

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE REPORT **Saturday 31st January, 2009**

NATIONAL WOMEN'S OFFICER

My primary aim for this year is to engage new women, both first years and women who have not been involved in national and/or campus campaigns or projects in the past. This will require all major campaigns to focus around issues which affect all women students, and regular direct contact with the National Office.

I have created relationships and networks with campus womens OBs, as well as women's organizations in the wider community. I have offered partnership and support for any relevant campaigns and projects they are coordinating for 2009. This will be key in ensuring women students are linked in with the wider womens movement and have an opportunity to meet and learn from the experiences of other women students.

NOWSA training camp has been re-scheduled and organised, details below.

I have designed materials for both NOWSA training camp, and the Violence Against Women campaign, as well as information about the National Women's Office and ways to get involved. These will be distributed in time for campus O-Weeks.

I also want to ensure that the women's office is entrenched within the structure and campaigns of NUS. I have and will continue to work with other office bearers, particularly the education and welfare officers on campaigns and projects, as well as ensuring that parallel campaigns with material and actions focusing on why and how these issues particularly affect women are run.

It has been a busy and exciting month, and I am very much looking forward to working with the passionate, talented women I have spoken with and met.

Contact with campus OBs:

- Called all campus women's office bearers, to coordinate the re-scheduling of NOWSA training camp, and discuss plans at a campus and national level over the next two months.
- Met with UNSW, UTS and Melbourne Uni womens officers, to discuss their plans for the year and any support which may be offered from the National Women's Department

- Updated campus womens office bearers and national women's email lists. Created database of all campus womens OBs contact details to be distributed to all OBs,

NOWSA training camp:

- Due to miscommunication between NUS office bearers and ASEN organisers, NOWSA training which was to be held in conjunction with ASEN in January was postponed after consultation with campus office bearers.
- NOWSA training will now be held Thursday 12th-Sunday 15th March in Melbourne. I have approached Trades Hall to provide the venue free of charge, and expect at this stage that this will be the case.
- The focus will be networking and skills share for campus womens OBs, but will also encourage general women campus OBs and women students to attend and participate.
- Campus office bearers have been informed about the new dates and location, and will receive registration and promotional material in time for O-Weeks
- Promo material and registration forms have been created, to be finalised and printed upon confirmation of venue by Monday 2nd February.
- A database of potential guest speakers and workshopers, including activists, academics, parliamentarians and industry leaders has been created, and all will be invited to attend upon confirmation of details by Monday 2nd February.
- Grant applications have been submitted to minimise costs for attendees.

Campaigns:

- The first campaign for the year is Violence Against Women on Campus. I have drafted a letter to be sent to the Vice Chancellor of each university, to request information about the prevention and reporting mechanisms in place to address this still rampant problem.
- When this information is provided, it will be compiled and form the basis of a set of national benchmarks which each university will be asked to commit to meeting by the end of 2009.
- Specific campus actions will be coordinated and organised with campus womens OBs to ensure they are relevant to the situation and circumstances at each campus.
- Long-term campaigns will be prioritised in consultation with campus OBs and womens collectives, with NOWSA training providing the first forum in which to discuss the year's plans. At this stage, the campaigns will focus on:
 - Paid Maternity Leave
 - Childcare on campus
 - Sexism in the classroom (addressing the discrimination faced by women students in every aspect of their university experience)
 - Womens spaces on campus

- National decriminalisation of abortion
- Body image
- Womens and gender studies

Forums:

- Presentation has been created for forums which will be held in every state at every campus (travel budget allowing). The presentation is essentially a basic run-down of NUS, the National Womens Office, and ways in which women can get involved at a campus and national level
- These forums will be key in ensuring women have contact with the National Womens Office, and will create a strong NUS presence on campuses

Media:

- Sent a media release to all news outlets following the release of the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'A Picture of the Nation' report, which found that women are 'over-represented' in the higher ed sector. The release acknowledged that whilst an increase in participation is a step in the right direction, it highlights the under-representation of women in professions, and particularly in leadership positions in the workforce.

APPENDIX A

Violence Against Women on Campus – letter to universities

Dear *VC,

I write as the newly elected National Women's Officer for the National Union of Students, to outline a new approach to dealing with the issue of Violence Against Women on university campuses.

There are of course an infinite number of issues faced by women students, all of which impact on their ability to attain the same level of success in their education as male students. Sexism is present in every aspect of women students' everyday experience at university, and can be as inherent as a dismissed argument in a tutorial, or as evident as the wage disparity they will face upon completion of their degree.

The issue of violence on campus has been prioritised by the National Womens Department in this context however, on the basis that it is unacceptable and inexcusable that women's safety continues to be compromised by the failure of universities to put in place adequate measures to prevent such incidents. The structures through which reports of such incidents are made, also often mean that either attacks are not reported, or are not appropriately addressed.

I acknowledge that there are a number of institutions which have worked to address this issue, and do not wish to unfairly condemn those who have taken steps to improve measures to prevent such incidents. This letter's purpose is to request information from each institution about the prevention measures in place to minimise or eliminate violence against women at respective campuses, as well as the number of incidents reported annually, and how these reports are addressed.

This information will be compiled, with best practice examples sent to all universities, and will also inform national benchmarks to be established which all campuses will be asked to agree to and meet by the end of 2009.

I look forward to your response, and ask that you contact me on 0409 850 364 or at womens@nus.asn.au should you have any queries.

Yours Sincerely,

Kaitlin Ferris
National Womens Officer
National Union of Students

Appendix B
MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL WOMENS OFFICER, Kaitlin Ferris
National Union of Students

STATISTICS HIDE REALITY FOR WOMEN STUDENTS

The release of the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'A Picture of the Nation' yesterday, has been hailed as evidence of women closing the gender gap in university qualifications.

The increase in attainment of tertiary qualifications is a positive sign for women students, for whom access to, and completion of degrees in the higher education sector remains a major issue.

National Womens Officer for the National Union of Students Kaitlin Ferris said "whilst it is certainly a step in the right direction, the apparent 'over-representation' of women undertaking university-level education raises questions about their relative participation in the workforce, and most concerningly, the ongoing under-representation in positions of leadership within all industries and workplaces."

"When considered in the context of the difficulty women face in paying off HECS debt once in the workforce, it is clear that there remain serious barriers for women to participate fully and equally in society. "