Inspiration, cooperation and salutations



The backstories and legacies of being part of the union movement were a major highlight of the November State Council Conference, held recently at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The two-day conference, which facilitates the meeting of the highest decision-making body of the SSTUWA, saw a former union president conferred with life membership, as well as outgoing senior officers being acknowledged for their tireless contributions to the union.

Conference delegates also started working on the SSTUWA's Log of Claims for the next General Agreement (2026) by participating in two workshops to provide ideas and feedback for the next Log.

Delegates also heard updates from the AEU Tasmanian branch, as well as the Queensland Teachers' Union about their EBA negotiations, with both unions fighting for improved pay and working conditions on issues similar to those in WA.

State Council Conference is held twice a year, in June and November and is the SSTUWA's highest decision-making body. Elected delegates meet to discuss, debate and vote on motions that determine the direction and activities of the union.

For November State Council Conference, more than 125 delegates were in attendance, in addition to seven SSTUWA life members.

UnionsWA Secretary Rikki Hendon (pictured below) was a keynote speaker at the conference and shared her story about how she joined the union movement.

Ms Hendon said she was inspired as a high school student to campaign for human rights during the Tampa refugee crisis in 2001, attending protest rallies – and her personal values about social justice influenced her decision to pursue social work as a vocation.

She encouraged all those present to reflect and share their motivations for being involved with unions.

“I’ve not yet met a union leader who intended to become a union leader,” Ms Hendon said.

“I’ve often reflected on how the heck did this happen and the short answer is, I got here by saying, ‘yes’.”

“I’m sure this is a familiar scenario to anybody who’s in this room. Because I’m sure you said yes too, at some point … yes to standing up and being active in your union.”

“For you all in the room today, you’re all union leaders in your workplaces.”

November State Council Conference honoured many contributors to the SSTUWA and the union movement.



Pictured: UnionsWA Secretary Rikki Hendon

Palmyra Primary School was awarded the SSTUWA’s Reconciliation in Action award, while the Joy Barrett Work Health and Safety (WHS) Award, named in memoriam after the union’s longstanding WSH organiser, was presented to member Sundarii Barnao, from Aveley North Primary School.

Sundarii has demonstrated outstanding leadership in advocating for WHS at her school, whilst driving initiatives that have been recognised across the Department of Education and statewide.

“Our schools should always be safe places, safe for our students, and equally safe for the people who dedicate their lives to teaching and supporting them,” she said in accepting the award.

“Because of the work of everyone in this room, and all those who work alongside the State School Teachers’ Union of WA, our schools are safe places.

“The commitment, care and leadership shown across our education system ensures that safety isn’t just a policy, it’s a culture. And that culture protects not only those who need it most, but every single person who walks through our school gates.”

Acknowledgements and thanks were given to General Secretary Mary Franklyn and Senior Vice President Natalie Blewitt, who will both finish in their roles at the end of 2025 (see story below).



Pictured: Palmyra Primary School was awarded the SSTUWA's Reconciliation in Action award.



Pictured: Sundarii Barnao, from Aveley North Primary School. Sundarii is this year's recipient of the SSTUWA's Joy Barrett Work Health and Safety Award.

Former SSTUWA President Anne Gisborne was also recognised for her giant contribution to the union and the wider trade union movement by being conferred life membership of the SSTUWA.

"It's a huge privilege to accept such an honour from an organisation, such as ours," she said.

"A union, a collective body for workers in our public schools and TAFEs, teachers and leaders, lecturers … birthed 127 years ago. And still wedded to promoting public education as a common good.

“[We are] joined in solidarity with unions across the nation and the globe to fight for fair treatment, access to education, equity and the fundamentals of democratic society. Sometimes I think when we’re in our schools, we forget how far and deep our range is.

“So we need to remember that, and to be proud of it.

“It’s a profession to be proud of. It’s a public system that, despite the neglect, people like you cherish and breathe life into, an organisation, the SSTU, which has fought, and does fight, and will continue to fight on behalf of better conditions and dollars, as well as the institutions themselves.

