



The University of Western Australia
Academic Staff Association

Annual General Meeting

Held on **Thursday 24th October at 12:30pm in the University Club of Western Australia**

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES

1. Welcome and apologies

In attendance: Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, Jacqueline Van Gent, Lynette Fernandes, Demelza Ireland, Natasha Pauli, Dino Spagnoli, Ray Da Silva Rosa, Alice Vrielink, Allison Imrie, Hamish Russell, Debra Judge, Marco Rizzi, Tony Bakker, Jeff Keelan, Samina Yasmeen, Philipp Kastner, Stella Tarrant, Brett Montgomery, Matt Piggott, Lara O'Sullivan (late arrival at 12:45pm), and Marina Gerzic (*ex officio*).

Apologies: Kaz Bland, Emily Brink, Romola Bucks, Philip Burcham, Robyn Carroll, Laura Dales, Stephen Dobbs, Kathy Fuller, Alex Gardner, Kelly Gerard, Michael Gillan, Michael Giudici, Kenneth Glasgow, Philip Goldswain, Des Hill, Kyoko Kawasaki, Nin Kirkham, George Koutsantonis, Chris Letheby, Jane Lyndon, Shane Maloney, Philippa Martyr, Lyle Noakes, Doina Olaru, Fiona O'Shea, Shalmalee Palekar, Fiona Pixley, Becky Stevens, Marc Tennant, Kati Tonkin, David Webb, Suzanne Wijsman, Pejman Rowshan Farzad

Proxies: Robyn Carroll TO Marco Rizzi, Laura Dales TO Marco Rizzi, Nin Kirkham TO Natasha Pauli, Shane Maloney TO Natasha Pauli, Doina Olaru TO Debra Judge, Shalmalee Palekar TO Debra Judge, Alex Gardner TO Stella Tarrant

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

Members were welcomed to the 2024 AGM of the UWA Academic Staff Association and thanked for making the time to come along. Apologies and proxy votes were noted, and the meeting declared quorate with the use of the proxies.

2. Minutes

Minutes from the 2023 AGM (Appendix A) are introduced for ratification.

Action: Marco Rizzi noted that a minor correction to the circulated minutes was needed to item 7. The President's report: 'Vice-President' corrected to 'President'.

Motion: C Bourgault du Coudray PROPOSED that the minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting are accepted. Seconded by S. Yasmeen

Unanimously Accepted

3. Business Arising from the Minutes

Marco noted he will address the action points from the 2023 UWA ASA AGM in the President's report.

4. Appointment of Auditor

Motion: D. Judge PROPOSED that DM Advisory Services be appointed as auditors for 2024-2025. Seconded by B. Montgomery.

Unanimously Accepted

5. Appointment of Returning Officer

Motion: D. Judge PROPOSED that the WA Industrial Registrar be requested to arrange for the WA Electoral Commission to conduct the elections for 2025-26. Seconded by B. Montgomery.

Unanimously Accepted

6. Treasurer's Report (Professor Shane Maloney) for year end 30 June 2024

Shane Maloney was an apology for the AGM, and so UWA ASA President Marco Rizzi presented the report on his behalf.

For the year ending 30 June 2024, the Association finished with a surplus of \$2,388 compared with a deficit of \$604 in the previous accounting period.

To comply with federal law, our association has to have an Auditor that is registered on the Professional Register for the purposes of the Corporations Act. Our new auditors are DM Advisory Services, Perth.

\$235k remains invested in a term deposit with UniBank. At the end of September 2024, there is approximately \$17k in the UniBank cheque account (accumulated membership fees) and \$2k in the Westpac cheque account for working funds.

Membership income remains the major source of income. We currently have 116 members which nets \$1,142 per fortnight. The interest paid on investments was slightly better than last financial year, but remains low.

The 2023-2024 honorarium payments to Committee members have been made.

Expenses overall remain relatively static, with our largest expense being the biennial Philippa Maddern Awards. Those expenses for the 2024 award will fall into the 2025 reporting period. It is likely that the Association will continue to run a small annual deficit in the future.

We encourage everyone here to talk about joining the Association with their colleagues so that we can remain a robust organisation that represents the interests of academics at UWA.

Action: The Treasurer will investigate reinvesting the Term Deposit at a higher rate, either with Uni Bank or another financial institution.

Motion: R. Da Silva Rosa PROPOSED that the Treasurer's Report is accepted. Seconded by: Jeff Keelan.

7. President's Report (A/Prof Marco Rizzi)

Dear friends, I will begin by acknowledging that our meeting takes place on the unceded lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people. I wish to recognise their irreplaceable role in caring for this country for tens of thousands of years, acknowledge their ongoing struggle towards Reconciliation, and pay my respect to Elders, past present and upcoming, as well as to any Indigenous person in attendance today.

I welcome our members, both current and honorary, to the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the UWA Academic Staff Association and thank you all for making the time to come along, I know this is a busy time of the year.

