ASSOCIATION FOR
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Enhancing the Educational Experience
Australasia

2026

Annual Report

Bringing educators and designers together to shape the future of learning environments.









ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in which this report was generated on and subsequently read on. This message comes to you from the land of Nipaluna and the muwinina people. We acknowledge the deep connection First Nations people have to the land, water and air. We pay respects to their elders past and present. We also acknowledge any First Nations people reading this report.



HIGHLIGHTS

Our achievements and milestones

1. **Delivered our 24th Annual Conference UNLEASH**, hosted by the Western Australian Chapter in Perth | Boorloo, exploring Living, Learning and Leading.
2. **Celebrated 90 entries in the 2026 LEAD Awards**, recognising excellence across eight categories and showcasing projects from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Asia.
3. **Commenced LEA's strategic planning process**, establishing shared priorities and a clearer direction for the organisation's future.
4. **Strengthened our operational foundations** through new systems and improved processes, supporting more consistent and effective ways of working across LEA.
5. **Secured member approval for constitutional improvements**, clarifying governance responsibilities and supporting continuity in Executive leadership.
6. **Shared Internationally the Mayfield Loop engagement resources**, providing practical tools to help schools and designers learn from the experiences of those using learning environments.
7. **Welcomed 16 emerging professionals to the 2027 Mayfield Project**, supporting collaborative research into what endures in learning during an age of rapid change.
8. **Supported the Schoolyard Greenprint Research**, contributing funding towards practical resources that place student voice, wellbeing and inclusion at the centre of outdoor learning environment design.
9. **Continued professional learning and connection across our eight Chapters**, through learning tours, presentations and opportunities to exchange knowledge between education and design.
10. **Progressed major initiatives for 2027**, including the evolution of Regional Day Out into LEA Connect and preparations for our milestone 25th Annual Conference, BELONGING, in Sydney | Gadigal Country.

OUR COMMUNITY



57.0%
Architecture & Design

27.9%
Education

6.6%
Other / Allied Health

5.4%
Manufacturing & Construction

3.1%
Consulting



FROM THE CHAIR

As I present my final annual report as Chair of Learning Environments Australasia, I feel an enormous sense of pride in our community. Over these two years, I have seen how much people are willing to contribute when they believe in a shared purpose.

Across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, that commitment continues to bring educators and designers together to shape better learning environments. What has stayed with me most is the care people bring to this work, and their willingness to keep learning from one another.

LEA is one of a rare group of organisations that remain entirely volunteer led. At every level, people give their time and expertise alongside demanding careers and personal responsibilities. The effort invested by our Chapter committees, Subcommittees, Regional Council and Executive is extraordinary.

Supported by our small operational team, this generosity makes possible the experiences and connections our members value. It has been a privilege to witness that commitment firsthand. We should never take for granted the many hours given quietly, often outside working hours, to keep our organisation moving forward.

Supporting this community means ensuring the organisation behind it works well. Throughout my term, we have focused on strengthening our operations, introducing new systems and improving processes. This is not always glamorous work, and much of it happens beyond the view of our members. Yet it is foundational.

Clearer responsibilities and reliable systems help our volunteers and team work together effectively, while giving LEA the capacity to develop and deliver new opportunities. They also help preserve knowledge as people move between roles, allowing each new group of volunteers to build on the work of those before them.

The strategic planning process we commenced in early 2026 has been an important part of that work. It has encouraged us to consider our direction collectively, examine our priorities and connect our ambitions with the practical steps required to achieve them.

For me, the conversations themselves have been valuable: listening across the organisation, understanding different perspectives and building a clearer sense of what we are working towards together. My hope is that this shared direction will give future leaders the confidence to make considered decisions about where LEA can contribute most.

Cohesion matters in an organisation as geographically and professionally diverse as ours. Each Chapter contributes local knowledge and relationships, while our committees bring expertise to shared challenges. Our strength grows when those contributions connect.

2026 LEAD AWARDS

The 2026 Learning Environments Australasia Design (LEAD) Awards celebrated the collaboration between educators and designers that creates meaningful places to learn. This year's program attracted 90 entries from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Asia.

Across eight categories, projects demonstrated how thoughtful design supports learning, wellbeing and community connection. From small interventions to new campuses, entries showed the value of aligning educational ambition with the needs of those using each space.

Winners and commendation recipients were announced on Thursday 14 May at WA Museum Boola Bardip during our 24th Annual Conference, UNLEASH. The evening recognised the people and partnerships behind these achievements.

The Overall Winner, Young High School, Hilltops Young High School Library in New South Wales, designed by Hayball, demonstrated the possibilities of a contemporary library shared by a school and its wider community.

The jury recognised its diverse learning experiences, cultural inclusion, sustainability and design excellence, highlighting how a library can serve its community beyond books and quiet study.

The conference exhibition, online gallery and 2026 Contemporary Learning Spaces book extended the program's reach, creating opportunities to explore and learn from every entry.

We thank our 18 volunteer jurors, the Awards Subcommittee and everyone who supported the program, including Interface, our LEAD Awards Dinner Sponsor.

Congratulations to all winners, commendation recipients and entrants. Your willingness to share your work helps our community question established approaches and continue improving learning environments for all.



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OUR VALUES

LEARNERS FIRST achieved by recognising students as the ultimate beneficiaries of our work; demonstrated when educators, planners, designers, builders, and school systems think first about the needs of students.

