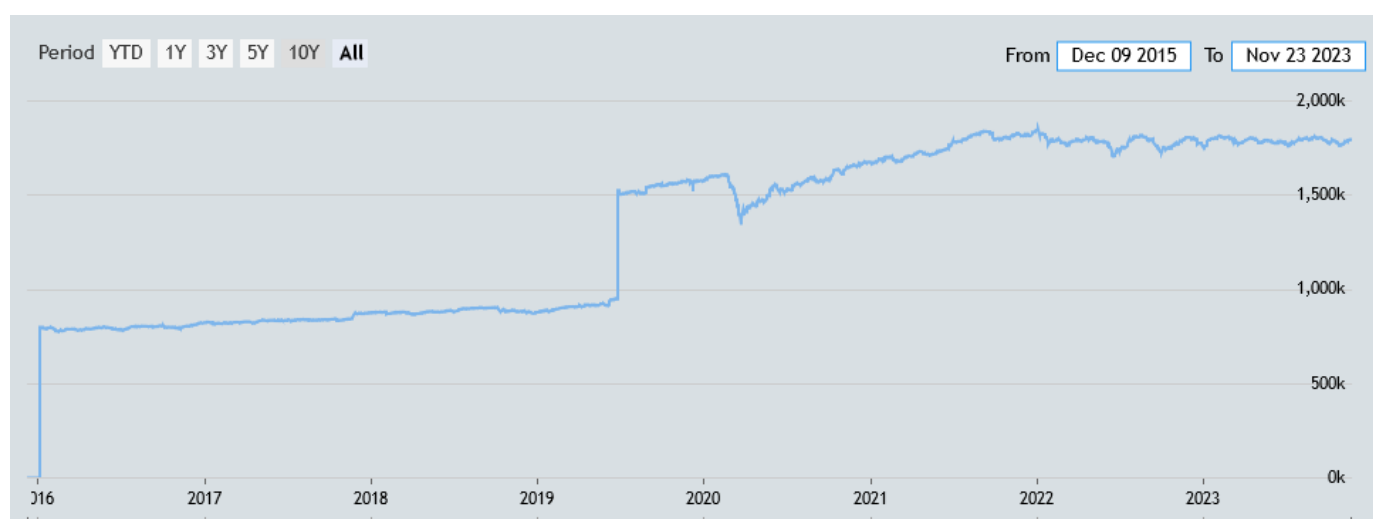


Quality Education Nepal Incorporated President's Report for 2022-23

I am pleased to present a report on the operations of the Association for the year ended 30 June 2023 followed by a report of those of LEARN, the NGO that we support in Nepal.

The Association continued to support LEARN throughout the year both financially and in oversight of its administration and operations. This has become the primary activity of the Association, with resources no longer being committed to active fund raising. As a result we are reliant on continuing donations from past supporters for which we are very grateful, together with income from the capital fund that has been accumulated.

That fund is very healthy, as shown by the following graph. It shows two major injections of funds by donation. Early in 2020 the value of the fund dipped with the onset of the Covid crisis, but it quickly recovered much of the loss. However, the pandemic brought an end to LEARN's training activities. The four staff were retained with the senior staff accepting a 30% salary reduction with no prompting from QEN. As a result of the reduced outgoings the value of the fund steadily rose. Since training activities resumed in 2022 that increase has levelled off, having reached around \$1.8 m.



As a consequence of lack of active fund raising membership declined from 33 in 2022 to 19, with donations received declining from \$27,439 to \$10,521.

The Association continues to operate through my voluntary efforts as President and Treasurer. These include:

- Monitoring the administrative, financial and operational activities of LEARN
- Transferring funds to LEARN as required to support their operations
- Receiving and acknowledging donations
- Monitoring the performance of our investment fund including, along with other directors, approval of the financial manager's recommendations. We are fortunate to have the fund ably managed by Hewison Private Wealth.

As an example of item 1 I travelled to Nepal in February 2020 to meet the new staff, review LEARN administration including assistance with the accounts, and participate in a Rotary audit of our recently completed Rotary Foundation Global Grant project. The audit report was very positive on our achievements, though we objected to their conclusions on the financial side as they let Rotary Foundation standard practice override the terms of the MoU between the sponsor Rotary Club, LEARN and QEN. As a result the Rotary contribution fell some thousands of dollars short of our entitlement.

I returned from that trip just a week before the travel lock-downs of the pandemic. While I was keen to return it was not until November 2022 that I did so with Ronda, each of us having had four vaccinations.

By arrangement we were flown by helicopter from Kathmandu to Khopra Ridge and then down to Paudwar village. By paying passenger fares we subsidised the cost of ferrying building materials from Ghara village to Khopra Ridge (six 10-minute round trips). Alas, after a day in Paudwar a bad night's sleep led me to taking a RAT test which was positive. The Paudwar health post confirmed that my blood oxygen had fallen to 76%.

