REPORT

IPEd National Survey of Editors, 2016

The Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) surveyed members of the six branches of IPEd and the Canberra Society of Editors (CSE) during November 2016 using an online survey.

The survey collected data from editors across Australia but also allowed for breakdown of state-specific data as respondents were asked to nominate which branch of IPEd they were a member of, if they were members of CSE, and if they were members of CSE and a branch of IPEd.

The survey link was sent by email to 1531 members of IPEd and CSE in mid-October 2016 with a deadline of 15 November. A reminder email was sent in early November.

The link to the survey was also posted on IPEd's Facebook and LinkedIn pages, which attracted responses from some editors who were not members of either IPEd or CSE.

There were 541 respondents to the survey. The overall response rate was 35%, with between 30% and 49% of the members of each branch of IPEd or CSE taking part.

Twenty respondents who were members of CSE were also members of an IPEd branch.

The affiliation of respondents and the proportion of each branch or society membership represented in the survey are shown in Table 1. Respondents who were members of both CSE and an IPEd branch are not included in branch totals.

Table 1:   Branch/society affiliation of respondents (n = 540)

Primary affiliation (branch or society)	No.	% of responses	% response of branch/society membership
Editors Victoria*	170	32	30
Editors New South Wales*	111	21	35
Editors Queensland*	96	18	36
Editors WA*	48	9	49
Society of Editors (SA)*	42	8	33
Editors Tasmania*	10	2	31
Member of CSE only	36	7	32
Member of CSE and an IPEd branch	20	4	n/a
Not a member of IPEd or CSE	7	1	n/a
Total	**540**	**100**	

* IPEd branch

Respondents were also members of many other organisations, with, in particular, many mentioning membership of writers centres and authors groups. Respondents also listed indexers groups and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). At least five mentioned membership of the [UK] Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP).

While we can't be sure of the extent to which this survey represented Australian editors as a whole, it identified that 85% of respondents were female, 43% were over 55 years old and only 11% were under 35 (Figure 1).
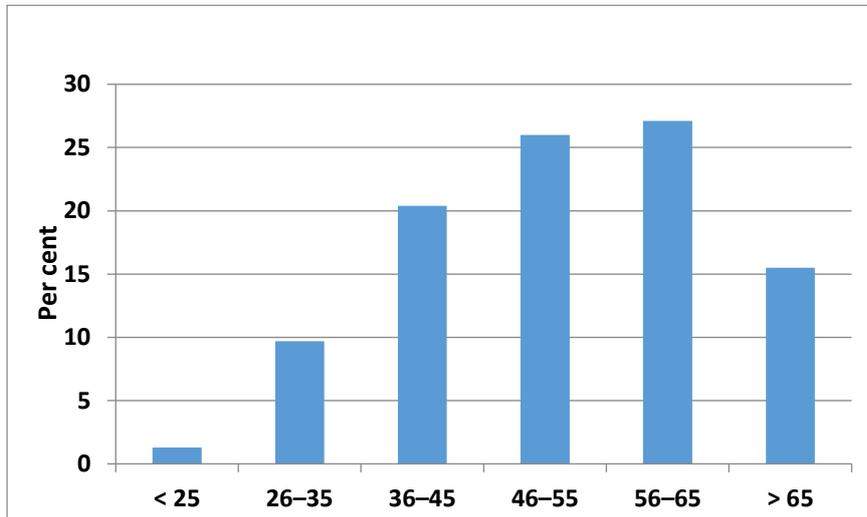

Figure 1: Age group of respondents (n = 535)

More respondents lived in Victoria (32%) than in any other state, followed by New South Wales (25%) and Queensland (17%). Eight respondents didn't live in Australia but identified Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Mauritius, Peru, New Zealand, Germany or Thailand as their place of residence.

