

Reimagining Democracy in a Membership Research Organisation: The AARE as a Case

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This 90-minute workshop explores organisational advocacy for education research in current contexts. There will be ample dialogic space for participants to ‘read the world’ in relation to how the AARE, as a membership research organisation, can/should pro-act for research futures.

In the past two decades, research time, opportunity and valued social purposes have taken severe hits in Education (and other) programs across the Australian sector – especially for early- and mid-career academics – as federal government reduces funding, and university Senior Managements and Councils restructure and downsize academic workforces, intensify workloads, and de-value all-but-‘superstar’ research, debilitating the nexus and cultures of teaching-*and-research*. Covid-19 gives further impetus, and ‘excuse’, to these trends. AARE membership has suffered: from nearly 900 in late-2019, to 330 in late-2020.

At a well-attended 2017 AGM, a motion was passed unanimously for AARE pro-action, as a research organisation, to challenge these trends. A Working Party, formed in 2018, wrote AARE submissions to government inquiries, and conducted a Workshop at the annual conference to gather viewpoints – across doctoral, early-, mid- and senior-career members – about conditions affecting research in their universities and programs. In 2019, the WP put these questions to full AARE membership in an electronic survey that received wide response. At the 2019 AGM, members passed further WP motions directing AARE pro-action. A WP Report, accessible to all members in June 2020, summarised findings and recommended actions.

In effect, participatory-democratic involvement of AARE members in determining AARE organisational directions built from 2017 into 2019. However, momentum stalled through inaction at AARE Executive level. WP motions, based on Report recommendations, were excluded at that 2020 AGM; an interpretation of AARE constitution clauses was given as the reason. The motions were heard at a Special General Meeting in May 2021; but ‘the constitution’ was invoked to restrict voting to motions as worded, without room to revise them *in situ*. Nor has membership since heard anything about action to follow. Non-action on motions passed by AARE members – when pro-action for research futures needs pace – raise impulse among WP members to facilitate this workshop as an alternative conference space for re-imagining a more inclusive and participatory AARE.

Other organisational modes are possible. Along with re-thinking relations between AARE membership and Executive – including AGM and other meeting-structures – we invite member

knowledge about other professional and community associations that, in current times, model democratic participation, advocacy, and decision on actions and directions.