Over a century of representing members



From left: Ed Harken, Pat Byrne, Matt Jarman, Anne Gisborne, Mike Keely

A century and a quarter is how long your union has been around to advocate for public educators and the profession.

During this time the world has undergone much historical, social and technological change, which has shaped and changed the way education is delivered in public schools.

But the SSTUWA has remained steadfast and unstinting in its mission to never waver in securing the best outcomes for its members.

From reduced class sizes, to better pay and conditions and equity among the member base, the union has been there throughout, always at the forefront.

At June State Council Conference this history of achievement was recognised and celebrated by conference delegates, union members, staff and special guests on the first day.

Meredith Hammat, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, congratulated the union for over a century of advocacy for public education and workers, while union past presidents also shared their reflections of the union.

“One hundred and twenty-five years is a fantastic achievement and a significant anniversary. It is one you should all be incredibly proud of,” Ms Hammat said.

“Representing working people and being a voice for your profession is an incredible achievement.

“You have been able to adapt and change over 125 years continuing to do the really incredible work that you do.”

Ms Hammat, also a former secretary of UnionsWA, said the SSTUWA had played an important leadership role in the union movement in WA and had a track record of producing and electing outstanding union leaders, who were smart, strategic and disciplined.

Also on hand to speak were past presidents Pat Byrne, Anne Gisborne, Mike Keely and Ed Harken, who shared their recollections of union history and their involvement with the SSTUWA.

Ms Byrne recalled the Third Wave industrial legislation of the late 1990s which threatened the existence of WA's trade unions, as well as changes to the education system such as the Independent Public Schools initiative and the creep of commercialism in schools.

She said the union had continued to build though and now had many resources at its disposal to help members.

Ms Gisborne said consultation with schools had been reduced and capacity to make professional decisions had been undermined over the years.

Mr Keely said that by looking at the number of delegates in attendance at June's State Council Conference, the union should deservedly congratulate itself on what it had built over 125 years.

"Over a long period of time we have battled with some nasty customers – we've not always won but we always survived and are doing well," he said.

Mr Harken said the union had been remarkably skilled at balancing the ebb and flow between bosses and workers, "influencing what it needs to influence, because of the hard work it does, and its structures and policy."

"It has got public sector education in its blood," he said.

"Our union gets together and works hard at the way it does things and makes it an imperative for anyone [who wants] to get involved in authentic change in schools to come with our support and help.

"That's been 125 years."

The SSTUWA wishes to thank our guests for their heartfelt words.

It also would like to thank members across the 125-year history of the union, from the rank-and-file, to those who have committed their time and energy to serving the union as representatives, organisers, delegates, on committees, on Executive and as senior officers.

Without you and dedicated SSTUWA staff over the years, there would be no union, no achievements and no advances.

The history of the union has been written by you and is owned by all of those who have been part of it.

By Minh Lam

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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