

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP WOMEN IN ASTRONOMY

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TRIENNIAL REPORT 2009–2012

1. Formation and aims

The Working Group was created at the 25th IAU General Assembly in Sydney, Australia, in July 2003 by the IAU Executive Council as a Working Group of IAU Executive. The aims of the Working Group are to evaluate the status of women in astronomy through the collection of statistics over all countries where astronomy research is carried out; and to establish strategies and actions that can help women to attain true equality as research astronomers, which will add enormous value to all of astronomy.

The WG membership changed in August 2009 at the 27th IAU General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As well as new members, IAU Executive Vice President Martha Haynes was also appointed as the liaison between the Working Group and the IAU Executive.

2. Activities in the last triennium

Since the IAU General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro in August 2009, the WG has been working towards a system for the collation of gender statistics on attendance, speakers and the award of grants at IAU-sponsored events. Thanks to the support of Thierry Montmerle and Lars Holm Nielsen, we now have an online system in place where gender statistics from post-meeting reports is collated online and reported in the WG's website. IAU Symposium organisers complete the online form (www.iau.org/science/meetings/past/meeting_report/womeninastronomy/) and the WG add the data annually to their statistics website (astronomy.swin.edu.au/IAU-WIAWG/projects/IAUmeetingstats.html)

As well as statistics on IAU-sponsored meeting, the WG continues to collate global astronomy gender statistics as they come to hand. Without appropriate funding, it is unfortunately not possible for the WG to conduct its own global survey of the status of women in astronomy.

The WG has also been working with the Special Nominating Committee as required to provide the names of potential candidates for IAU Officer positions, to ensure that prominent women, as well as prominent men, be considered for these important roles.

The WG continues to advocate for affordable child-care facilities for IAU-sponsored meetings. The WG notes that different people have different requirements (e.g. on-site child care, funds to cover child care costs back home, funds to support travel for accompanying family members) and that the IAU does not have a reserve of funds. The WG welcomes that the IAU recognises that support for child care should be taken into account when grant money is distributed. This is now reflected in the rules for the “IAU grants for IAU Symposia”. (<http://www.iau.org/science/meetings/rules/#231>) and “Travel grants for GA Joint Discussions and Special Sessions” (<http://www.iau.org/science/meetings/rules/#33>).

3. Meetings & workshops

The WG hosted a Women in Astronomy lunch meeting at the 11th Asian-Pacific Regional IAU Meeting, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on Wednesday 27 July 2011. Prof Jocelyn Bell Burnell presented the keynote address on the status of women in astronomy. About 50 participants attended the meeting.

There was also a women in astronomy lunch meeting at the IAU Symposium 268 “Light Elements in the Universe” held in Geneva, Switzerland, in November 2009. The main message to come from the meeting was that we do not need to wait for the IAU GA lunch meeting which is held every three years, but that each symposium should try and hold their own informal women in astronomy lunch meetings to assist with networking.

4. Plans for the future

It has become clear that efforts to establish strategies and actions that are positive to women in their various career stages and positions within astronomy can best be pursued through person-to-person contact and group discussions. The WG is therefore seeking ways to sustain its momentum during the 3 years between its main meetings (at the IAU GA), and is currently considering a mentoring scheme. Details of the scheme (e.g. whether mentor and mentee should come from the same country or region) will be debated next year in Beijing, and a trial programme will then be launched.

The WG will continue hosting Women in Astronomy meetings at the IAU General Assemblies, but will explore expanding the format of these meetings. At the 28th IAU GA in Beijing 2012 the WG will include a mentoring session as well a poster session to allow more participants to be actively involved in the meeting. The WG will also try to assist Regional IAU Meetings to run Women in Astronomy meetings.

The track the topics that are important to women in astronomy the WG will also summarise the main topics of discussion and any outcomes from various the Women in Astronomy meetings. This will allow the WG to see what issues are common to all women in astronomy, what issues are specific to regions, and what progress is made over time. The WG will continue to collate statistics on the status of women in astronomy and work with the IAU Executive to promote women in astronomy.

Sarah Maddison
Chair of Working Group