

President's Report – U3A Brisbane 2018 AGM

It gives me great pleasure to report to the AGM that 2017 has been a very successful year in many ways. From growth in membership during that time - to improving what was already a very healthy balance sheet - to increases in class offerings. Following the large investment in the Adelaide Street rooms in 2016, it was decided to prudently control our expenditure even more so than usual during 2017. This was achieved and is reflected in the financial results. The investment in 232 Adelaide Street has paid off in spades – not only has it allowed us to increase our class offerings, but it has also allowed us to conduct extra one-off presentations which have proved to be very popular with members, so much so that they have all been fully attended but more on that a little later, as I will now get down to the all-important details:

U3A Brisbane now offers 187 classes in the 2 city campuses, plus in excess of another 100 classes are held in districts, the largest being Logan with 53 classes offered. This means there are now over 280 classes being offered across the Brisbane and Logan regions every week, facilitated by a veritable army of volunteers comprising over 270 tutors and office staff. That makes U3A Brisbane by far the largest U3A in Queensland and second only to Canberra in Australia. We also believe we are one of the very few, if not the only, U3A in the world that owns its own premises. We are a rapidly growing organisation with a projected membership of 3,900 during 2018 and, while growth is good, we realise we are facing issues which we will be addressing during the coming year. There are some interesting statistics I'd like you to be aware of and these graphs will help explain: As well as experiencing exceptional growth in membership numbers in recent times, it is interesting to note that participation rate has also been steadily climbing over the last couple of years. In other words we now have a higher percentage of members attending classes than ever before. A close tab is kept on membership growth which is updated monthly.

I am also very pleased to announce that we have been able to hold the membership fees at \$40 per annum and the class fees, where applicable, to \$5 per session. Of course, many classes held in the districts are free of charge.

I am very fortunate to have such an exceptional Management Committee to work with and I'm also extremely happy that most have decided to renominate for another year. The only change has been the retirement of Peter O'Loughlin earlier this year.

I will now give a briefing on the roles of the committee members:

I will start with Marilyn Wagland, our immediate Past President, now Vice-President. Marilyn has worked tirelessly throughout the year in diverse roles such as organising the one-off speakers I mentioned previously, heading the all-important Winter School committee as well as being interviewed on radio to name just a few. She has done all this while caring for her very ill husband Mark who sadly passed away recently. A very well-done job Marilyn, your efforts and commitment under adversity are truly extraordinary.

Of course, no organisation can operate without good financial control and we have plenty of expertise on hand with our Treasurer, Greg Williamson, controlling our finances, managing our 10-year plan and ensuring that the servicing of the noteholders mortgage is handled efficiently. We are in extremely good shape; however, I won't steal Greg's thunder as he will be telling you all the good news shortly in his Treasurer's report. I'm sure you'll all be pleased.

ICT is an important department in U3A Brisbane and we are lucky enough to have this area of responsibility under the stewardship of Greg Taylor, one of the best in the business. There are many facets to this area and, to do it justice, I will now describe the latest innovations:

- Developed an SMS Alert system integrated with the member database to enable SMS bulk texts to be sent to individual classes or an entire day's classes. This is particularly intended for situations where classes need to be cancelled at short notice due weather or similar cause.
- Developed a Social Event booking system to replace the old paper booking sheets. This system has automated waiting lists and incorporates the SMS broadcast system for rapid notification of cancellations.
- Developed a real-time monitoring system for Winter School bookings so that organisers can instantly see the booking status for each event. The SMS broadcast system has also been incorporated into the Winter School so that late event cancellations can be communicated rapidly.
- Redesigned the website styling and layout to bring it up to date with current design standards and response time expectations. The system was improved so that the site reconfigures itself for optimum layout for different sized devices, especially mobile phones.

- Analytics and management reporting capabilities were much improved so that management can be better informed about enrolments, membership growth trends and classes that have filled. This has become particularly important in recent times where demand for classes has increased faster than supply.
- State Conference website database was completely re-designed so that it can be more readily adapted to different conference venues each year.

This is a complex part of our operations and its importance for the future development of Brisbane U3A cannot be understated. Well done Greg on your hard work and commitment.