Seventy-five per cent of the respondents had four or more years of editing experience, 33% had four to ten years of experience and 17% had over twenty years of experience (Figure 2). But the greatest proportion (25%) had between one and three years' editing experience (compared with 23% in the 2014 survey).
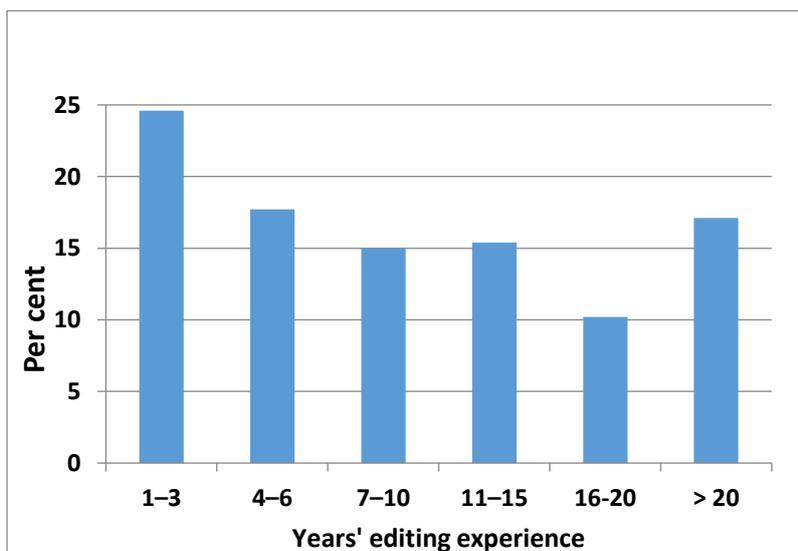

Figure 2: Respondents' full-time equivalent years of editing experience (n = 536)

Qualifications and training

Respondents were typically well educated, with 93% having a degree or higher, 64% having a qualification higher than an undergraduate degree and 12% having a doctorate (Figure 3).
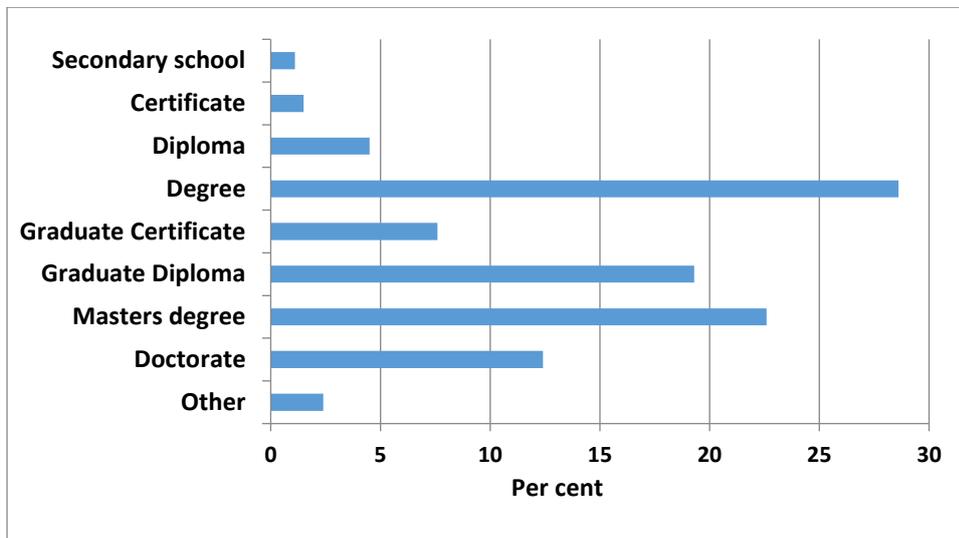

Figure 3:   Respondents' highest level of education (n = 539)

Sixty-two per cent of respondents were Professional members of IPEd and 32% were Accredited or Distinguished Editors. Associate and Student membership levels accounted for 30% of respondents, suggesting an important role for IPEd in supporting emerging editors.

