

Executive Director's Report

Despite a difficult year in 2010, WEA Sydney approached 2011 with confidence and determination, fully aware of the quality of its courses, the skill level of its tutors, and the enhanced nature of WEA House where the majority of its educational program was to be held. 2010 had seen a fall in enrolments due to the disruption caused by eight months of refurbishment work in WEA House, allied to the continuation of the wide-spread economic downturn that affected so many of WEA Sydney's student base. Plans for 2011 had been based on the expectation that some of these lost students would return, thus boosting income from fees, and that some buoyancy would return in the profitable training and vocational education sector. However, while WEA was able in 2011 to present a completed, renovated and professional building to its students, it was impossible to predict the lingering affect of the wider spread economic downturn, with its mid-year threat of a recession to match that of 2008/2009, and thus with its continued severe affect on potential student spending. This consumer resistance to anything other than required or necessary spending naturally bit into WEA Sydney's 2011 enrolment levels, which by year end stood at 14,353, down slightly on the 2010 result. The framework for WEA Sydney's trading year was made obvious by a headline from *The Age* newspaper, which on 6 February 2012 stated *Retail sales in worst showing since 1984*.



Michael Newton, Executive Director

Within this picture of depressed trading, however, shining lights were visible, and many of these educational successes are noted in the following pages. Foreign language enrolments rose for the third year in succession. WEA's core activity, the teaching of Humanities-based subjects, continued to attract considerable numbers to its high quality program, and its unique distance education activity, the Discussion Group Program, continued to provide geographically distant groups of students with stimulating and highly valued courses. WEA's track record of corporate training was also enhanced by the delivery of a highly valued program in April in Office Skills to 18 students from the NSW Australian Migrant Education Service (AMES) as part of the Employment Pathways Program funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Throughout all of these varied educational activities, the quality of WEA Sydney's tutoring, and general services for students, remained outstanding. Verification of this claim was fully endorsed by the findings of the large scale Student Survey that was conducted throughout Winter term, where over 90% of students rated their course as excellent or good. Similar outstanding results were recorded for staff work, classroom facilities, and the support services that students received. Please see page 13 for details. Attainment of such high standards was also reflected in the mid-year receipt of WEA Sydney's Certificate of Registration to continue to provide fully accredited courses, under the National Vocational and Training Regulator Act 2011 (as administered by the Australian Quality Training Framework). The process of re-certification as a NVR Registered Training Organisation (RTO) was arduous, but fair, and WEA Sydney can now be confident of receiving government support for its accredited training program through to December 2016.

The Association's high standards are also reflected in the loyalty that is shown by its body of tutors, many of whom have been working with WEA Sydney for a decade or more. This collegiate atmosphere was acknowledged in a special ceremony held on 15 July when long-serving tutors were rewarded with a certificate of service, and a small gift. A full report, including the names of those tutors so honoured, can be found on page 21.

WEA Sydney's governance system continued to work effectively throughout 2011, with animated and informed discussions occurring at Board and Council meetings. Council meetings featured occasional guest speakers, and Board directors enjoyed a lively workshop at the end of the year designed to enhance their governance skills. In addition to its regular duties, discussion and review of reports, the Board also oversaw the commencement of work on selected activities planned to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the WEA in Sydney in 1913.

The Board also continued with its valued support of the officers' work in management, audit procedures, financial reporting and overall control of the Association's vast program of activities. While many of these activities are described in detail in the following pages, statistical high-lights include:

- 14,353 enrolments taken in total
- Over 45% of enrolments taken in WEA Sydney's core Humanities and Social Sciences program (including the Discussion Group Program)
- Continued growth in enrolments in Foreign Languages courses, which now contribute 28% of overall income
- Over \$63,000 in fee income conceded through concessionary fee support
- Active participation in celebration of History, Science and Adult Learners' Weeks
- 48% of enrolments received from the over 60s age group
- 33% of enrolments taken into courses with a vocational or career improvement content.

Despite these achievements, a considerable deficit was posted at the end of 2011 (\$98,252), primarily due to the effect of the current economic setting in which WEA Sydney operates. Full disclosure of WEA Sydney's financial operations are found on pages 34-45. Turning this result into a more positive outcome for future years will occupy considerable time on the part of WEA Sydney's Board and management. WEA remains a vital ingredient in Sydney's wider educational mix, and the Board is determined that its unique blend of courses will continue to have an impact on Sydney's citizens' lives.

I therefore commend this 2011 Annual Report to our members, and to all who support the ideals of the Workers' Educational Association.



Michael Newton
Executive Director

Please contact the WEA Sydney office if you would like a copy of the 2011 Annual Report