

PRESIDENTS' PANEL

Viv Elton

When I think of my time as President of APAS, I remember the presidents who came before me and the people who worked with me as a team. Nothing is achieved in isolation.

Maria Teresa brought me onto her Executive as Hon Sec, and together with Frances as VP we made a strong, unified team. We worked together at all hours of the day and night, and it was exciting, engaging and totally immersive.

Then Frances became President, and I was Scientific Sec, and we continued to have meetings at all hours! Both Frances and Maria Teresa were always available to answer any questions or discuss issues during my term as president

Subsequently I worked as Vice President with John McClean, and an excellent Executive team. John was a thoughtful, calm, and considerate leader who kept the ship afloat, and at times that was no easy task.

I am saying all of this because I know that they will not say how great they all were or mention the selfless service that they gave to the society.

It seemed to me in all my time as President, it was never about just me as President. It was about the Executive and working with a team of committed colleagues. Robin Truda, Kate Kendall, Julie Meadows, Tim Keogh, Milena Mirabelli, Leonie Sullivan, Ron Spielman, Adele Carmady and branch chairs Rise Becker, and Gil Anaf were all part of the team and we worked well together, although we didn't always agree.

Early in my tenure, Tim and I and the committee agreed to meet on weekends to formulate our mission statement and examine governance issues. Tim with his vast experience led us to develop a vision that we both hoped would continue beyond our time on the Executive.

We outlined what we could see as problems for our group and brought our thinking to the membership for further comment. One issue was the potential retirement of members, which could deplete our numbers. This issue was first highlighted by Bob Salo and then further developed by Mark Howard. The projection was that this would take place during my presidency. Fortunately for me this did not happen. The ageing of our group was highlighted by Rise Becker during an Ethics group meeting when she pointed out that at 50-something, she was one of the youngest members present!

Subsequently Mark Howard started outreach programs called PPC @SIP and Small Group Seminars (SGS) which now has over 200 participants. Melbourne had developed Models of the Mind and other outreach programs, and Adelaide had a seminar program for candidates and interested mental health professionals as well as other programs. Many candidates from the individual branches seem to have done one of these programs prior to applying for training.

In relation to our ageing group, we decided that we also needed to be able to assist members who became unwell or had difficulties without having to involve the Ethics committee. Frances suggested that we create a “psychoanalyst assistance committee” for this purpose. We created the Psychoanalyst Assistance Committee which we brought to the membership for a vote, and this became a standing committee of APAS.

John McClean, John Boots and Maurice Whelan were invited to be the first members of the PAC. They took on the roles with consideration and delicacy. After John Boots sadly passed away, and I had stepped down from my role as President, the Chair, John McClean invited me to join the committee, which I was happy to do.

One thing that always impressed me was how, despite our best intentions, there was almost always a major, difficult issue that came come up for each president, which took up much time and energy. Often these matters could not be discussed with the general membership. We dealt with these problems as best we could, taking advice where it was possible.

I had always been interested in psychoanalytic education and was involved in writing the first curriculum for APAS along with the chairs of the programs/committees in the branches. When Virginia Ungar as Chair of the IPA committee for Child and Adolescent training created the Integrated Training, I thought it represented a great opportunity for candidates. Working with Louise Gylar, we brought the Integrated Training officially into the APAS training, which was voted on at my last AGM as President. Many candidates have since participated in the program and become both adult and child and adolescent psychoanalysts.

With the assistance of Kate Kendall, we investigated the issue of the membership/associate membership to see if we really needed the associate membership category. Although most members did not think it was necessary, it still stands.

We also investigated the possibility of allowing candidates who had already had significant training before applying to APAS for training, to join our training later in the program. This matter continued to be discussed during Julie’s presidency.

We undertook an overhaul of the constitution but were not able to finalise it during my time as president, as our lawyer became very ill. Constitutional renewal has been taken up since and is now being presented to members to be voted on at this AGM.

I also really enjoyed my experiences as a member of the presidents' council of the EPF, where we met and shared matters of importance to psychoanalytic communities.

In finishing I would like to say that each president takes on a huge responsibility, but it is also a time of great creativity, and camaraderie, and connection with members and candidates of APAS.

As president you are closely connected both to those with whom you work closely and to those who came before you as president, and you hope that some of your initiatives will continue to be developed by subsequent presidents.

I would like to thank all members who were part of my continuing journey through different roles in the local Branch and the President and being a part of the Executive over 11 years.

I would especially like to thank Maria Teresa Hooke, Frances Thomson Salo and John McClean for their warmth, experience, thoughtfulness, and guidance. Without you I would never have been able to undertake the role that initially seemed so daunting.