

Issue 6, October 2019

Welcome to the 6th issue of *Footwork*, aiming to keep Orientation and Mobility (O&M) employers, employees, and other stakeholders informed of developments in the O&M Association of Australasia (OMAA).

# OMAA: New website, public register and membership processes

After many months of twisting and tweaking, the new and improved OMAA website went live on 7th September 2019 <https://www.omaaustralasia.com/>. It has the same OMAA look and feel, but with some exciting new features for members and consumers:

* O&M Public Register: <https://www.omaaustralasia.com/register/>

Please note this is not yet populated, as we need to manually enter members who are confirmed COMS. Once you pass the COMS exam, please send a scan of your COMS certificate to [standards@omaaustralasia.com](mailto:standards@omaaustralasia.com) to go on the Register.

* For current members, reset your password and log in to your account: <https://www.omaaustralasia.com/members/reset-your-password/>

Please note: after resetting your password, you’ll be prompted to log in; use your first name and surname as your username.

* For new OMAA memberships, including secure online payments: <https://www.omaaustralasia.com/members/become-an-omaa-member/>
* For OMAA membership renewals, including secure online payments: <https://www.omaaustralasia.com/members/renew-your-membership/>
* To edit or update your OMAA membership details: <https://www.omaaustralasia.com/members/edit-your-member-details/>

Further information and instructions will be shared with members via email over the coming months.

# OMAA: New membership processes

In line with our work towards professionalisation and to align ourselves with NDIS requirements we need to change our subscription from biannually to annually.  This will occur as membership renewals become due. These changes and requirements have prompted a revision of fees which will be announced at the AGM on Thursday 7th November 2019.

# Training update: Training new O&M professionals

Meetings have begun between OMAA (Lil Deverell), Guide Dogs Australia (Alastair Stott, Annette Clarke) and the Renwick Centre (Sue Silveira) to discuss our ongoing challenges in training O&M professionals in Australia. The OMAA Professional Standards Committee is keen to find a sector-wide solution. COMS provides us with minimum standards for graduates - a bachelor’s degree and a 350-hour COMS-supervised internship. Our challenge in Australia and New Zealand is to make our professional O&M training programs comprehensive, economical, sustainable, COMS compliant and accessible to people who come to O&M via different pathways. O&M Specialists enter the profession from such diverse fields as (but not limited to) education, allied health, hospitality, dog training, social work, counselling, and sports science. This makes our profession rich in knowledge and experience, and well able to serve the diverse needs of our clients. If you have good ideas about the best use of our expertise and resources in relation to training pathways for O&M Specialists, please contact Lil at [standards@omaaustralasia.com](mailto:standards@omaaustralasia.com).

# PhinisheD!

Congratulations to Katrina Blake (2018), O&M specialist/teacher in Queensland who had her PhD conferred earlier this year. Katrina investigated O&M teaching and learning with primary students, their families and teachers. You can find her marvellous thesis at <https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/59103/>

Errol Ingram (2019) and Lisa Dillon (2019) both submitted their theses mid-year too. Errol investigated the lived experience of acquiring life skills with congenital total blindness. Lisa evaluated an individualised exercise program to prevent falls and improve balance and physical function in clients. What a wonderful and varied contribution to Australasia’s O&M body of knowledge. Thank you, Doctors!

# O&M Scope of Practice

After the Australasian O&M Conference in Melbourne in 2018, a small group has been working on an O&M Scope of Practice for OMAA. We are now looking for reviewers. Please contact Lil if you can give it some time in the next few weeks [lil@deverell.net](mailto:lil@deverell.net)

# COMS Update

**Have you changed your name since you qualified?**

If you have changed your name since you qualified in O&M you will need to provide two forms of evidence/confirmation – e.g. birth certificate + marriage certificate – in one of three ways. You can upload this evidence with your COMS application, attach it to an email to Kathie Zeider [kzeider@acvrep.org](mailto:kzeider@acvrep.org), or send a certified copy to Arizona when you send your transcript.

