



The University of Western Australia Academic Staff Association

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON OCTOBER 18TH 2018 AT 12.30PM IN THE SUE BOYD ROOM, GUILD VILLAGE, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

PRESENT: N Kirkham (President and Chair), and members including S Bunt, D Jayatilaka, H Jaccomard, M Ponsonnet, A Hughes-d'Aeth, G Neylon, A McKinley, K Glaskin, R Carroll, T Bakker, R Bencini, P Burcham, B Montgomery, J Keelan, L O'Sullivan, J O'Shea, S Maloney, P Kastner, J Elfving-Hwang, G Acciaioli, L Fernandes, A Gaynor, R da Silva Rosa, S Tarrant and W Taylor

APOLOGIES: D Judge, V Morgan and N Bannan

PROXY VOTES REGISTERED BY:
M Tonts, S Dobbs, A Gardner, R Tuckey, P Attwood, A Lynch

ATTENDING: J Manvell (administrator), M O'Brien

1. WELCOME:

The President took the Chair and formally opened the meeting by recognising that the meeting takes place on the traditional lands of the Wudjuk Noongar people, and by acknowledging and respecting their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Members were welcomed, apologies and proxy votes noted and the meeting declared quorate.

2. MINUTES:

A Gaynor **PROPOSED** that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 12th October 2017 are accepted.
Seconded by W Taylor.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

None

4. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR:

T Hughes-d'Aeth **PROPOSED** that Caffarelli & Associates, Chartered Accountants, be appointed as Auditors for 2018-19. Seconded by A McKinley.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

5. APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER:

G Acciaioli **PROPOSED** that the WA Industrial Registrar be requested to arrange for the WA Electoral Commission to conduct the elections for 2019-2020. Seconded by S Maloney.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

6. TREASURER'S REPORT by the Treasurer, Professor Allan McKinley

For the year ending 30 June 2018, the Association ran at a profit of \$ 8,850, compared with a deficit of \$ 3,718 in the previous accounting period.

This is due in part to the late payment of workload-release payments to the Committee for the year 2017-18, which will be reflected in the accounts next year.

The running of the Philippa Maddern Award on a biennial basis also causes the fluctuation from profit to loss as expenses are spread over the financial years, but other expenses remain relatively consistent.

Falling income from declining membership and low interest return on investments continue to be of concern, and we encourage everyone here to talk about the Association with their colleagues. Casual academic staff are able to join UWAASA for a cost of \$20 p.a., whilst membership fees for salaried staff continue at a low 0.16% of gross pay.

N Kirkham **PROPOSED** that the Treasurer's Report be accepted. Seconded by R Bencini.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

7. PRESIDENT'S REPORT by the President, Dr Nin Kirkham

Good afternoon, welcome to all our members and thanks so much for coming along today during what is a characteristically busy time of year. But let's be honest, what time of year isn't busy these days? Thank also to those who took the time to pass on their proxies, so that we can get the business of this meeting conducted in a straightforward way.

I will keep my address brief, something I intend to make characteristic of my leadership of the ASA. I recently went to Melbourne for the National Council of the NTEU and found that its leaders don't share my love of brevity and my belief in its close relationship to wit. By the end of each day, I was so worn down by the speechifying that I would have been willing to give them my first-born child to make it stop! Only joking, it was utterly riveting from start to end.

What can I say about the year 2017/2018? I have to admit that UWA ASA had a fairly quiet year compared to the previous couple of years, in some respects. This may have been partly due to the fact that things seem to have settled down a little after the tumultuous upheaval of 2016 and its aftermath in 2017. It may have been partly due to the fact that many of the committee members were otherwise engaged, with a rather crushing teaching load in my own case, and with sabbatical in the case of our VP Debra Judge and our secretary, Stella Tarrant. But we did get up to some interesting and at least mildly influential things. I'll give you some highlights.

We hosted an enjoyable and successful forum in first semester this year, focussed on the rather gently phrased question "Is there a downside to students as customers?". We had excellent attendance from academics across the University, as well as the President of the Guild and several interested professional staff. Most Academics had strong views about the corrosive nature of treating students as if they were customers consuming education products — corrosive to the ability of academic staff to effectively engage and challenge students, corrosive to the levels of student performance and learning, and corrosive to the morale of all academic staff in the University many, if not all, of whom see their role as educators as conceptually and practically distinct from that of sales assistants. In a university, the customer is not always right. Others reminded us that students are paying for their degrees and we have to be answerable to their expectations as customers, at least to some degree. In the context of what has been a major reconfiguration of education as a commodity for sale, where higher education is the third largest exporter in Australia and where 35% of students studying in Australian universities are from overseas, the question of how we assess the impact of the commodification of education is not going away any time soon.

