

# Australian Federation of Graduate Women

*A Voice for Graduate Women*



## Newsletter

October 2011

As our financial year ends on June 30<sup>th</sup>, it is usually the case that this final Newsletter in the calendar year is a report of the AGM as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council Meeting of the year and 7<sup>th</sup> of the triennium. Since the Secretary has been resident in Sydney since the start of the 34<sup>th</sup> Triennium, late in 2006, this AGM is the 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive one to be held in Sydney where the attendance has been predominantly of members from AFGW-NSW. As always, I am grateful to these loyal members for guaranteeing a quorum but very aware that this newsletter and reports from STA Presidents back to the States are the only way reports and decisions from these meetings get back to the membership at large. Three STA Presidents (all of whom are ex officio AFGW Vice Presidents) were unable to attend the Council meeting so the reporting responsibility falls on their proxies demonstrating once again the need to have such proxies.

The first good news is that Kayte Reid Smith, a VP of the last committee in the Northern Territory, was able to attend the AGMs of both the Education Trust and AFGW. Had she not been travelling, and so missed all the email details of the Council Meeting besides losing her luggage, we had hoped to welcome her to the Council Meeting. She is optimistic that an enthusiastic group of 20 potential members will be able to revive AFUW-NT and is working towards that end, armed with a lot of sound advice from long standing members.

Next we were all delighted to welcome Dr Jennifer Strauss to the AGM for her admission as our first Member Emerita. An edited version of tributes from Dr Barbara Murray, President AFUW – Vic, and others present will appear in the next edition of *Graduate Women*.

At the AGM of the AFGW Education Trust the presentation of the Georgina Sweet Fellowship was made to Christina Kenny of AFGW NSW who will use the money to further her project 'Legal and Cultural Frameworks of Consent- an examination of the sexual experiences of Kenyan women in a new constitutional age' by conducting interviews with women in Nairobi. It was a pleasure to welcome to our AGMs Dr Clementina Lwatula from Zambia, and for the two young women to share knowledge and information. Clementina, a former scholar of AFUW-Q, is Medical Officer in the University of Zambia and at present an AusAID scholar in Sydney doing a short intensive course in HIV AIDS medicine.

The AGM is also the time when our annual finances are presented and this is a much less encouraging picture. Bluntly, to carry on functioning as we are we need about 220 more full fee paying members. Half the administrative expense is the cost of the audit that is required under the Constitution. It has proved impossible to find someone to do this on a pro bono basis. While audit is not a requirement of incorporation in NSW, it was felt most volunteers holding the position of Hon Treasurer would be happier to have their accounts audited, though it was established that audits were not done in every State. It has obviously become urgent to reassess the ways we function as a group with more electronic contact and a possible loss of face-to-face meetings.

The General Fund holds the funds that we use to run the organisation - audit fees, meeting costs, Vice Presidents' airfares, the website, the post office box, general expenses. That was \$1,682.46 in arrears for the 2010/2011 financial year. It is only money we owe to our consolidated funds but it is also indicative of the current financial state of AFGW. On present capitation fees we need an extra 223 members to break even. Based on 2009/10 membership figure if this is to reflect present membership figures:

AFGW NSW has 34% of the membership i.e. needs to recruit 76 new members

GWQ has 32% of the membership – i.e. needs to recruit 72 new members

GW(WA) has 13% of the membership – i.e. needs to recruit 29 new members

GWV has 9% of the membership – i.e. needs to recruit 20 new members

GW SA has 6% of the membership – i.e. needs to recruit 13 new members

AFGW ACT has 5% of the membership – i.e. needs to recruit 11 new members

AFUW-NT has 1% of the membership – i.e. needs to recruit 2 new members

and, most importantly, those need to be **net gains** - e. g. gaining 13 new members but losing 5 existing members will not do the trick.

