

Executive Director's Report



After a difficult preceding year which had seen considerable changes in its top management team, and a third consecutive dip in enrolment figures, WEA Sydney faced 2009 with a cautious approach. Re-accreditation as a Registered Training Organisation would be required by year-end, the Global Financial Crisis still had consumers in its claws, WEA Sydney's annual grant from the NSW government was to be reduced by a small percentile, and new staff had to be bedded in. Yet by the end of 2009, those clouds had largely lifted, as the association recorded a growth in total enrolments, and a small improvement in its financial trading position.

Yet positive enrolment statistics and a healthier balance sheet do not always present the whole picture. WEA Sydney is a not-for-profit organisation, whose defining mission is the provision of stimulating and varied educational activities, with a special emphasis on providing opportunities for study of the arts, humanities and social sciences. It was gratifying indeed that the major boost to enrolments in 2009 came in exactly this area, supplemented by yet another increase in enrolments into foreign language classes. Yet growth in these areas was off-set, financially, by a drop in computer and training enrolments, and with added expenditure relating to salaries, computer costs, and general operating outlays, the association ultimately recorded an operating deficit of some \$12,000. Cash flow was also influenced at the end of the year by the commencement of large scale infrastructure work within WEA House. WEA's application for Federal Government support was written to meet a number of government aims, including access and equity issues, vocational training outcomes and services for disabled students.

It was gratifying that all aspects of the application were approved, and that funding was made available up to mid-2010 for a substantial renovation of the two lifts in WEA House, new work at the entrance including the installation of a lift for the mobility-disadvantaged, and a thorough upgrading of the teaching rooms on level 2, to make them into state-of-the-art rooms. The work of planning, documentation, certification, DA approvals, and so on, occupied the remainder of 2009, with actual physical refurbishment commencing early in 2010. The project is officially funded by the Australian Government through the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund (TLCF) for Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Another goal was also achieved mid-year, when WEA Sydney received its formal re-registration from VETAB (NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board) as a Registered Training Organisation, enabling it to continue to present accredited courses. This process had involved considerable internal reviews and form submissions, and WEA was grateful for the support of former Executive Director Richard Pinder during this process. A sting came in the VETAB tail, as the association was then required to implement a new variety of evaluations for its accredited courses (competency completion reports), which placed an extra administrative load on tutors and staff.

WEA Sydney's governance system continued to work well throughout the year, with a seamless transition of office-holders during the year (Margaret Bagby stepping down from the Vice-Presidency, to be replaced by Ann Wilson), and invigorating discussions at both Board and Council level. One major task to be achieved by the Board was the development, and approval, of a new Strategic Plan, to cover the forthcoming years 2010-2013, which in many ways steered the association back to its core purpose, the provision of quality educational courses. In addition, the Board fully supported the officers' work in

management, audit procedures, financial reporting and overall control of the association's vast program of activities. While many of these are described in the following pages, highlights include:

- 16,020 enrolments received in total
- Nearly 47% of enrolments taken in the broad range of Humanities and Social Science courses (including the Discussion Group Program)
- 41% of enrolments received from the over 60s age group
- The healthy and continual use of WEA Sydney's library, illustrated by a total of nearly 7,500 borrowings
- Nearly \$70,000 in fee income conceded through concessionary fee support
- Joint provision with NSW AMES of a Certified Linked Skills Program in office administration and spoken and written English (under the Employment Pathways Program).

While reflecting on the achievements of 2009, and of previous years, is instructive, the real challenge is to look forward with confidence to ensure that WEA Sydney's future remains assured as a leading provider of worthwhile lifelong learning and training opportunities to the people of Sydney.

I therefore commend this 2009 Annual Report to our members, and to all who support the idea of the Workers' Educational Association.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Newton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Newton
Executive Director