Every efficient committee needs a good secretary and I doubt we could do any better than our current Secretary, Simon Wood. Simon's attention to detail and record keeping is second to none and many a time he has been called on to give advice on constitutional matters and other legal matters which may affect our operations. I for one, am very happy that Simon has renominated as secretary of the committee for the coming year and thank him for his efforts.

The office is the heart of our operations and we are again extremely fortunate to have the services of Yvonne McGann, our office manager, ably assisted by Day Leaders Mary Calder, Helen Davis, June Morris, Eve McCormack, Jayne Shuttlewood and about 50 volunteers to make this part of our operation run like a well-oiled machine. From looking after the class sheets to manning the class entry, printing information for tutors and brochures and other material for promotions, nothing is too much trouble for these ladies (and the odd gent) under Yvonne's control. I believe this is probably one of the happiest office environments I have ever encountered and what make it so exceptional is that every single person is a volunteer. I believe the corporate world could do well to get advice from Yvonne and her magnificent crew. I must also personally thank Yvonne and her team for all the assistance they have given me during my first year as president.

The six districts associated with Brisbane are very important to our operations as they give flexibility to members who don't wish to attend classes in the city. This part of our operation is very competently administered by Mary Calder and, under her management, the districts are steadily growing and continue to develop under the umbrella of U3A Brisbane. District coordinators are mainly responsible for the introduction of tutors to their particular areas and ensuring their class information is up to date. A meeting between Mary and the

coordinators is held once each term to discuss any issues arising in the districts. This process has worked extremely well during the last year, including the appointment of a new coordinator and Management Committee member, Martin Bridgstock, to head a sub-committee to administer the large district of Logan City. The other District coordinators are: Alan Wishart – Southside, Rod McLary – Northside, Anna Blake – City Precinct & Westside, Chris (Nobby) Hobbs - Wynnum. Rod has also been actively involved in various promotional activities in addition to his coordinator's role. Mary's other responsibilities are assisting in the office administration once a week, along with quarterly production of the Class Schedule. Mary works tirelessly for U3A and nothing is too much trouble so thank you Mary for your fantastic commitment.

The two newest members of the Management Committee, Martin Bridgstock & Anne Hetherington, have certainly proved their worth during the last year by handling a number of projects and promotional activities during that time. As previously mentioned, Martin took over as coordinator of Logan district with a smooth transition and, along with Anne, assisted in a number of promotional presentations at Probus clubs and retirement seminars, to raise awareness of U3A within the seniors' community. Anne also took a lead role in obtaining quotes and procuring a grant for the installation of defibrillators in both the Adelaide & Creek street premises, as well as the recent chair replacement at Creek Street. Recently Martin and Anne joined forces to attend an Expo at The Village, Yeronga that generated quite a bit of interest in our organisation. They have also formed a dispute resolution panel for when the need arises. Martin has also taken on the task of writing a paper on the health benefits of lifelong learning. This is now available on our website and will be an invaluable marketing tool for, not only U3A Brisbane, but also U3A Network Queensland when lobbying the Government for grants.

Peter O'Loughlin deserves a special mention. Peter retired from the Management Committee on 31st January, but he left behind a great legacy of accomplishments that will serve U3A Brisbane very well for many years to come. He managed the fitting out of Adelaide Street, the upgrade of Creek Street plus a myriad of other jobs and finally, the reconfiguration of Rooms 18 & 19 into the much larger and more useable Room 18. You are probably aware that this has been named the "Mark Kapper Room" in honour of Marilyn's late husband Mark whose generosity made this project possible.

This AGM is the culmination of my first year as President and, as I have enjoyed it so much, I have decided to renominate for at least another year. It's been an

honour to be your President, but what has made the job so much easier is working with the professional group of people that make up the current committee and I am delighted that it is virtually remaining intact for the coming year. As most of you probably know, I retained the publicity role when I became President last year and I intend to retain that responsibility into the future. During the last year, I have been instrumental in organising a press campaign for Brisbane in the Brisbane Seniors newspaper, revamping our promotional brochure with a small grant from Network Queensland, conducting radio interviews, organising our team of speakers to conduct sessions and expos across the city and running our Facebook page. Believe it or not, there are still people out there that have never heard of U3A so awareness of who we are is an important part of the publicity role.