We have a number of options:

1. Wind up totally - STAs need to work out what effect that will have on the scholarship funds and any other projects they are involved in at the moment, AFGW members (who wish to) becoming Members at Large of IFUW.
2. Only some STAs wind up - how does that affect AFGW as an NFA e.g. could members join as branches of another STA?
3. All STAs remain but we look at a cheaper way of running the organization - currently our major costs are - the auditor, followed by Council members' airfares and meetings.

Contributions to travel to both Council meetings and IFUW conferences will need to be reduced. The February Council Meeting will necessarily focus on plans for alternative models of our present structure.

On the membership issue, a report was presented from the facilitators of the Membership Workshop and Challenges. While discouraged by the very limited response they have had from members, they are prepared to continue but to focus on a single challenge, that of defining our purpose and how we distinguish ourselves from other women's NGOs, and to rework our 'objects' to present to the triennial conference in 2012. I thank Kathy Mumford and Kathryn Seymour for the work they continue to do in this area. Michelle Imison has withdrawn from the project so I thank her for her many contributions over the last year and wish her well in her tasks as Convener of the IFUW Projects Development Committee and Director of OXFAM and with the continuing work towards her PhD.

An important focus of the Council meeting was a review of the Standing Committees. For a considerable time it has been obvious these committees were not functioning as planned in the Constitution, that is with a federal convener of each committee and representation from each state and territory. When we had a larger membership many states had committees in each area of interest rather than just a single 'convener'. Part of the problem is the unfilled positions at state level, but there has also been a lack of communication both up to the federal conveners and down to the states. This is further complicated by the fact that, by and large, education, at least at school level, is a State not a Federal issue. Despite this, the Education Conveners have managed to make submissions on School Funding and language learning in Indigenous communities with helpful input from state conveners. Education is undoubtedly our main focus so it is very pleasing to know that States have responded to the request to appoint conveners to this vital committee and that co-operation is producing results.

Council resolved to continue with the current Standing Committees, Education, Status of Women, Peace and Human Security and Resolutions, until the end of the Triennium, but a review was recommended early in the next triennium. Resolutions towards this should perhaps be considered for the Triennial Conference. All conveners were asked to review the current documents on the Role of Standing Committees to understand what was expected of them. STA Presidents were urged to fill all their convenership positions and to provide copies of the Role of Standing Committees to the relevant members of their committees. The same applies to the State Co-ordinators of International Relations, the group that through the Federal CIR, Dalma Jacobs, keeps in touch with what is happening at IFUW and to some extent with relevant Federal publications such as all the Bulletins from the office of the Minister for Women. Much of this material is suitable for publication in Newsletters. If we could make the Status of Women committee more effective much of the Federal information could be distributed to states through this committee – but it does need a Co-ordinator in each State! In addition, due to the widespread interest in Human Rights within the community, it was resolved to draft a by-law to establish a new position.

**Moved:** That the AFGW Council appoint a Convener for Human Rights who will work in conjunction with the Conveners of Peace and Human Security and of Status of Women. The term of the office for the Convener for Human Rights shall be reviewed at the end of the 35<sup>th</sup> Triennium of AFGW, (Baker/ Eskdale) CARRIED

The President will approach Lily Tsen of AFGW Vic to fill this office.

It was agreed that Caroline Jones, Peace Convener NSW should attend the roundtable workshop in Canberra on the **National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security** as Bev Hall, National Convener Peace and Human Security, was unable to go, and that Caroline should report back to Council about the workshop.

Council expressed delight that the Student Support and Amenities Bill had passed with legislation enabling universities to charge students fees again to fund essential support activities, sports and clubs. The Higher Education Convener was asked to draft a letter of congratulation to Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education.

