

Women for Election

Inspiring and Equipping Women to Succeed in Politics

Annual Report 2017-2018



Board and volunteers - WFEA's Masterclass, 'Women Breaking through the Barriers', August 2017

I would like to acknowledge and thank all those who have volunteered their time to build WFEA - the board, past and present, our committee members, interns and volunteers.

2017-2018 has been a year of regeneration, revitalization and generational change as we farewell our founding members and embraced new members bringing new ideas and a new energy to the board.

I wish to thank the retiring foundational directors whose passion and commitment have helped set WFEA up for the success we are now seeing. Having worked tirelessly, they are stepping aside to make way for new members who will meet the emerging needs of WFEA in its next stage of development - the need for expertise in media, strategy, IT and marketing, government relations, diversity and fundraising.

Over the year, directors Carrie Kellar, Christine Foran, Heather Forton, Deborah Harrigan, John Simons completed their term, and Joanne Yates (Deputy Chair), Karen Iles (Secretary), Brenda Santiago (Treasurer) have stepped down due to changes in jobs and increased work commitment. We wish them all the very best and look forward to their continued involvement.

The newly appointed board/committee members are

- Jenny Morris (Chair)
- Brynnie Goodwill (Deputy Chair)
- Amber Daines
- Imogen Boas
- Coleen MacKinnon
- Licia Heath
- Dannya Hu (Secretary)

Special thanks to our UTS intern Melanie Wong, to Committee Member Sarah Gatehouse, to former board member Anita Fernandes, and to Kriti Colless for their ongoing support with media, board meetings, minutes, research and discussions.

I would like to thank Madhu Malini for setting up & entering 3 years of accounts and to Sally Aves, who recently joined WFEA's Finance Committee. We look forward to Sally joining the board in FY2019. The current cash balance is \$9,950.34. A financial statement and full audited report will be provided separately.

WFEA Achievements for 2017 – 2018

- Designed and delivered the inaugural WFEA Masterclass: Women Breaking Through the Barriers to inspire and engage women to consider entering public life and politics. The program was a call to action for women to address the lack of women in public life and the state of political discourse.



69 women attended the 1-day forum, Women Breaking Through the Barriers NSW Parliament House.

It was a most exciting and inspiring day. The forum was chaired by MC, Narelle Hooper, with a keynote address from former NSW Premier Kristina Keneally.

The program included insights by **5050 by 2030 Foundation's** Virginia Hausseger; interactive conversations with 14 women MPs from all sides of politics in a World Café format; a lively panel discussion with campaign managers Dai Le, Dee Madigan and Michael Morgan; and a presentation by Heather Forton exploring the unconscious barriers to women's success. The Masterclass provided a chance for participants to network with like-minded people, understand the world of personal and public influence, learn how to build a brand, manage media relationships and campaign with confidence.

The event was designed by, organised by and delivered by women, all of whom volunteered their time and expertise. It was a truly remarkable achievement.



Through sharing ideas, building and equipping toolboxes and facilitating collaboration and networking opportunities, WFEA is creating a community of women who do things differently.

Particular thanks go to Maddocks who provided sponsorship for the event.

Further achievements in FY2018 include:

- Securing a partnership with UTS Shopfront, to engage final year students in the Professional Pathways Placement program to conduct research and to redesign our brand and marketing collateral. Thanks to Licia Heath for identifying the opportunity and driving the relationship.
- Engaging in partnership discussions with UTS, University of NSW, Local Government Association of NSW and other organisations regarding collaborative relationships
- Completing the report: Young Women and Politics: A Snapshot of Attitudes and Aspirations in 2017: WFEA Report on NSW Parliament and Tara Anglican School for Girls focus groups. Thanks to Joanne Yates and Karen Iles for their work in collating the feedback and writing the report (see appendix).
- Conducting a roundtable with women who have served or are currently serving in public office or have supported election campaigns. The discussion included the mentoring, training and support needs of women who have achieved election to public office; challenges women find when standing for election and when in office; personal reflections; the differences between the challenges that women face today and those faced in the past; the qualities, skills and support that are needed to attract and retain women in politics.

