



**ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION**

**Queensland Branch**

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Promoting International Understanding and Human Achievement through English  
The English Speaking Union (Queensland Branch)  
ACN 009 706 236 ABN 56 009 706 236

An independent not-for-profit community organization  
Queensland President: Emeritus Professor Roland Sussex

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## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 24 NOVEMBER, 2019**

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT, 2019**

#### **PREAMBLE**

The mission of the ESU, which encompasses more than 50 institutions around the globe, is to promote international understanding and human achievement through English. Our language has become the world language, and is far ahead of any other language in international usage. This places a special responsibility on those who care for its inclusive, as well as its leadership, role as the language in which so many people do business, government, diplomacy, culture, tourism and sport.

#### **THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

2019 has been a year of re-evaluation and change. It has been a difficult year, dominated by uncertainty about our future, our building, and our activities.

On 1 June we discovered via the liquidator that Momani's, the restaurant tenant, had ceased to trade. This was the fourth restaurant to fail. This meant that we no longer had access to the former income stream from the restaurant, which was designed to support the cost of the building as well as the cultural activities of the ESU in Queensland.

The Board briefly considered the possibility of a replacement tenant, but enquiries through commercial networks yielded no solution.

The costs of the building, infrastructure and cultural activities in 2019 have have therefore come from the ESU's financial resources. This situation was not sustainable, and the ESU's financial

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position was deteriorating rapidly. Without the restaurant as income stream the ESU (Q) did not have a future.

After extensive discussion the Board, with great reluctance, decided that ESU House would have to be sold, and that we needed a new business model suited to the new commercial and social conditions. This reluctance was combined with regret that we were being forced to move away from the vision which we had inherited from our former President, Ann Garms OAM.

The sale of the building dominated the work of the ESU and the Board for the rest of 2019, and substantially interfered with some aspects of the normal program of events. A previous attempt in 2018 to secure the sale of the building by auction had attracted no bidders, and the commercial situation in the CBD of Brisbane and close areas has not improved. The Board was not certain that a buyer indeed could be found.

Of the two major outreach initiatives, the Education program, featuring the Public Speaking Competition, continued under the leadership of Professor Caroline Hatcher. However, for financial reasons the Roly Sussex Short Story Competition was put on hold until 2020.

The concluding of the sale for \$1.6m will allow the Board to reset the financial status of ESU (Q) and to develop new business and cultural plans for consideration. After payment of outstanding commitments, including the estate agent's fee, there will be approximately \$1.5m to invest in our future, in addition to current financial resources (see the Treasurer's report).

Members will be kept informed of developments for the future of ESU (Q) in terms of location, housing and activities, and will have opportunity for input.

## **SALE OF ESU HOUSE**

Board member Gary Gardiner took over responsibility for negotiations with estate agents, in consultation with Board members and especially with the Executive. A bid was secured through Raine and Horne, but at \$1.5m it was short of the figure we were advised was aiming for (\$1.8m - 2m), and was qualified by a number of conditions which made it unsuitable. A bid was then secured from Coronis Real Estate with positive buyer credentials, for \$1.6m. Independent advice indicated that this should be accepted, given the current conditions in commercial real estate. Negotiations with the buyer were completed with the buyer for the chattels, and the buyer agreed to extend the handover date by 2 weeks to 29 November. This allowed the Public Speaking competition to be held at ESU House, as well as the AGM and Christmas Party.

The Board is very aware that this outcome is well short of the price (over \$3m) which was paid for the building. But the commercial property, restaurant and other conditions have been changing radically over the past decade. The Board has acted to secure the best future it can for the ESU Queensland.

The ESU has been legally represented by Pender and Whitehouse, who have provided prompt, professional and considerate service. I will be writing to thank them on our behalf.

Members of the Board will be helping Gary Gardiner in the coming week remove the chattels from ESU House.

## BOARD ISSUES

The Board warmly welcomed Jan Heffernan as the new Secretary.

Many initiatives had to be put on hold until the sale of the business was finalized, since without the sale the future of ESU Queensland was uncertain. For that reason, 2020 will be marked by the introduction of initiatives which were put on hold in 2019.

Issues in 2019 included:

**1. Constitution.** The existing Constitution had not been revised since 1961. It was in need of revision, which was undertaken by Roland Sussex and Richard Macedo. A draft is ready. Presentation and discussion of the draft was interrupted by the issue of the sale of the building, since the physical situation of the ESU (Q) is relevant to the formulation of the Constitution. The draft will be a priority item for the new Board.

**2. ESU Membership.** Current paid-up membership numbers are steady but not increasing. The Board has identified growth, deepening and broadening the membership base a priority, especially involving younger members, whose participation will be promoted through new initiatives.

**3. Board Membership.** All nine members of the existing Board have renominated for 2019. Ross Brodie has offered to take over as Secretary from Janet Heffernan, who wishes to step down. Ray Heffernan has generously offered to continue as a Treasurer while a successor learns how to handle this complex portfolio.