As has been the custom with these reports, I'll keep the address short and to the point and after I have finished, we can open the meeting to a broader discussion of the current situation at UWA and, more specifically, what members believe are the main issues for academic staff that UWA ASA should be focusing on in the coming year.

First, I wish to formally thank two outstanding members of our community, Nin Kirkham and Debra Judge. Nin and Debra have been at the helm of UWA ASA for several years, with Nin as President and Debra as Vice-President, until last year when they reversed their roles. On behalf of UWA ASA I sincerely thank them for their leadership over what, by all accounts, has been an incredibly challenging time, and for their ongoing passion and spirit of service. We are lucky and grateful that after all these difficult years they are still keen to be involved in our governing committee.

Secondly, we have continued to go through a bumpy transition period after Jo Mansfield left. The 2023-2024 financial year has had its challenges. Natasha Terbeeke, who had joined as our new Executive Officer left rather abruptly, and her initial replacement was unable to commit long-term. Finding our feet in the aftermath has been complex, as this unexpected change coincided with the transition from Debra and Nin to myself as President and Emily Brink as Vice-President. May, June, and July were... interesting, for lack of a better word. But... now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer as we have welcomed Marina Gerzic in the Executive Officer role! Marina has already had a tremendous impact and made a huge difference since joining. If today I am in the position look at the future of the organisation, it is in no small part thanks to her. So, thank you, Marina, we hope that this is the start of a long journey together.

As this is a report, it is incumbent upon me to indeed report on our activities. So, what did we get up to over the past year?

- We ran the Philippa Maddern Award. The Award for an academic still working at UWA went to Professor Robyn Carroll, and A/Prof Gavin Pinniger was awarded the Posthumous Award. It was a lovely night as always, and a reminder of the importance of these events for the community. More on this below.
- We hosted a forum on student and staff wellbeing. The turnout was decent attendance, but mostly professional staff as attracting academics to this type of event is increasingly difficult (with exceptions, as was the case with last year's forum on the potential merger of WA universities). Again, more on this below.
- We undertook a lot of background work to get us back on our feet (with regard to finance, the website etc), most of which is invisible, but essential to our future.
- We formalised a change of guard at the helm.

As this is my first AGM as President, I want to focus on the future, and raise the question of where do we want to go from here?

Let's start by taking stock of the current scenario. As I mentioned in my last message to our members, the last five years have been, in many respects, an absolute ordeal. In a short

timeframe, we have gone through the global havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; endured yet another internal restructure; awaited, and are still awaiting, the potential for further disruption of the WA Review of the University Sector (which is likely to be resurrected after the state elections next year); copped two successive federal governments who seem to share an iron will to botch any higher education policy they decide to put in place (the tone changes, but the net results are not entirely dissimilar). And, also, we can no longer park when we come to work (I am probably forgetting stuff, but you get the gist).

In the midst of all this, we have witnessed, and continue to experience, how the frightening polarisation that occurred during the campaign for the Referendum on the Voice to Parliament and reactions to the ongoing horrors in the Middle East have impacted our university communities, and our society more broadly.

In this context, with creeping workloads, endless administrative checklists, a depressing de-personalisation of professional services, etc... it can be hard to remember who we are, what we do, and why.

Yet, we see signs of hope. After years of heartbreaking and often untactful dismissals, and a mass retreat to the confines of our offices and homes, we have started to see people coming back to our beautiful campus and welcomed many new faces. While trust in our governance remains understandably shaky, there seems to be a generalised yearning for a lost sense of community and shared purpose.

UWA ASA can and wants to play a role in the bottom-up rebuilding of our university community. With a rich and longstanding history, we remain 'uniquely placed to represent the needs of the academic staff at UWA. The core mission of the University of Western Australia is to serve the public good and UWA ASA functions to maintain the visibility of this mission by supporting the collective exercise of academic citizenship'.

As an association, I believe that we must take stock of the fact that the university has changed shape (arguably too many times), and that the pace of that change has significantly accelerated. The community is evolving and constantly shifting. For example, the faculty of my own school has changed dramatically in a relatively short period of time, despite us not being directly affected by the restructure. This is not a fertile terrain for us. The way we have interpreted our role so far does not cater to medium- or short-term staff. We do not provide services, or bargain for our working conditions. Our focus has been primarily (though not exclusively) on governance. As Debra said in a March 2021 newsletter: *'many may think, "I am an academic, what has governance to do with me?"* To which I respond, an awful lot! Understanding the governance structure allows one to identify where power concentrates, pathways to influence decision makers and, most importantly, where responsibility resides.' Undoubtedly, this focus remains critical. But, I suggest, it is no longer sufficient, particularly as interest in governance is dwindling more generally across the university, as exemplified by the recent Academic Board election, with so many vacancies left unfilled. To be honest, there are some valid reasons for this. Many of us remember the fate of the motions moved by UWAASA and passed by Academic Board in 2021. This situation puts an organisation like ours, that has made the exercise of influence in governance bodies its main trade, in a very difficult position. Before we can exercise influence at the top, we need to remember what it feels like to have a community at the bottom, on whose behalf we intend to speak. As universities evolve, so does the nature and purpose of academic life, and UWA ASA wants to be a protagonist in shaping the future of that academic life and citizenship at UWA. The last few years have been very hard on any collective organisation (ours included), but we are still here, and we have the motivation and (some) means to rise to the challenge!