Attendees:

Jenny Aitchison	Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly Member for Maitland NSW Rep Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians
Hon. Robyn Parker	Former NSW Minister for the Environment CEO of Ageing and Disability Service provider Delphis Australia
Mary-Lou Jarvis	President NSW Liberal Council Woollahra City Councillor
Linda Scott	President of LGNSW City of Sydney Councillor
Louise Hislop	Campaign Manager and Activist
Patricia Forsythe	Former Member Legislative Council Executive Director Sydney Business Chamber
Jess Miller	City of Sydney Councillor and Deputy Lord Mayor
Susan Templeman	Federal Member for Macquarie
Jenny Morris	WFEA Chair
Brynnie Goodwill	WFEA Deputy Chair
Licia Heath	WFEA Director
Coleen MacKinnon	WFEA Director

A report on the roundtable discussion was generated by our intern, Melanie Wong, and used to inform our planning for WFEA's August Conference 'Women in the House'.

- Developing the program and commencing promotion of the ‘Women in the House’ Conference scheduled for August 17 at NSW Parliament House and securing sponsorship and initial funding for the conference. Thanks to the huge efforts by Katrina Ironside and Imogen Boas who worked tirelessly to build the data based and IT systems and website, and Coleen Mackinnon, Licia Heath and Amber Daines for engaging the speakers and panelists.
- Funding: As a working board of volunteers, we continue to seek avenues for both recurrent and project funding. Many thanks to Brynnie Goodwill, through whose efforts we obtained support from Vasudhara Foundation for project work and for scholarships to the August Conference ‘Women in the House’. Thanks also to Maddock’s for their donation of \$5,000 toward Conference costs.
- Seeking and obtaining a partnership with National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) and the establishment of a NFAW sub-fund enabling donations to WFEA through the sub-fund to be tax deductible.
- Obtaining the support of Justice Connect to secure pro bono lawyers to assist us with legal matters including achieving DGR status in our own right.

Objectives for 2018-2019

1. Increase the board directors to nine, including one indigenous woman.
2. Develop a new strategic plan for 2019-2022
3. Provide short courses on the political process, campaigning, integrity and ethics in politics
4. Deliver a one day inspirational conference to 100+ women at NSW Parliament House
5. Continue to seek and obtain funding
6. Continue to build a WFEA community (Facebook and LinkedIn) and keep the alumni engaged with networking events
7. Publish WFEA research on the attitudes of young women at school, to politics and public life
8. Identify and engage Ambassadors to join a WFEA Advisory Council
9. Secure partnerships with universities and other organisations to further the programs and activities of WFEA

With global movements such as #metoo and the increasing numbers of women seeking public office in the USA and other countries in response to inequitable legislation, policies and practices, 2018 is a watershed year. Public awareness of the lack of women’s representation in the Australian government, and the ramifications from this lack of representation, is increasing. This is a perfect time for WFEA to exert its influence and bring women’s voices to the table.

I want to take this opportunity to again thank our hard working board, intern and volunteers for the effort put in to ensure that women’s voices are heard and that there will be gender equity in our governing institutions. I look forward to the continued challenge of performing beyond the call of duty to ensure we are on track and keep up the momentum

JLMorris

Jenny Morris, WFEA Chair

APPENDIX
Young Women and Politics:
a snapshot of political attitudes and aspirations

Report by Joanne Yates and Karen Iles for Women for Election Australia
20 May 2018

Executive summary	7
Background	7
About Women for Election Australia	7
Young women’s political attitudes and aspirations	8
Partnership 1: NSW Parliamentary Leadership Program for Young Women Students	
Partnership 2:Tara Anglican School for Girls	
Research methodology	9
Our Findings	10
Recommendations for Future Action	12
Conclusion.....	13

Executive Summary

In June and September 2017, Women for Election Australia conducted focus groups with young women leaders, students from across the public and independent schools' sectors, on the question of their political engagement. We sought to further find out why young women are rejecting politics as a viable career option.

The results of our focus groups confirm that young women are highly observant, and that good, strong role models matter – what they see they might aspire to. Significant media consumers, they are concerned at the plight of women at the hands of the media. They want to influence change, but cannot accept the treatment of women leaders. The crushing of their ambition should be of concern to us all, and WFEA urges immediate action for gender equity in Parliament.

Background

Entrenched gender inequality in politics has proven to be particularly difficult to address in Australia. Our concern about this lack of progress led to the establishment of Women for Election Australia (WFEA), and the publication of a 2015 research report, *FutureProofing Australia: Gender Diversity in Politics*¹, which highlighted key challenges and issues for Australian women politicians.