When responding to the question about the benefits of their Accredited Editor (AE) or Distinguished Editor (DE) status, 78% said they had benefited moderately to a great deal, and 22% only slightly or not at all. Among AE/DE respondents, 79% believed that their status made the profession more professional, 72% identified gaining increased confidence in their ability, while 66% considered that their status gave clients more confidence in their editing ability. Sixty-one per cent of respondents felt that they had benefited from professional development through exam preparation (Figure 4).
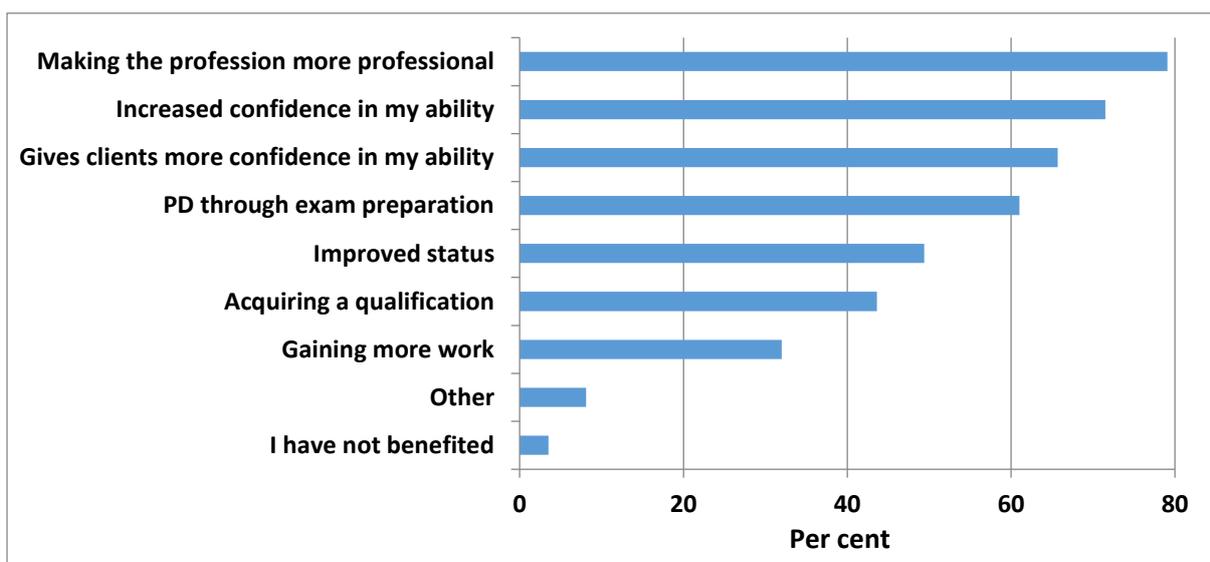

Figure 4: Perceived benefits of respondents' AE/DE status (n = 172). Respondents could select more than one category.

Other 'benefits' of AE/DE status listed included:

> *It gives other editors confidence in my ability, for them to refer work to me. (I refer overflow work to other AEs only.)*

> *I charge a higher rate.*

> *[It] has not increased my income or ability to increase rates with clients.*

Only 3.5% of AE/DE respondents claimed that they had not benefited at all (Figure 4) and 2% said they would not renew their accreditation when it was due.

The question about planning to seek accreditation was answered by 361 respondents, with 25% saying they would seek accreditation and 43% undecided. While only 89 respondents were clear that they would seek accreditation, 232 responded to the question concerning *when* they anticipated doing so, with 24% saying they would seek accreditation next time it's offered and 41% saying they would seek accreditation at some time in the future but were not sure when.

