

U3A Ipswich & West Moreton Inc.
Report of the President, Ian L Muil,
for the year ended September 30, 2020
Presented to members at the association's
Annual General Meeting
on March 19, 2021

My report would normally cover the period to the end of September, our financial year, as our AGM would have been held not long after the end of the financial year.

However, as we were not able to hold the AGM until now, due to COVID-19 restrictions, I have decided to include the period up until today.

Congratulations and appreciation to all on the Management Committee and sub-committees for their continued commitment over the past 18 months, a difficult and sometimes stressful period.

I compliment our membership as well for the incredible resilience, graciousness and compassion members have shown to each other, to the Management Committee and to the association.

The Management Committee which has steered the administration of U3A Ipswich over the past 18 months includes Vice President and Acting Treasurer Karen Doolan, Secretary Robyn Hargreaves, Tutor Coordinator Amanda Schloss, and Committee members Norah Blunden and Lorraine Owens.

Did I mention Yvonne James, our Volunteer Coordinator, a past Secretary and a past Membership Officer? Yvonne is quite devastated, I know, as are we, that our Constitution does not allow her to re-nominate today, having served a full five years, and more, on the Committee.

I think that deserves a special round of applause.

During the course of the year the following members of the Management Committee resigned for various personal reasons: Glenda Chaille, Marie Davidson, Julie Laughlan, Rena Wright and Ros Nugent. I extend my thanks to them all for their contributions.

Following election at the 2019 AGM the Management Committee met throughout December and January so was well prepared for Open Day on January 22 last year. The day was a success, if unbearably hot, and the day did highlight some issues we felt we must address. We therefore established a small sub-committee to review Open Day.

Our analysis highlights strategic areas we must address – class waiting lists and inability to get into popular courses; a need for more tutors and how to recruit them; the desirability that members see themselves as members of the wider U3A Ipswich and not just a specific class; more group activities around socialisation and outside of the individual class structure, like bus tours and theatre nights.

Those are issues we have started to address and will continue to address.

I am not going to dwell on COVID-19 because I am sure you all know as much about that and its impacts, as I do.

So some of the highlights of the year were:

I attended a seminar organised by Rhonda Watson, President of U3A Toowoomba and held under the banner of the International Association of the Third Age. Paris-based Professor Francois Vellas, President of the Association of International Universities of the Third Age and Mark Tucker-Evans, CEO of the Council on the Ageing were the guest speakers.

Karen Doolan, a retired accountant, was elected Vice President by the Committee and Chair of the Audit & Finance Committee. She reviewed our financial system in consultation with our auditor and the Management Committee unanimously then endorsed Karen's proposal to invest in an MYOB accounting package. This, apart from all the daily benefits of the reporting capacity of such a system also means that hand-over to an incoming treasurer is less stressful. That's important, given the fact that no treasurer can stay in the position for more than three years.

We established the Communications & Marketing Sub-Committee and invited U3A Ipswich members Geoff Mayhew, Laurie Zaat and Lorraine Pitcairn to contribute to that committee. A major initiative from that committee was the decision to embed a membership platform program, MyU3A, into our website which will give control of classes to tutors and give members the ability

to manage their membership online. It promises much for us and has been very successfully installed by an implementation team lead by Laurie Zaat. Rollout to general members is now a matter of weeks away.

We had to cease all classes, all gatherings, in March 2020 but the Management Committee kept meeting, this time by Zoom, and we started meeting on a weekly, rather than fortnightly basis, given the uncertainties facing us.

One of the issues addressed by the committee was concern over the welfare of members now forced to isolate and, of course, what could we do to compensate for the disruption of classes for which members had paid.

So we set up a phone-a-friend register making it easy for members to call fellow members who may be lonely, fearful, bored, just to keep in touch and let them know we care.

We also encouraged the use by tutors of Zoom and we funded one-year membership for all our members to access the many courses offered by U3A Online.

