

Executive Director's Report

Not many institutions stay the course of time to celebrate their centenary – certainly not many not-for-profit organisations. But this is exactly what WEA Sydney has been able to achieve! The WEA was founded in Australia, in Sydney, in November 1913 – and 100 years on, WEA Sydney was able to celebrate one of the great success stories in adult education in style. Fully supported by WEA Sydney's Board of Directors, and with co-ordination from staff and a small committee, activities were mounted in all terms of 2013, ranging from one-off talks or lectures to buoyant cultural days. A media campaign generated stories and interviews, famous names were happy to be associated with WEA's story, and a series of public events were held in November as the culmination of celebrations, including the unveiling of a birthday plaque in WEA House in Bathurst Street, and the gift of a reception in WEA Sydney's honour from the Lord Mayor of Sydney. Full details of the wide variety of activities held as centenary celebrations can be found on pages 18-20.



Michael Newton, Executive Director

Many of these events were open to WEA's students at reduced cost, or even offered as free attendance. Whole-hearted participation by students helped to boost enrolment numbers in 2013 beyond previous years, to a total of 15,385. Within this overall figure, more detailed breakdowns illustrated that Foreign Languages reached a record high enrolment level of 3,904, and now contribute 32% of total income; Humanities courses saw a total of 6,974 enrolments, representing over 45% of the annual intake, which when combined with the Humanities-based Discussion Group Program, take that percentage higher and thus illustrate the Association's commitment to its wider Mission Statement; computer and training figures, while lower than in the boom years, continued to contribute to WEA's RTO status, with this area also gaining a significant boost in numbers through the receipt of a Telstra-supported government grant to put on Tech Savvy Seniors courses.

In addition, two factors emerge from a review of the Statistical Report for 2013: one, that WEA Sydney's commitment to making its educational program available to all remains intact, with over 38% of total enrolments being taken at reduced concession rates (and thus forfeiting some \$90,000 in fee income); and two, the over 50s demographic remains the highest enrolment block. The benefits of the type of education that WEA Sydney offers to the elderly, and the semi or fully retired, is of intense value, not just to the individuals themselves, but also to a wider society. Study after study illustrates that keeping one's mind active and engaged eases wider health problems into old age. As Keith Suter wrote in his introduction to WEA Sydney's centenary souvenir booklet *WEA 100 Years*: "WEA is playing a vital role in not only catering for the educational needs of young people but also making sure that older Australians can live a healthy and productive life."

Tutoring standards were maintained throughout the year, with highly qualified new tutors being welcomed into WEA's structure, and evaluations continued to highlight the benefits that WEA Sydney's unique offering of courses brought to students. The Association owes a deep note of thanks to its tutors for their loyalty, their professionalism and their outstanding abilities. The Board of WEA Sydney continued with its valued support of the officers' work in management, audit procedures, financial reporting and overall control of the Association's program of activities. Most importantly, WEA Sydney's Board committed sufficient funds to support WEA's centenary – in 2013 almost \$56,000 was spent on these activities, in addition to healthy sums in the preceding two years. This financial support came at a time when adult education in general was suffering a wide-spread decline, with colleges closing their doors during the year, and all suffering a significant drop in fee-paying enrolments (as opposed to government funded student places), in exactly the type of courses that WEA Sydney has as its main offering.

The Board of WEA Sydney acknowledged this difficult and challenging setting, by passing a budget for the year's trading operations that listed a realistic deficit. In doing this, the Board committed WEA Sydney to the full maintenance of its high standards of administration, tutoring and course support

services, believing that compromise in either quality, or the pursuit of its wider mission, would have a detrimental effect on WEA Sydney in its centenary year.

However, expenses continued to grow, and with the added centenary costs, the end of year deficit had exceeded both the budget and last year's trading result. Final details of WEA Sydney's financial operations in 2013 are found on pages 31-43 - including the listing of the total deficit figure of \$155,844. 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. As a step towards this outcome, after considerable discussion, the Board endorsed a Strategic Plan for 2014-2018 which now had achieving a proper financial balance as the core requirement, in addition to the fulfilment of its educational mission. WEA Sydney remains a vital ingredient in Sydney's wider educational mix, and the Board is therefore determined that its unique blend of courses will continue to have an impact on Sydney's citizens' lives.

I therefore commend this 2013 Annual Report to our members, and to all who support the ideals of the Workers' Educational Association, Sydney.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Newton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "M" and a stylized "N".

Michael Newton
Executive Director