

U3A Ipswich & West Moreton Inc.
Report of the President, Ian Muil, for the year ended December 31, 2022
Presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on March 31, 2023

My report covers calendar 2022 and in that year we continued ‘mopping up’ as the worst of the COVID lockdowns and regulations started being relaxed – we needed to remain vigilant, however.

Some classes continued to be deferred as a result of actual COVID restrictions and lingering caution and fear.

Our membership base has not yet fully recovered to pre-COVID numbers – we had 275 financial members at the start of 2022 and at mid February this year we had 262 financial members.

New members are trickling in and renewals are continuing but its a slow process with long-term implications. Hence the Management Committee’s decision late last year to increase membership fees from \$70 a year to \$80, a \$10 a year increase.

I have sometimes been asked why we want to increase membership. A good question as it goes to the criticism of growth for growths sake. In our case we have two levers to pull on the revenue side – membership and fees. If we face a decline in membership we can rely only on fees and then a renewed push for new members to ensure our revenue is greater than, or at least equal to, our expenditure.

On the expenditure side I no longer subscribe to the 1970s/80s dictum, a la Chainsaw Dunlap, that there is no such thing as fixed expenditure. Anything and everything can be slashed. Well, Chainsaw Dunlap might have done a great slash-and-burn job for Kerry Packer but he never set foot in a not-for-profit community organisation. We have fixed costs – our venues cannot be done away with, our utilities such as power and water, are essential, our basic office supplies and cleaning materials are essentials. And those ‘fixed’ costs have been rising steadily over the past 18 months – all of them. And we get no subsidies on them at all.

So to keep revenue in line with expenditure we have had to revert to the fees lever. We prefer growing membership and that’s the basic reason why it is in all of our interests to encourage membership growth.

In January 2022 the Management Committee consisted of me as President; Robyn Hargreaves, Secretary; Sue Mundt, Treasurer; Amanda Schloss, Tutor Coordinator; Karen Doolan, Membership Officer; and Lorraine Owens, Committee member. Jill Gibson had resigned from the Committee but continued on as Volunteer Coordinator. Following the March 2022 AGM the following people constituted the Management Committee: me as President; Robyn Hargreaves, Secretary; Sue Mundt, Treasurer; Amanda Schloss, Tutor Coordinator; and Mark Fort, Lisa Campbell, Nigel Coupland

and Dean Olafsen on the Committee. Not long after the AGM, however, we were pleased to accept the offer of Laurie Zaat to join the Committee.

At the first Management Committee meeting after the AGM new Committee members undertook an induction process. As part of that all were directed to the U3A Ipswich & West Moreton web site where important documents are located and with which Committee members were required to familiarise themselves: our Constitution, By-Laws, Policies, Procedures, Strategic and Operational Plans. Members were also encouraged to become familiar with the U3A Queensland Network web site.

As in the previous year we again had to manage the fact that some classes did not recommence at the start of the year and a small number were cancelled – again the COVID legacy. However, during the year we were able to settle in our technology upgrades – the Online Member Services system, our Omail member communications system and our eWay online payment system.

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.

Through our Management Committee we also have a member, Laurie Zaat, who is part of the very useful U3A Queensland Network Technology Forum. Given the speed of Artificial Intelligence, information technology and social media developments it is essential we remain as informed as possible.

We were pleased to accept the offer of Rhonda Weston, president of U3A Toowoomba and president of U3A Queensland Network, to be our U3A Queensland Network liaison officer under a new program of the Network. Rhonda and her husband David then met with the Management Committee at U3A House over a sandwich lunch to explore the benefits and resources available through the Network.

During the year the Management Committee spent a significant amount of time on emerging issues – the need to update, and add to, our suite of policies and by-laws, and the need to develop our annual budget aligned with our Strategic and Operational Plans to ensure we are not ‘flying blind’.

We updated our by-laws with a new by-law and policy covering the management of class absences and preservation of class places – a critical issue because we find that a number of potential new members are discouraged from joining when told that their

preferred class is full and has a waiting list. Yet we know that in some such classes there are members who have not attended those classes for some time without apologies but their names remain as registered for the class simply because of historical links with the tutor. This issue needs to be addressed but it is a sensitive one – one I'm happy to be passing on to the new Committee.

The other by-laws related to a policy on refunds required by eWAY which we now use for online payments by credit card on our website.

We also developed an Assistance Animals Policy, based on such policies recommended by U3A Queensland Network and already adopted by a number of U3As in Queensland.

Last year we held the second of what is now an annual fixture in Ipswich's art world, thanks to the initiative of Wayne McDonnell – an exhibition of works by U3A Ipswich & West Moreton artists. Fay Steel's painting class, Wayne McDonnell's photography class and Yvonne James's drawing classes again held a one-week combined exhibition in the Ipswich Community Gallery, superbly organised by Wayne. Our 2022 art exhibition was formally opened by Rhonda Weston and the event was attended by the Ipswich Mayor Teresa Harding who gave a short address, Ipswich State Member of Parliament Jennifer Howard and a number of Ipswich City councillors. The event was very well attended by members and the general public and many exhibited works were sold during the exhibition.

