

U3A Ipswich & West Moreton Inc.
Report of the President, Ian L Muil,
for the year ended December 31, 2021
Presented to members at the association's
Annual General Meeting
on March 25, 2022

One word encapsulates the past year – COVID.

Lockdowns, masks, vaccinations, testing stations, RAT packs, isolation, quarantines, cancelled travel plans – we had the tsunami of a pandemic.

However, gratefully, no members succumbed to the virus though all were impacted. Certainly, U3A Ipswich & West Moreton was impacted.

We lost members (424 at the end of 2020 and 330 last month) and some classes have not recommenced and a small number have been cancelled.

But we are now almost back to normal in that masks are no longer compulsory and we can meet in greater numbers. So theatre nights are back – last month all tickets in our block booking for the Ipswich Little Theatres first play of the season at the Incinerator Theatre were taken up by members.

We delayed the start of our academic year for face-to-face classes until February 7 in line with the delayed start to the 2022 school term.

Late last year your Management Committee made the decision that double vaccination be mandatory for members to be able to attend classes. Members responded positively with only one member asking for a refund on the basis of reluctance to be vaccinated.

During the year we had welcome additions to the Management Committee – Lorraine Owens, Jill Gibson, Sandra Harvey, and Lynette Duffy. Unfortunately, for various personal reasons, Sandra Harvey, Lynette Duffy and Jill Gibson all resigned from the Committee at different times during the year but Jill has continued as volunteer co-ordinator and for that we are grateful.

Functions which are allocated by the Management Committee are vice president, tutor co-ordinator, volunteer co-ordinator, venues co-ordinator, membership officer, grants officer, and publicity & promotions officer.

At our 2021 AGM members unanimously endorsed the adoption of an amended constitution which, after a minor amendment requested by the Office of Fair Trading, has been formally approved.

The major changes in the constitution were: membership fees are now set by the Management Committee and changes no longer require a Special General Meeting; proxies are no longer utilised; and the financial year end is now December 31 bringing our membership year, financial year and academic year into alignment.

The amendment requested by the OFT was that our constitution must state that we have a common seal. The constitution approved at our AGM stated: 'The association will no longer utilise a common seal'.

This was because changes introduced by Queensland Parliament in June 2020 included some changes taking effect immediately but a delay in proclamation meant one change not enacted was the provision that associations need not use a common seal. The OFT asked us to re-instate that requirement.

We had to have a Special General Meeting for that so we turned this to our advantage by inviting all members to a morning tea following the SGM. That was very successful with over 70 members enjoying the social event.

Our new constitution is on our website as well as our By-Laws and our policies, all of which have been updated during the year.

During the year the Management Committee spent a significant amount of time on emerging issues – the need to update our constitution in line with amended legislation; the need to update, and add to, our suite of policies, and the need to develop a Strategic Plan and Operational Plan to ensure we are not ‘flying blind’ and to inform our annual budget.

One of those policies is our Complaints & Grievances Policy. We established standing a sub-committee to manage any such issues and I thank history tutor Steve Marriott and ‘mindfulness’ tutor Di Mead who are on the Complaints & Grievances Standing Sub-Committee. I represent the Management Committee on this Sub-Committee.

We added two new By-Laws: one covering member management of class absences and preservation of class places and another on the process for classes to obtain U3A Ipswich sponsorship for promotional activities.

Two new policies, one on Privacy and one on Refunds, were a requirement of eWAY which we have adopted for online payments by credit card in our Online Member Services (OMS) facility on our website. eWAY is a global payment provider, similar to PayPal.

Our Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024 is also on the website.

U3A Ipswich photographers and artists exhibited during the year to great acclaim. Fay Steel’s painting class, Wayne McDonnell’s photography class and Yvonne James’s drawing classes held a one-week combined exhibition in the Ipswich Community Gallery in October.

In a separate initiative Fay Steel’s art class held their annual exhibition in Boonah in September. The group exhibits under the banner of Warrego Art Group of U3A Ipswich.

We supported these initiatives because these exhibitions raise the profile of U3A Ipswich showing the positive contributions we make to our community.

Almost all photography students delivered images for display and 11 members of the painting class and 13 students from drawing classes entered works for display.

Public comments were very positive and over 200 people viewed the exhibition. A ‘meet the artists’ cheese and wine opening function on the Sunday was a success with 120 people attending. Short presentations were given by the State member for Ipswich, Jennifer Howard; Ipswich mayor Teresa Harding and Ipswich Arts Connect president Glen Smit. Ipswich News Today covered the event with photographs and an article.

The Management Committee has agreed to Wayne McDonnell’s recommendation that such an exhibition be held annually and the gallery has been booked for this October.

