

Australian Federation of University Women

A Voice for Graduate Women



Newsletter

December 2009

A New Triennium, a New President, a New (old) Name

The 34th Triennial Conference has come and gone, ushering in the 2009-2012 triennium and a new Executive, who, in accord with one of the 43 amendments to the Rules passed during the Conference Business sessions, assumed office at the Council Meeting held immediately after the close of Conference. Three members of the Executive need no introduction to members as they are continuing in their previous roles: Dalma Jacobs as CIR, Tricia Blombery as Secretary and Deborah Haydon as Treasurer. AFUW is very fortunate that they are generous enough to give us the benefit of their experience for another three years. The new AFUW President is Jane Baker. She and I have agreed that, as outgoing President, I will write this Newsletter – final not only for 2009, but also as the last Newsletter to go out under the AFUW banner – so that I can introduce her to those members who have not yet had the chance to meet her, and also report on the final outcome of the Resolutions (amendments to the Rules and additions to policy) that have been filling up your inboxes in the past months.

Jane Baker completed her MB/BS degree at Kings College London and Westminster Medical School in 1961. Unemployed initially in her pre-registration year because she had the temerity to apply for the Resident Accoucheur position and was told 'no way was it going to a woman', she moved to Winchester where she achieved registration plus a Diploma in Obstetrics from the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. In a career shift influenced by the existence of female role models in anaesthetics, she returned to London and qualified as a Fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Surgeons. Adventuring to America, she spent 1967 and 1968 as an Instructor in Anaesthetics at Stanford University, before returning to the UK as Senior Registrar to the Nuffield Department of Anaesthetics in Oxford. There she met and married one of the Australian research students in the department and so came for the first time to Australia to Brisbane. Having been assured the Brisbane anaesthetic scene was overcrowded and she'd be lucky to get a job she had a brief diversion to do the Family Planning Diploma only to be told with a laugh on the final day of the course by a fellow student from Australia that Queensland had yet to consider opening a single Family Planning Clinic. She was in fact to be one of the pioneers in the first Family Planning Clinic in Fortitude Valley.

New Zealand followed Queensland, and there she joined the Otago Branch of what was then NZFUW (their name change preceded ours by several years). And so to Sydney, where she was finally claimed by AFUW in 1992. Of her AFUW-NSW career she says: 'Until I retired in 2003 I was one of the unseen members – ultimately persuaded by the indomitable Minna Shaw Smith I joined the Branch Committee, became NSW Medical Convener while the post existed, then Central Committee Representative and Branch President of a Branch that sadly closed during my term of office, and in succession Ordinary Member, Vice President, Secretary then President of the NSW Member Association.

My dream [as AFUW President] of course would be to get equal recognition for excellence in teaching and for academic achievement in Australia to that given to those in the sporting field. More realistically I see the challenge of my term as one of maximising the contribution of the new AFGW at a time when we have a Government planning an Education Revolution and the introduction of Human Rights Legislation.'

The Registrar: The position of Registrar is also filled by election at Conference. We welcomed back Merle Thompson in this role, as well as thanking the outgoing Registrar, Wendy McCallum for her work as Registrar in the past triennium. One of the sadder moments of Conference was acknowledgement of the loss incurred by both AFUW-NSW and AFUW Inc through the untimely death of Merle's sister, Lyn. Together they were the mainstay for the production and distribution of these AFUW Newsletters from the time they were introduced in 2007.

Amendments to the Rules passed at Conference: There were 44 amendments to the Rules proposed to Council, each of which required a two-thirds majority of delegate votes to pass. Thanks to the skill of Jocelyn Eskdale as facilitator we did actually manage to consider all of these, so it's cheering that Jocelyn has accepted the role of Resolutions Convener for the new triennium. As mentioned above, 43 were passed, the only one to fail being a statement of AFUW objects which was found to be excessively wordy and referred to the incoming Council for pithier expression. Many of these amendments were a matter of tidying up the Rules to deal with changes in our practice over the years or with minor changes required by our tax exempt status or our incorporation. One structural change was to make Conveners of the Standing Committees of Council full voting members of Council, but this was done under notice, so to speak, as the incoming President voiced the concerns felt by many that the Committee system has not been functioning well and needs to demonstrate its value in the coming triennium.

Members will probably be most interested in the outcome of proposals re our name and our membership provisions. Delegates voted that 'The name of the association shall be the 'Australian Federation of Graduate Women Incorporated' (referred to in these Rules as 'the Association' or 'AFGW'). The understanding is that STAs will be able to refer to themselves as 'Graduate Women-NSW' etc. We have already received notice that the new name, which is of course a reversion to the original names with which the STAs began, is acceptable to IFUW, so it only awaits approval by the Office of Fair Trading to become official.

Resolving membership eligibility has been difficult and we were unable to obtain clear directions from the IFUW Membership Committee as to which of the two proposed amendments to the clause on academic qualifications was preferable. The amendment passed was the one recommended by the Working Party convened by Katherine Seymour, and tweaked slightly by Council, namely that: 'The academic qualifications for individual membership shall be study at an institution of higher or tertiary education or institution of comparable academic standing followed by the award of a degree, diploma or equivalent qualification which meets the requirements of IFUW and the provisions of the Australian Qualifications Framework in accordance with the Guidelines on Membership Eligibility set out in Annex 1 to the Rules.' The Annex will be provided to help Membership Secretaries evaluate qualifications and consider questions of equivalence. What is clear is that this will open up the possibility of drawing members with qualifications from the TAFE sector.

