

What's important about editors?



The Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) is the national professional association for Australian editors. CEO Karen Lee outlines the organisation's history and speaks to some of the key issues facing the editing profession today.

IPEd's history began almost five decades ago, when editors began to mobilise, frustrated by the lack of support for their profession. They shared common concerns about the lack of formal qualifications in editing and publishing, the absence of formal guidelines or standards for editing practice and little, if any, cohesion as a professional body. As a result, state and territory societies of editors began to form, with Victoria first in 1970, New South Wales in 1978 and the other states and Canberra following by 1992.

In 1998 these societies formed the Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE) as a peak body to undertake projects to benefit editing and editors on a national basis for the first time. CASE's landmark project, *Australian Standards for Editing Practice* (published in 2001, second edition 2013), codified the knowledge an editor brings to the job and set standards against which to measure editorial competence.

Using the *Standards* as a foundation, CASE then set about establishing an accreditation scheme. In 2005, CASE became the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) and in 2008, after years of research, planning and consultation, the first accreditation exam was held and the first candidates were accredited.

By 2016 IPEd had nationalised, the former societies becoming branches—increasing its paid staff and capacity for advocacy work. Most recently, IPEd welcomed its first international branch: New Zealand.

Advocacy and representation are key issues for our members, and a large part of where IPEd's work has been focused. Below is a snapshot of current issues facing editors, and IPEd's work in those areas.

Role of the editor

One of the biggest challenges facing the editing profession is a lack of understanding about what editors do. This has been the shared experience of editors across the board, whether they work as freelancers or in-house staff for publishing houses, not-for-profits, universities and the education sector, the public service or the

corporate sector. To address this, IPEd has established a national educational pilot program to educate and inform writers about the profession.

With funding support from the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, the Ambassadors Program—as it's known—will target those who require editors most. Arguably, anyone who publishes content *needs* an editor, but IPEd has decided to narrow its scope to universities and writers groups.

Why universities? Despite the existence of thesis editing guidelines co-authored by IPEd and the Australian Council of Graduate Research, misunderstanding of the role of editors and their services is rife among higher degree research students and their supervisors. Similarly, in approaching writers groups, IPEd will focus on people who most likely require the services of an editor.

From mid-2019, our initial cohort of ambassadors will begin visiting a selection of university campuses around Australia, as well as libraries, writers centres and writers festivals to dispel misconceptions and give advice on the role that editors play in the publication process and the value they add to writers' work. While editors have often given presentations on an ad hoc basis to such groups over the years, this is the first time, as far as we are aware, that it has been done on an organisational level and at such a scale. IPEd has high hopes of being able to expand the program in the future.

Raising the profile of the profession

Raising the profile of editors goes hand in hand with the work of the Ambassadors Program. But where our ambassadors will be speaking with writers, this particular focus targets the publishing industry, government and organisations such as the Australian Society of Authors (ASA), Australian Publishers Association (APA), the Copyright Agency and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). Editors play an important part in creating publications and want to be part of initiatives that shape the future of communication and publishing. To do this, they need to be at

the table to contribute to discussions and negotiations on issues that affect the wider publishing industry.

IPEd recently worked with the APA to develop a guide for the Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (AIPI), which aims to increase access to published material for people living with print disabilities, and we are also providing an advisory role to the federal government's Digital Transformation Agency (DTA), which is in the process of revising the *Style Manual*, a bible for editors and anyone working to ready content for publication.

Recommending pay rates for editors

Rates of pay have long been a bugbear for editors. This has historically been a fraught issue due to the wide variations between rates charged by different editors, as well as some variation between states. There are many reasons for this, including an individual editor's experience, training and accreditation, as well as individual project variables such as the quality of the copy, the depth and breadth of the edit required and the timeframe allowed to complete the work.

IPEd is establishing a working party to review freelance and in-house editorial pay rates with a view to setting IPEd recommended rates. One of the challenges we face in representing our members in this area is that we are a professional body and not a union. However, we will be consulting with other industry bodies—in the first instance the MEAA—for advice on how we can tackle this.

A second stage will see IPEd develop a national campaign on recommended pay scales for Australian editors and promote their adoption by publishers, government, business and other clients.

Recognition of accreditation

Accreditation was the principal reason for CASE and IPEd's establishment, as it assists editors to gain formal recognition of their skills within the publishing industry and with prospective employers. This is increasingly necessary in the gig-economy era, when professional editors who have spent years training or acquiring expertise find themselves competing with hobbyists who charge unsustainable rates.

Similar to an accountant undertaking formal studies to become a CPA, editors who pass the IPEd accreditation exam are certified by our accreditation board and are granted the postnominal AE, for Accredited Editor. A decade since the first AEs were unleashed, we are increasingly seeing evidence of employers desiring, or sometimes even requiring, IPEd accreditation when advertising for editors, especially in government fields.

While the cost of accreditation is high (it can be as much as \$680 for IPEd members and \$850 for non-members), it gives prospective employers and clients a reliable indicator of competence in the skills of the editors they engage; as such, many AEs find they are able to charge higher fees. But given that the high cost can be a barrier to entry for some editors, IPEd is investigating avenues for lowering the cost so more editors are able to gain accreditation.

As for skills development, IPEd has created a national online training program, also funded through the Copyright Agency's

Cultural Fund, offering webinars to all members, regardless of location. The first of these launched last year, and IPEd is now focused on setting up a national framework of online workshops, broadening the topics to address the many skills, both new and established, that editors need today.

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Crystal-gazing into the future

Publishing is changing. The rise of new platforms allows more and more people to publish their work and, with the barriers to entry now much lower, editors are needed more than ever.

In his introduction to the second edition of the *Standards*, linguist Roland Sussex asserts that editors play an indispensable role in today's rapid communication cycles. He argues that the skills editors possess—such as diplomacy, logical thinking and a solid grasp on the essential tools of writing and communication—are as important now as they have ever been.

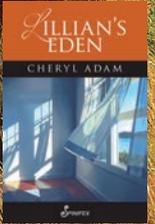
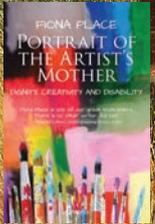
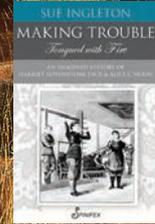
And editors need these traditional editorial skills as well as new ones. The editors of tomorrow will be digitally savvy communication consultants, coders, teachers, mentors and advocates for accessibility and inclusivity. Novels, textbooks, government reports, corporate documents, self-published books, scripts, social media, mainstream media, websites, apps, blogs, marketing materials and more—editors' skills will make them shine.

Author, editor and journalist Gary Kamiya pinpoints another essential fact about editors:

The art of editing is running against the cultural tide. We are in an age of volume; editing is about refinement. It's about getting deeper into a piece, its ideas, its structure, its language. It's a handmade art, a craft ... Editing aims at making a piece more like a Stradivarius and less like a microchip. And as the media universe becomes larger and more filled with microchips, we need the violin makers.

IPEd is proud to salute and celebrate our violin makers. 

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