

U3A Ipswich & West Moreton Inc.

Report of the President, Laurie Zaat, for the year ended December 31, 2023 Presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on February 23, 2024

This report deals with the calendar year, 2023, a milestone year in which we celebrated 30 years longevity, and a year in which U3A Ipswich and West Moreton experienced membership growth despite the lingering veil of COVID and other related health issues in the senior's community specifically, as well as the persistent scourge of increases in day-to-day cost-of-living expenses, a challenge that seems to generate much political and corporate rhetoric but, alas, little real progress in solving.

I say with some pride that, despite the dire financial situation generally, we made a modest profit. This, notwithstanding our being squeezed on the one hand by increases in rent, consumables and utilities, and on the other by the ever-diminishing discretionary spending capacity of our members.

I attribute our success to a number of factors.

Firstly, the careful oversight of our expenditure by the Management Committee, led by the ever-vigilant Sue Mundt, our Treasurer.

Secondly, improved class management via OMS and a focus on new courses and activities beyond the mainstream, with the popularity of Arduino, Pickleball and the Ukulele classes prime examples, to name just a few. We know from the results of the Membership Survey that these outliers in fact generate memberships in their own right, and that once on board, these new members are joining more mainstream classes. They also have captured existing members and encourage them to renew their membership. We had one new member through Pickleball that introduced a new course as well. The Online Membership System proved very useful, with increasing use by members to enrol in and manage their participation in classes. There's also been an increase in use by tutors – though more is needed – in handling attendance, managing classes and maintaining contact with class enrollees.

Thirdly, we have striven to pursue as many revenue raising opportunities as possible when they present, membership, both renewal and new, still our priority. We continued to apply for grants, one most recently acquitted being for the 30-Year Book Project. The project was cost neutral, and provided a great opportunity for recognition of our brand in the community, through the book itself, as well as the launch event that was held late last year. We participated in senior's events, such as the Able Australia fair at the Ipswich Showground, where foot traffic created dozens of enquiries about our activities. And our annual Creatives Exhibition of photography and art, under the stewardship of Wayne McDonnell, is always a strong drawcard. At most, if not all our activities, raffles have continued to be an excellent source of revenue. We applied for and have been accepted into the Bunnings Sausage Sizzle program, and, though we missed out in 2023, will hold our first next month. These are an excellent source of revenue, and provide an opportunity to highlight and promote our association to a diverse audience of hungry DIYers.

Fourthly, and importantly, our members demonstrate camaraderie, good will and respect for each other when they participate in our classes, led by our wonderful, passionate tutors, and supported by our dedicated volunteers. U3A Ipswich is a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and rewarding experience for all our members. And it shows in the high number of new and renewing members and is supported by the comments made by members in the Membership Survey.

Against a 2023 state-wide average growth in U3A memberships of four point one per cent (4.1%), U3A Ipswich had growth of better than ten percent (10%) in memberships.

At the conclusion of the AGM held last year in March, a new President, myself, and new Secretary, Mark Fort, were elected. Both of us had been on the Management Committee in 2022, and with the return of Sue Mundt as Treasurer, it was a smooth transition for the Executive, from outgoing President, Ian Muil, and Secretary, Robyn Hargreaves.

Robyn very generously returned to serve on the Management Committee, providing important continuity, particularly grants administration. Robyn is not standing for a position in 2024, and we extend our deepest and most sincere thanks to her for her outstanding service over four years on the Management Committee.

Colin James, who took on the Tutor Coordinator role from the retiring Amanda Schloss, as well as new comer Ryle Moldrich, returning Committee members Dean Olafsen and Lisa Campbell made up the remainder of the Management Committee.

In a departure from past practice, three non-Committee members were appointed to coordinator roles, to allow us to utilise their expertise without the need to burden them with management committee responsibilities. Yvonne James, a past Management Committee member took on Membership Officer duties, Sue Rose took on Volunteer Coordinator and Jane Elmore became a much-needed Venue Coordinator to deal with the ever-changing GRUC relationship. We reluctantly needed to accept Lisa Campbell's resignation late in the year, and were able to accept Rozina Daniels offer to be Marketing and Communications Coordinator and thus fill the casual vacancy created by Lisa's departure. Unfortunately, due to health issues, Rozina was forced to relinquish her position in December.