So, what to do? I come seeking a mandate to investigate some options:

- Changing status: there may be merit to incorporating UWAASA as a not-for-profit, rather than continuing as a state registered union;
- Use our funds more effectively: we may be able to package our funds to allow us to offer certain benefits to our members, such as grants, or emergency funds.

- Create communal opportunities: we can attempt to foster a sense of community by creating opportunities for members to spend time together, for example, in writing retreats (combining a social and research component).
- Offer mentoring to junior staff: we could consider having periodic gatherings for knowledge sharing on topics such as promotions, returning from parental leave, sabbatical applications, writing a book, coordinating a big unit for the first time, being a foreign academic in Australia. The list goes on...
- Offer even very practical things: for example, a common babysitting service for parents with young kids during school holidays.

These are just ideas to be considered (and they are in no way an exclusive list!). We need to re-normalise being together and not just remaining within the confines of our schools, surviving the grind, and then running away, so that we can appeal to a broader base and build up our membership.

The aim is to recreate a critical mass of 'togetherness', that would also allow us to regain status and influence. It's a slow process, but it is doable. Let's discuss!

Discussion that arose from those present included:

- The lack of funds to achieve all the ambitious agenda proposed in the President's Report, and how to solve this issue, i.e. bank interest, charitable donations.
- Charitable donations were proposed as one way that could potentially be used to fund grants, hardship funds, and communal events that create opportunities for sharing of knowledge (e.g. writing retreats, seminars, forums).
- It was noted that non-for-profits can provide benefits to members (examples from insurance, and academic societies were cited).
- It was noted that non-for-profits may be eligible to apply for grants (government, Lotterywest etc.) to fund initiatives.
- Concern was raised about contacting DAR for advice about the change in status and charitable status, however, there was clarification from Marco that no formal connection to UWA was implied in the suggestion of contacting DAR for advice, and other entities including WAIRC, and Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (who manage and regulate incorporated Associations in WA), and legal experts who deal with charities.
- The past excellent work of the Association was highlighted including, forums on parental leave, workload, etc. The special status of UWA ASA at UWA was also highlighted, e.g. UWA ASA has the right to nominate to someone to promotions committee, and that UWA informs UWA ASA when they search for new chancellor, with a noted that the effect on the status of UWA ASA at UWA (because of its institutional history) need to be investigated and clarified before any change of status is made.
- The vital point that UWA ASA needs more members, especially younger members to increase revenue and engagement was made.
- Two main avenues for improving membership numbers were suggested.
 - 1) Financial incentives to being a member: investigating ways to use funds more effectively.

- Suggestions for 2025 forum topics included:
 - Academic perceptions of teaching forum – what teaching entails (workload issues).
 - AI and teaching.

- 2) Promotional campaigns
 - Marco reported that he has discussed with People and Culture (HR) that the induction for new staff include UWA ASA promotion.
 - Increased visibility was raised as key to keep the community growing.
 - Knowledge events (for both members and non-members) were suggested as an excellent way to promote UWA ASA, e.g. explaining things like leave, superannuation, etc.
 - Using the website events page more productively was also suggested. Marina is also able to do extra work as needed to facilitate any extra promotion and events run by UWA ASA.
 - Given the multicultural landscape is changing at UWA, UWA ASA need to identify communities at UWA that are being excluded and bring more visibility to the experience of being excluded.
 - Discussion with Heads of Schools was also needed to promote UWA ASA, and to allow staff permission to engage with UWA ASA (i.e. time off to attend events built into workload models).
 - A clear statement or summary that appeals to younger faculty who don't know about UWA ASA – explaining what it is for, and how it influences things for staff. UWA ASA could aid in building a sense of community, particularly where staff are located on campuses other than Crawley campus.

Action: The UWA ASA Committee to investigate the procedure involved and the effects of changing status.

Action: UWA ASA to run a member event in the first half of 2025 to discuss on what sort of events and grants to prioritise, and to revisit the mission of the Association and draft a statement or summary that will appeal to junior staff.

Motion: C Bourgault du Coudray PROPOSED that the President's Report is accepted. Seconded by A. Imrie.

Unanimously Accepted

8. Any Other Business

Members commended UWA ASA on the new set up for the AGM at the University Club.

The meeting closed at 1:40pm: The President and Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting.