

2019 AGM: President's Report

The year from March 2018 until now could be described as a year of relatively quiet but busy progress for U3A Geelong. We didn't run a Summer School this year, and we didn't undertake any large new projects funded by Grant money. I think this was partly because many of us felt we needed a break from extra projects after the hectic Summer School activities of January 2018 – especially Greg Duggan and Loretta Winstanley, who were showing signs of exhaustion when it was all over, and partly because we had acquired a number of new Committee members who needed time to settle into learning the jobs they had volunteered to do. The result has been a year of steady progress and consolidated activities, which I will detail for you as follows.

You might recall that in my introductory welcome last year I expressed some concern about falling numbers of tutors and what was showing as a reduction in our membership numbers. Well I'm very happy to tell you that that trend, if that's what it was, has been completely reversed. In what has been a surge in membership applications, and growth in tutorship and course numbers, our membership has risen from around 880 back then to now stand at 1067 – the first time, I think, that we have gone over the thousand mark. Our tutor numbers have gone from 52 last year to currently 73, our Course offerings have risen from 85 to 102, and we have a total number of 1821 enrolments in classes. As to reasons for this growth, apart from natural fluctuations, I suppose we might presume that the Baby Boomer generation is starting to affect retiree numbers in the Geelong region, a situation we can expect to continue and expand in the coming years. But I would also like to think that we at U3A Geelong can take some credit for an enhancement in our reputation in the region due to the wonderful efforts of our volunteers – that is, our tutors, our office volunteers and our Management Committee, in successfully delivering a well-organised program of Courses that are interesting and relevant to needs of the community.

This enhancement of our standing in the Geelong community has been helped along by increased efforts on the part of our volunteers to publicise U3A activities. We've had pieces in the local newspapers, we've had a new advertising film made and running all year at the Pivotonian Cinema, and we enjoyed what I think was our best ever Open Day in October, with a record number of visitors coming through to enquire about Courses, and to generally enjoy the buzzing, friendly atmosphere we created. Particular thanks are due to Loretta Winstanley for taking the trouble to help us with that, and to all those – Nanette, Anne Carne, Mary Tieman, who helped with the organisation and the food on that day.

We had other social activities during the year – the usual Tutor's Lunch and a Melbourne Cup Day lunch went off well, as did our several "Let's Do Lunch" events, initiated and led by Nanette Tunnicliffe – all of which have contributed to the social enjoyment and sense of togetherness which I'm noticing more and more is a feature of U3A Geelong.

But we are not just a social club; we are, first and foremost, a learning centre, and I think we can see by the growing number of Courses on offer that in this respect U3A Geelong is doing its job and serving its members in fine style. The range of Courses we offer, the standard of our tutors, the efficiency of our office staff, all make us without question one of the best U3As in the State of Victoria. And I might add, we are able to do this, and have been doing this now for over ten years without raising our membership fee!

Another important aspect of our educational offerings has been the series of open Friday lectures that were held throughout the year. Some of these were in our Deakin Lecture series, organised by David Galloway. Dr Shayan Seyedin gave an interesting talk about new technology in energy-storing clothing fibres. Professor Mark McGillivray spoke about the value of Aid Programs to Tanzania.

Dr Anthony Ware spoke about the conflict in Myanmar, with Aung San Su Kyi and the Rohingya people. We also had other guest lecturers come and talk to us: Graham Weber spoke about the relative merits of Nuclear Energy for Australia. Barbara Abley AM helped us to understand more about the Australian Honours system. Philomena Manifold gave us an overview of some of the cultural and historical associations of the geology of the Great Ocean Road. And Alan Denham gave a well-illustrated talk about his experiences of the geological and physical features of the Western Australian coast. We do hope we'll be able to continue throughout this year to attract interesting speakers for our Friday open lecture spot.

On the financial side, you will see in the Treasurer's Report that we continue to travel well inside our budget, and have once again made a modest profit in the last year, despite the fact that we applied for very little grant money from outside sources. I am happy to report that our finances are healthy and well-managed.