And now on to other key people and events:

Gail Hawkins, our tutor liaison officer for the city campuses deserve a very special mention. Gail works tirelessly in tutor recruitment and matching room availability with tutor requirements. It's a little like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle, however, she does a terrific job. She may not be able to please everyone all the time, but she certainly gets the mix right more times than not. A very difficult role but she does it extremely well. Congratulations Gail on a job very well done.

Of course, without tutors U3A Brisbane wouldn't exist so a big thank you must go to these hard-working, dedicated people who give up so much of their time. Quite a number of our tutors conduct multiple classes which means even more preparation, but nothing seems to be too much trouble for these special people who gain a great deal of satisfaction from the appreciation of their efforts by their students. A very special well done to you all.

Another important part of Brisbane U3A is the computer section which continues to offer classes in most aspects of computing at all levels. Gwenn Ball has managed this area for many years and is to be thanked for her hard work and commitment. You do a great job Gwenn.

Winter School has been Brisbane U3A's premier event for many years now and it goes from strength to strength. Last year's attendances almost reached 2,000 and I fully expect that figure to be surpassed this year. The keynote address, held at the auditorium of the State Library of Queensland, is the highlight of this event, with last year's fascinating presentation, given by

eminent Queensland Paleontologist, Dr Steven Salisbury, being delivered to a packed house. Planning for the 2018 event in July is well under way and is being organised by a committee headed up by Marilyn Wagland, assisted by Kate O'Loughlin and Mrs Winter School herself, Anne Douglass who has been involved with this event from its inception. With such a great committee organising this important event, Winter School this year should prove to be even bigger and better than ever.

Another important fixture in the U3A calendar is the monthly IT session held monthly on a Saturday which now has a new coordinator. After 8 years Helen Carberry has retired and been replaced by Diane Arapovic. Diane has already conducted a successful session with Chris (Nobby) Hobbs on shopping online and another session is planned for next Saturday on social media, conducted by Des Taylor, other regular presenters are Greg Taylor and Keith Catts. Many thanks to Helen Carberry for running these sessions for such a long time. Your commitment has been greatly appreciated by all who have attended over the years.

ENews has a new editor this year, with Jean Smith taking over from Helen Dubois who managed this publication for many years. Jean, having been an editor for many years, is perfect for this role and has already successfully overseen the publication of two editions of *ENews*. Unfortunately, we will be saying goodbye to Helen a little later this year as she is moving down south to live with her daughter. We wish her well and thank her for her many years of dedicated service to *ENews* and the social committee however, she will remain chair of this committee until her departure. Speaking of the social committee, they have conducted a number of very popular excursions throughout the year and these include theatre visits to shows such as Kinky Boots & Alladin and excursions to High Tea at Parliament House and Christmas in July just to name a few. The social committee is a very important facet of U3A Brisbane as it underlines the importance of social activities as part of our overall offerings.

There have been many other highlights this year, such as the interesting day VP Marilyn Wagland, myself and our resident Chinese specialist Bryan Iles entertained 40 Chinese visitors from Jinling University; a very special 100th birthday party organised by Ray Bricknell for our oldest student, Bill Richards in December with about 70 guests; and, more recently, the partial retirement of Jean Townsend, the lady whose drive and determination was instrumental in establishing Logan U3A in 2009, although she is still an active tutor. Thanks for your commitment Jean over the years. Also, on the menu during the year were

the very popular science films presented by our very own scientist, Marty Gellender and another intriguing session from a group called "Courage to Care". On a practical note, Brisbane hosted a workshop on grant writing on behalf of U3A Network Queensland which was well attended by U3As from as far away as Cairns. By the way our Adelaide Street rooms received many compliments, and a little bit of envy, from these visitors!

Of course, we have had our challenges during the year. Our class offerings, especially languages, are becoming more popular every week. A number of classes have had to put up the Class Full sign but, please be assured, the Management Committee along with Gail Hawkins are actively seeking more tutors and hope to be able to offer more classes in the not too distant future. A new email address is now available specifically for feedback from members who may experience difficulties finding a place in classes for Term 2.

In conclusion, I have been very proud to be president of such a well-run, professional organisation such as ours for the last 12 months and thank you all for giving me the privilege of being your President for a further year.

Greg Doolan, 11th April 2018