements across the states and territories. AHISA Branches are as actively engaged in state and territory education issues as in national issues and are AHISA's chief vehicle for the collegiality and fellowship that are of such benefit to members.

The first national test of the new structure was the Howard government's proposed change in federal funding arrangements for non-government schools.

'The funding of independent schools was a huge issue,' recalls Dr Gordon Donaldson, AHISA National Chair in 1997-99. 'Judith Hancock and I met with Dr David Kemp (then federal Minister for Education) in Canberra a couple of times and responded to his questions as best we could on behalf of AHISA. Until then AHISA had never really sought to establish firm positions because it was a collective of individuals each with their own opinion. AHISA members and the Branches were busily engaged in the debates in their own states but to have a collective opinion within AHISA on a national issue was very difficult to ascertain. The Howard government wanted to speak with organisations associated with schools and AHISA was one of them. This accelerated AHISA's evolution.'

Supporting purposeful engagement

The political goal posts in education then shifted further as the Howard government began to wrestle the states and territories for a leadership role in school education. 'We were used to our state governments telling us what to do,' recalls Malcolm Lamb, AHISA National Chair in 2003-05.

Dr Judith Hancock AM

AHISA National Chair
1995-97



Dr Judith Hancock was Headmistress of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School from 1977 to 2001 and Administrator of Rockhampton Girls Grammar School from 2002 to 2003.

'We need to value and appreciate the wealth of talent that exists in our schools and learn that cooperation not competition can actually be empowering. Sharing knowledge is the key to breaking down barriers and strengthening our entire educational system.'

Dr Gordon Donaldson AM

AHISA National Chair
1997-99



Dr Gordon Donaldson was Principal of Scotch College, Vic from 1983 to 2007.

'Heads naturally enough seem to take on the personality of their school, which inevitably dictates how they approach education. The broad range of schools represented in AHISA's membership has therefore brought a breadth of perspectives. It is not always easy to find common ground with a colleague if their school's circumstances are miles apart from your own, but it's worth working on.'

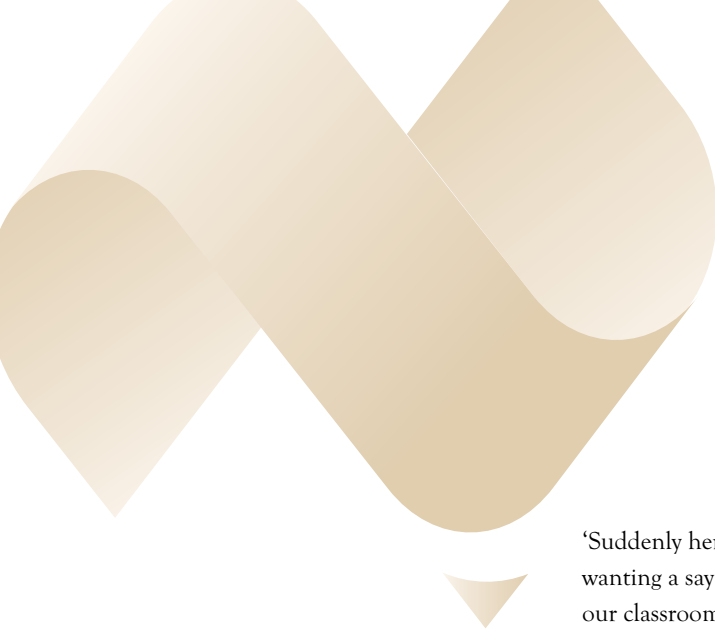
Fr Chris Gleeson SJ

AHISA National Chair
1999-2001



Fr Chris Gleeson was Headmaster of Xavier College, Vic from 1981 to 1992 and Headmaster of St Ignatius' College, NSW from 1993 to 2002.

'Teacher quality was always a topical issue. We were concerned with teacher education and also practical questions of how we can we attract the best teachers and how we can hold on to them. These questions are perennial, and rightly so because to my mind teachers are the big shapers.'



‘Our contribution to pastoral care in schools and how schools deal with social issues has been one of the most profound ways we have exercised influence in Australian education.’

‘Suddenly here was another government wanting a say in what happened in our classrooms.’

During her term as National Chair in 2001-03, Noelene Horton challenged AHISA to ‘reimagine’ itself in the face of a rapidly expanding national education agenda. ‘Noelene stirred the pot to put us in a better position to be a national voice for education,’ recalls Malcolm Lamb. ‘Until we grasped that I think we were always going to be a very good collegial organisation that did some great work in things like social issues, but we had to go further than that.’

