

**President's Report, AGM of the Australasian Speech Science and Technology
Association,
7th December 2020 1pm AEDT**

To say that 2020 has been incredibly challenging is a vast understatement. The pandemic has changed the way we conduct our lives in so many respects. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate ASSTA members on the resilience you have shown during the pandemic and the hard work you have done to keep working towards your goals while supporting your families, friends, colleagues and students.

The pandemic has highlighted human capacity for creativity and adaptability. The determination to keep the research effort alive and find new ways to get the job done has been remarkable. At short notice, you were able to roll out excellent online learning, virtual scientific meetings and seminars that can be accessed from all over the world, opening up tremendous opportunity for collaboration and sharing of cutting-edge research findings. You were able to explore and develop new ways of recruiting participants and collecting data, of working remotely and juggling the challenges of family, home schooling, teaching, and research. Although there may have been days when curling upon the couch was the most sensible thing you could do for yourself and your loved ones, you got back up and got on with the business of getting through this unprecedented time in human history. My heartfelt condolences go out to those who have lost loved ones this year.

One major casualty of the pandemic was SST2020 which would have been held on the Gold Coast next week. The decision to cancel SST for 2020 was not taken lightly and was made after considerable consultation. In March we took this unprecedented step based on the uncertainty ahead. The rationale for cancelling SST at the beginning of the pandemic was based on the following major considerations:

- A large number of ASSTA members, including the SST organising committee, were immediately tasked with the very challenging job of redesigning and deploying teaching materials for online delivery in a very short timeframe (as few as a couple of weeks). This took members away from research and away from other professional activities and community service.
- Face to face data collection ceased, so students and researchers were faced with considerable delays in progressing their projects. It was anticipated that this would affect researchers in ways that could not be predicted but would undoubtedly reduce the number of projects ready for write-up/completion.
- Social distancing measures including school closures and workplace shutdowns meant that families were required to rearrange schedules to manage childcare responsibilities. This, combined with job uncertainty, added to the burden on families and individuals – potentially further impacting the progression of research.
- Modelling at the time suggested peak transmission would occur around the time that the 4-page SST papers would be submitted and reviewed. We were concerned that researchers may have been unable to commit to SST submission and reviewing through illness or caring for sick loved ones.
- If SST were to go ahead, the organising committee would have been required to commit funds immediately. A late cancellation would almost certainly have resulted in financial loss for the host institution and for ASSTA.

I am so sorry that we can't all come together for SST2020, but now is the time to move forward with planning for SST in 2022. I call on members to think about hosting SST in two years. There is plenty of time to start planning. Now that virtual meetings are the norm, there is no reason why an even bigger and better SST2022 cannot go ahead in whatever form is appropriate. I look forward to seeing you all at SST in 2022.

In an initiative to support members during the pandemic, we launched a new grant scheme the **ASSTA COVID-19 Special Conference Support Awards** of up to \$500 each. This grant aimed to provide funding for student and ECR members to help allay the costs of conference attendance (virtual or in-person) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two awards were made this year to Jenny Yu for Speech Prosody and Joshua Penney for INTERSPEECH.

ASSTA is also committed to supporting groundwork meetings for setting up new or strengthening existing research collaborations and for seminars or workshops on particular issues of note. The **ASSTA Research Event Awards** are offered for up to \$5000 each. In the past, calls for research events were made twice per year but we are now accepting submissions at any time with a maximum of two events funded per year. Submissions are sent for review to an independent expert assessment panel. This year two awards were made. Congratulations to Gerry Docherty, Janet Fletcher and Olga Maxwell for their award for SocioPhon Aus – 3rd Worksop on Sociophonetic Variability in the English Varieties of Australia, and to Jesin James, Catherine Watson and Peter Keegan for their award for Speech Technology Research Hui at the University of Auckland. My understanding is that both events have been postponed.

Our support for members comes from income generated mainly from memberships and profit that may be achieved through ASSTA sponsored conferences. ICPHS 2019 returned a small profit to ASSTA.

In other exciting news Michael Proctor is in discussions with various organisations and groups about putting in a bid to host INTERSPEECH in 2026. This would be another major event for ASSTA and, building on the success of ICPHS 2019, would further raise awareness of the important phonetic, speech science and speech technology research being done in our part of the world.

The Australian Acoustical Society and The Acoustical Society of America are planning a joint meeting which was originally due to go ahead in December 2021 but has been postponed to 2023. ASSTA has expressed interest in being involved in this event and a preliminary meeting with organisers has taken place earlier this year.

On 19th October 2020 the Job-Ready Graduates Package of reforms to higher education was passed into legislation. This package effectively disincentivises HASS courses in favour of STEM. ASSTA is proud of the success we continue to achieve in bringing together both HASS and STEM in our SST conference series and in our support for members and research groups. In June when the package was announced, ASSTA became a signatory to the HASS associations letter opposing changes to HASS degree fees.

<https://www.chass.org.au/media-releases/letter-from-hass-associations-opposing-changes-to-hass-degree-fees/>

ASSTA has distributed one newsletter this year – thank you to Olcay Turk for taking charge of the ASSTA Newsletter. Another newsletter will come out in the New Year so please send through your lab reports and news to Olcay as soon as possible (olcay.turk@vuw.ac.nz).

The Forensic Speech Sciences Committee of ASSTA has been quiet of late but we are hoping to reinvigorate the committee which will receive a boost from the new Research Hub for Language in Forensic Evidence established at The University of Melbourne's School of Languages and Linguistics. Debbie Loakes will be in touch to seek expressions of interest from potential committee members.

In October we received notification from Trent Lewis that he would be stepping down from the Executive. I would like to thank Trent for six years of valuable service on the ASSTA Executive. Trent has been instrumental in getting the new website up and running. I think you'll all agree that this new site is a great improvement and will help to streamline member experience in communicating with ASSTA and accessing important information. Trent also took responsibility for the ASSTA grants program. We really appreciate the voluntary contribution that office bearers make over and above their regular academic roles. Thank you Trent, your contribution has been greatly appreciated.

As there was only one nomination for the President, Secretary, Treasurer and one executive member, the current office bearers will retain their positions in 2020. For the position vacated by Trent Lewis there were two nominations and members have been asked to vote for their preferred candidate. An announcement of the new executive member will be made at the end of the AGM.

Remember that ASSTA has a twitter presence thanks to Debbie Loakes. You can find us at the_real_ASSTA @realASSTA. Please follow, retweet and tag.

As we could not have our fiercely contested and hugely successful biennial in-person spectrogram reading competition, we created a virtual one. Four spectrograms with a COVID-19 theme were sent by email to members. Winners will be announced at the AGM. We will also make the spectrograms available to the wider local and international community after the AGM via twitter to raise awareness of ASSTA.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the ASSTA Executive (Janet Fletcher, Trent Lewis, Debbie Loakes, Michael Tyler) for their hard work and dedication to the ASSTA community and you for your continued support of ASSTA.

I wish you a very happy and relaxing holiday season.

Felicity Cox
ASSTA President