All members of the Management Committee who served at any time through the year worked diligently and effectively, putting in hundreds of man hours overall to achieve our results, and to them all I want to extend my sincere thanks.

To Eric Boel, a tutor who manages the Woodend campus, and Geoff Mayhew, also a tutor, who manages the Booval campus, and all things networking, yet again thanks for another year of keeping both campuses operating smoothly.

To all the tutors, the whole membership thanks you for your dedication and persistence is providing guidance, leadership, inspiration and more than the odd bit of perspiration through the year.

And to all who volunteer within our association, we simply wouldn't exist without you.

I must make very special call out to someone who epitomises the very essence of volunteering and selflessness, a most self-deprecating and humble man, Roy Taylor.

Roy was a founding member of U3A Ipswich, and has been, among other things, a past president, tutor, grants writer, management committee member, and to this day, a most persistent (and I use the word advisedly) volunteer, to be found helping out at the Booval office reception, at our Open Day each year – and most probably on the tea trolley today.

In recognition of his contributions, the Management Committee has bestowed life membership on him, only the second such award in U3A Ipswich's thirty-year history.

In my handing the letter of appointment to Roy in the office back in January, upon reading it, he rather drolly replied: "Oh, another one... that's three now".

I think that says it all about his humility and the high esteem in which many others in the community, not just us, hold him.

Roy – congratulations, and may you be with us for many years to come.

In 2024, we are entering our 31st year, and while the 30 Year Book provides an excellent rear mirror view of our development and growth, we cannot afford to be nostalgic. We need to look forward and embrace new technologies, processes and policies that will take us into the next thirty years. First steps were taken during the 2023 year to initiate necessary change.

A thorny issue that had constrained the Management Committee over the years was the wholly unnecessary requirement under the Bylaws for Executive Committee members – President, Secretary and Treasurer - to limit their appointment to three years. Raised as a murmur at times in Management Committee meetings earlier, and brought to the attention of the membership at last year's AGM by then President, Ian Muil, the incoming Management Committee immediately amended the Bylaws to remove this restriction. Concerns that such a move would entrench vested interests were spurious; all positions on the Management Committee are vacated every year at the conclusion of the AGM, as required by the Constitution. Existing office holders can only retain their positions if re-elected.

Other significant changes affecting the Management Committee were introduced progressively.

Where previously support and administration activities were appointed to Management Committee members, the Bylaws were changed to allow non-elected members of the association to hold those positions, appointed by, and fully accountable to, the Management Committee.

Accountability and transparency are key performance indicators for the Management Committee. We changed the Bylaws further such that a member of the Management Committee who fails to attend a prescribed meeting three times, successively without an apology, is taken to have resigned, with a casual vacancy thus created, which can be

filled by a non-elected member of the association if such an appointment by the Management Committee is considered to be expedient or necessary for the efficient operation of the association.

There are instances where subcommittees are formed to undertake lengthy and complex projects that may span more than one year. A case in point was the set-up of the Online Membership System in 2021-22, and more recently, the 30Year Book project, 2022-23. To ensure the integrity of such projects the Bylaws were changed such that the appointed subcommittees responsible for these projects survived the extinguishing of the Management Committee that established them, for instance, at a subsequent AGM. Furthermore, it limits the incoming Management Committee's ability to terminate an established project only to where it can be demonstrated that the project is no longer considered to be expedient or necessary for the efficient operation of the association. To do otherwise would be of gross disrespect to the members of the subcommittee, and a waste of money and resources already invested.

I hasten to add, no such situation has ever arisen to the best of my knowledge.

By extending our reach into the community and our membership through our website and Facebook, we need to protect ourselves from trolls and other malicious actors in the online universe. We also need to keep abreast of shifts in the directions our major technology platforms are moving.

According to the Membership Survey, almost twenty per cent (20%) of our members found us by doing an internet search. Less than one per cent (1%) do not use a smart device or computer. Half the membership uses social media regularly, including keeping up to date with U3A Ipswich activities and information.

As an active member of the U3A Queensland Technical Forum, we remain alert to security and privacy issues, and take proactive steps to mitigate risks as best we can.