Of the respondents who did not plan to seek accreditation (n = 201), 53% said that clients had never asked for it and the same proportion said they did not believe they would gain more work because of it. Thirty-nine per cent said they had other qualifications, 37% had extensive experience and didn't think they needed it and 30% believed the exam was too expensive (Figure 5).
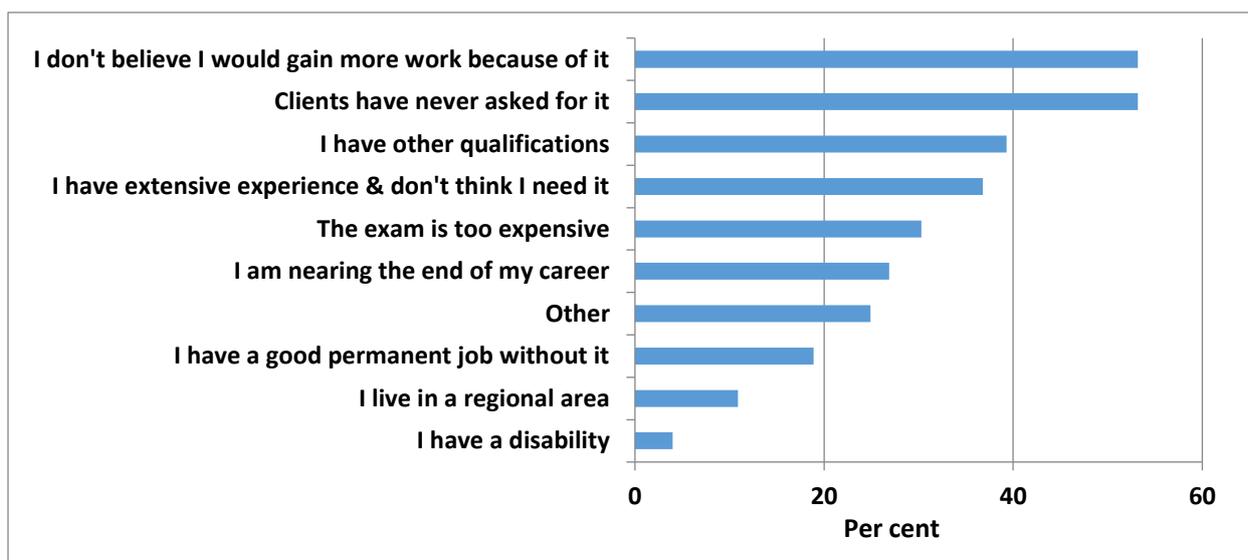

Figure 5: Reasons given for respondents not planning to seek accreditation (n = 201). Respondents could select more than one category.

Among 50 'other' responses were:

> *Attempted exam once but none of my clients ask for it – I'm happy to stay unaccredited.*

> *I'm not sure where my career is going yet, I need more experience before I consider accreditation.*

> *At the moment, accreditation would not make a difference as my existing clients choose to work with me based on my reputation and high standard of previous work. In the future, if I need to build my client base, I will consider accreditation.*

A number of other responses related to lack of time, the perception that the exam was too difficult, and that it was not relevant to the type of editing the respondent did.

Thus, the perception of benefits arising from accreditation was mixed, and IPEd has a challenge to raise the status of accreditation so that more editors, and clients, see real benefits flowing from the commitment to take the accreditation exam.

Australian editing work

Only 23% of respondents worked full time as editors, 40% worked part time and 21% had editing work in addition to other employment. This contrasts with results from the 2014 survey, which identified that 27% of respondents were full-time editors, 30% were part time and 14% had editing work in addition to other employment. Most respondents (76%) were freelancers, compared with 56% from the previous survey. It may be that, in accord with the rest of the labour market, full-time jobs are getting harder to find.

The state from which most of respondents' editing work was sourced aligned closely with their place of residence. For example, 25% of respondents lived in New South Wales and 23% reported they gained most of their work from within that state (Figure 6), suggesting perhaps that most editors gain most of their work from within their own state or territory. Scrutinising the data more closely reveals that, indeed, for between 87% and 100% of respondents, their editing work was sourced mainly from the state in which they lived. In the ACT, however, 60% of resident respondents gained most of their work from within the ACT, with an additional 23% gaining most of their work from within New South Wales.

Figure 6: Origin of most of respondents' editing work (n = 519) and their place of residence (n = 538)

But, while only 2% of respondents lived outside Australia, 9% of them gained most of their editing work from outside Australia (Figure 6), with at least 30 countries nominated, as can be seen in Figure 7. The 2014 survey revealed 4% of respondents gaining most of their editing work from outside Australia. We may be seeing a trend towards Australian editors gaining an increasing proportion of their work from overseas.