Other Principals’ groups were also being challenged by the emerging national education agenda which, because of AHISA’s collaborative relationships with them, was adding to the workload of the National Chair. As a national organisation, AHISA was also called to play a consultative and representative role with government departments and agencies.

In 2002 the role of the Executive Assistant to the National Chair was refashioned as Executive Officer to better reflect the responsibilities of the position, which included carriage of a substantial amount of AHISA’s collaborative and consultative work, and in 2004 AHISA’s Standing Committee began deliberating the advantages of moving the secretariat to Canberra. The possibilities of radical constitutional change were also explored.

‘There was no way a National Chair could do all there was to do and still operate effectively in their school,’ recalls Geoff Ryan, AHISA National Chair in 2005-07. ‘We decided on quite profound changes. We changed our legal status and governance structure and became

an incorporated not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Our Standing Committee then had all the legal protections – and responsibilities – of a board of directors. In what was really only a matter of a few months we were housed in Canberra and fully engaged in pursuing our primary objects, both internally and externally. We appointed a former member, Allan Shaw, who had been Foundation Principal of Peter Moyes Anglican Community School in WA, as fulltime Chief Executive responsible to the AHISA Board, which gave us even greater scope to engage in the national education agenda.’

Responding to social change

Just as political change has been a key driver of structural change in AHISA, social change has affected its focal interests.

Fr Chris Gleeson, AHISA National Chair in 1999-2001 recalls that when he first joined AHISA’s Standing Committee in 1987 he was asked by then National Chair Bill Dickinson to establish a Social Issues Committee. Active social issues committees have operated at both Branch level and at AHISA Standing Committee or Board level ever since.

‘The very first issue we dealt with was pornography and pornographic videos, which was topical at that time,’ says Fr Gleeson. ‘Fellow Social Issues Committee member Harry Macdonald and I appeared at a Senate select committee hearing in Canberra where we were up against a full-time lobbyist from the pornographic industry. It was important as educational leaders to speak out on behalf of all the young men and women in our schools given that opportunity, and we did

address other inquiries, but generally the work of the Social Issues Committee was to raise awareness and try to help AHISA members and their staff – and parents – cope with issues such as drugs, alcohol and teen suicide.’

The influence of the Social Issues Committee was felt well beyond members’ schools. For example, in 1990, AHISA sought funding through the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation for a four year project to develop, implement and evaluate a school community approach to the minimisation of harmful use of alcohol by post-primary school students across independent schools and Catholic and state school systems. The \$1.3 million four-year project commenced in 1991 and was managed by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation. Three AHISA members sat on the project’s management committee.

Alongside practical action on issues affecting young people was a growing focus on pastoral care.

‘In my time as National Chair pastoral care was beginning to be seen as something independent schools should engage in more purposefully,’ recalls Bishop Greg O’Kelly. ‘There had always been school chaplains but then our schools began to appoint student counsellors, careers counsellors and youth ministers and began to give more time to House Masters or Year Coordinators in order to exercise pastoral care. We were really leaders in establishing these new forms of pastoral care.’

During the chairmanship of Dr Judith Hancock, a biennial program for Pastoral Care Conferences was established. AHISA’s Pastoral Care Conference is the only conference in Australia fully dedicated to pastoral care in schools and

is now open to a broad cross-section of those involved in pastoral care.

‘AHISA members have always been strongly committed to the notion of educating the whole person – intellectually, physically, morally and spiritually,’ says Simon Murray. ‘Along with championing excellence and high academic standards, I believe our contribution to pastoral care in schools and how schools deal with social issues has been one of the most profound ways we have exercised influence in Australian education.’

Meeting special needs

Social justice and equity issues were also on AHISA’s agenda. In 1993 a national survey was undertaken to gauge the level of provision for students with disabilities and other forms of educational disadvantage in members’ schools.

‘What was a problem then – and remains so – is the defining of disabilities, the level of severity and so on,’ recalls John Moody, who managed the survey for AHISA.

‘That threw a light mist as it were over the statistics but nonetheless the survey did reveal significant numbers of students within the schools of AHISA members who had a physical or intellectual disability or who were disadvantaged for other reasons such as Aboriginality, socio-economic circumstances, isolation or language background. It helped dispel the public view that our schools were the haven of the elite and was also an encouragement for schools to act in this area even though lack of government grants to meet the often very high costs was a great inhibitor. I like to think the survey was one of the early stirrings of later developments by independent schools in this area.’