DIVERSITY, with the intent of fostering equity and inclusion, achieved by deliberately and authentically engaging all voices and perspectives; demonstrated when everybody's ideas, suggestions, and recommendations are heard and valued.

INNOVATION achieved through the exploration of opportunities at the intersection of learning and place; demonstrated when the value of place in learning is recognised and our work strengthens learning for all through exceptional environments.

COLLABORATION, COLLEGIALITY, CONNECTION achieved through the sharing of ideas, resources, and values; demonstrated when our members operate seamlessly across market sectors and geographic boundaries.

RESPECT achieved through recognition and acceptance of ideas, thoughts, and perspectives that differ from your own; demonstrated when a culture exists where new ideas and perspectives are embraced and welcomed.

PLACE MATTERS achieved through alignment of learning and place; demonstrated when the value of place in learning is recognised and our work strengthens learning for all through better environments.

Our values have been adopted from our International Organisation Association for Learning Environments (A4LE).



ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Our 24th Annual Conference, UNLEASH: living, learning, leading, brought the LEA community together in Perth | Boorloo from 13 - 15 May 2026. Hosted by the Western Australian Chapter, the conference created opportunities to explore how learning environments respond to changing educational needs.

The program invited delegates to consider different perspectives on education and design, with themes spanning Indigenous learning, everyday learning experiences, cultural diversity and global connections.

Through keynote presentations and concurrent sessions, educators and designers shared ideas and experiences. The Engage, Experiment and Reflect formats encouraged active participation, making room for discussion, practical exploration and the exchange of knowledge between disciplines.

Learning tours provided opportunities to experience educational environments firsthand, connecting conference conversations with the places and communities putting ideas into practice.

The LEAD Awards Dinner at WA Museum Boola Bardip was another highlight, where delegates celebrated outstanding and innovative educational design. The accompanying awards exhibition offered further opportunities to explore the thinking and collaboration behind this year's entries.

We warmly thank the Western Australian Chapter, conference organising committee, speakers, tour hosts and volunteers for their generous contributions. Our appreciation also extends to our sponsors, partners and event team for supporting this shared experience.

UNLEASH reinforced the value of coming together as a professional community. The questions explored and connections formed provide opportunities for continued learning, carrying the conference conversation back into our workplaces and Chapters throughout Australasia.

We look forward to seeing how these ideas develop.

With Gratitude

I have valued the willingness of people throughout LEA to share ideas, work through differences and support one another. That teamwork helps us make better decisions and keeps our purpose at the centre of our work.

During 2026, UNLEASH, the LEAD Awards and our Chapter activities have provided opportunities to see that purpose in practice.

They have brought people together to question, discover and learn from one another. Alongside these experiences, we have commenced major projects for launch in 2027, including the evolution of the Regional Day Out into LEA Connect.

There is further work ahead, supported by the foundations we have been strengthening together. As these initiatives develop, their value will be measured in the opportunities they create for our members and the communities they serve.

As I hand over to Derek Bartels and the incoming Executive team, including Ella Masters and our incoming International Director, Daniel Smith, I wish them every success. I look forward to supporting them as Past Chair over the next two years, continuing to contribute to an organisation that means a great deal to me.

My hope is that I leave LEA stronger, more cohesive and better equipped to pursue its purpose. Thank you to everyone who has contributed along the way, and to our members for the trust you have placed in me.

Above all, thank you for the care and energy you continue to invest in this remarkable community.



ROS MARSLAND
CHAIR







On Friday 20 November 2026, Deb O'Riley concludes five years as International Director, marking an extraordinary contribution to LEA's international work.

Deb has approached the role with diligence, passion and an unwavering commitment to LEA and its mission.

Her service has involved countless early morning meetings with A4LE, our international organisation, and significant time away from her professional and personal commitments to attend meetings in the United States, and beyond.

Throughout, Deb has brought LEA's perspectives to the International Board. Her warmth and distinctive personality helped her forge new relationships and deepen existing ties across the global learning environments community.

Her contribution extends well beyond this role. Deb has also served the South Australian Chapter and contributed for many years to LEA's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Research Subcommittees.

In 2025, her exceptional contribution was recognised with LEA Life Membership, our organisation's highest honour.

As Deb concludes her time on the Executive, the relationships she has built and the perspectives she has shared will continue to benefit LEA. Thank you, Deb, for your generosity, dedication and years of leadership within our community.

HONOURING DEB O'RILEY
15 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP

EXECUTIVE TEAM



Ros Marsland
Chair



Derek Bartels
Chair Elect



Felicity Lewis
Treasurer



Dani Martin
Strategic Governance Director



Deb O'Riley
International Director

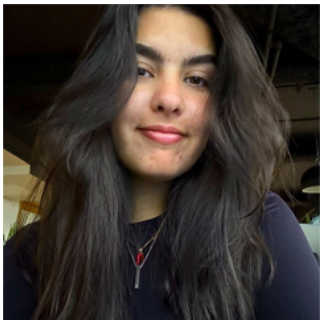


Daniel Smith
Past Chair

LEA TEAM



Nicola Payne
Manager, Marketing + Strategic Operations



Jennifer Herrera
Senior Operations Officer



Soraya Ramsey
Awards Coordinator

"To my fellow Executive members and our dedicated LEA team, thank you for the care, wisdom and extraordinary effort you bring to this organisation. I have deeply valued your support and the way we have worked together over these past two years. It has been a privilege to work alongside you."

Ros Marsland