There was considerable discussion about the distribution of *Graduate Women*. A number of extra copies have been printed and are available for STAs to distribute to new members, to women in state parliament or positions of authority or to women academics in the state. Copies have been sent to Federal Parliamentarians and to State Ministers for Women or their equivalent. Several people have suggested the journal be available on the web. The suggestion that each article be made available instead was accepted. This would result in smaller files for download and eliminate the problem of removing the 'contacts' page. I am exploring the feasibility of this method of presentation but also awaiting the consent to such publication by those featured in the profiles

I was lucky enough in July to attend the inaugural Dr Delma Doherty lecture arranged by GWQ and to hear Denise Conroy speak on Women in Science and Technology and extend my thanks to the committee for their hospitality and my congratulations to Delma on the honour.

I was also able to attend the UN Women 'Accelerating Gender Equality: Introducing UN Women' meeting held in Sydney. This was attended by delegates from National Committees in New Zealand, the Netherlands and several European countries, though only those who spoke were identified. Speakers included the Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Women, Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Meredith Burgmann, Professor Marion Baird, Director of the Women: Work Research Group of Sydney University and one of Australia's leading researchers in the fields of women, work and family, and last, but far from least, Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary General to Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women. The Spring Campaign to support work against the alarming rate of violence against women in the Pacific Region was

heavily stressed but there was an all too overwhelming feeling that with UN Women Australia there would be a single focus for the Government on Women's Issues and the rest of us may struggle to be heard.

I was delighted to hear recently from Dr Rhoda Ila, the young doctor from PNG whom we sponsored to the UN Conference on world health in Melbourne last year. She is working with HIV/AIDs patients in a remote area of PNG and, though she is not complaining I fear this may reflect the attitude towards women doctors in PNG in that her Diploma from Queensland has not advanced her progress in the government Health Department as it might have done for a man.

The recent electronic vote of IFUW on the acceptance of electronic voting and the readmission of Zambia to IFUW worked smoothly and both motions were passed. It is still a complex process but if such votes extend to full council meetings will we need IFUW Triennial Conferences? Is it possible to choose between candidates for high office in IFUW without a face-to-face meeting? Is Skype the same even were it available reliably in all NFAs? The vote in favour of Zambia's readmission did make the AGM a unique occasion as we were able to welcome Clementina as a member of the Zambian Association of University Women.

IFUW has announced the Conchita Poncini Jimenez Human Rights Fellowship to promote the use of human rights instruments and agreements for the advancement of women and girls. The award is named in honour of Conchita Poncini Jimenez, IFUW Representative to the United Nations 1994-2011.

The Conchita Poncini Jimenez Human Rights Fellowship will be given in 2012 for advanced research, an internship or study related to the use of human rights instruments and agreements for the advancement of women. IFUW is currently raising funds for this award.

Proposals must relate to the use of human rights instruments and agreements for the advancement of women, for example the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Full details of the Fellowship are available on the website <http://www.ifuw.org/what/fellowships/poncini/>

It is time for serious consideration to be given to nominations for executive positions for the next triennium. The Secretary, Treasurer and CIR have all served a maximum time and I think it is time for a younger President and would be most reluctant to continue. Our constitution provides some continuity in that I should have a further year on Council as Past President. If face-to-face meetings continue, financially Sydney and Adelaide offer the cheapest fares from the rest of the country and possibly Adelaide cheaper venues than the YWCA or the Mercure. So is there a South Australian out there willing to stand for secretary and are there volunteers to stand for President, Treasurer and CIR?

Finally, the modern invention of Skype enabled me to have a long almost face-to-face talk with the incoming President of the Canadian Federation, Susan Jane Murphy, about planned changes to their Constitution. With upwards of 10,000 members, annual conferences in association with their AGMs and a salaried secretariat it was sometimes hard to see their similarities with us but it was a reminder that many in IFUW admire what we are achieving in Australia and seek our input. I often feel we are punching above our weight, thanks to the work of many volunteers, and thus manage to look less vulnerable than we really are.

Although much remains to be done before Christmas and the summer holidays this is my last communication with you for the year so I end with my warmest greetings to you all for Christmas and 2012. By working together may we see AFGW safely and successfully into its tenth decade

Jane Baker  
President