



The University of Western Australia Academic Staff Association

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON OCTOBER 12TH 2017 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, A McKinley, M Forsey, J O'Shea, D Judge, S Dobbs, N O'Sullivan, S Maloney, G Acciaoli, L Fernandes, A Gaynor, R da Silva Rosa, F O'Shea, G Koutsantonis, S Tarrant, W Taylor, E Blue, C Bourgault Du Coudray and S Yasmeen

APOLOGIES: M Tonts, P Burcham, L O'Sullivan and P Attwood

PROXY VOTES REGISTERED BY:
L Dales, V Morgan, M Wise, T Nguyen, A Gardner, A Hughes-d'Aeth, R Carroll, M Rubin and G Brown

ATTENDING: J Manvell (administrator), V Burbank (honorary member)

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:

N Kirkham **PROPOSED** that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 13th October 2016 is accepted. Seconded by J O'Shea.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

None

4. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR:

A McKinley **PROPOSED** that Caffarelli & Associates, Chartered Accountants, be appointed as Auditors for 2017-18. Seconded by S Dobbs.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

5. APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER:

D Judge **PROPOSED** that the WA Industrial Registrar be requested to arrange for the WA Electoral Commission to conduct the elections for 2018-2019. Seconded by G Acciaoli.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

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

For the year ending 30 June 2017 the Association ran at a deficit of \$ 3,628, compared with a deficit of \$ 7,526 in the previous accounting period.

The improved result, despite falling income as membership declines (another side effect of Renewal) and low interest return on investments, is due to lower operating costs overall.

The committee is still well served by Ms Joanna Manvell, as Admin Officer, and she has continued to keep all our accounts and documents in excellent order. We are also exceptionally fortunate to have benefited from the diligent and effective activities undertaken by our special project officers Prof. Victoria Burbank and Ms Ali Hansen.

During 2016/17 we transferred our investment reserves to Westpac for a higher interest rate but have since moved these funds back to UniBank for the same reason.

As UWAASA continues to be a place to meet kindred spirits, those who hold values associated with collegiality, scholarship, discovery, democracy, dialogue, and positive change, we would encourage everyone here to talk about us with their colleagues. Casuals are also now 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.

A Gaynor **PROPOSED** that the Treasurer's Report be accepted. Seconded by N O'Sullivan.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

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

While I intend to keep my address as brief as I can, there are a number of things that I need to say, and some that I want to say, so I hope that you will bear with me for the moment. Once I have concluded my remarks, I will open the discussion up to our topic for this year, which is "What are the burning issues for Academics at UWA?"

In general, it is fair to say that UWAASA has had a productive and successful year. In many respects, the broader University of WA context seems to have settled, at least relatively, after the tumultuous year we had in 2016. I hesitate to use the term 'renewal' in this context, as I think it is incumbent upon us to resist euphemisms like this that can mediate against alternative and more truthful ways of seeing and explaining the situations we find ourselves in. In any case, much of the effort of the Association in the past year has been focused on issues that have arisen as a result of the 2016 restructure and attendant loss of staff, but we have also been active in a range of different contexts and towards a range of different issues.

I will try to give you some of the highlights.

This year we held our biennial Philippa Maddern awards, created four years ago by the UWA Academic Staff Association (UWAASA) to honour the life and legacy of historian Philippa Maddern's leadership, her mentoring of students and contribution to pedagogy. We received an excellent field of nominations and presented an award in each of our categories. Dr Judith Maitland was honoured in the award's *Posthumous* category for her 'enormous energy, an endless enthusiasm for madcap fun and an infectious love of the classics'. Paediatrician, academic and health care leader Professor David Forbes received the award in the category of *Former Colleagues* (Retired/No Longer Working at UWA) for his significant impact on the quality of health care delivery over the past 50 years. Dr Louise Naylor won in the 2017 *Present Staff* category, in recognition of her 'many and varied positive influences on colleagues and students at UWA and in the healthcare sector of WA'. Thanks must go to our special project officer Ali Hansen for her hard work in making the Awards so successful.

UWA Academic Staff Association is fortunate to continue to be looked after by our wonderful administrative officer and all round legend, Jo Manvell, without whom, as we all say, none of this would be possible. Apart from keeping the Association running smoothly, Jo has also this year, among other things, overseen a complete overhaul of our website.