Even though the office was closed and classes cancelled, U3A Ipswich in virtual hibernation, many issues remained on the agenda for the Management Committee – maintaining venue agreements; retaining and recruiting tutors; recruiting and preparing volunteers; researching new classes; continued office administration; the critical need for budgeting; preparing for the financial year end and auditing; planning for the AGM whenever that could be held; staying on top of the review of Queensland's Associations Incorporation Act which would require incorporated bodies, such as ours, to update their constitutions.

I have mentioned already the resilience, the determination, of our members and tutors many of whom came up with innovative methods to continue their programs and contact with their classes. For example French tutor Marie Davidson continued her French classes using Zoom; Carol Aveley's book club continued sharing reports on books they were reading; Rob McGeehan, tutor and facilitator of the film and history groups, kept his classes engaged with emails and links; Bruce Duckett sent his students a weekly email with cryptic crossword lessons and homework; drawing tutor Yvonne James sent her students tutorials from an art website; and photography tutor Wayne McDonnell regularly sent his group articles on different aspects of photography and received photos taken by his students for constructive critique.

Acting Treasurer Karen Doolan will shortly present the financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2020 and I will not tread on her territory. However, I do want to point out that the Management Committee has taken its fiduciary duties very seriously with income and expenditure statements and year-to-date balance sheets presented at the monthly Management Committee meetings. And we adopt a conservative approach to budgeting which always precedes major expenditure. One philosophy which COVID helped unearth is that at times like this organisations such as ours can and should be prudent in accessing their reserves to invest in themselves. That is what it is – an investment in our association.

You will be pleased to know that the budget which allowed us to offer renewed membership for \$45 for 2021 has now not only been met but exceeded. The fee for new members remains \$70 for the full year.

It seems everything across the State, across the nation, was being cancelled and sadly the U3A Network Queensland State Conference, to be held in Redlands last June, was a COVID victim. But two delegates from our Management Committee will now be attending the 2021 State Conference which is in Stanthorpe. This conference can be attended by any member of a U3A but, of course, it is only the delegates whose costs are met by the association.

We resumed classes, some at least, if not most, from Monday July 13, the original start date for third term. This caused extra unprecedented activity by the Management Committee, especially hard-working Tutor Coordinator Amanda Schloss, because we had to learn a whole new set of rules. First we had to develop a COVID-19 Safe Plan to ensure we met all requisite health regulations of the Queensland Government as well as of the Ipswich City Council and Glebe Road Uniting Church, our major landlord.

So we had to become expert in determining legally allowable participants in rooms; timing of classes; venue availability; restrictions on use of kitchen facilities and how to keep that important social ‘cuppa’ after classes alive; establishing a wipe-down sanitising regime of desks, door knobs, chairs, all surfaces and equipment used in each class; ensuring availability of hand sanitisers and wipes at all venues.

We also sought clarification and assurance from our public liability insurer of our status should the need for a claim arise.

During the year Glebe Road Uniting Church was informed that the child care group, which used the backyard at U3A House and a section of the house itself, would not be resuming. The church therefore amended our lease to cover the entire premises. We then immediately and successfully put in for an Ipswich City Council grant to instal an air conditioning unit and flat screen TV to enable the extra room to be used as a computer lab, which it is doing now very successfully.

U3A Ipswich & West Moreton emerged from that COVID year relatively unscathed – scarred but in some respects stronger. It was very satisfying to see the enthusiasm for new classes – to mention just a few: stitching, a sing-along group, an extra science class, a climate change class, a local history class, an extra history class, mindfulness, chair yoga and Pilates and a walking group.

Then Open Day this year in January was very different but very successful. We had to control the numbers in the hall so restricted it to new members. That worked well. It seems those who attended Open Day did so with the intention of joining. We welcomed 26 new members on Open Day compared with 34 last year – a small drop but far less than we expected.

Given our new calendar membership year and the implementation of the MyU3A membership portal on our website, Open Day will now be held later in November or early December.

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 part of a committee which it is a pleasure to be involved in.

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