**COMS Q&A Sessions**

Worried about COMS? Whether applying for COMS, preparing for the exam, or supporting others, you can contact Lil to ask specific questions or arrange a COMS Q&A session for your team: [lil@deverell.net](mailto:lil@deverell.net) or Mob: 0419 370 312. Alternatively, you can join a general COMS Q&A session in the next few months. Just click on, or copy and paste the URL into your preferred browser. Note that these are Melbourne Daylight Savings times, so you will need to adjust for your time zone:

Tuesday 15 October 2019 @ 1pm (AEDT) <https://swinburne.zoom.us/j/817116860>

Monday 28 October 2019 @ 1pm (AEDT) <https://swinburne.zoom.us/j/909391823>

Tuesday 19 November 2019 @ 1pm (AEDT) <https://swinburne.zoom.us/j/265970730>

Tuesday 10 December 2019 @ 1pm (AEDT) <https://swinburne.zoom.us/j/689851750>

**Don’t have 3200 hours in the past 3 years?**

If you haven’t worked 3200 hours O&M service in the past three years (because of study, travel, illness, maternity leave, part time work, changing jobs, working freelance, training dogs, etc.), then ACVREP has said you can submit your CV as evidence of your work experience, instead of the Appendix C Employer Verification Form from the COMS Handbook. Please let Lil know if you need to take this option (your name goes on the list of “exceptions”) and get the details of what needs to go in your CV [lil@deverell.net](mailto:lil@deverell.net).

**COMS – Why bother?**

Some people have continued to ask, “Why should I bother applying for COMS? Is there any guarantee that the government will recognise COMS in relation to NDIS?”

In reply: “Why should the government recognise O&M as a distinct profession if we haven’t bothered to professionalise?”

Professions like OT, physiotherapy, medicine, nursing and teaching have clear standards for registration that are not set by the employer, but by the professional body or AHPRA (Allied Health Practitioners Regulation Agency). These standards benchmark minimum qualifications and experience, and outline scope of practice, insurance requirements, grievance procedures, and requirements for ongoing professional development.

• The OMAA is the professional body for O&M Specialists in Australia and New Zealand.

• The OMAA adopted COMS as the standard for entry-level O&M professionals from 2013.

• The OMAA has determined COMS + OMAA Membership as the requirement for professional registration.

• The COMS program requires ongoing professional development to stay registered.

These standards go beyond employer requirements and boundaries. They help to progress a worker who is doing a job into a professional who is in solidarity with other professionals in the same field and subject to the disciplines of that field. It’s your choice.

# NDIS – Next steps for COMS

Now that many people are underway with their COMS applications, the OMAA Professional Standards Committee is in the process of reconnecting with NDIS to review their policies on O&M Service Providers. For the NDIS to take us seriously, the OMAA needs to report our progress towards professionalisation and show as many names as possible on our Public Register of O&M Specialists. We will give you an update on these conversations in the next issue of Footwork. For now, we need you and your colleagues to apply for COMS, do the exam, become a member of OMAA and get listed on the OMAA Register as soon as possible.

# International O&M Online Symposium

As an Orientation and Mobility Specialist, often the nature of our role means we do not get to spend as much time with our colleagues as we would like, especially if we cover isolated areas or are the only O&M Specialist in a centre. And although we would all dearly love to pack our bags and travel to exotic places for international conferences, this is not always a reality, as the cost of getting to these conferences is often prohibitive for us personally and for the organisations we work for. A way to overcome this and to boost your professional development for the year is to take part in the online International Orientation and Mobility Symposium which is happening on 29-30 January 2020.

The symposium offers a great opportunity to learn from your peers (both locally and internationally), to explore some of the latest resources and research and to upskill your practice without having to leave the comfort of your own home. The symposium is community driven in that it relies on professionals working in the field to make it a success. We all face the same obstacles as each other and your ideas could help thousands of people with visual impairments around the world. Another benefit of the symposium is that it is partnered with ACVREP to ensure that it provides fantastic CEU opportunities.

**How the symposium works:** Each presentation is online and you can access them through Zoom (you will be sent the link once registered), starting at around US 9am (times still to be confirmed) each day. Unfortunately, with the time zone differences, it does make for an early start in Australia and an even earlier one in New Zealand! However, you don’t have to watch the presentations live, as the link is valid for a couple of weeks. You can watch it at a time that suits you (however this will mean you will not be able to ask any live questions). If you are interested in joining the symposium, are keen to present, would like to receive updates or just want to find out more about it, check out the following link: <https://www.orientationandmobilitysymposium.com>.

