



ANNUAL **REPORT**

2023/2024

www.aafie.org.au



Education is the foundation upon which we build our **FUTURE**

THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR FLEXIBLE & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (AAFIE)

AAFIE is the home for all educators, researchers, and policy makers with a shared commitment to providing successful educational opportunities and pathways for young people who have experienced barriers to completing school education. AAFIE supports the Flexible and Inclusive Education sector who support young people to learn and succeed.

AAFIE ASPIRATION STATEMENT

At AAFIE, our fundamental belief is all young people, regardless of postcode, have equal access to inclusive, positive future focused educational opportunities, specific to their needs. AAFIE understands that flexible and inclusive learning programs come in many shapes and forms, but they have in common a desire to change the way schooling is provided to better suit young people for whom traditional schooling approaches have not worked well.

We understand that a young person's access to educational opportunities does not exist in isolation, in fact, education is a central part of the ecology of a young person's life. This eco-system is unique and relies on the support of a broad range of providers to function successfully.

For this reason, AAFIE recognises that all young people have the right to:

- A home. Safe, affordable and suitable accommodation
- Relationships that are safe and supportive
- Health care that is tailored and specific to developmental need
- Mental, physical and spiritual support services
- To be treated fairly by all systems who are charged with responsibility to provide care – youth justice and child protection



2023/24

HIGHLIGHT

DSD24: at a glance

Delegates

617

Representation

41% - Queensland
27% Victoria
15% New South Wales
7% South Australia
3% Western Australia
2% Australian Capital Territory
1% Tasmania & Northern Territory

Who came?

Teachers
Wellbeing workers
School Leaders/Principals
NGO policy/co-ordination
Government Departments
Policy co-ordination
Researchers
Youth Workers

Organisations?

Fast programs 37%
Independent schools 17%
Government Education
Department 10%
NGOs 8%
Universities 7%
Mainstream schools 5%
Catholic Education 5%
Peak Bodies/business 11%

85%

Delegates rated the
conference between
GOOD & PERFECT

Keynote speakers

6

Presentations

70

Young people

Musical performances
& Market Stall



DOING SCHOOL DIFFERENTLY

As the sun emerged over the river in Meanjin, Brisbane to welcome a new day, a group of education professionals readied themselves to converge on the largest gathering of flexible and alternative education and learning in the country: The Doing School Differently Conference.

There was a feeling of electricity in the air. A vibrant atmosphere, a lively tapestry of people, of ideas and enthusiasm. This event, notable on the education calendar, promised engaging discussion, weaving together creativity and innovation to nurture an inspiring environment of learning and wisdom exchange.

Bundambah Yah, a descendant of both the Toorabul and the Jagera Clans, welcomed and provided safe passage for the conference delegation on Country. Together, a group of multidisciplinary educators, social, mental health, and wellbeing, cultural, arts and outdoor learning professionals, researchers, academics, and young people arrived to celebrate what is now the fastest-growing education sector in Australia.

Around this Country, approximately 70,000 children and young people are now participating in alternative forms of education, including flexible and alternative schools. These school and programs are providing place and space for those young people for whom school has not gone well. These places provide opportunity to engage in learning crafted for the learner.

This year's Doing School Differently Conference, the fourth of its kind, continued to nurture the creation of a community of committed individuals, with shared vision. Many programmes, services and schools represented at Doing School Differently are indeed lighthouses of practice. Teaching ways forward that benefit all learners and play an important role in the ever-growing epistemology of learning and education. The conference program was rich and diverse, including six keynote presentations, from nationally and internationally respected speakers, Dr Ross Greene, Dr Tom Brunzell, Dr Iain Matheson, Carolyn Blanden, Krysta McMahon and Associate Professor Marnee Shay with Uncle Fred Cobbo.



The Conference was formally opened by the Queensland Education Minister, Hon. Di Farmer.

The program also showcased over 70 presentations and workshops. Each presentation demonstrating the ways in which flexible and alternative education programs are leading the necessary change to ensure our students can engage and succeed in learning, outside of traditional systems.

Most important, however was the participation of young people at Doing School Differently.

Take for example young woman Taliah, a descendant of the Gunggari people and flexi school student, who supported the conference opening with her beautiful singing performance, or the group of nine young people who travelled all the way from Djilang, Geelong. Their band Dysfunction entertained the crowd at the end of the first day, their very first concert! Or the flexi school group from Gympie Flexible Learning Centre who hosted a stall alongside other sponsors and retailers, selling their handmade goods that they crafted at school.

The student performances were a highlight. Really important to have some student presence at the conference to keep it grounded in reality and centred on student/youth experience

This was a wonderful and affirming conference to be part of

We thank all delegates who attended DSD and brought the flexi energy and passion to the space, to our major Sponsors Life Without Barriers, St Joseph's Flexible Schools network VIC, and Berry Street. Gratitude to Stephanie Doyle from The Conference Planners who again supported AAFIE and led the event management of the conference.