But what are the issues for younger women, as they leave school and embark on their education and careers? What do they make of the Australian political landscape and are they encouraged to participate in it, or are they negotiating their civic engagement elsewhere?

In an effort to answer these questions, WFEA held a number of focus groups during 2017 with senior high school students at Tara Anglican School for Girls and at the NSW Parliament's Young Women's Leadership Seminar.

About Women for Election Australia

Women for Election Australia provides non-partisan, issue-neutral leadership programs for women aspiring to enter public life or women already holding elected and appointed office in Australia.

WFEA is driven by a belief that enriching the diversity of voices in our politics will lead to more robust decisions, and help create a fairer, more inclusive and dynamic society, better equipped to tackle future challenges.

Our research classifies the reasons for women's under-representation in politics as the '5 Cs':

- **Confidence:** women are less likely to put themselves forward for selection
- **Cash and Career:** women have less access to resources than men and already face penalties for career interruptions through caring responsibilities
- **Candidate selection procedures:** the processes by which political parties select candidates poses a significant obstacle to women's political participation
- **Culture:** a gendered culture is often prevalent within political parties of all persuasions as well as in the parliament
- **Childcare:** women are still more likely to bear the bulk of this responsibility.

¹ <https://wfea.org.au/library-2/wfea-research/>

For WFEA the solutions to these challenges include:

- Tailored programs of support to inspire, equip and inform women to run for political office
- Cross party networking forums of political women committed to equal representation of women in Australian politics
- Advocacy and campaigning focused on increasing the number of women in Australian politics at all tiers of representation

Further efforts to bring about real change requires a combination of hard measures, including quotas, and additional supports, including mentoring and training programmes and women's political networks.

Young women's political attitudes and aspirations

In 2017 WFEA turned the spotlight on young women's attitudes towards politics, what attracts them to, or in fact, drives them away from considering a career in politics. WFEA wanted to test the idea that generational change will alter the representation of women in Politics.

Partnership: 1.

NSW Parliamentary Leadership Program for Young Women Students

The NSW Parliament's education program holds regular *Leadership Program for Students* interested in politics.

The program aims at young women in Year 11, providing them a behind-the-scenes experience as an active member of Parliament – both in the lower and upper houses. The program offers interactive and engaging sessions with women MPs, a history of women's representation in the NSW Parliament, an opportunity to hear directly from women members and to observe debates in both chambers. The program runs throughout the year, with approximately 100 student participants per program. They are drawn from 50 state and independent schools, chosen for their leadership qualities and potential.

WFEA arranged with the NSW Parliament, to conduct focus groups with the young women in the program to understand their interest in contemporary political issues, the political process and the pursuit of a career in politics.

Partnership 2.

Tara Anglican School for Girls

At the request of the School, WFEA proposed to conduct a focus group with a number of students from years 11 and 12. The students were advised prior, that the topic to be discussed would be to explore their understanding of and attitudes toward politics. 11 students attending self selected, with six from year 11 and five from year 12. The session was held after school hours and lasted approximately one hour.

The focus group was facilitated by WFEA's Anita Fernandes, supported by Joanne Yates and Sue van Zuylen (the school's senior advisor).

Research methodology

A facilitated discussion in focus groups methodology was used by WFEA to conduct the research that informs this report.

Focus groups were held on the following dates:

- 11 May 2017 – Tara Girls focus group
- 22 June 2017 - 8 focus groups in Parliament House
- 14 Sept 2017 - 5 focus groups in Parliament House

Each focus group consisted of approximately 15 students and lasted for one hour. Teachers and other NSW Parliamentary staff were absent for most of the focus groups in an effort to secure unbiased responses from the students.

It is important to note that where teachers were present in the focus groups at Parliament House, WFEA's facilitators perceived a reluctance of the students to speak as freely as students participating in focus groups where no teachers were present.

The findings are a reflection of the conversation of the focus groups.

Focus group participants

Focus group participants were young women attending year 11 at either a NSW public, private or catholic school from across NSW. Aged between 16 – 18 years the students were 'high achievers' invited to participate in the NSW Parliamentary Young Women's Leadership Program and from the Tara Anglican School for Girls.

The students attending Parliament House were randomly allocated to a focus group, in equal numbers. Each had a diverse mix of student, including by their geographical location, school sector, and religious background.

