



## AEU Women's Conference Purpose, Values and History.

The Australian Education Union's Federal Women's Conference is held annually. It forms part of the strategy and policy development processes of our Union.

At the Federal Women's Conference women delegates from around Australia, together with women from the Federal Office of the AEU, gather in order to debate and discuss the significant issues for women within our society, for women within our Union and for women and girls within education systems.

### **Purpose:**

The Conference has four main purposes:

**Policy** To develop policy and strategy in relation to trends within education, industrial relations and society generally.

**Advice** To advise our Union on methods to improve and broaden the representation and participation of women who are members of our Union and the impact of developments within society, our Union and education systems on women.

**Development** To provide delegates with current information in relation to the latest trends within education, industrial relations and society generally. To expose delegates to leading writers, researchers and advocates, and to extend delegates' knowledge and skills

**Activism** To build the activism of women, as members of the union and generally, and to assist them in creating networks.

Each year a theme or emphasis is chosen for the Conference. This focus may be on a key emerging trend in industrial or professional arenas. Alternatively, it could be a more encompassing topic such as the 1996 Conference which focused on Public Education.

### **Values:**

The Conference is a feminist forum. Its core values are:

- Inclusiveness of all participants;
- Respect for a variety of views;
- Encouragement to take risks within a safe and supportive environment;
- Development of individuals and the collective in order to advance the position of women;

and

- Celebration of women's achievements within our Union and elsewhere.

## History:

In October 1984 the first national Australian Teachers Federation (ATF) Women's Conference was held in Melbourne. Although many issues of concern to women were considered, the major purpose of the Conference was to discuss the representation of women in the ATF. At this stage, discussion necessarily centred on ATF issues. However, problems identified in the forthcoming transition to the Australian Teachers Union (ATU) were also dealt with from legislative and educative perspectives.

The recommendations from that Conference included proposed amendments to the ATU rules which would ensure women's representation in the ATU.

These rule amendments were pursued at subsequent Women's Conferences and resulted in the approval by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in May 1991 of a rule that guaranteed that at least 50 per cent of delegates to ATU Federal Conferences (up to and including the normal two yearly election in 1993) were women. This was a landmark decision with positive ramifications for women unionists.

As recently as 1999, a similar rule change has been achieved to ensure that at least 50 per cent of delegates at the AEU National TAFE Council Annual General Meeting are women.

A decision to employ an ATF Women's Officer was also made as a result of a recommendation from the 1984 Conference. Women's Conferences since that time have been planned and conducted by our Union's Women's Officers' group. This group of Officers includes representatives from each State and Territory and the Union's Federal Office

## Today and the Future

The AEU is proud of its record of achievements in relation to the promotion of women and issues of particular concern to women; however, it recognises the need for constant vigilance to protect these achievements and that there are still many gains to be made. The AEU, therefore, looks to its annual Federal Women's Conference as a major source of direction and innovative ideas.