**4. Board roles**

The Board has endorsed the principle that members should take turns at the various executive roles, which is for the benefit both of the ESU and for the Board.

**5. Electronic networking.** The Board has successfully trialled the Zoom software, which made it possible for members to attend Board meetings even if they are not physically able to attend at ESU House. The Board is considering ways of exploiting electronic networking, including cultural activities run through electronic networks, as a means of expanding the ESU's work and outreach.

**6. Presidents' portraits.** The Board has collected portraits of all former ESU Presidents, with the intention of displaying them online, and in such premises as the ESU will negotiate.

## AUSTRALIAN ESU

Roland Sussex and Richard Macedo attended the annual meeting of the AESU in Melbourne by electronic means. The AESU is led by Chris Perriam (President, Adelaide ESU) and Robert Furlan (President, Melbourne). The network as a whole is declining in membership, with only Melbourne showing more robust numbers. There is only limited interchange between the various branches of the ESU in Australia, and between Australian ESUs and the ESU in London.

## EVENTS

### **Education: the Public Speaking Competition**

The public speaking competition ran again in 2019. The schools and their curriculum timetables are in a year of transition, but participation was again close to the levels of preceding years. The standard, in the opinion of the judges, was even higher than in the past. The continuing support for this competition from a number of schools, and new participation from schools which have not participated before, bode well for the future. The ESU expresses its warm appreciation to the two judges, Emeritus Professor Caroline Hatcher and Adjunct Professor Patsy McCarthy, for their superior work, and especially to Caroline Hatcher for organizing and orchestrating this excellent competition.

### **Roly Sussex Short Story Competition**

This competition began in 2015. It was put on hold for 2019 for financial reasons until the building was sold and the future financial position of ESU Queensland was secured. In 2020 we intend that the competition will benefit from wider and more proactive promotion outside Queensland, especially the Secondary School competition. The Governor, who has been a strong supporter of the competition, has indicated his regret at the temporary interruption, and his readiness to continue to support the competition in future.

### **Churchill lecture**

The Churchill lecture was presented by John Thompson-Gray, with the topic "Churchill as scientist". A highly appreciative audience participated in lively discussion after the presentation, which gave a perspective on Churchill from the point of view of a scientist, writer and historian of ideas.

### **Future perspectives for events**

The Board has been discussing a proposal from Roly Sussex, in consultation with Majella Stevens, to run a series of language and grammar workshops, initially for school students, probably in years 10-11, in 2020. These will be paid events, but with the prime goal of expanding the ESU's footprint and impact. Extensions of this program to consumers in the ethnic and other communities is being considered.

Caroline Hatcher is preparing a plan for a series of literary luncheons for 2020, which will target some new demographics and activities in a way which belongs very much within the scope of the ESU.

## THANKS

I express my sincere appreciation to the members of the Board, who helped me take over the duties of Acting President at an especially difficult time, and who have not only continued their existing duties, but have gone out of their way to ensure that ESU Queensland will regroup and move forward into 2020 with confidence and a renewed sense of purpose. I particularly thank:

Richard Macedo, Vice-President, especially for his role in revising the Constitution, and providing legal advice relevant to the sale of the building;

Janet Heffernan, who has been an exemplary secretary;

Ray Heffernan, Treasurer, who has not only kept a close watch over the Union's finances, but has also provided invaluable advice and guidance over the sale of the building.

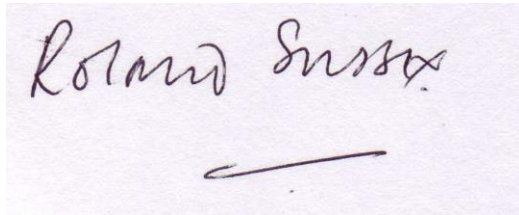
Gary Gardiner, who took over much of the negotiation with estate agents, and was crucial in securing a buyer for the building;

Caroline Hatcher, who continued to lead the Public Speaking Competition;  
Ross Brodie and Robert Goes, who have taken over coordination of events  
Majella Stevens, who has provided invaluable new input and stimulus, and will be involved  
in new initiatives in 2020.

It would not have been possible to negotiate this difficult year without the support and collegiality  
of these Board members.

## **THE FUTURE**

2019 has performed been a hiatus year, and a turning point, in the activities of the ESU (Q). The  
Board has had to take strategic decisions for the continuation of the ESU (Q) under different  
conditions. I am extremely positive about our prospects for the future. While we will not be  
possessors of a signature heritage property, I expect that the opportunities which are now opening  
up will allow the ESU (Q) to experience a new period of vigorous activity and existence.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Roland Sussex" in a cursive script. Below the name is a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that serves as a decorative flourish or underline.

Emeritus Professor Roland Sussex OAM, Chevalier des Palmes Académiques  
Acting President, ESU Queensland Branch  
November, 2019