We're so delighted that for the 10-year anniversary in 2026 we will be returning to Naarm, Melbourne, where we look forward to seeing both old friends and new faces to share flexi joy and wisdom," AAFIE Co-Chair Professor Kitty te Riele.

"Doing School Differently 2024 is over, yet voices of the sector are still ringing out - AAFIE is receiving comments 'best conference I have been to', 'this conference has brought a level of maturity to our sector', 'what a fantastic opportunity to share, and learn'," AAFIE Co-Chair Dale Murray.



Loved all of it!
The most valuable was networking and getting to hear about different practices across the country.



We'll be in Naarm, Melbourne in 2026, and so the planning begins! We have received wonderful, constructive feedback about how we truly present conference that is different, to compliment the diverse and creative ways of working in education settings across Australia.

We're up to the challenge.



AAFIE BOARD

WELCOME FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Professor Kitty te Riele & Mr Dale Murray



We write these words today on the lands of the Gubbi Gubbi nation (Dale Murray) and Muwinina people (Kitty te Riele). We pay our respect to elders past, present, emerging.

It is our fifth anniversary in 2024! AAFIE was established mid 2019 after two successful Doing School Differently conferences: DSD16 in Melbourne and DSD18 on the Gold Coast. We asked: 'would you like a peak body for flexi-folk, to stay connected in between DSDs?', and the answer was such an enthusiastic yes!

Thank you if you've been with us from the start! And thank you if you have joined us since then, helping AAFIE to grow!!

A special welcome to all our new members in 2024. If you joined DSD24 then you are part of our AAFIE community too. We hope you'll find much to love here. Check out our website, listen to our podcasts, connect with like-minded folks.

And everyone, please invite others to join us!

Together we are an inclusive and safe community for sharing our ideas, our challenges, our successes. Together we reform the way school is done through our innovations and our care. And most of all together we walk alongside our young people – supporting them to learn and learning from them.

Kitty & Dale

AAFIE Board Directors

Gratitude to the AAFIE Board Directors for your continued allyship. It is a privilege to work alongside of you all as we work towards to strategic objectives of AAFIE. It is owing to your hard work, and commitment to the vision of AAFIE that we continue to thrive and raise the profile of the important educational opportunities that Flexible and Alternative programs provide for Australia's young people.

The AAFIE Board continues to be led by their strategic plan including priorities about how we maintain our Professional leadership in the space, how we amplify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice through our processes including our governance and how we mobilise our collective work through Special Interest Groups and local connections and communities of AAFIE. The year ahead looks bright.



Pictured (L - R)
Associate Professor Glenda McGregor (QLD), Dr. John Davis (QLD) Ms. Megan Hall (QLD), Mr Simon Vaughan (ACT), Dale Murray (QLD), Professor Kitty te Riele (TAS)
Absent from photo: Prof. Julian Sefton-Green (VIC)



AAFIE MEMBERS

Thanks to our Doing School Differently Conference we've expanded our membership; a positive outcome, important to the future work of AAFIE. Together with the support of our knowledgeable, experienced, and passionate membership, our membership provides the lighthouse for AAFIE to direct our work across the sector.

AAFIE's current membership structure consists of: Individual, Organisational, Student/unwaged, Silver, Bronze, Gold and Supporter members.

To date, AAFIE members are a mix of students, individual and organisations. We continue to see steady gains in membership demonstrating that word is out about AAFIE.

We aspire for FY24/25 to provide more opportunities for our members to take up further active roles in the business of AAFIE with the development further Special Interest Groups other localised AAFIE connections.



THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES & NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMISSION

AAFIE is compliant to the Australian Charities and Non-for-Profits Commission (ACNC). Part of this accountability requires meeting ACNC governance standards. The Governance Standards are a set of core minimum standards that deal with how charities are run (including their processes, activities and relationships) – their governance. They help charities remain trusted by the public and continue to do their charitable work. Because the Governance Standards are a set of high-level principles, not precise rules, a charity must decide how it will comply with them.

For AAFIE our focus is:

- Keeping accurate records
- Reporting annually
- Maintaining our charity status

AAFIE reports our activities annually to the ACNC. In 2023/24, AAFIE continues to monitor its governance responsibilities and uses a framework to guide our compliance.

Keeping accurate records

We made a commitment to strengthen our financial governance this year to ensure that we are compliant with the Australian Accounting Standards and will seek external support to manage AAFIE financial reporting processes ongoingly.

Reporting Annually

In the 2023/24 financial year, our audit was conducted by Haywards Chartered Accountants.