Focus group facilitation

WFEA engaged experienced facilitators to lead each of the 14 focus groups. Facilitators were chosen for their expertise in conducting workshops, in working with young people and in applying a feminist framework to inquiry.

Facilitators introduced each session explaining that responses would be used in WFEA research into the attitudes and aspirations of young women regarding politics, and that no individual responses or schools would be identified.

Research questions:

The following questions were asked at each of the 14 focus groups.

1. Have you ever considered a career in politics? Why / why not?
2. What do you understand about Australian politics?
3. How do you feel about Australian politics or the Australian politicians that you may have heard of?
4. Do you discuss politics and political issues with friends or family?
5. If you do discuss politics, where do you get your information about political issues?
6. Any other issues that you would like to add or discuss?

Our Findings

The young women in the focus groups were leaders in their school and community settings. They were clever, spirited, engaged, thoughtful, interested, and absolutely committed to making their world – their communities – better places in which to live.

Would any of them decide to enter into politics to pursue this noble objective. The majority view was negative.

The vast majority of girls were turned off by the term ‘politics’ but highly engaged when the discussion was focused on community and influence.

When we asked why, five main themes emerged

1. **Politics as Theatre.** Politics seemed to be little about issues and mostly about beating the other team or scoring points in a game that was unclear and unpalatable. ‘Cheap debate’, as opposed to discussion of the real issues that they and their friends are interested in, left them feeling excluded, and importantly, left them feeling that politics was not really the place of strong or sound decision making.

“Debate is confronting and disrespectful.”

“They take our views for granted, and it seems like they are there for their personal ambition and not for the community”

2. **Women’s Representation in Parliament.** A lack of women’s representation has a profound impact on young women's confidence to enter political life. These young women notice that women remain a minority in parliament. They were dismayed by the misogynistic treatment of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, at the hands of both colleagues and of the media in general, and reported this to be a strong reason for avoiding this particular career choice. Many thought the price too high, having to develop a personality tough enough to manage that onslaught is too big a price.

“There is a lack of women in Parliament...and a lack of the faces that make up my community...I can’t see my reflection and so it’s hard to imagine myself there”

“You need to see someone like yourself...there are so many stereotypes, and it’s a huge challenge because in school we are taught that we are equal, but it’s not what we see”

“I wish more politicians would stand up for women...they are just denigrated...it makes it hard for women when there are so few there”.

“Julia Gillard faced so much misogyny and sexism...women are viewed as soft, as unable to meet demands, and yet we are leaders at school. We definitely need more women in Parliament”

3. **The role of the media.** The students considered the media in general to be extremely biased and in its treatment of women and race, as conforming to unrealistic stereotypes. They saw that women in politics are scrutinised unfairly by the media, for everything from what they wear to whether or not they have children.

They believe that their gender will make it more difficult for them to get into politics, and that they will be treated more harshly when they get there. These students observe these harsh realities during the very time they are forming their future aspirations.

Because the majority of the students receive their current affairs information from television or the radio (in a family context) or from social media feeds – the negative messages about women’s leadership is constantly reinforced. Interestingly, their overall level of trust of the media, including social media was almost zero, with the exception of the public broadcasters, which they thought provided a credible coverage of events. Regrettably, this does not translate into their questioning other nuances message about the roles and place ascribed to women, which runs counter to their lived, personal experiences of being young women leaders.

“You have to be really thick skinned because its hard to disagree with what’s being said...the media projects a lot of sexism and you can’t defend yourself...you have to be really hard and really tough. I wouldn’t feel like that was natural for me”.

“I like the ABC because they’re not biased”.

These attitudes reconfirm the work still required to demonstrate that women can and should be community and national leaders.

4. **A Place for Young People.** The exclusion of young people and their issues from debate and consideration is noticed and it matters. These students are keenly interested in contemporary debates on a range of significant and important issues of interest to young people and to policy settings across our broader society and economy.

For instance, marriage equality was an issue being hotly contested at the time of our focus groups, and a vast majority of these students thought the Parliament should have been the place for the debate, not a public characterized as it was, by divisiveness and negativity.

These students leaned towards issues related to equality and human rights, the environment and climate change, welfare, animal rights, social justice and education. None of these, they felt, had appropriate centrality in political debate. All students were concerned that the ‘old white men’ of the Parliament were making decisions that would impact their generation without taking the time to seek their views or include them in debate.