These exhibitions raise the profile of U3A Ipswich & West Moreton, showing the range of activities we offer and also the positive contributions our members make to our community. Public comments were very positive and over 200 people viewed the exhibition. Local media covered the event with photographs and articles.

In January last year we held our first meeting of interested members to establish a functional structure for the publication of a book marking the 30th anniversary of U3A Ipswich & West Moreton. This year marks our 30th anniversary, the occasion of the foundation meeting, not incorporation which took place in 1994. We established the History Publication Sub-Committee chaired by Wayne McDonnell. This committee has achieved much and is on track for publication later this year. Wayne proved to be a fortunate choice as chair as we later found that he was an Ipswich City Council alderman at the time U3A Ipswich & West Moreton Inc was established, very much under the impetus of council. We were delighted to receive the \$5000 Viva Cribb grant for costs associated with the history to be published later this year or early next year. The bulk of the work has been undertaken by members on the sub-committee – in other words volunteers. But there will be costs, such as printing and formatting and the Viva Cribb grant covers that.

On the subject of grants we were successful in gaining a grant to replace the two antique copiers at Woodend with a state-of-the-art printer which does in 1/10th of the

time what the poor old rattling ones attempted. We also received a small grant to add to our promotional items, essential in any membership campaigns planned.

The Management Committee was energetic in developing and organising various activities and events. We held a number of discussions with ICC officers around the lease arrangements for the Woodend Nature Centre, including one meeting with senior council staff at Woodend mid last year. However, we have not been provided with any further updates from Council so still have no clarity on any lease likely to be offered.

We offered members a number of special events such as the history of church architecture, the Freedom Street documentary, and a presentation by an APT advisor on important things to know when travelling.

We responded to requests for presentations, information and stalls from a number of local community organisations. We attended the 'Health & Wellness Expo' at Goodna; the 'Ageing – Everyone's Doing It Expo' at Ipswich Showgrounds where we hosted an information booth; the 'West Moreton Older Persons Care Collaborative Forum'; an Ipswich City Council workshop on Inclusion and another one on Marketing & Branding; the Seniors Technology Expo and we were invited by Ipswich City Council to attend the Ipswich 2032 Olympics forum.

Our block bookings for Ipswich Little Theatre productions performed at our iconic Incinerator Theatre in Queens Park were well attended in March and September but we did have to cancel some planned bus trips, again COVID.

We offered theatre 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.

In addressing the many challenges which lay ahead for the incoming Management Committee, indeed for the organisation, I will start with volunteering. Volunteering across Australia is undergoing something of a contraction. Much of that has been put down to the pandemic and the lingering mental scars left. Volunteers are our lifeblood. 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 until recently, volunteer co-ordinator. That function has now been taken up by Sue Rose and we thank her.

With all these categories of volunteers our members are superb – we have no yawning gaps or concerns for the future - we have a hard core of committed tutors and members offering to tutor new classes; there is always a pleasing response to calls for help in office administration.

But with the Management Committee we have a problem, partly self-imposed by an outdated by-law. Our 'By-Law Number 2: Electing the Management Committee' states under section 4. "A member of the Management Committee who has held a position on the Executive Committee (president, secretary, treasurer) for three years in succession shall not be eligible to nominate or accept a position on the Executive Committee. And under Section 5 "A member of the association who has been a member of the Management Committee for five years in succession shall not be eligible to nominate for a position on the Management Committee."

Under today's climate of volunteering that by-law is damaging to U3A Ipswich & West Moreton and needs to be discarded.

Whatever its original purpose any such purpose now is unnecessary, redundant. It is hard enough recruiting new members to the Management Committee without placing artificial barriers in the way of those with a passion for service, a passion for U3A Ipswich & West Moreton and a desire to continue to serve in that capacity. One of the most successful U3As in Queensland is U3A Toowoomba and Rhonda Weston has served continuously as their president for over a decade now. She brings corporate memory, experience, local knowledge, local contacts and enthusiasm to the role. Most U3As in Queensland do not limit terms on their Management Committees. It is not as though any person is elected for life – our constitution requires that at every AGM all positions are declared vacant. That should not change. But prohibiting an enthusiastic and dedicated member from continuing on is just crazy. We have a situation now where neither I nor Robyn Hargreaves can nominate for the Executive Committee positions we have held for the past three years. Of course, I believe that Robyn and I would probably not have re-nominated for those positions anyway but should we have wished to nominate I don't believe it in the interests of the organisation to block that. Of course, this By-Law can be changed at the stroke of a pen by the Management Committee and we could have done that before this AGM. However, I declined to propose that to the Management Committee preferring to leave that to the incoming Management Committee. What might focus the minds of incoming committee members is the knowledge that unless this unnecessary and unhealthy By-Law is changed during the year then, at the next AGM the organisation will be looking for a new treasurer. How absurd when we have a treasurer who is on top of the job, has full transparent control over our finances, reports diligently and accurately to every monthly Management Committee meeting, has answers when questioned on the monthly financials. And, I believe, actually enjoys what she does. If anyone disagrees with me about discarding this By-Law then I suggest you nominate yourself now for the committee, for president or secretary and for treasurer at the next AGM.

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 our computers and IT at U3A House in Booval. Thank you gentlemen.

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

I move that my report be adopted.