Maintaining our charity status

The executive officer and Co-Chair of the Board have attended Company Director training this year with the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



AAFIE IN CONVERSATION

Our Podcast continues to add unique voice to the sector. Each episode takes an informal conversation style approach to discussing topics that we can all share, learn and grow from. In 2023/24 we produced the following episodes:

Student Ownership of Learning

- 🎧 DSD24 – Dr. Tom Brunzell
- 🎧 DSD24 – Carolyn Blanden
- 🎧 DSD24 – Associate Professor Marnee Shay
- 🎧 DSD24 – Dr. Iain Mathe
- 🎧 DSD24 – Krysta McMahan



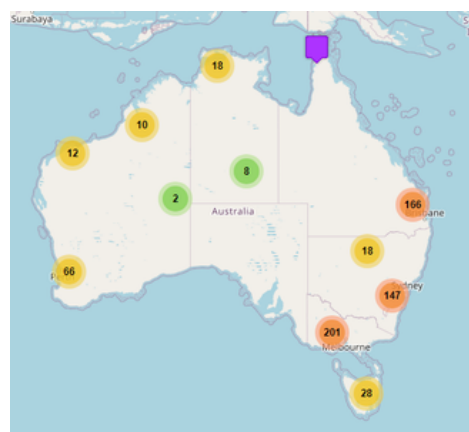
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are designed to involve a broad range of people in the work of the AAFIE. SIGs allow members to become more actively involved in AAFIE and aim to provide an avenue to explore and deepen member interest in areas of practice, policy and planning. Accordingly, the role of SIGs will vary depending on topic and purpose; however, the overarching role is to ensure that the vision of AAFIE is central and draws on the expertise of the membership to progress its work.

Working Groups are important to the business of the Association and focus on working with the Board rather than with the broader AAFIE Membership.

In 2023/24 AAFIE made progress towards supporting SIGs and Working Groups and welcomed a Music focussed SIG, with members from St Joseph's Flexi and SongMakers who have vision to amplify the musical talents of young people across Flexi through virtual opportunities and a showcase at DSD26.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPTIONS DATABASE



AAFIE still manages the only Flexible Learning Options Database. This geo-located map is an important resource for the sector, and community to locate flexible and inclusive education programs nationally. We acknowledge that not all programs may be captured in the database, however all programs that are captured have accurate information.

We welcome AAFIE members and friends to add programs they know about that are not listed yet, find it at www.aafie.org.au

COLLABORATIONS

Data Collaboration Project for Flexible & Inclusive Education

This is a developing data collaboration partnership between AAFIE and Latitude Network, alongside of Flexible and Inclusive Education Programs nationally. Data collaboration is a powerful approach that enables schools and organisations to analyse data across the education sector.

By participating in this initiative, it is envisioned that AAFIE and flexi schools can work together to enhance educational programs, improve student wellbeing and create a more supportive learning environment.

Latitude Network specialises in facilitating and managing these complex collaborations, ensuring schools receive actionable insights to drive positive change. This work continues.



Learning Creates Australia

Partnering with Learning Creates Australia, AAFIE facilitated conversations across the sector seeking feedback and input to how we showcase and evidence young people's accreditation and broader recognition in flexible learning spaces. This work continues.

RESEARCH

Supporting teachers and teaching in flexible and non-traditional schools serving vulnerable young people LP190100398.

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of the teaching workforce in flexible/non-traditional schools?
2. What are the challenges experienced by the teaching workforce in flexible/non-traditional schools?
3. What are the factors that enable successful teaching in flexible/non-traditional schools?
4. What are the curricular and pedagogical innovations used by this workforce and how significant are their contribution to teaching and learning?
5. What evidence and outputs will support workforce planning and sector investment by sponsors and support teaching staff and principals; and contribute to the body of academic knowledge in this field?



- Update 2024**
- All data gathering and analysis of interview data complete and report writing is underway.
 - Construction of other deliverables underway in tandem with the report: other deliverables including recommendations for support, capabilities framework and video/visual PD pack.
 - We have sought a further 6-month extension on the project for the following reasons:
 - We need to secure an external provider to assist in crafting the visuals and videos.
 - Before finalising the deliverables, we would like time for our partners to provide reflections and feedback.
 - Following such feedback, we finalise deliverables and decide on a launch date
 - Launch – after consultations with AFFIE this will be planned for mid-2025.

Chief Investigators	Dr Glenda McGregor Griffith University	Dr Aspa Baroutsis Southern Cross University	Professor Martin Mills Queensland University of Technology
Partner Investigators	Mr Dale Murray Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education		
Industry Partners	Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education	Jabiru Community College, Zillmere, Qld Community Learning Ltd	Youth Inc., Adelaide South Australia



The GrandSchools Project

This project is an Australian project that is federally funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) being undertaken by Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Australian Catholic University (ACU), Deakin University, Western Sydney University, and Fulton Trotter Architects, in collaboration with several industry partners.

The project is acting upon recommendations from the Inquiry into the Quality of Care and Residential Aged Care in Australia (QCRAC, 2018) and is investigating the concept of an intergenerational model for senior living within school campuses. The project is establishing an economic, policy driven 'shared campus facilities and services' approach, which is person centred, health focussed and socially inclusive.

The model intends to be translatable across diverse Australian contexts, from urban realms where land is limited, as well as regionally, where closer engagement between generations will maintain social networks.

<https://grandschoolsproject.wordpress.com/>



THANK YOU

CONTACT US



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www.aafie.org.au