Figure 7:   Countries outside Australia from where respondents sourced editing work

Respondents were asked to identify areas from which they generated most of their editing income, and again could nominate more than one category: 36% nominated academic editing, 36% education and educational publishing, 26% research, science and/or environment, 22% self-publishing clients, 20% government and 18% publishing clients. A smattering of respondents (up to 6%) nominated from among a wide range of other categories.

When it came to identifying one or more specialist/subject areas (more than one could be chosen), 38% of respondents identified as academic specialists, 35% as generalists, 28% as education specialists, 25% as non-fiction editors, 21% as specialists in government publications, 18% each as science editors, corporate communication or fiction editors, 17% as web content and digital media editors and 16% as social science editors. Between 1% and 9% of respondents identified a specialist area from one or more of numerous other categories.

Respondents were asked for which media most of their editing work was done in the 2015–16 financial year: the greatest proportion selected print materials (36%), with 26% of respondents having edited mostly print and online versions of the same publication and 15% having edited mostly online materials, websites and multimedia materials. The remaining 24% had edited mostly a combination of the above categories. Thus, close to two-thirds of respondents had edited some form of electronic materials.

Technology and editing

Among respondents who did proofreading (94%), 66% used onscreen mark-up, 19% used hard-copy mark-up and 15% used about the same of both. Of respondents who offered editing services, 85% used onscreen mark-up, 3% used hard-copy mark-up and about 12% used both (Figure 8). This shows a slight increase (2% and 6% respectively for editing and proofreading) in the proportion of editors using onscreen technology compared with the 2014 National Editors Survey. The majority of respondents (58%) used PCs, 22% used Macs and about 20% used both.
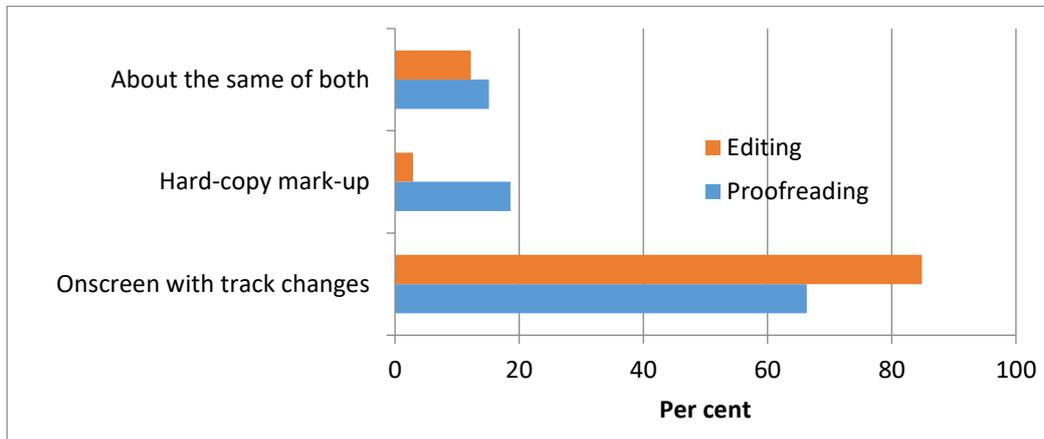

Figure 8: Majority method of editing (n = 515) or proofreading (n = 490) among respondents

Editing income

The question about income was answered by 495 of 541 (92%) of respondents, who estimated their gross income from editing work, before tax and expenses, for the 2015–16 financial year (Table 2). Clearly Australian editors, to the extent that they are represented by the respondents, are not a high-earning group, with 72% of them earning $50,000 or less from editing in 2015–16. It is not surprising, therefore, that many editors combine editing with other work. Comparison with the 2014 survey results suggests that income from editing work may have decreased since that time, with 73% in 2014 (compared with 79% in 2016) earning $60,000 or less in the relevant financial year, and the same proportion (4%) earning more than $100,000.

