PRESIDENT'S REPORT – 2026

In my President's Address last year, I reported a successful year, with strong growth in membership, courses and participation. This growth has continued throughout 2026, reflecting the commitment of our volunteers, our sound financial position and an active Committee focused on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The Strength of U3A Canberra

The strength of U3A Canberra lies in its diverse range of courses and activities, delivered by dedicated volunteer tutors and leaders, and the social connections they foster.

U3A plays an important role in supporting the wellbeing of older Australians through intellectual stimulation, social engagement and opportunities to make friends, maintain relationships and share experiences. It provides a valuable antidote to social isolation.

Strategic Planning

A major focus this year has been implementing the recommendations of our 2025 Strategic Plan. Key challenges include an ageing membership, reliance on a relatively small volunteer base and the need to attract more members aged 50–60 to become future tutors and leaders.

Working groups have been established to progress four priorities:

- Growing membership, particularly in the 55–75 age group.
- Expanding courses to reflect member interests and demand.
- Using technology to improve productivity and reduce administrative workloads.
- Strengthening governance and clarifying volunteer roles.

Achievements include:

- Updating governance materials and processes.

- Exploring new course delivery models and improving support for course leaders.
- Introducing automated course registration.
- Refreshing our Newsletter, eBulletin and website.
- Increasing media exposure through radio, the Seniors Expo and Facebook.
- Clarifying activity categories: Courses, Interest Groups and Events.
- Introducing member information and orientation sessions.

Our member survey attracted almost 800 responses (approximately 17% of membership), providing valuable feedback to guide future planning.

Financial Stewardship

U3A Canberra remains financially strong. Despite significant investment in meeting rooms, IT, services and member activities, we expect a modest surplus in 2026.

The Committee has allocated our reserves across four strategic funds:

Reserve	Purpose	Allocation
Operating Reserve	Up to one year's normal operating expenditure.	$250,000
Building & Asset Replacement	Furniture, IT, audiovisual equipment and potential future facilities in Tuggeranong or Gungahlin.	$200,000
Strategic Development	Technology, governance, consultancy, learning resources and membership growth.	$150,000
Contingency / Emergency	Unexpected income losses, emergencies, repairs and essential compliance costs.	$100,000

My thanks to Treasurer Graeme Swift and the Finance Team for their careful financial management.

We are also introducing a U3A Canberra Activity Support Fund to assist courses and activities aligned with our strategic objectives, including equipment purchases and community participation.

Volunteers

With more than 4,500 members and over 250 courses annually, U3A Canberra relies heavily on volunteers. Their commitment is fundamental to our success.

With assistance from ClubMap, the Committee held a workshop on succession planning and attracting and retaining volunteers. Like many community

organisations, we face declining volunteer participation and increasing competition for members' time.

Our priorities are to:

- Improve support and training for volunteer leaders.
- Strengthen volunteer recognition and retention.
- Improve succession planning for key roles.

Where volunteers cannot be found for valued activities, external support may need to be considered, with some costs potentially shared by participants. We must ensure our limited volunteer resources are directed towards activities members value most.

Online and External Engagement

We will maintain a limited online program. While face-to-face activities offer greater opportunities for social connection, online delivery remains valuable for lectures, presentations and forums, extending our reach beyond Canberra.

We maintain strong relationships with the ANU School of Music, National Film and Sound Archive, National Gallery of Australia and University of Canberra.

With over 4,500 members, U3A Canberra is Australia's largest U3A, approximately ten times the average branch size. We contribute nationally through representation on the U3A Network NSW Committee and U3A Australia Board, where Brian Weir is helping develop a national strategic plan.

Through our MatchFit program, we have shared practical approaches to organisational sustainability with U3As across NSW and elsewhere. Our Tuesday Forum Zoom sessions also reach more than 35 U3As nationally.

A particular highlight was our national cybersecurity seminar, which helped more than 500 U3A members improve their online safety and confidence. These initiatives demonstrate the value of sharing our experience with the wider U3A movement.

Acknowledgements

I warmly thank my fellow Committee members for their commitment and support throughout the year.

In particular, I acknowledge Graeme Swift, Treasurer, and Christine King, Member Liaison Officer, who are stepping down after many years of service, as

well as Maria Magro who stepped down as Secretary in August. Their contributions have been greatly appreciated.

My sincere thanks also go to our tutors, course and activity leaders and all volunteers. U3A Canberra could not operate without your dedication.

Looking Ahead

The Committee remains committed to strengthening U3A Canberra and supporting the wellbeing, social connections and intellectual engagement of our members.

We will continue to build an inclusive organisation that is financially sound, well governed and responsive to changing member needs.

We have a strong foundation, an engaged membership, dedicated volunteers and a clear direction for the future. With your continued support, I am confident U3A Canberra will continue to thrive and enrich the lives of older Australians for many years to come.

Alex Gosman
President
U3A Canberra