In the past year, UWAASA has held two forums on matters of interest to the Academic community. As you probably already appreciate, we hold such forums as a means to seek out and promulgate the views and concerns of our members; we hold them to fulfil our mission to provide an independent voice for Academics on campus. The first, a forum on "What Qualities are Important in our next Vice-Chancellor (held immediately prior to the 'international search' for a new VC, that resulted in the appointment of our current leader) and the second, just recently, a forum on the proposal to introduce a compulsory Oral Component or VIVA to the PhD examination process.

During the past year we fought a number of skirmishes on matters of Academic concern. We have had some unexpected victories and had occasions where we have had to be content with fighting the good fight.

We fought hard against, but ultimately lost, on the restructure of the academic calendar from 13-week to 12-week semesters, a change that was passed through Academic Board even though neither the student representatives nor the academic staff were in support. We had a partial win on the changes to the policy on Lecture Capture and managed to prevent decision making authority about the availability of online lectures from being removed from academics and given to the Deans of Teaching and Learning. We continue to fight against the use of the SURF metric, especially where it is being used for individual performance review.

And through a combination of luck and being in the right place at the right time (the details of which I can't divulge, but we can discuss off the record) we prevented a summary change in the Senate rules for the appointment of new Chancellors; a change that would have moved us from a process that explicitly calls for the input of the University community, to one that would have, in effect, made the appointment of a new Chancellor a captain's pick. We capitalised on this by putting forward two suggestions of potential Chancellors for UWA, after seeking input from our members. Happily, one of the suggestions we put forward happened to accord with the thinking of the other bodies that have input into the decision and it is with our full support that we congratulate the Honourable Robert French in his upcoming role as our new Chancellor.

Now, I said that this victory was achieved by a combination of luck and being in the right place at the right time, but I think it is important to recognise that in these situations you only get lucky if you also happen to be in that place and happen to be paying attention. And it is this that we take ourselves to be doing much of the time at UWAASA: being in the right places and paying attention. As you know, we continue to have our members on Senate, Academic Board, ACC, NTEU and many other committees around the university. We try to take the time to read the agendas, to be across what is happening around the university, to listen to our members and seek their feedback. So several of the wins that we have had, have come about just by our being on the case - like I said, you have to be in the right place at the right time to get lucky!!

Lastly, you will have noticed that some rather significant changes have occurred with respect to the leadership of the Association. After the "elections" in June (and I use the term election in the least demanding sense, as we are never overwhelmed with people wanting to take on committee membership, let alone the named roles) we welcome our new committee, and the office bearers Stella Tarrant our secretary (who, in accepting the role, re-establishes the long-standing tradition of having a member from the Law School as secretary), our longstanding treasurer Alan McKinley and our new Vice President, Debra Judge. Our highly esteemed colleagues Ray da Silva Rosa and Stuart Bunt stepped down as President and Vice President, respectively, after at least a decade of service. On behalf of the Association, I want to express our sincerest thanks for their service and commitment over such a long period. At this point it is also timely to acknowledge the service and contribution of our colleague and friend, Victoria Burbank, as a long-term committee member and staff writer. On behalf of the Association, I would like to congratulate Victoria on her recent election to the prestigious Australian Academy of the Social Sciences.

I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to follow Ray as president of the UWA ASA. I would like to acknowledge the great contribution Ray has made not only to the association, but also to each of us as members. I have known Ray personally for only a couple of years, but by reputation far longer. My first encounter with him was when I read a "the last word..." piece he wrote for the old UWA News, in which he made some gently critical comments about our then motto "Achieve International Excellence" or was it Achieving? It all seems so quaint and inoffensive in light of what has come more recently. But his points about excellence and our real motto "seek wisdom" were well made and it was the first time I had read something carefully argued but openly articulating the criticisms that many of us (I presume), and certainly I, had been making snidely to colleagues.

