**CEO’s Report to the AGM 2019**

As I sit down to write this report, it is almost four years ago to the day that I accepted the role of CEO of the ASA: and what a four years it has been. Just as I took up the reins at the beginning of 2016, we lost our organisational funding from Australia Council, which catapulted us into a period of immense and often unsettling change. Balancing our mandate to advocate and provide support for our members, against the need to develop new services and opportunities to grow membership and drive revenue, however, has been challenging. The 14% increase in membership in the 2019/2020 financial year, combined with an approval rating of just under 92% in our 2019 survey, suggests that we have found this balance.

S**ignificant Achievements in 2019/2020**

* Good financial performance
* Institution of an Investment Committee underpinned by a board-approved Investment Policy and Strategy, and the appointment of new financial advisors
* Significant membership growth
* A raft of new member services successfully launched, including a new rates tracker
* Publication of the first edition of a new member handbook
* Significant increase in the quantum and complexity of advice queries
* Strong advocacy initiatives including Digital Lending Rights, exposure of piracy, a call for Tax free Literary Prizes and sustained lobbying for fair contracts

**Advocacy and Advice**

From our annual surveys, we know that Advice and Advocacy are two of the major reasons new members join the ASA, closely followed by the Contract Assessment Service and the opportunity to become part of a community of like-minded people, who understand the joys and tribulations of the creative life.

Our advocacy efforts are focused on two distinct areas:

* Political advocacy, which is concerned with the big issues that affect the earnings and control of their content, for all writers and illustrators
* Personal advocacy, where we work with individual members to try and resolve problematic issues that have arisen with their contracts or their relationships with their publishers

The Big Issues: Political Advocacy

The Copyright Modernisation Review has been on hold for much of this year while Government has focused on the ACCC Review of Digital Platforms, but this does not mean that they have lost interest and once this review has been finalised, the Government’s attention will return to copyright. While acknowledging that the current Copyright Act is out of date and modernisation is required, the ASA’s fundamental position remains the same:

a robust and fair copyright regime is the only way in which creators can be fairly remunerated for their work.

There are, however, other strategic advocacy initiatives that have been receiving our focus:

* The expansion of PLR and ELR to apply to digital formats, including eBooks and audio books.
* Greater recognition of and funding for, Literature which received only 7% of discretionary funding from the Australia Council for the Arts in 2018/2019; the lowest of any of the art forms.
* Consideration of legislative protection for authors, with regard to reversion of rights and bestseller clauses, as is the case in many other copyright territories throughout the world. At the moment, the author/publisher relationship is covered solely by contract, yet the contractual relationship is not a balanced one, with the publisher almost always holding more power than the author.
* Tax-free Literary Prizes. Lotto winnings are tax free, yet all literary prizes, other than the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards, are taxed. We are calling on the Government to redress this imbalance.

We recently met with the Minister for Communications and the Arts, and were able to explain the platforms of our advocacy. Best-selling author Jacqueline Harvey joined us and spoke very eloquently about the realities of the writer’s life and we believe it was a very positive first meeting. We have also built a constructive relationship with the Literature team at the Department of Communications and the Arts, particularly with regard to Digital PLR.

In addition, the ASA is part of Books Create Australia, a joint book industry platform of authors, publishers, libraries and booksellers, dedicated to identifying areas for potential collaboration and to championing Australian writing. This collaboration has led to the creation of Parliamentary Friends of Australian Books and Writers, a group that provides a forum for Members and Senators to meet and interact with the publishing industry on matters relating to the work of writers, printers, publishers and the whole of the industry.

Individual Advocacy

As we have been signalling for some time now, the easier the technology to make a book becomes, the greater the proliferation of predatory or inexperienced publishing sites. These in turn lead to many problems for our members, from unfair contracts through to non-payment of royalties and everything in between. We have seen a 140% increase in the number of written advice queries over the past two years, an issue that is exacerbated by the fact that the queries are also growing in their complexity. Increasingly we are being called on to intervene on the author’s behalf and try and negotiate both termination of contracts and reversion of rights.

**Industry Initiatives and Partnerships**

* Judge for the Australian Book Industry Awards
* Judge for Copyright Agency Publishing Scholarship
* ASA group of authors attends the Visiting International Publishers’ Day as part of the Sydney Writers’ Festival
* Copyright panel at the Digital Alliance Conference
* Author panel at Perth’s Disrupted Festival
* Publishing panel at SPN in Melbourne
* FNAWN Diversity Conference in Canberra
* ASA presentation at Romance Writers’ Conference, the first-time that the ASA had been asked to attend
* Ingram Spark’s Indie Publishing panel
* ASA presentation to IPED (Editors’ Association)
* ASA member of the industry Business Round Table along with ABA, APA and ALIA (libraries)
* Member of Parliamentary Friends of Australian Books and Authors
* Partnered with Macquarie University Economics Department to present a lecture on the issues facing authors today, from which the students developed research projects pertinent to the ASA
* Contra advertising in place with both the Melbourne and Sydney Writers’ Festivals, Sisters in Crime, the BAD Sydney Crime Writers Festival, History Writers and Romance Writers
* Partnered with Varuna for the Ray Koppe Award

**Membership Services**

Distribution

Dennis Jones & Associates was the biggest distributor for self-published authors and small publishers in Australia, so when they went into liquidation in August 2018, it sent shockwaves through the book industry and the ASA membership. The situation was made worse by the fact that all stock was on consignment, but the landlord of the warehouses holding that stock was uncooperative and only willing to provide access for stock retrieval on an extremely limited basis.

The ASA activated a plan that removed members’ stock on their behalf, secured them alternative distribution with John Reed Books (JRB) and facilitated the transfer of stock either back to the author or to that new distributor. This took an enormous amount of work but earned considerable respect from the affected members and excellent PR across the industry in general.