“I thank you for the privilege that is being offered to me, and the opportunities to walk alongside many of you.”

SSTUWA Life Member Edd Black, former Vice President Samantha Schofield and Natalie Blewitt all spoke in support of life membership conferral for Anne, paying tribute to an astonishing contribution to the union.

To read more about Anne’s influence and legacy to the SSTUWA, read SSTUWA President Matt Jarman's article from this issue of *Western Teacher* here.

Thank you to Anne, Sundarii, Mary, Natalie and all of the dedicated union members whose contributions to the SSTUWA have made it the peak body that it is today.

SSTUWA President Matt Jarman, in his opening address, reported that the union’s Member Assist Team had so far taken over 10,000 calls in 2025 from members seeking support or advice (not including emails).

“There have been more than 750 school site visits by organisers to date in 2025 and thousands of phone calls and online meetings between organisers and members,” he said.

“TAFE reps and staff have attended meetings and shared information with members across WA.

“Up until September the Growth Team alone had visited 240 different schools reaping 85 financial new joins and 55 student joins.

“That is in addition to the 1,500 or so members who every month use the Know Your Rights sheets on the SSTUWA website and the many more who are helped face-to-face by reps and organisers.

“This union is no passing fad but an established and vital feature in the public education system.

“From an individual member’s issues to broader political strategies and aims, we cover a lot of ground. We never stand still.”

Mr Jarman also noted the ongoing impact of the Facing the Facts report on the future direction of public education in WA.

“Of the 46 recommendations made in Facing the Facts we have seen significant progress on eight and progress on a further 24,” he said.

“It has become the blueprint for reforming public education in Western Australia.”

For a full transcript of Mr Jarman’s address to November State Council, visit bit.ly/3LQ1Ioj



Pictured: TAFE delegates alongside TAFE Organiser Ramona Mitussis (pictrued right) at November State Council Conference 2025.



PIctured: Former SSTUWA President Anne Gisborne was recognised for her giant contribution to the union and the wider trade union movement by being conferred life membership of the SSTUWA.

Farewell and thanks to departing senior officers

During State Council Conference SSTUWA President Matt Jarman paid tribute to outgoing senior officers, General Secretary Mary Franklyn and Senior Vice President Natalie Blewitt, who will finish in their roles at the end of this year.

Mr Jarman said Mary, as general secretary, had set the SSTUWA on the road to financial security and the SSTUWA had an organisational structure which was the envy of other unions in WA and across the country.

“From the delivery of professional development via the Education and Training Centre, to the financial management of the union, to a bespoke database system, online security and the constant evolution of member services, Mary has led the way

on every issue," he said.

"Whenever major decisions have been required Mary is always the one to say, 'how will this help our members?'.

"The work she has begun on recruitment and retention will be a lasting legacy.

"Mary is also a fearsome negotiator and without her presence and support on those vital moments many of the wins we have achieved for our members would not have happened."

Mr Jarman said Mary's time as general secretary began just after the horrendous cuts inflicted on public education by the Barnett Government, which left both schools and TAFEs reeling from those devastating decisions.

"Fortunately, in the toughest of times we had just the right person for the job. Someone who would guide the union and establish it as a body that governments would come to respect and listen to," he said.

"In supporting, with her fellow senior officers, the Putting Our Kids First and TAFE Works campaigns, Mary set the SSTUWA up to start the fight back.

"TAFE Works, in particular, was a huge influence on the incoming government. While other states saw TAFE virtually destroyed, WA TAFE was saved for future generations.

"Mary's passion, leadership and principles have been essential to the SSTUWA as a whole, especially to me personally and set much needed, at times, examples to many government senior leaders."

Mr Jarman said Natalie was admired across the public education system and the AEU in her time as senior vice president and was regarded as the go-to person on new educator issues at a global level.

He passed on a message from AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe and Federal Secretary Nicole Calnan: "'Natalie, thank you for all of your efforts nationally with the AEU but also on behalf of all of our members who have benefitted from your detailed analysis and work and extremely long hours as senior vice president over the last three years."



By Minh Lam

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