It was decided that I needed medical attention which would require a two-hour trip to Beni and a further 3 hours to Pokhara. This was complicated by it being Nepal's national election day. To prevent possible riots the government had banned traffic throughout the country. However, a certificate from the Paudwar health post saw us through five roadblocks.

Upon arrival in Pokhara a GP was called, and he promptly had me admitted to the Gandaki Hospital – a typical, not very clean Nepali hospital. After a night there a helicopter trip took us to the Grande Hospital in Kathmandu (landing in its grounds) and admission to ICU. Tests showed that I had both bacterial and viral pneumonia. High pressure oxygen helped me recover and after three days I was well enough to be moved to a general ward, to be released four days later. The quality of service of that hospital far exceeded my expectations, including a daily visit from the Operations Manager. Apparently their normal patronage is wealthy Nepalis, of whom there are many despite the poverty of the country as a whole.

That experience put an end to my intentions of reviewing LEARN administration. As we had been joined at short notice by our daughter Rowena, I instead enjoyed recovery time as a tourist in Kathmandu. I am now looking forward to when I can return for a more relaxing and productive trip, maybe in a year or so.

Returning to the affairs of QEN, I am pleased to have active board members overseeing our activities and offering their advice. My thanks go to Michael Dillon, Simon Cowen and my wife Ronda. I also take the opportunity to thank Gordon Nightingale who resigned from the Board during the year after moving to New South Wales. Gordon took a very active interest in the activities of LEARN, travelling to Nepal more than once to observe those activities on the ground and to contribute his expertise, as in drafting plans for lodge accommodation at Balhara.

The main item of consideration by the Board in recent times has been the future of the Association and its funds when I am no longer able to continue in my roles. Various possibilities have come under consideration:

- Engagement of an accountancy firm to undertake these roles under the supervision of the Board. This would enable the funding of LEARN to continue should Krishna and the LEARN staff wish to operate in that way.
- Winding up the Association with transfer of the funds to like-minded organisations. The Australian Himalayan Foundation and the New Zealand Himalayan Trust are obvious candidates as both were involved in the development of the teacher training practices that LEARN has adopted and continue with active teacher training programs.
- Winding up the Association with transfer of funds to other organisations with goals that match those of the Association. Possibilities include:
 - funding the construction of a hospital in Western Nepal by Australians for Women's Health under the supervision of gynaecologist Dr Ray Hodgson comparable to the one they are presently constructing in Eastern Nepal
 - integrating with Edutech Nepal, an organisation sponsored by New Zealand philanthropist Mike Chisolm committed to equipping 1,000 computer laboratories in rural schools in Nepal. LEARN has entered an agreement to work with Edutech to develop three such laboratories this financial year.

Suggestions of other possibilities would be most welcome.

A year of consolidation and progress for LEARN

2022-23 was a year of consolidation after the staff turnover of the previous year when Khadka Shrestha and Toya Ammai joined LEARN as trainers and Manista Pun as Finance and Administration Office. Since then they have been bringing LEARN back into full operation after the cessation of training due to Covid.

This has entailed extensive travel to Myagdi District, with the area of LEARN's operations becoming progressively more remote, now involving trekking for days despite the continuing extension of the road network.

A most unfortunate incident occurred in the course of that travel. Khadka and Toya had agreed to take the day bus from Kathmandu to Beni on August 22 of this year. Toya changed his mind, deferring his departure to the night bus, leaving Khadka to travel. The bus drove off the Prithvi highway near the town of Gajuri, 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of the capital, Kathmandu, and fell meters into the Trisuli River, killing eight people and injuring many more.

Khadka was among those injured, necessitating two operations on his knees and legs. He is now recovering and has resumed work in the office, but is not yet able to return to the field.

LEARN's training program is subject to approval by the Social Welfare Council and the relevant Rural Municipal Council. This process led to LEARN and the Rakhugunga Municipal Council entering into an arrangement to split the outgoing costs of a program (but not the relevant LEARN staff salaries) on a 50/50 basis. This was a valued step forward, not only allowing QEN's available funding to be spread more widely, but also demonstrating the value that the Councils place on LEARN training.

We had hoped that such arrangements might extend to other municipalities, but Krishna has found the negotiating process extremely frustrating, experienced selfish behaviour on the part of bureaucrats of Rural Municipalities, not to mention the widespread corruption prevalent in Nepal, noting that the International Nepal Fellowship has commented on the bureaucracy and political situation in Nepal which has led to the country remaining the poorest in Asia. Krishna observes that it is also the most corrupted country, with an adverse culture in most government department and bodies.

Accordingly Krishna has recommended working without financial involvement of Rural Municipalities, instead relying on the funding that QEN can provide. The QEN Board has endorsed this conclusion. New programs will be undertaken which directly connect with students and parents. Refresher teacher training will continue to be provided, with more focus in computer and IT. Support for school infrastructure will be increased including the setup of computer laboratories in conjunction with Edutech.

Peter Hall
President
26/11/23