Noelene Horton AM

AHISA National Chair
2001-03

Noelene Horton was Principal of Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School, Vic from 1988 to 2005.

‘Affirming the big picture of education, affirming all young people in Australia – which is enshrined in AHISA’s aims – is really important.’




Malcolm Lamb AM

AHISA National Chair
2003-05

Malcolm Lamb was Principal of Pembroke School, SA from 1991 to 2010.

‘A major change has been that schools are much more into the home. Our understanding of pastoral care now embraces families.’



AHISA recognises school leadership as a special form of leadership, going far beyond corporate leadership and management to provide educational, cultural and spiritual leadership.

Investing in good governance

A change in perception of the role of Principal also commanded action. ‘There was an increasingly corporate view of schools, and the Head was being seen as a Chief Executive Officer rather than a head teacher,’ recalls Dr Judith Hancock. ‘An issue that arose out of that was the need for proper processes to evaluate the performance of Heads and we did set up a framework for that.’

AHISA recognises school leadership as a special form of leadership, going far beyond corporate leadership and management to provide educational, cultural and spiritual leadership. As a consequence of the trend toward corporatisation of schools, the concept of pastoral care came to embrace AHISA members and their staff as well as their students.

‘We became more focused on the welfare of Heads and how they could best use their time and not burn out,’ recalls Malcolm Lamb. ‘The short tenure of many Heads was a particular concern.’

‘At the time I became National Chair school boards were saying, in the corporate world you become the CEO for five years and then move on so why not in schools?’ recalls Noelene Horton. ‘The average life of a Head was dropping from eight to seven to five years. In their first five years a Head can achieve some things, but working with a culture and a community so that it is ongoing and sustaining demands a longer term commitment. We built that into the AHISA School Governance Conferences as a talking point and things did improve.’

AHISA School Governance Conferences – at first only for Chairs of school

governing bodies and sometimes conducted jointly with NCIS – had been instituted during the chairmanship of Bishop Greg O’Kelly.

‘AHISA accepts unconditionally the authority of the school governing body,’ explains Bishop O’Kelly. ‘If a council does do the wrong thing by the Head, AHISA can intercede on behalf of the Head but industrially it is a toothless tiger. We introduced biennial meetings of Chairs of council in order to educate Chairs about their proper role and facilitate the proper functioning of the relationship between the Head and the Chair.’

It has been an important part of the AHISA National Chair’s role to argue for equity and parity on behalf of a Head or to mediate between the Head and his or her Chair when the occasion warranted. ‘There were occasions when I was accused by council Chairs of being just the head of a union,’ recalls Fr Chris Gleeson, ‘but AHISA is not a union.’

While AHISA’s primary concern is for Heads, it also commits substantially to the promotion of good governance in independent schools. As well as the biennial School Governance Conferences, it holds governance sessions for Heads at its annual New Members’ Conference.

AHISA also tackled the issue of succession of Heads and promoting school leadership. ‘We were very preoccupied with how Heads could encourage other people to become Principals,’ says Malcolm Lamb. ‘We had aspiring Principals’ seminars, especially at Branch level, and put the issue of moving into the Principal’s role on the program at the AHISA Senior Staff Conferences. We still have a big job there.’

Technological change was another challenge faced by Heads. 'Heads had to grapple with new technologies and how these affected the classroom and the budget,' recalls Malcolm Lamb. 'New technologies also affected how Heads ran their days. We had to come to terms with emails and the internet and then mobile phones.'

Meeting change with continuity

At the same time technological change was challenging schools and Principals, it was supporting the development of new forms of communication with, and virtual collegiality among, AHISA members. An email network was established for information exchange and support between Heads and replicated for senior staff, junior school leaders, middle school leaders, pastoral care staff and Chairs of governing bodies. Regular information e-bulletins were initiated by the AHISA national secretariat and the AHISA website became a repository of online resources. The website is now interactive for members.

The investment in communications meant AHISA had technical capacity in the secretariat to respond to the information explosion created by the Rudd government's national education initiatives. It found, however, that it needed to review its deployment of expertise to meet increased demand for collaboration and consultation with government agencies and other education groups.