Since then, I have got to know Ray rather better and had time to appreciate the finer points of his intellectual life and his understated way of fighting the good fight. As I understand it, it was under Ray's leadership of the Association that our unofficial motto 'a voice for academics on campus' was developed. While many people have pointed out a difference in style between Ray and myself (the committee has had some fairly humorous conversations about Ray allegedly being emollient and oleaginous, and less humorous conversations about my being blunt and direct) I think that we share a fundamental commitment to open critical engagement and constructive disagreement.

In light of our mission to be an independent voice for academics on campus a few final comments about the importance of constructive disagreement do not strike me as out of place. So I am going to leave you with a quote from a recent address by Bret Stephens to the Lowy Institute: "Intelligent disagreement is the lifeblood of a thriving society To disagree well you must first understand well. You have to read deeply, listen well; watch closely. You need to grant your adversary moral respect; give him the intellectual benefit of the doubt; have sympathy for his motives and participate empathetically with his line of reasoning. And you need to allow for the possibility that you might yet be persuaded of what he has to say."

On that note, I will open the discussion up to our topic for this year, which is “What are the burning issues for Academics at UWA?”

Thanks.

R da Silva Rosa **PROPOSED** that the President’s Report be accepted. Seconded by D Judge.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

8. OPEN DISCUSSION: What are the burning issues for Academics at UWA?

- i. Educational policy appears to be driven by asking the students what they want. Students assume that if the Management approaches them with a proposal, that Academics will already have been consulted. This is clearly NOT the case (as clearly demonstrated in the change from a 13 to 12 week semester).
ACTION: Dialogue with students at all levels, from an individual basis to building a relationship with the Guild.
- ii. Academics feel that they are here to make the Administration run smoothly, rather than the Teaching. There is a culture of supporting students over academics, the latter often assumed to be “at fault”.
- iii. Academic decisions are taken by Management without proper consultation with staff, such as moving graduations from March to December, which has reduced time available for marking. The changes to Graduation seem to be following a more American format of “Commencement”. Also, PhD applications are to be reviewed in 3 days, which compromises proper due diligence.
ACTION: Request more meetings with the Executive to ensure that the Academic voice is heard.
- iv. “Corporatisation” of the University. Since a corporate structure has been pursued, the wages of the Executive have grown exponentially. As “directors”, the Executive’s KPIs need to be fulfilled, so decisions are pushed down, rather than being developed through consultation (the Viva decision being an example). This is an Academic Establishment, for which the current financial and managerial decisions being made are not suitable. There is optimism that the incoming Chancellor may adopt a more sympathetic approach.
- v. Anecdotally, academics that have been politically vocal in the USA have been given “admin leave”. The current trend of risk aversion on campuses to outspoken opinion is partly due to the value of the international student market. However, DFAT has recently warned the university sector to be resilient to outside interference, and protect academic freedom. (*Beijing has been accused of influencing Chinese students in Australia, encouraging them to challenge academics whose views clash with the worldview of the Chinese Communist Party*).
Academic freedom of speech is in the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement at UWA, and therefore legally enforceable. Academics and students ARE the university, and the right to criticise is inherent.
ACTION: UWAASA to promote the clause on Academic Freedom from the EBA, once this has been ratified by the Fair Work Commission. This will also highlight that bargaining by the NTEU is not just about pay, but also conditions.
- vi. The numbers of students with poor skills (of language, computer and life) are increasing, and subsequently the number of requests for remarks. This puts pressure on academics, and should the proposed changes to Federal funding occur (linked to the failure rate), this can only get worse. (These changes have since been blocked in the Parliamentary Senate). Entry requirements need to be more rigorously applied.
- vii. The Staff-to-Student Mentoring Scheme is to commence next year and its effect on workload is yet another cause for concern.
ACTION: Encourage meetings between staff to share experiences, particularly to mentor junior staff.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

- Academics need a louder and more active vocal group (not just UWAASA), to share information and foster a strong debate.
ACTION: Encourage eligible academics to attend Academic Board.
- **ACTION:** UWAASA to organize core discussion groups in Schools, of both members and non-members. Lunchtime gatherings to mix faculty members. More forums. A Discussion Café with a noted speaker and a theme. Hold discussion groups around campus, involving all areas e.g. QEII.
- Online submission of application form
SMS or WhatsApp notification of events.
ACTION: J Manvell to investigate these proposals.

There being no further business, the President and Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 1.40pm.