The 2020 State conference of U3A Network, to have been hosted by U3A Redlands, was cancelled because of COVID. The 2021 conference went ahead, however, hosted by U3A Granite Belt and held in Stanthorpe. Our official delegates were our membership officer Karen Doolan and me.

In acknowledging the three-month lockdown and continued disruptions to classes by COVID we reduced membership fees for financial 2021 to \$45. Member response was positive and complimentary. These responses, together with the level of membership renewals, and the gentle agitation for class renewals, underlines what a positive ‘vibe’ we have in our membership.

Members, it seems to me, greatly value what U3A Ipswich offers and delivers.

During the year the MyU3A Online Membership System, a new computer-based administration system, was integrated into our updated website, thanks to the project leadership of Laurie Zaat and support of Management Committee members, Karen Doolan and Amanda Schloss.

The new system allows members to select and register for any class online. Members have instant access to all start dates for every class of every course at every venue. Members can immediately see if classes are wait-listed, how many are on the wait-list, and how they may be progressing up the list. It means you can make alternate choices without having to wait for a tutor or office administrator to get back to you.

Tutors have access to membership details of their students and can manage their classes online – change the course description, set the number of places in a class, change dates of classes and complete the roll-call each lesson, all online.

Open Day was held on December 7, 2021. Thanks to our OMS system, and eWay digital payment system, members could renew membership, pay fees and register for courses online before Open Day and new members could register from Open Day on.

Laptops, PCs and tablets were available on the day for new and renewing members and volunteers were there to assist.

I thank all tutors who attended and all volunteers who helped on the day. We had 60 people through the door, compared with 64 the previous year and we signed up 20 new members on the day. Many renewals have since been online.

The ability to renew and join online, and to pay online, will inform how we structure future open days.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of U3A Ipswich. Office volunteers, events volunteers, tutors, and committees – all contribute immeasurably to the success of our organisation.

Co-ordinating these various groups of volunteers is essential and I thank Amanda Schloss, our tutor co-ordinator and member of the Management Committee; and Jill Gibson, past Management Committee member and now volunteer co-ordinator.

During the year volunteer co-ordinator Figlia Di Dio let us know she needed to step back from the role but she ensured that Jill was ready to step in. We were most grateful for Figlia's contributions, also for her tasteful interior decorations of U3A House.

We have a small band of dedicated volunteers who look after the office but we need more. We have no back-up if anyone is unable to attend on their rostered day, resulting in closure of the office for that day. So can you help? You do not need to have any experience working in an office and you do not have to be able to use a computer. If you can help, please speak to a Management Committee member today or email us.

Next year, 2023, is the 30th anniversary of U3A Ipswich & West Moreton. To mark that occasion we hope to publish the story of our U3A. We will apply for a grant for printing and aim to have the book published in the second half of next year.

We invited expressions of interest from members keen to be involved and the response was very positive. A Publications Sub-Committee has been formed, chaired by Wayne McDonnell.

The Sub-Committee has already met on a number of occasions and started sketching the structure of the project. I congratulate Wayne and his committee on their commitment and assure them of the full support of the Management Committee.

It has been exciting if challenging returning to 'normal' as we learn to live with the threat of COVID. Mandating double vaccination has meant we can start offering some of the social activities members had come to expect from U3A Ipswich.

So we confirmed a block booking of 40 seats with Ipswich Little Theatre for their first production of the year, 'The Games People Play – A Season of One Act Plays', performed at our iconic Incinerator Theatre in Queens Park.

We offered the tickets to include a finger supper at interval, always a most enjoyable part of an evening at the theatre. We sold all tickets and also ran a very successful raffle, with prizes donated by Ipswich State MP Jennifer Howard, U3A Ipswich secretary Robyn Hargreaves, and U3A Ipswich itself.

Another activity we were pleased to be involved in during the year was hosting an information booth at the 2021 Seniors Expo, held in the Events Centre, Ipswich Show Grounds in October, organised by Able Australia and Ipswich City Council.

In thanking people I want to single out Eric Boel who is a tutor and looks after our Woodend campus and Geoff Mayhew, also a tutor, who looks after U3A House in Booval and our IT. And, of course, Laurie Zaat who project managed the MyU3A Online Member Services and eWay installations. Thank you gentlemen.

In closing I thank you all for attending, I thank especially all our tutors for their commitment, and I thank my colleagues on the Management Committee for being positive and energetic members of the committee – secretary Robyn Hargreaves, tutor coordinator Amanda Schloss, treasurer Sue Mundt, membership officer Karen Doolan, and Lorraine Owens.

I move that my report be adopted.