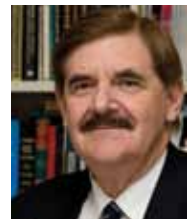
'When the Labor government won office in 2007 it initiated one of the biggest change periods in Australian history in relation to school education,'

recalls Barbara Stone. 'As well as billions of dollars' worth of investment in infrastructure, trade skills centres and the digital revolution, serious work began on a national curriculum and a full program of national reporting and assessment was introduced. These things had never been attempted all at once at a national level before. There were so many things on the national education agenda and such massive change to the possibilities of education within independent schools that the need to get the right opinions in the right places was a key issue for AHISA. It was hard to capture appropriate people to respond to all of them.'

AHISA met the challenge with three significant changes. One was to seek continuity in its key representation on other national bodies, instead of changing representatives every two years as the National Chair and elected members of the Board changed. Neville Lyngcoln, then Principal at Yarra Valley Grammar School, continued as AHISA member on the board of Principals Australia (later to become its Chair) and Geoff Ryan continued as AHISA's nominee on the board of Teaching Australia. Continuity of service of AHISA members was also believed to benefit these organisations as they too adapted to a new educational context.

'This strategy supported AHISA's call to take a major leadership role in other organisations,' explains Barbara Stone. 'The calibre of our members is widely recognised by other organisations. What we hadn't done until this point was let our representatives stay anywhere long enough to become indispensable.'

A second change was to pull together with other Principals' groups to jointly advocate to government on issues of common importance.



Geoff Ryan

AHISA National Chair
2005-07

Geoff Ryan was Principal of Westbourne Grammar School, Vic from 1990 to 2010.

'The AHISA Biennial Conferences are incredibly important because they foster the culture and uniqueness that is in our schools.'

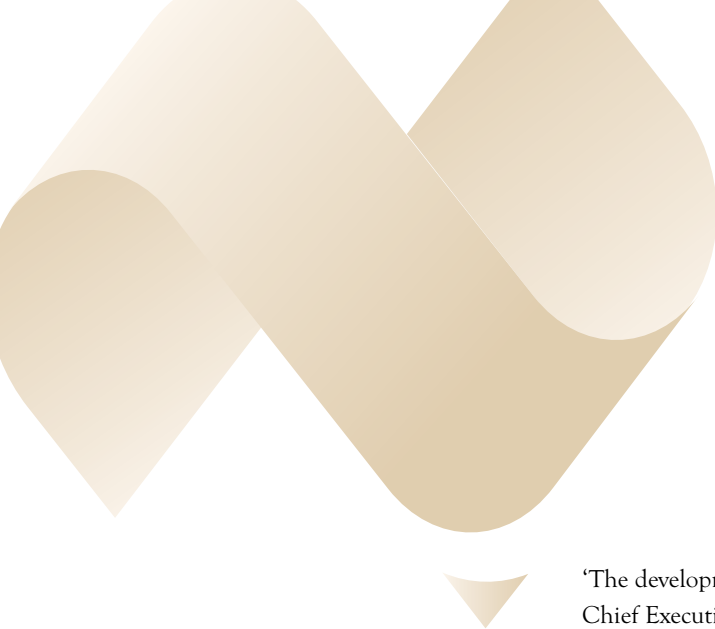


Barbara Stone AM

AHISA National Chair
2007-09

Barbara Stone has been Principal of MLC School, NSW since 1990.

'Leading a school is a human activity and it depends on a very deep understanding of how people learn. It is not a management job. It is dealing with the hearts and minds and souls of people.'



*For AHISA,
autonomy is not
a means to avoid
accountability,
it is the path
of greatest
responsibility.*

‘The development of the position of the Chief Executive was also a critical part of the strategy of continuity,’ says Barbara Stone. ‘It enables AHISA to move with the national changes as they happen and keep within a single strategic direction beyond the two-year life of the National Chair.’

With the shift to politically driven national education policy, that strategic direction is summed up by Barbara Stone as ‘keeping education in education’. An increasingly pressing issue for AHISA today is ‘keeping independence in independent schools’.

Autonomy and responsibility

‘The term “accountability” is now used widely in the education sector,’ says Geoff Ryan. ‘Education is very important and therefore schools must be accountable for the education they provide and the resources they use. What we need to be wary of is the kind of accountability that just means less and less autonomy and more and more red tape.’

For AHISA, autonomy is not a means to avoid accountability, it is the path of greatest responsibility. It is about the freedom and responsibility of Heads to be excellent, the freedom and responsibility of Heads to be innovative and to aspire to do better, and the freedom and responsibility of Heads to build and lead great schools and communities.