Table 2: Respondents' estimated gross income (before tax and expenses) from editing in the 2015–16 financial year (n = 495)

Income range ($)	No.	%
<20,000	214	43
21,000–40,000	97	20
41,000–50,000	44	9
51,000–60,000	35	7
61,000–70,000	30	6
71,000–75,000	13	3
76,000–80,000	11	2
81,000–90,000	22	4
91,000–100,000	8	2
>100,000	21	4
Total	**495**	**100**

The freelancer experience

Freelance rates

The average hourly rate charged by freelancers in each of the branches of IPEd and CSE is shown in Table 3, with a national average of $67 per hour. This had essentially not changed since the 2014 survey, when the average rate was $66 per hour.

Table 3: The average hourly rate charged by respondents who are freelance editors in IPEd branches and CSE

Branch/Society	No. of respondents	Rate per hour ($)
CSE	30	76
Editors Tasmania	9	73
Editors Victoria	119	71
Editors New South Wales	95	67
Editors Queensland	69	63
Editors WA	39	60
Society of Editors (SA)	28	57

Nationally, 24% of respondents who worked as freelance editors charged between $60 and $69 per hour, with 19% charging between $50 and $59 per hour and 17% charging between $70 and $79 per hour. At the extremes, 12 (3%) of freelance respondents charged more than $120 per hour, and 11 (3%) charged less than $30 per hour (Figure 9).
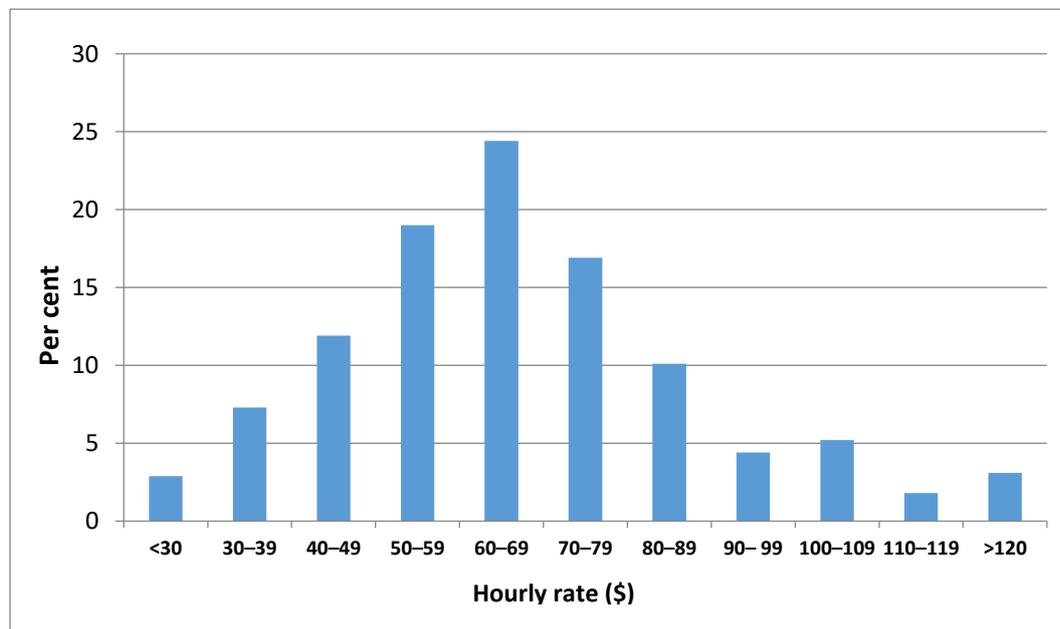

Figure 9: Standard hourly rate (excluding GST) for respondents' freelance editing work (n = 389)

Not all freelance respondents charged different rates for different types of work. However, for those who did vary rates (63%), the average (mean) rate for proofreading was $55 per hour, for copyediting $65 per hour and for substantive or structural editing $74 per hour. Writing was charged at an average of $84 per hour and thesis editing at $54 per hour.