Last year I briefly raised the matter of our relationship with Network Victoria, specifically over the manner in which it distributes its government - provided funds to the member U3As throughout Victoria, and also over the vexed matter of representation on the working committees of Network Victoria. We are not happy with the way Network Victoria currently operates, and the two vexed issues remain as yet unresolved. The first is, you might recall, that Network changed its policy on distributing the funds it receives from government sources in 2016; before then all U3As received funds according to the size of their membership, but the new policy means that we can only get money for doing new Projects – that is, over and above what we already do, which of course is run a busy U3A. Since we are actually receiving no government money from Network for running our programs, and it costs around \$2000 per annum to belong to Network, we have to ask ourselves the question – are we getting value for what we are paying to belong to Network Victoria? The second issue we have with Network is about the relation between the Members Council (which consists of representatives from the individual U3As) and the Network Executive; power was shifted across in a somewhat opportunistic manner from the Members Council to the Executive in 2013, and our group of U3As are striving to get that power back. Our Vice- President, Eeon Macauley, has had our interests in this matter in hand all year, and will continue with his usual patience and persistence, and the support of a number of other U3As, to pursue a just resolution to the problems. Eeon believes that progress is being made, and that we are hopeful that we'll get the right outcome during the course of this year. But I think it is fair to tell this AGM at this stage that it is a matter important enough for U3A Geelong to consider withdrawing its membership from Network Victoria if the problems are not soon fixed. Of course, any such move would only be made with the clear support of the U3A Geelong membership, and would have to be done either at an AGM or a Special Meeting of members, requiring all the pros and cons to be clearly put to a discussion and possible vote. But let us hope it never has to come to this. We will keep you posted on any important developments.

Finally, and most importantly, I have to thank many people for their contribution to the successful running of U3A Geelong during the past year. To the members of the Management Committee who give their time and effort to keeping the ship on course from month to month, let me single you out: to Greg Duggan, who has been a conscientious and highly efficient Secretary, and whose advice I so often rely on, I give special thanks. Sadly, Greg has decided not to stand for re-election this time, having other things that he wants to pursue, understandably, and so I would like us to give Greg our special thanks for his period of service over the past two years. But we can take consolation from the news that Loretta Winstanley has put her hand up to take over the Secretary's job for the coming year, and it will be marvellous to have her back.

To Eon Macaulay, another wise head whose support and advice I have often sought to my benefit, and for his, shall I say, dogged pursuit of a just deal for us and other from Network Victoria; to Irene Cannon, who has been our highly professional Treasurer now for I don't know how many years – ever since I first came on the Committee anyway; to Nanette Tunnicliffe, who has so willingly taken on a number of jobs since she joined in 2017, including the important and busy portfolio of Course Manager, which she has been gradually taking over from me in the past few months; to David Galloway for his skilful arranging of the Deakin Lecture series, to Mary Tieman and Anne Carne for their stalwart help on social and public relations matters, including the very successful Open Day; to the two Ken's – Ken Bolton and Ken Morris OAM, who have contributed to the overall competency and diligence of the Committee: I thank you all for your efforts, your wisdom and your goodwill in making my job easy and pleasurable. You are excellent colleagues.

I want to thank Mary Paul and Tina Colla and their staff of office volunteers, who do such a marvellous job keeping all our queries, our room problems, our photocopying, our general flow of information, and a thousand other matters that crop up every day, so competently and cheerfully under control in the office every day. I might mention here that Mary could do with more volunteer staff in the office, so if anyone has any spare time, or knows anyone who might be able to give a morning during the week, I'm sure Mary would love to hear from them. I have also to thank Graeme Allen for his excellent editorship of the Newsletter, and my son Corley Kinnane for his continued maintenance of our Internet website.

And of course, most important, our line-up of wonderful tutors, who, without financial reward, give us so generously the benefit of their time, enthusiasm and expertise across so many fields of knowledge; I hope I'll never tire of saying thank you to every one of you, who really are the driving force of the whole University of the Third Age concept – no tutors, no Courses. So thank you to every one of you.

That, I think, pretty well covers my report; if there is anyone I've missed, I do apologise. I would simply close by saying that U3A Geelong is thriving on all fronts thanks to the efforts of everyone involved – and that means all of our members, and that I look forward to us enjoying another successful twelve months of learning activities.

Garry Kinnane
March 2019

Treasurer's Report