Current AHISA National Chair Simon Murray explains: ‘AHISA advocates that autonomous school leadership is the best way to achieve the best school outcomes for students. That is the context in which we support and encourage each other and seek purposeful engagement with national education policy development. It is the flag we are flying as we move forward into our next 25 years.’ ■

This article was prepared by Lyndal Wilson, Editor of AHISA's journal Independence, from a series of interviews with AHISA National Chairs conducted in 2009 and 2010. Excerpts from the interviews are also published in Independence, and in the AHISA Bulletin.

AHISA thanks former National Chairs for generously giving their time to the Year 25 celebration projects.

AHISA acknowledges its many members who, though not named in this document, have contributed to AHISA through participation on its Board or Standing Committee, on working groups and sub-committees and through AHISA Branches.

AHISA is a national organisation which acts nationally. While this article focuses on AHISA's national story, AHISA members contribute substantially to State and Territory developments in Australian school education through AHISA Branches.

AHISA thanks member Nick Hatley, Head of Trinity College, SA, for his permission to use College photographs in this publication.

Purposeful engagement

From its beginnings AHISA has sought to represent to governments the value of aspiring to excellence in education. This was primarily achieved through formal submissions, responses to discussion papers, letters to ministers and consultation. Today, AHISA continues this work through representation on and consultation with government agencies and collaborative relationships with other national education organisations.

Issues on which AHISA has made formal written representation are listed below.

1985-87

- Secondary education and youth policy
- National policy for the education of girls
- Education of gifted and talented children
- Overseas students
- Schooling in rural Australia
- The role of independent schools in teacher education in Australia
- Quality and equality in Australian schooling
- The outcomes of schooling and their assessment

1987-89

- The availability and effects of violent and sexually explicit video material on children
- Teacher training in mathematics and science
- National goals for schooling
- Teacher quality in Australia

1989-91

- Teacher education
- Quality of teaching
- Rural education and training
- Strengthening careers education in schools
- Commonwealth funding arrangements for non-government schools
- Financial needs of isolated children
- School commencement age
- Draft national statements on curriculum
- Compulsory years of schooling – Year 5

1991-93

- Gender differences in English performance
- Commonwealth Equity Program
- Compulsory years of schooling – Years 6-10
- Proposal to form a national teachers' council
- English literacy and English as a second language: Pre-service and in-service teacher education



1993-95

- Draft national strategy for equity in schooling
- National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- The role of schools in the vocational preparation of Australia's senior secondary students
- The role of schools in after hours care for pre-school children
- Civics and citizenship education
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- McKinnon Review of new schools policy
- Internet access to pornographic material

1995-97

- The impact of broadband services on all levels and areas of education and training in Australia
- Gender equity: a framework for Australian schools
- The status of teachers and the development of the teaching profession
- Enhancing teacher professionalism: towards a new national body for teaching professional associations
- Review of the ERI (education resources index) funding model for non-government schools
- Standards relevant to the supply of services utilising electronic technologies
- Children and the legal process

1997-99

- The status of teachers
- Models and options for reporting on school and student achievement
- Review of the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schools in Australia

1999-2001

- Fringe Benefits Tax arrangements in relation to boarding schools
- National strategy to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage
- National inquiry into school history
- Social, cultural and education factors affecting boys' education
- States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Bill 2000
- Entry to the teaching profession as a later career
- Education of gifted and talented children

2001-03

- Excellence in School Leadership – an issues paper on a national coordinated approach to school leadership
- Australian content in commercial free-to-air television
- Education of students with disabilities
- Vocational education in schools
- Teaching and teacher education
- Languages other than English in schools
- Education of boys
- Young people, schools and innovation: towards an action plan for the school sector

2003-05

- Commonwealth funding for schools
- Review of pre-service teacher training

2005-07

- Academic standards of school education
- National professional standards for advanced teaching and school leadership
- Attitudes to languages education
- Charter for the teaching profession
- Australian Certificate of Education
- Family-school partnerships draft framework
- National recognition of approved pre-service teacher education programs

2007-09

- Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008
- National curriculum development paper
- Principal autonomy study
- 21st century education and learning project
- Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians
- Alcohol management in sport
- Charter for the teaching profession
- Draft national professional standards for Principals

From 2009

- National schools performance information and reporting framework
- Administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing
- Australian Curriculum
- Draft national professional standards for teachers



Association of Heads
of Independent Schools
of Australia

AHISA'S PRIMARY OBJECT

To optimise the opportunities for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY

AHISA supports and promotes autonomy for Principals on the understanding that the Principal is critically linked to a school's success. To build successful schools Principals need three kinds of autonomy:

Operational autonomy

The freedom to effectively implement the school's shared vision within the strategic framework determined by the school's governing body.

