

Executive Director's Report

WEA Sydney celebrated an extraordinary year in 2013, when it was able to announce the successful completion of its first 100 years of existence to the wider world of Sydney! Founded in 1913, WEA Sydney has played a vital role in Sydney's intellectual life, educating thousands upon thousands of citizens, and providing them with opportunities of personal development in ways that no other adult or community college could aspire to. 2013 saw a wonderful range of activities put on by WEA Sydney as part of its year-long celebration of its Centenary, and these courses served both to promote WEA Sydney and its objectives, and to boost enrolments well beyond the levels of the previous years. Some 15,385 students enrolled into this vast mix of educational programs, from study days to one-off talks, often offered in conjunction with other well-known institutions.



Michael Newton, Executive Director

The challenge that WEA Sydney therefore faced in 2014 was two-fold: one, the need to maintain this high level of enrolments, particularly into its core activities, after the excitement of 2013; and two, how to bring WEA Sydney's financial outcomes back towards a break-even setting, as the cost of developing and promoting the extensive centenary program, plus the production of specific centenary merchandising and public relations materials had led to the posting of a significant deficit in 2013. Equally, WEA Sydney learnt early in 2014 that the regular VET support grant awarded to it by the NSW state government would no longer apply in 2015. It is to the credit of all involved with WEA Sydney's work in 2014 that these challenges were met and indeed surpassed.

The most significant achievement for the year was the slight advance in total enrolments over the renaissance seen in 2013 – a total of 15,418 enrolments were recorded, with the vast majority of these being in regular fee-paying courses. The main driver of this return was the continuing success of WEA's foreign language program, with all European languages and several near neighbours seeing classes fill term after term, in beginners, and as importantly, in continuing classes. Credit is due to the tutors who worked tirelessly in this area. Equally important, and in full alignment with WEA's Mission Statement, enrolments into the core Humanities program also grew. The result of this pattern of success saw the income raised from enrolment fees surpass the 2013 fee income result by over \$100,000, with a subsequent flow-on into both total income and the final financial return for the year. Other areas of WEA's educational program contributed to the health of the association, with computer courses holding their ground, and with distance education courses in the unique Humanities-based Discussion Group Program continuing to serve the needs of those beyond the Bathurst St classrooms for intellectual discussion.

In addition, a review of the Statistical Report for 2014 reveals that WEA Sydney's commitment to making its educational program available to all remains intact, with over 43% of total enrolments being taken at reduced concession rates (and thus forfeiting some \$110,000 in fee income); and that 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 2014 progressed, enrolment patterns and their financial implications were reported to WEA Sydney's Board of Directors, which 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 funds to enable WEA to evaluate the impact of the sale of the adjacent building to WEA House, 286 Sussex St. A small sub-committee was established to review this occurrence, with reports commissioned and duly presented to the Board, and a letter opposing the development's application of work lodged successfully with the City of

Sydney Council. The cost of this activity stood at \$33,369, a sum which therefore added to the 2014 trading deficit. Even with the addition of this war-chest of building funds, the overall deficit for 2014 still stood well below that recorded for 2013, with a subsequent reduction in withdrawal from WEA's cash reserves. This was an outstanding result. In addition to authorising this mix of regular and irregular expenditure, the Board also authorised the changeover of all lights in WEA House to LED low power bulbs – while this activity involved considerable initial outlay, rewards in reduced monthly electricity costs were apparent by year-end, with associated environmental benefits. More detailed aspects of WEA's financial setting were discussed from May onwards by a small Finance Sub-Committee, which reported by year-end recommendations of activities and expense cuts which would start to return WEA to a better financial position in the coming years, in line with the overall objective of the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan which had placed WEA's financial stability at its heart.

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. A second example of the loyalty and commitment that WEA Sydney's stakeholders feel for the association's work was seen in March, when the WEA library's administration was largely passed over to volunteers. This move enabled the library to stay open for longer hours than previously, as well as providing fresh faces for students to interact with. All volunteers were trained by WEA's professional librarian, who continued in a part-time capacity to oversee the management of this rare resource. WEA Sydney's full time management staff were also busy with a variety of promotional and professional activities, from industry networking to meeting with executives from like-minded organisations, such as the Council of the Ageing, and with potential partnerships under review with the City of Sydney. Training opportunities for tutors were also offered throughout the year.

In summary, WEA Sydney met the challenges of 2014 with confidence, and with success. Full disclosure of the association's financial operations in 2014 are found on pages 27-39. Building on this result for the coming years, in the face of new and different challenges (lack of government funding, issues of disruption through the development of the adjacent property), will occupy considerable time on the part of WEA Sydney's Board and management. WEA Sydney 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 2014 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".

Michael Newton
Executive Director