“It feels like all politicians are old and male. They make decisions that affect us, but we’re never asked what we think about [those issues].”

“Debates should be more engaging with young people”

5. **Politics as Celebrity.** For many, the concept of politics and celebrity has become blurred. Issues were seen to take second place to self-aggrandisement and appearing to win an unexplained and unclear contest at all costs. The notion of acting in the best interests of community was lost in the pursuit of personal outcomes and the sense of winning. For these young women, with their keen interest in social justice and equality, of society and better outcomes for all, no wonder their disillusionment is palpable and the concept of engaging in that kind of debate not worthy of their consideration.

“The majority of the media bombard their viewers with manipulated information...and a lot of politician appear a lot on television, like Sunrise, to talk about themselves”

“There is little discussion of policy against policy, rather its party against party”.

“Politicians get very influenced by money”.

In addition, we observed that the following factors discouraged their engagement:

1. A sense of personal distance from politics and/or knowing politicians is a determining factor in their engagement
2. Lack of understanding of the structural elements of politics and Australia’s political system
3. Misogyny and the ill treatment of women MPs, together with a general lack of diversity in representation
4. Young women engaged in politics in a family context if there was a focus on particular contemporary issues on the evening news.
5. A general lack of engagement with traditional media. Young women were more encouraged to engage through formal activities, such as the school debating team or engagement in the discussion of personally relevant issues through their social media feeds.
6. They did not discuss politics with their peers or their boyfriends

Recommendations for Future Action

As this paper is drafted, pre-selection debates are occurring across the country where women are losing their pre-selection battles, including women who have held their seats and exercised their leadership well. If we continue on this trajectory, the realization of equal representation in Parliament will remain a very long way off.

We simply cannot keep waiting for the situation to improve, or for the men who hold the decision making processes and positions in party structures to do the right thing and implement the cultural and organizational change required to ensure women are able to stake their claim of a rightful place in Parliament. For the young women whose talent we squander, whose potential we waste and whose ambition is redirected to a career choice more ‘appropriate’ is a wasted opportunity for us all.

We think its time to introduce and enforce 50/50 targets to ensure women are preselected into winnable seats and once there, re-contest their sets until their personal decision to retire. The Father of the House is terms of honour and privilege and dedicated to the longest serving (male) MP. Surely we can aspire to a Mother of the House with equal measure and exaltation.

We urgently need a media whose default position is currently sexist reporting, to ensure that political reporting does not concentrate on women’s fashion, family, children or looks.

There is an urgent need for all media reporting to take women’s leadership seriously.

Conclusion

Despite winning the right to vote and to contest elections in 1901, women first represented Australian communities in the Parliament in 1943 and have generally acquitted themselves well since. We ought not wait another 50 years for equal representation

The under-representation of women in parliament remains a significant challenge in Australia. Despite several women having filled high profile roles in Commonwealth, state and territory parliaments in recent years, including Prime Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Foreign Affairs, State Premiers, and Mayors, women continue to be significantly under-represented in all tiers of Australian government.

In Australia, women's representation in Parliament hovers at around one third. This places Australia at 51 out of 193 nations for gender equity in representation. For the young women in our study, the dearth of women in Parliament means a dearth in role models. If there were more women to aspire to, more women to demonstrate the possible, then our next generation of young women leaders might be inclined to consider a career in politics.

The ill treatment of women in parliament at the hands of their peers and by the media has a deleterious impact on how young women perceive politics and is a significant reason why they reject any notion of a political career. The young women chosen to participate in this study exhibited personal signs of leadership, determination, ambition and intellectual prowess – the very qualities one would think essential requirements of contemporary political leadership. And yet, in general, what they see of politics and public life generally dissuades them.

This research identifies key challenges and issues for attracting our next generation of young women leaders to consider a career in politics. The findings indicate that there are still significant social and cultural factors that inhibit women from participating on an equal basis as men at the highest level of decision making in our country.

In this respect, it mirrors WFEA's earlier research on the impenetrability of gender roles and stereotypes impacting women parliamentarians. Women elected representatives – or those seeking or considering office - face varied gender specific constraints. As more and more women aspire to take their rightful place within governance bodies, it is important for all institutions (state, family and community) respond by redefining gender roles, the gender division of labour, identifying systemic barriers and addressing biased attitudes.

www.wfea.org.au