That temporary arrangement with JRB became a permanent arrangement in March 2019. Although up-take has been slow, because the high costs of Print on Demand and freight make it difficult for authors to cover their costs, it is important that there is an alternative available for those who are struggling to publish traditionally. It is also likely that short run and POD will become more cost effective over time. The ASA charges a small annual administration fee but takes no share of the revenue generated through this arrangement.

Insurance

A specially tailored author insurance package was launched in October 2018 as a member service at a heavily discounted price. The ASA receives a small commission on every sign-up. Up-take has been steady, but the aim is to offer a very competitive rate on individual insurances specifically for authors and illustrators, early in 2020. This has enormous potential over time.

Mentorships

The mentorship register was refreshed, with a broader range of mentors including illustrators. CA Award mentorship applications almost doubled compared to the previous year and included a closed Facebook community for all winners and a *Paths to Publishing Program* both of which have been very well received. A new initiative, *The First 10 Pages* was also launched to provide a more affordable mentorship option for members.

International Marketplace

This service has continued to grow, with 700 international publishers and agents now on the ASA database. The IMP is now presented as a full-colour catalogue, which is more accessible for the recipients and the first contacts have now been made, although there has not yet been an agreement signed. While the catalogues generate modest direct revenue, this service does drive new membership.

Style File

The new Style File website launched in October 2018 and has been very positively received. It is also generating work for the members, with 86 job offers made from launch until the end of June.

Advent Calendar

December tends to be a very quiet revenue month so the ASA Advent Calendar was launched, offering a special promotion every day for the month. This generated additional revenue but also kept the ASA at the forefront of people’s minds at a very crowded time of the year.

ASA Comprehensive Guide to Australian Publishing

This handbook was developed as an incentive for members to renew, as we did not want to discount the price of membership. The Guide was very well received and is now being used as an incentive for new members to join up. It will be up-dated and extended in early 2020 in time for the end of the current financial year membership drive.

Workshops

While Professional Development is now proving to be very challenging, in part because there are now so many opportunities available outside of the ASA, but the two major workshops in the year, *Self-Publishing* and *Money Matters*, were both well attended and drove much needed revenue. Both were held in person in Sydney, but had up to 45 members joining in virtually.

Contract Assessments and Advice

Contract Assessments continue to be a very popular service, to the extent that we have had to employ another part-time lawyer, to keep up with demand.

The aforementioned growth in advice queries confirms that the ASA has become the unofficial information hub for the industry, which is valuable to our members, but is a significant drain on resources.

Events

This year the Colin SImpson Lecture was presented by the very successful author, Jacqueline Harvey, who stepped in after a cancellation.

The Barbara Jefferis Award was held at the Women’s College at Sydney University, with Rosalind Hinde’s family present and it was a very special and well-attended occasion.

Resources

New publishing contract templates were launched, including a Ghost Writing Agreement, as well as content from Professional Development activities and a very popular paper on Literary Estates.

Following the decision to close the print edition of *Australian Author,* a commemorative edition was published in November 2018 and elicited a very positive response.

There is considerably more work that can be done in resources but lack of funding does make it difficult to exploit these opportunities as quickly as we would like.

**Membership**

Membership is a good news story with an increase of 14% in the 2018/2019 financial year. At the end of October 2019, the membership numbers were 16% ahead of the prior year, so the growth is continuing. This is particularly pleasing in a very flat economic environment.

**2019/2020 Financial Year Initiatives Underway**

* Recent launch of the ASA HQ Contemporary Fiction Award which is being run in conjunction with Harlequin, and bears a prize of a $10,000 advance and publishing contract. Over 130 entries were received.
* *ASA Insider* launched on 20 August. This video series is designed to keep members up-to-date with what we are working on and to answer any questions that the members want answered.
* The inaugural Style File mentorships were launched and the 8 winners have been very excited to have this new opportunity.
* A new member Noticeboard has been launched, where members can advertise their launches, promote their work and offer services.
* The ASA Rates Tracker has been well received and will help provide us with market information that will inform our review of the Rates of Pay.
* The annual survey has been completed and as this is the third year of the survey, we are starting to build up some useful trend data.
* The Beckett Blake Trust Literary fellowship, which is a $20K fellowship for an ASA member, gifted by one of our members, Wendy Beckett.
* Pilot Library Project providing the opportunity for established Australian authors with reverted rights, to access libraries in 3-4 states, via a specially developed licencing scheme for eBooks.
* Two new event series have recently launched, which will carry over into 2020.

**CONCLUSION**

As I reflect on the many changes that have taken place at the ASA, not only in the last financial year, but over the last four years, there is much to be proud of, including: steadily increasing membership, a significantly broader range of services, increasing member satisfaction ratings and growth in the ASA’s profile within the industry. The substantial increase in the number and complexity of advice queries also demonstrates that the need for the ASA has never been greater.

This success has only been possible because of the commitment, skill, passion and drive of the ASA team: Laurine, Lauren, Emily, Angeles and of course the wonderful Olivia who is about to step into the role of CEO. It has been such a pleasure working with them and I would like to thank each and every one of them for their support, irreverent humour and willingness to keep pushing the boundaries. While they have all done a superb job working with me to broaden the scope and reach of the ASA, however, the continued lack of government funding cannot help but have an adverse impact on the rate at which they will be able to continue to develop new initiatives.

Finally, I would like to thank the ASA Board, our many partners and affiliates and of course, the members. It has been a privilege and a joy to work with so many creative and dedicated writers and illustrators, who simply refuse to give up. Your stoicism in the face of such a tough publishing environment is inspirational and I take my hat off to each and every one of you. I can assure you that your new CEO and the ASA team will always have your back.

Juliet Rogers

CEO

7 November 2019