# IMC17: International Mobility Conference 2020, Gothenburg Sweden

Please be aware that the deadline for submitting abstracts is 15th November 2019. The theme for IMC17 is “Challenges for an inclusive society”. More information can be found at the conference website <https://ips.gu.se/english/cooperation/conferences/imc17>.

# Thomas James “Tom” Blair Orientation and Mobility Museum

Jeremy Hill, COMS, Communications Committee

Tom Blair was a trail blazer for the Orientation and Mobility profession in Australia. He was the first graduate Guide Dog Instructor in Australia in 1959 and trained dogs and instructors, taught O&M and became a pioneer in researching electronic travel aids. In 1977 he set up O&M training schools around the world including Indonesia, Hawaii and USA. His last place of work was with VisAbility in Bunbury, Western Australia, where he retired in 2013. I visited Tom in Bunbury in October 2017 and Tom showed me his collection of awards and historical photographs from around the world which he kindly allowed me to copy. Unfortunately, Tom passed away 11th February 2018 and at the 6th Australasian Orientation and Mobility Conference, Melbourne April 2018, a tribute presentation was made to Tom featuring some of his photos. It was then decided by the OMAA to set up a “virtual” online museum on our new website.

So far, I’ve invited some “icons” of Australasian O&M to send me a short biography and any historical photos they may have. Thank you to the people who have sent in their history and a few photos, however we need a lot more to make the museum worthwhile. If you would like to be included in this exciting project or would like to suggest someone please contact me. I can email you some suggested questions to help the biography and please email or post me any photos you may have with indication of the event, date and people included in the photo. I can scan any posted photos and return them to you. I’m looking forward to hearing from you and please email me for further details at [jhill@guidedogs.com.au](mailto:jhill@guidedogs.com.au).

# OMAA: Committee updates and position vacancies

**OMAA Secretary; Executive Council – Position vacant**

Now is the time to consider what you can contribute to your OMAA. The role of Secretary on the Executive Council involves management of memberships (with the Treasurer), OMAA Executive and Council meetings, and the AGM. Much of the secretary duties have become automated through the new OMAA website and membership portal. If you are interested please email [info@omaaustralasia.com](mailto:info@omaaustralasia.com). Keep in mind, serving on the Executive Council will contribute points towards ACVREP COMS recertification (see Category Four: Professional Services <https://www.acvrep.org/recert/points>).

**Professional Standards Committee – New recruit**

Errol Ingram has accepted an invitation to join the OMAA Professional Standards Committee and will be helping us to navigate the way forward with NDIS. Welcome Errol!

**OMAA Blogger, Footwork Editor; Communications Committee – 2x Positions vacant**

The Communications Committee is seeking two volunteers to help disseminate valuable content to our membership base. The OMAA Blogger will produce a monthly list of news, updates, resources and conference information via the website. The Footwork Editor will help to collate, edit, and publish our Footwork newsletter on a quarterly basis. Content for both Blog and Footwork is usually generated by the Executive Committee and OMAA members, and plenty of support is provided. If you have some time and energy to offer our team, please contact Amy via email at [info@omaaustralasia.com](mailto:info@omaaustralasia.com).

**OMAA grievance officer; Professional Standards Committee – Position vacant**

The Professional Standards Committee is looking for an OMAA Member or other recommended person to serve as Grievance Officer for the OMAA. This is a spasmodic job that requires a prompt, discrete response to formal complaints and disciplinary issues according to the OMAA grievance policy, an ability to examine the situation fairly from all sides, keep clear records, respect confidentiality and report back to the relevant authorities. Please contact the Committee if you are interested in this role, or know someone you can recommend [standards@omaaustralasia.com](mailto:standards@omaaustralasia.com).

**OMAA Council – Movements**

Darren Moyle, previously serving as state representative for NSW, has returned to his roots in Melbourne and will now be serving as state representative for Victoria.

Please circulate *Footwork* to anyone who might be interested. If you have queries about the work of the OMAA, or would like to subscribe or unsubscribe to *Footwork*, please contact [info@omaaustralasia.com](mailto:info@omaaustralasia.com)