Another area where the UWA ASA continues to be active and influential is at the Academic Board. As you would be aware, the stated key purpose of our organization is to be the "voice of academics on campus" and we see our work on Academic Board is a significant part of fulfilling that purpose. Earlier in the year, after some slightly fraught involvement as a stakeholder in changes to research policy under the so-called New Policy Framework, I had the good fortune of happening upon the copy of an email informing members of the policy team that the Executive of the University had approved this new framework which in effect, and straightforwardly contrary to the university statutes, 'established' that the Academic Board and the Academic Council were no longer the approvers of any policy in the University. This looked very much like an attempt by Exec to move the legislated power of AB and AC to approve academic policy, to the DVCs E, R and C&E.

So, we developed an argument to show why this change was inconsistent with over a hundred years of precedent, directly contravened the Academic Board Statute 19 (3) and did not comply with the Higher Education Standards relating to Academic oversight 6.3 2. a. and to the separation of academic from corporate governance in the University. We submitted the argument in the form of a question on notice to the June Academic Board meeting and, at rather short notice, collected an impressive number of signatures from Academic Board members. My personal impression was that the question on notice generated quite a bit of angst among the Exec, and there was an absurd explanation at Academic Board in which it was made 'clear' that issue had been the result of an ambiguity in the use of the, normally straightforward, word 'approver'. Nevertheless, the result at the Board meeting was a clear statement from the VC that the New Policy Framework would not in any way remove Academic Board as the approver of Academic Policy.

Unfortunately, at the same meeting of Academic Board the proposal to change the Lecture Capture Policy, to make the use of LCS mandatory in all units and make lectures downloadable by default was passed, to the disappointment of many, but not all academics, even though the policy was debated at the Academic Board meeting of September 2017. There it was resolved that permission to take down lectures, or to not record them would not be required by an academic, but the academic must notify (rather than ask permission from) their Faculty's Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning. While I acknowledge that there is a range of views on this issue, the main reason I was disappointed with the outcome is that it was a policy developed by the DVCE in consultation (or perhaps more accurately cahoots) with the Guild President, and no academic staff had the opportunity to give feedback. Unfortunately, the discussion of the issue at AB was attenuated due to a packed agenda, and I was left with the feeling that a decision, which seriously limits academic freedom to choose how to teach, was reached without sufficient consideration of the outcomes. Nonetheless, UWA ASA will continue to fight to have the academic voice represented in all decision-making processes in the University.

On the topic of Academic Board, I would like to congratulate our immediate past President Ray Da Silva Rosa on his recent election to the Chair, and to thank our long standing UWA ASA member Cara MacNish for her four years of service in the role.

Some thankyou's must be said at this stage. Firstly, to Debra Judge, our VP, for her unflagging enthusiasm for highlighting and pursuing matters of importance to Academics, for reigning me in when I am too combative and for steeling my nerve when I don't have the courage to act. Thanks to Stella Tarrant our Secretary and Allan McKinley, our Treasurer for their work over the past year. Thanks to the dedicated members of the UWA Academic Staff Association committee for all their work over the past year (Stephen Dobbs, Bill Taylor, Stuart Bunt, Jamie O'Shea, Ray Da Silva Rosa, Tinh Nguyen) and also to our colleague and friend Victoria Burbank who, even though retired, continues to attend our committee meetings and provide support and encouragement for our endeavours. I also would like to take the opportunity to personally thank Tinh Nguyen for his years of service on the committee, and to welcome to this year's committee Brett Montgomery. Like Tinh before him, Brett joins us from the Medical Faculty and we hope that we can work with him to build more and stronger connections with Medicine. Finally, UWA ASA is lucky to be looked after by our administrative officer, Jo Manvell, who manages to keep the association running with an admirable appearance of ease and grace.

Finally, after our success last year in preventing a change to the Senate rules for the appointment of new Chancellors, and the resulting appointment of the Honourable Robert French as our new Chancellor, we were rather pleased to welcome Professor French to our November committee meeting where we discussed a range of pressing issues for academics at UWA. The committee were impressed and grateful to find that Professor French had done quite a bit of background reading, and thinking, about the recent work of UWA ASA, and rather than taking the estimation of the outgoing Chancellor at face value, had clearly decided to engage with us with an open mind. I think I can safely say, on behalf of the committee, that after our meeting we felt that a positive change in leadership style and focus was likely under the new Chancellor. But, as you know, change takes time and not all the signs this year have been uniformly seem as positive. The Chancellor has been an outspoken proponent of free speech, a topic on which I happen to agree with him wholeheartedly, but it is important to acknowledge that many of my colleagues feel that his position does not give enough attention to questions of how we should prevent the dissemination of harmful views.