Policy Resolutions: After the negotiating session on the first full day of Conference and with the aid of the Drafting Committee, the following policy Resolutions were passed and members are urged to do what they can to act on them. Conference attendees received a fifteen page document reporting on actions taken by AFUW Inc and some STAs on previous resolutions and were pleasantly surprised (a) at how busy we have been, and (b) at the fact that the purpose of several of our past resolutions has actually been achieved. The document will be placed on the website as an attachment to the Advocacy page.

1 - Proposer AFUW-SA

That the 34th AFUW Conference calls upon AFUW and the State and Territory Associations to monitor the implementation of the Bradley Review of Higher Education:

- a) to explore potential unintended consequences and
- b) to discover how far it is favourable to women.

2 - Proposer AFUW-SA

That the 34th AFUW Conference calls upon AFUW and the State and Territory Associations to monitor the implementation of the national curriculum across Australia:

- a) to consider the impact of the emphasis on consequential testing on education at pre-tertiary levels and
- b) to advocate for the provision of quality resources, with a focus on the provision of qualified staff and professional development support for all staff as they implement the national curriculum.

3 - Proposer AFUW-SA

That the 34th AFUW Conference resolves that AFUW and the State and Territory Associations, in acknowledging that education shapes and prepares us for both our professional and personal lives, recognise the need to include respect for our natural environment as a fundamental value in all aspects of education.

We ask AFUW and STAs to seek to identify areas of education, for example science and economics, that influence the way we understand and treat the environment and to advocate in such cases for policies that embody best environmental practice.

4 - Proposer AFUW- Qld / Education Standing Committee

That the 34th Conference of AFUW strongly recommends that each STA:

- a) maintain a watching brief of the national and state/territory reports on curricula with a view to developing appropriate advocacy;
- b) support advocacy for improved pre-service training, particularly addressing practicum processes;
- c) support career-long in-service training;
- d) support advocacy for adequate incentives to ensure equity in education:
 - i. in areas of hardship, e.g. rural and remote and low socio-economic status, and
 - ii. in all curriculum disciplines;
- e) support the promotion of an enhanced status of the teaching profession within the wider community.

Conference was, however, not all a matter of reports and debates. The Local Arrangements Committee, under the chairmanship of Ivy Edwards, had provided well for our entertainment. There was a sunlit Reception in the charming courtyard of our Conference venue, Sancta Sophia College of Sydney University, a sunset cruise on Sydney Harbour, and an elegant Gala Dinner at the Women's Club.

The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly the presence of Australia's first woman Governor General, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce (in a more modest earlier role, a past member of AFUW-Q). She spoke eloquently of her recent encounters with women in many countries, their hardships, but also their courage and their triumphs and reminded us that to be a member of AFUW is to be an international citizen with a real chance to 'make a difference'.

In a small way, we were given the chance to do so at Conference, when Pauline Riley introduced us to Sister Veronica, a member of a teaching order working in the Solomons, and struggling to continue to train teachers in the face of the catastrophic events that those islands have suffered recently. With a small amount of money that had been passed onto us from PGWNet, topped up by donations from Council members and a final contribution from AFUW-Qld, AFUW was able to provide enough funding to see a student through her teacher training. At the same time AFUW-NSW finalised a project to provide similar funding for a student in Fiji, and Jane Baker had the pleasure of being able to hand the money over in person to the three members of FAWG (the Fijian Association of Women Graduates) who had come to join us at the Conference. We thank Beverley Turner, NZFGW and IFUW adviser to PGWNet, for sponsoring the registration of FAWG's CIR, Angela Boud, while AFUW also provided sponsorship for a second FAWG member.

The Fijians were not the only international members of Conference. We were delighted to welcome a contingent from New Zealand that included NZFGW President, Dot Page; CIR Claire Matthewson and past CIR Stephanie Hutchinson as well as Dorothy Meyer, Convener of the IFUW Status of Women Committee, and Louise Croot, IFUW President. It was great to have Louise with us throughout the Conference and members very much appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from her an account of IFUW's purpose, planning and actions.

Other welcome guests were the two Indigenous students sponsored by the NSW Office of Women's Policy. We are grateful to the OfWP, and indeed to all the NSW university sponsors who helped make the Conference such a success: The Universities of Sydney, of Western Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, Macquarie and Charles Sturt Universities and the Australian Catholic University.

We are also extremely indebted to the four speakers who made the Public Day on Saturday such a rich and exciting contribution to the theme of 'Women Building Sustainable Futures.' Professor Mary Crock of the Faculty of Law at Sydney University spoke with passionate lucidity about the potential role of a Human Rights Act in sustaining human rights in Australia; Marie Persson, Deputy Director-General, TAFE and Community Education, reminded us of the role of TAFE, so important in women's lifelong learning, in developing the skills and knowledge needed for a more productive and sustainable economy; architect Caroline Pidcock, director of her own architectural and sustainability consultancy, and an AI Gore trainee, expounded her vision of a sustainable man-made 'built environment'; while Professor Lesley Hughes of the Department of Biological Sciences at Macquarie spoke of the threats posed by climate change to sustaining natural biodiversity.

The Governor of New South Wales and Chancellor of Sydney University, Marie Bashir, had set a very high standard of intelligent, engaged and lively public speaking when she opened the Conference. We were extraordinarily fortunate that successive speakers maintained that standard, making this a memorable Conference, of which all involved can be justly proud.

Time, however, moves on. An email Council Meeting of PGWNet starts on 8 December, and planning is well under way for the IFUW Conference in Mexico in August next year. There will be news aplenty for the 2010 Newsletters.