It is clear that some editors charged less per hour for thesis editing than for other types of editing and some of the reasons given were:

> *I charge for thesis editing on a project basis – what I think students will be willing to pay in total works out to be a lower effective hourly rate than my standard rate.*

> *I charge less for thesis editing because I assume students have limited incomes.*

Determining freelance rates

When determining their standard hourly rate, many freelancers used more than one strategy, with 53% of respondents basing their rate on what they thought the market would pay, while 45% determined a rate based on the level of editing required, 35% based it on the client budget and 29% compared their rate with what other editors charged and tried to be competitive.

When providing a quote for an editing job, 33% of freelance respondents provided an estimate based on an hourly rate and the number of words, 26% provided a firm quote for the whole job and 19% provided an hourly rate and charged for the number of hours the job took. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents stated that their quotes varied depending on the client and the nature of the work. Fifty-seven respondents added a variety of other criteria for quoting. Examples include:

> *The estimate is based on a trial edit. It is not possible to base on number of words alone, as the quality of writing varies between authors. The final cost invoiced is for the number of hours taken, often a little under or over the estimate.*

> *I quote for the job, but add provisos e.g. word length +/–5% of the material I quoted on; my quote is valid for 6 months; vast difference in material then I'll contact client to renegotiate.*

> *I estimate 4–6 pages an hour at $109, and give that as a range (rather than a fixed quote). If the text is a real mess, or if it has many pages of references, I reduce the number of pages per hour that I use as the basis for a quote OR set a separate rate for the reference list.*

Many respondents commented that they charged less for thesis editing than they did for corporate or government assignments because they believed students don't have enough money. Some editors did not charge charities at all or offered them a discounted rate.

Editors Directory

Freelance respondents were asked whether they intended to list their services on IPEd's new national Editors Directory (ED) which was then due to launch on 1 January 2017. Among Professional and Honorary Life members (who are eligible for a listing on the ED), 78% indicated that they would or already had, with most of this group already listed on their branch directory. Only 2% of Professional or Honorary Life members who responded and who were listed on their branch list, did not intend to complete an entry on the ED. Reasons for this included having plenty of work without the listing, pending or actual retirement or withdrawal from editing work, and concern about the cost.

Freelance challenges

Respondents were asked to rate the level of challenge posed by a number of situations that commonly face freelance editors, on a 5-point scale from extremely challenging to not at all challenging. Situations that most challenged respondents (scores 1 and 2) were broadening their client base (51% of respondents), finding enough work or clients (44%) and maintaining and extending networks (43%), as shown in Table 4.

Only 9% did not think it was a challenge at all to broaden their client base, 12% did not think it was a challenge at all to find enough work or clients and only 7% found maintaining and extending networks not at all challenging. Keeping up with developments or changes in style, usage etc. and working to a budget were the least challenging matter faced by respondents.

Table 4:   Challenges for freelance editors: respondents who found situations challenging (scores 1 + 2 on a scale of 1 to 5)

Situation	No. of respondents who selected 'most challenging'	%
Broadening my client base	200	51
Finding enough work or clients	174	44
Maintaining and extending networks	170	43
Balancing editing with other commitments (work-life balance)	153	39
Estimating the time a job will take	139	35
Keeping up with new technologies	139	35
Changing direction as an editor	137	35
Having colleagues I can reliably hand work on to	116	30
Workload management	114	29
Finding interesting work	102	26
Extending my skills	98	25
Keeping up with developments or changes in style, usage etc.	87	22
Working to a budget	87	22

Respondents also mentioned a variety of other challenges. Examples include:

[I] sometimes experience conflict/overload when I'm required as technical writer when I'm already in an editing contract.

A real challenge is lack of valuable feedback from freelance clients about my work; a follow-up job from them is about all we get to say it was good work.

Managing a business as well as working in the business.

Business costs

Freelance respondents' business expenses reported in the 2016 and 2014 surveys are shown in Table 5. There seems to have been little change, with the 2016 respondents reporting a slightly lower level of business expenses, and the majority in both surveys reporting expenses of less than $3000.

