

President's Report

The academic year 2020-2021 has been more challenging than we anticipated, in many ways. There was a general expectation, naively as it turned out, that life would be much closer to normal in the latter part of the year. Instead we dropped back into various lockdowns and a continuation of remote meetings and classes.

Staff and members continued to rise to the challenge, developing a growing confidence with using technology that encouraged large numbers of students to join classes continuing on Zoom, and the online lectures enjoyed by many of you.

However several of the Regions faced the increasing challenge of their city areas becoming Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs), which has had a major impact on our traditional programme. Branches have had to look at their programmes and, in some cases, possibly reduce their local offer. Staff have also been challenged as they prepare bids that would compete successfully in these regions.

Congratulations are due to all of you for rising to these challenges.

Against this background Trustees and Council have embarked on a major review of our Governance systems. Together with the CEO/GS and members of staff we are looking at our roles in the 21st Century and how we can improve our communications with volunteers and members. This has been an ongoing concern raised by branches for quite a while now and it is something that needs resolving.

These changes will not happen overnight but Council is committed to ensuring that a significant improvement is evident by the end of this academic year.

Council, together with Trustees, is also starting to look at some of the big concerns facing the WEA in the near future. Government funding is increasingly focused on adult skills education and we must find a way that engages with this whilst also finding funds for our outreach and social adult education. Major concerns such as environmental issues also feature in our discussions and Green branches are a growing part of our network. Health, social inequality and under achievement in secondary education are regular items raised by Regional Representatives.



On a positive note, I'm delighted to say that our membership numbers have increased steadily through the year and we are looking at different ways of engaging with those members outside classes.

As we look to slowly returning to some face to face classes and branches/regions are starting to meet in venues rather than by zoom WEA will continue to offer a mixed programme of remote and room classes to ensure our members and students feel secure while they study.

To those of you who have lost loved ones during this time I send sincere condolences and to all of you a hope that the future sees you remain healthy and active.

Pat Kynaston

WEA President