We recently experienced significant communications failure from within our OMS broadcast email system, Omail, with all our members who use Telstra's Bigpond email service. Telstra is phasing out Bigpond and the migration to Microsoft's Outlook email service has been catastrophic. Working closely with our OMS software supplier, MyU3A Inc., in Melbourne, it took several days to create and be able to apply a patch to our mail servers hosted by Siteground in Singapore to bypass Telstra's email address validation process which caused the outage with Omail.

Google is implementing email validation processes that will severely hamper use of their Gmail service. Expect more and more of your Gmail email to be undelivered over the coming twelve months, as Google decides - without your input - what is and what isn't real. The U3A Tech Forum is already suggesting all U3A office-bearers abandon Gmail for any and all association correspondence. The Secretary, Treasurer and myself, as both President and Webmaster, are making concerted efforts to use our u3aipswich.org.au email accounts and mail servers for broadcast communications to the membership, as well as with our other community stakeholders.

Regrettably, as we become more and more dependent on the “convenience” of technology – particularly all the ‘free’ stuff - we are more and more at the mercy of the whims of the tech giants. These are areas where we will need to invest significant membership funds to assure service delivery over the coming months and years.

And I’m not even going to mention the chaos and malevolence Artificial Intelligence - the ubiquitous ‘AI’ - will wreak on society in the immediate to near future.

Just to cheer you up a little, I want to reassure you we have a very secure and robust system in place to handle online financial transactions through the eWay gateway. No personal financial information is held in any of our membership databases.

Survey data indicates almost thirty per cent of members use the eWay card payment method, now neck and neck with direct bank to bank transfers. Payment in cash at the office is down, reducing the need to handle, transport and deposit it at our bank. Clearly, this is a trend that will continue to grow.

We amended the Bylaws, and developed and implemented a social media policy so that tighter control of what was posted on our Facebook platform could be enforced and to provide guidance, particularly with respect to various activities such as surreptitious cross promotion of irrelevant and potentially competitive Facebook pages; promotion of a commercial interest, whether passive – such as an image including a product or business implying a commercial relationship – as well by direct reference; and, the promotion of any social or ideological cause.

Non-members of U3A Ipswich have been removed and are blocked.

The social media policy is on our website, on the About Us page, where you will find everything you need to know about the association. The policy and bylaws make it clear that postings or activities that promote a commercial or party-political matter, or promote a particular cause or ideology are forbidden and are a breach of the Code of Conduct that may lead to punitive action, including expulsion from the association.

Like I said earlier, U3A Ipswich is a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and rewarding experience for all our members, and abuse or harassment will not be tolerated, whether in the real or virtual world.

There is a very real threat to the ongoing use of the GRUC premises, with what we understand to be the merging of local Ipswich Uniting parishes, and GRUC becoming the hub. Use of the Church Hall is no longer possible, and the Lower Hub, previously called Shalom House, will be totally refurbished within the next twelve months rendering it unusable.

The Venue Coordinator, Jane Elmore, has been compiling a list of alternate sites, and doing visits to assess their suitability. No doubt, we will need to transition classes to new venues as they both outgrow existing availability and are compromised by the GRUC amalgamation.

To broaden horizons as to what we could offer the membership in terms of classes and activities, in the past, we would try out an idea and see if it would fly. Now that we have significant statistically meaningful data from the Membership Survey, we can be more focused on and better plan the introduction of new and enticing activities, not just classes.

The survey has been a pet project of mine since 2022 and, having come to fruition towards the end of last year, it has delivered much better results than anticipated. More than one hundred and sixty (160) validated responses, out of a target of two hundred and forty (240) qualified members. We now have a comprehensive set of information and ideas from members to better inform policy decisions and set out a road map for the future in a more assured way. We can now target expenditure with the confidence of more likely-predictable outcomes; we can plan for revenue more precisely based on expected member behaviour in accordance with their input.

The survey will continue to evolve and be enhanced and can be expected to roll out at least annually. We will also look at more narrowly targeted surveys in the near future to seek specific input on more limited subject matter.

If you've not had a hoot reading our 30Yr Anniversary book, you are encouraged to do so. Copies are still available for sale. It's been a thrilling thirty years, and though there are challenges ahead, we also have the opportunity, through good management, sound planning, and increased participation, to continue to enhance the lives of those of us in the third age of life.

In closing, I thank you all for your attendance and support throughout the year.

I move my report be adopted.