Professional autonomy

The freedom to demonstrate and apply expertise to effectively lead and manage.

Personal autonomy

The freedom to learn, grow and develop self as well as develop professional expertise.

AHISA in 2010

AHISA Ltd is a professional association for Principals of Australian independent schools. Members' schools include single sex and coeducational day and boarding schools, and represent a range of religious and non-denominational affiliations and educational philosophies.

AHISA aims to maintain high standards of professional practice and conduct among its members by fostering a collegial and professional environment of mutual understanding, trust, respect and pastoral care to optimise the opportunities for the education and welfare of Australia's young people.

To achieve its aims AHISA works both nationally and regionally through its state and territory Branches to help Principals build excellence in school leadership through expert advice, shared wisdom and formal and informal professional networks and development opportunities.

Branch Chairs or their nominee and a further eight members elected every two years form AHISA's governing body along with the National Chair and immediate past National Chair. All members vote for the National Chair, a position which revolves every two years.

In 2010 the membership of AHISA comprises Heads of 348 independent schools with a collective enrolment of almost 350,000 students and a workforce of over 30,000 teachers. There are 17 honorary members, two associate members and 13 overseas members.

Professional learning

Collegial sharing of expertise at the time it is needed is an informal yet highly effective form of professional learning actively supported by AHISA. As well, AHISA hosts a range of conferences:

- AHISA Branches take turn in hosting the national Biennial Conference, which is AHISA's main conference event. For members only and their partners, the conference attracts leading speakers to reflect on school leadership.
- The New Members' Conference is held each year over one weekend and helps build collegiality between beginning and established Heads.
- The biennial Senior Staff Conference focuses on issues pertinent to school leadership teams and aspiring Principals.
- The biennial AHISA Pastoral Care Conference is the only conference in Australia dedicated to the issue of school pastoral care.
- The biennial School Governance Conference focuses on governance and topical issues affecting strategic school leadership.
- AHISA's biannual journal *Independence* is also a source of expertise on school leadership issues and information on national issues affecting school leadership. The journal features best practice in members' schools as well as contributions from members and their staff and leading thinkers and researchers on topical issues.



CELEBRATING **25** YEARS OF COLLEGIAL SUPPORT FOR EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Professional support

AHISA makes available draft contracts to guide members in their negotiations with school owners and provides advice to members on employment contracts. It is also able to assist Heads in their relationships with their schools should problems arise in the course of their employment.

Other key AHISA resources for members are the confidential Remuneration Benchmarking Survey for Members and Quality Leadership Profile online appraisal service.

National and international relationships

Through its national secretariat, AHISA develops and maintains close relationships with other Principals' groups and education and schools' groups in Australia and overseas, including the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) and the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA).

With other Australian Principals' associations, AHISA is a part owner of Principals Australia.

AHISA's Chief Executive sits on the board of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) as the nominee of Australian Principals' groups.

AHISA has a number of overseas members. In particular, AHISA works closely with its overseas members in New Zealand and in complementary fashion with their local organisations to provide the best possible assistance.

AHISA is a member of the International Confederation of Principals.

Engagement with the national education agenda

AHISA seeks to promote educational values and represent the professional voice of independent school Principals.

A key means by which AHISA supports the interests of Principals and students is through contribution to debate and policy developments affecting school education in Australia. Working groups of members track developments in key national education issues and help gather and analyse member input.

As well as its involvement in AITSL, AHISA consults regularly with the non-government sector nominee on the board of the Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority (ACARA) as well as with key ACARA staff.

AHISA also liaises with the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the office of the federal Minister for Education. ■

AHISA BOARD MEMBERS 2009-11

NATIONAL CHAIR
Simon Murray
St Peter's College, SA

IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR
Barbara Stone AM
MLC School, NSW

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Christ Church Grammar School, WA

AHISA NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

AHISA is supported by a national secretariat based in Canberra comprising three full-time and two part-time staff: the Chief Executive Allan Shaw; Office Manager Kate Wilson; Conference Coordinator Sharon Mahony; and Administrative Assistants Adi Raveh and Marg Christensen.



Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

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