Table 5:   Respondents' business expenses related to freelance editing for the financial years 2015–16 and 2013–14

Business expenses	2016 survey		2014 survey	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
< $3000	274	71	170	67
$3000-$4999	62	16	34	13
$5000-$9999	33	9	28	11
$10,000-$15,000	9	2	12	5
> $15,000	8	2	10	4
Total	**386**	**100.0**	**254**	**100.0**

Professional development

Areas of professional development that would assist respondents in their editing work are presented in Table 6. Most areas would be useful for more than 30% of respondents, but there seems to be little need for training in word processing.

Table 6: **Areas of professional development that would assist respondents in their editing work. Respondents could choose more than one category.**

Professional development area	%
SEO, accessibility and metadata	43
Training in Microsoft macros and other features	42
Marketing and promotion for freelance editors	41
eBook editing	41
Grammar, usage and style	37
Web editing	36
Networking	36
Training in design software	35
Business skills for freelance editors	32
Project management	26
Social media	23
Mentoring	22
Fiction editing	22
Training in word processing	10

Comparing these numbers with the 2014 survey results, the most notable difference is a decline of about 7% in the expressed desire for professional development in social media, business skills for freelance editors and marketing and promotion for freelance editors. Not all categories in 2016 were also represented in 2014.

Forty-seven respondents (10%) were interested in other forms of professional development, such as web design, client and risk management and structural editing.

While respondents expressed great interest in professional development, 43% of them had done five or fewer hours of professional development in 2015–16 (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Table 7: **Hours of professional development undertaken by respondents during 2015–16**

Hours of professional development	No.	%
0–5 hours	232	43
5–10 hours	102	19
10–15 hours	59	11
15–20 hours	43	8
20–25 hours	21	4
More than 25 hours	79	15
Total	**536**	**100**

The most commonly attended form of professional development in 2015–16 was workshops run by the societies of editors, with 40% of respondents attending these and 34% attending other society of editors events. Eleven per cent did a massive open online course (MOOC), 15% did other online courses and 16% attended a webinar. Many respondents mentioned that they did their own informal

professional development by reading articles on editing, researching or mentoring others. Twenty per cent did no professional development in the year.

Thirty-five per cent of respondents had attended an IPEd National Editors Conference, with networking seen as one of the greatest benefits of going to such a conference.

When asked to rank on a 6-point scale a list of activities that IPEd could pursue for the benefit of members, the highest priority for 37% of respondents was more advocacy and promotion of editing. For 25% the highest priority was more professional development programs organised or promoted through IPEd and 19% saw a centralised employment or freelance assignment brokerage as their highest priority. Notably, only 4% of respondents considered that more promotion of accreditation for editors was their highest priority. Many additional activities were suggested; for example:

Lobbying of governments and large publishing bodies … around the value of editing and the deep and broad skills of editors.

More networking events to build the editor community. The current programs seem too formal for me, as if they are aimed at older members.

Establishing recommended hourly rates for freelance editing.

A low-key or intermittent online advertising campaign to promote the benefits of engaging an editor and raise the profile of editing as a profession.

Conclusion

With 541 responses (a 35% response rate) this survey may represent the largest undertaken of Australian editors to date. The 2014 survey had 391 respondents of 1495 editors from across the societies of editors which were the members of IPEd at the time – a 26% response rate.

To the extent to which this survey represents Australian editors as a whole, editors are predominantly female, more than 45 years old, well qualified but not well paid, and enthusiastic about professional development. Most work as freelance editors.

The survey provides both an industry overview of sectors editors work in and areas of specialisation, as well as an idea of income that editors earn from editing. Industry information also shows from which states and territories in Australia editors find work and highlights that an increasing number of editors are securing editing work from other parts of the world.

The challenges and concerns members face as editors, and their professional development needs, are identified, providing IPEd with a useful overview of members' needs. This information, and much more from the survey, will be used to inform future activities and services for members.