



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
Australia

QUEENSLAND BRANCH

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

November 2020

OVERVIEW

By any standards, 2020 has been an exceptionally challenging year. The shadow of the Coronavirus is omnipresent, and unlikely to recede until the arrival of vaccines some time in 2021. Cultural organisations like the English-Speaking Union have been unable to run their usual programs of social events, and it was not until November 1 that we were able to gather together. The overwhelming metaphor for the year has been one of treading water in the hope that things would improve. Queensland has so far done well in keeping Covid-19 at bay. But an outbreak in mid-November in South Australia, a state with the pandemic apparently well under control, shows how easily an outbreak can escape the containment lines.

FINANCIAL

In retrospect, ESU (Queensland Branch) acted with excellent judgement in concluding the sale of ESU House in November 2019. The drain on the Union's finances, particularly in maintaining a heritage building, were no longer sustainable. As a result, we now find ourselves with a substantial sum of money in the bank, pending decisions about investment, property and related matters. The investment climate over 2020 has been erratic and generally showing low yield in terms of interest. The Board has taken advice and sought expressions of interest for managing the Union's investments in three investment houses. We have also discussed the merits of investing in real estate, and using the rental income to support the work of the Union. Members are invited to contribute to this discussion at the Annual General meeting, or by correspondence to the Secretary or President. With bank deposit interest rates at 0.05%, maintaining ESU funds in liquid assets is not an option.

REAL ESTATE

For the first time for many years ESU (Queensland Branch) find itself without a physical home. Board members have considered several proposals for investing in real estate, and will be taking up this matter as a priority in 2021. The absence of a physical home of our own has required us to find alternative accommodation for the Public Speaking Competition and for social events. The Board is developing a list of recommended venues for these activities, and will be testing and exploring them, with a view to longer term commitments, during 2021.

Board member Gary Gardner has kindly provided storage space for many of the possessions of ESU removed from ESU House at the end of 2019. His assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

EVENTS

Churchill Lecture

Because of the constraints on assembling for social events, and because this is the kind of event which

does not readily lend itself to Zoom delivery, it was decided not to hold this event in 2020.

Public Speaking Competition

Restrictions on public gatherings and questions of timing meant we regretfully had to cancel the Senior competition for 2020. However, under the leadership of Emeritus Professor Caroline Hatcher, the Intermediate and Junior competitions were held, using the facilities at the Indooroopilly Public Library and Marist College, through the offices of Board member Majella Stevens. Unfortunately the limitations on numbers of attendees meant that there were no spaces for members of the ESU Queensland who were not directly involved in the competition.

The Intermediate Final was broadcast via Zoom, so that members could “attend” virtually. It is intended to make this a regular feature of the finals from 2021.

It is planned to resume the full competition in 2021. In addition, planning is well advanced for a North Queensland regional competition, which will come together with the competition in South-East Queensland for the finals. The Board is excited at this opportunity to enlarge the footprint of the work of ESU Queensland, and is looking at other opportunities in this area.

I warmly thank Board member Emeritus Professor Caroline Hatcher for her exceptional work in ensuring the continuation of the Public Speaking competition under such difficult circumstances; and our judges, Professor Caroline Hatcher, Lesley Irvine and Annette Stoddard.

The Roly Sussex Short Story Competition

After 2019, when the Competition was not run because of financial considerations, the Roly Sussex Short Story Competition resumed in 2020, with a delayed launch and submission date. 40 entries were received (18 Open, 22 Student), and the stories are currently with the judges.

We do not yet know when or whether a prize-giving ceremony might be possible in Government House, as has happened in the past, which will depend among other things on state regulations involving public gatherings. The Governor has kindly indicated that he would be happy to continue to support the Competition in future.

I thank the Treasurer, Ray Heffernan, for his meticulous work in managing the data side of the competition; and our three judges, Professor Peter Little (Chief Judge), David Fagan and John Thompson-Gray.

It is intended that this competition will resume with a wider publicity outreach in 2021.

THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of ESU Queensland was long overdue for revision. Since its last major revision several decades ago we have become registered as a charity, with accompanying changes to our tax status and obligations. Work on the revision of the Constitution occupied much of 2020, led by Vice-President Richard Macedo working in collaboration with President Roly Sussex. The revision took into account other constitutions of ESUs in Australia. The final version has been fine-tuned by the Board at several meetings, and is presented for discussion and acceptance the Annual General Meeting.

On behalf of the Board and ESU Queensland I express my special recognition for the energy, expertise, and commitment shown by Richard Macedo during this long and demanding process.

Once approved, the Constitution will be lodged with the ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission).

TECHNOLOGY AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Technology has filled many of our needs for communication. Since February the Board of ESU Queensland has been meeting by Zoom, a software program which enables people in different locations to participate in meetings, lectures, conversations and more.

The combination of technology and Covid-19 has brought to the fore a number of possibilities which could bear on the future trajectory of ESU (Queensland), which are referred to the new Board as part of a renewal of activities from 2021.

LOGO

There has been a change in the colour and presentation of the logo on documentation and our website, as well as the Facebook page. This has brought ESU Queensland into conformity with the requirements for using the logo provided by ESU in London.

ACTIVITIES

The following socio-cultural events were possible in 2020:

- 18 October, 6.30pm Zoom lecture by Emeritus Professor Roly Sussex, President, ESU (Q):
“Communicating under Covid”
- 1 November, 6.30pm Discussion: “Which writer has had the greatest influence on English?”
(Roly Sussex on William Tyndale; Caroline Hatcher on Charles Dickens;
and John Thompson-Gray on C.S. Pierce)
- 22 November, 4pm Annual General Meeting, followed by the Christmas Party

MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD

With the exception of Ross Brodie, Secretary, all Board members have indicated a readiness for stand again for 2021. The President and Vice-President have agreed to stand again. Ray Heffernan has expressed a readiness to take over the Secretary’s position, and Julia Ponder that of Treasurer, in 2021.

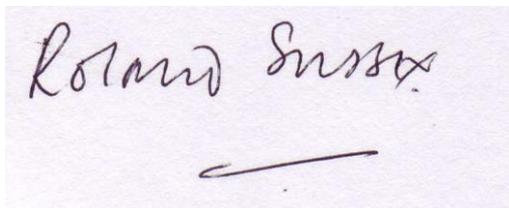
I express my particular gratitude to members of the Board for supporting ESU (Queensland Branch) through a particularly difficult year in 2020, and most of all to the members of the executive:

Richard Macedo, Vice-President
Ross Brodie, Secretary
Ray Heffernan, Treasurer

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

Years like 2020 force us to consider our current nature, activities and directions. To the new Board I commend the following considerations:

- a wider and younger membership
- links and shared activities with cognate organizations
- the expansion of technology for outreach and activities
- the expansion of the footprint of ESU (Q), perhaps using the North Queensland chapter of the Public Speaking Competition as a model for development
- resolution of the investment/real estate issue
- adoption of an investment strategy to secure ESU (Q)’s future financial trajectory

A photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Roland Sussex" in a cursive script. Below the name is a horizontal flourish or underline.

Emeritus Professor Roland (Roly) Sussex
President, ESU (Queensland Branch)
18 November, 2020