On the topic of entertaining guests at our committee meeting, we are expecting the VC and the SDVC Simon Biggs at our meeting next Thursday. So, in the general discussion time following my address, I would be grateful to hear any suggestions you might have for pressing issues that we should raise.

Finally, I noticed when reading the minutes from last year's meeting that I had ended my address with a plea for the importance of constructive disagreement. The ability to unflaggingly continue to engage in respectful and well-reasoned defence of our views is crucial to the functioning of a liberal democracy and should be at the heart of the mission of any University worth its salt. While there are many matters on which I vehemently disagree with J S Mill, I want to leave you with a quote from Chapter II of his seminal text *On Liberty*: "The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."

S Tarrant **PROPOSED** that the President's Report be accepted. Seconded by D Jayatilaka.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

8. OPEN DISCUSSION

- i. The role of Academic Board is to advise Senate. As the new Chair of Academic Board (commencing January 2019), R da Silva Rosa wants to actively canvas academics for their views. The Vice-Chancellor appears to take the view that most business is not academic, thereby narrowing the range of discussion. However, a lot of administrative matters can be seen as of a managerial nature, but they often have direct impact on teaching.
- ii. G Acciaioli asked whether the outcome of the recent consultation re Christmas holidays is known. The SDVC sought feedback on the University public holidays with a view to observing all the public holidays when they

fall and then requiring staff to take annual leave during the Christmas/New Year close down. The results of an NTEU survey noted that 95% of staff were against the change. This information was passed on but there has been no response. It seems that most were against it for reasons of pedagogy and freedom of choice.

ACTION: To take to the next ACC meeting, when the SDVC will have to respond.

- iii. During discussion, it was asked whether it is possible to request raw data from surveys? Qualitative analysis is what academics do! UWAASA did request the raw data from the "Your Say" survey, but this was denied, citing compromise of anonymity. Staff are increasingly mistrustful of results ("the black hole of feedback"), yet non-participation may skew results even more. Perhaps asking participants to share their responses with UWAASA or the NTEU will keep a context for survey results published by the executive?
- iv. Since the restructure post-Renewal, there has been an increasing misalignment between the faculty structure and the degree structure. This needs to be addressed with the reinstatement of Faculty Boards and Boards of Studies.
- v. Academics are undertaking an increasing amount of administrative work. This is as a result of the restructure and the advent of Service Delivery Centres, with the abolition of School Managers. This latter action was particularly ill-conceived, with an extraordinary amount of expertise and specific knowledge lost. Unit coordinators in particular have been over-loaded, and there is an increasing disconnect between support staff and academics. This is not a reflection on the performance of the professional staff, many of whom undertake workloads previously done by staff of a higher level (and therefore higher pay). The lack of admin support across all faculties is extremely demoralising and contributes significantly to academic workloads. It is reported that the Executive is working with Heads of Schools to improve the SDC model, although the school manager position will not be recreated.
ACTION: Inform the Vice-Chancellor that having given the SDC model time to settle-in, there need to be changes as there is just too much work for the professional staff, resulting in the overload of administrative work for academics who should be teaching.
- vi. There is concern that Student Offices are increasingly being used to push the student agenda. UniAccess has been granting student attendance exemptions with the academics knowledge. Special consideration has been granted to 5700 students from a total of 20,000, which suggests that at this percentage, these are no longer "special". There is no acknowledgement of, or responsibility taken for the subsequent administrative workload.
- vii. The development of the University-wide workload model is not well publicised and meetings that are held are frustrating for their lack of information.
ACTION: A question on notice for the next Academic Board?
- viii. Student enrolments are generally lower across the University, particularly from private schools. The student experience has not scored well at UWA recently, and the reputation of the University has suffered as a consequence. The Lecture Capture System is under-resourced and morale amongst staff is low – the restructure increased pressure on academic and professional staff, resources and the university environment. The marketing strategy must be questioned - the tail appears to be wagging the dog. Does the marketing department really know what academics do? What are prospective students being told about to expect? The "student experience" appears to be less about education and teaching and more about quality of life on campus.
- ix. The drive to recruit international students (35% of Australian students are now full fee-paying from overseas) means that a large number are now ESL students, which inevitably appears to compromise quality. There is also a corresponding rise in plagiarism, although it is noted that plagiarism is not necessarily frowned upon in other cultures.
- x. Renewal did not lead to budget savings, but was expensive and demoralising. Staff are expected to promote UWA, but many are finding this difficult as they are no longer sure what UWA stands for, are demoralised and are too busy. Broadening units in particular are not resourced enough. Most academics care deeply about UWA and its reputation in the community but resourcing is required to "deliver the product" that marketing is promoting.
- xi. Notwithstanding the above, positive experiences are also highlighted.

There being no further business, the President and Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 2pm.