

A Survey of Western Australian AIP Members

David Parlevliet¹, Chris Creagh¹, Bruce Hartley², Marjan Zadnik³

¹Murdoch University, ²UWA, ³Curtin University

The Western Australian Branch Committee of the AIP was concerned with the low AIP membership numbers amongst WA physicists and their lack of participation in branch organised events. In the latter half of 2012, in order to glean information, we conducted an online survey of WA members on their views of branch activities and the perceived value of their AIP membership (see Appendix A below for the questions).

The survey was conducted using an online survey tool (Survey Monkey), which allows for rapid and anonymous collection of survey data. The initial link to the survey was sent to WA members via email. This survey tool permitted worded questions and responses, as well as multiple choice style questions. Several email reminders were sent out to the current membership list encouraging people to fill in the survey. Of the 100 current members in Western Australia there were 19 respondents, many of whom were members of the branch committee itself. Due to this bias the results published here must be viewed as being representative of this small group of self-selected respondents rather than the whole membership, although we think the data is useful in indicating general trends and as a pilot for a national survey of AIP members.

Members were asked about their membership in the AIP including their reasons for joining and the benefits of the membership. The most commonly listed reasons for joining included being affiliated with or supporting the professional body for physicists in Australia. Many respondents joined the AIP to take advantage of networking opportunities and to maintain links with the physics community. The Australian Physics magazine was also viewed by many respondents as a major benefit of their membership as can be seen in Figure 1.

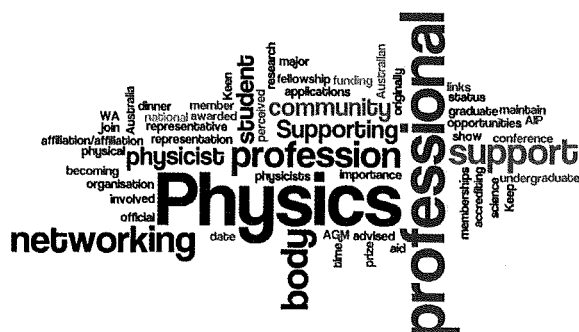


Figure 1 Word cloud from the responses to why people join the AIP

In WA most of the different grades of membership are represented. This data were extracted from the WA membership list so as to provide a better overall picture. By far the most common grade of membership is Member (63%), closely followed by Fellow (22%).

The members were asked which year they joined the AIP as this data has not been captured on the membership list. While there is a larger portion of the members in the above 50 age group, the majority of the respondents had joined the AIP fairly recently. This may just be a case of the newer members being more proactive and not (yet) suffering from survey fatigue!

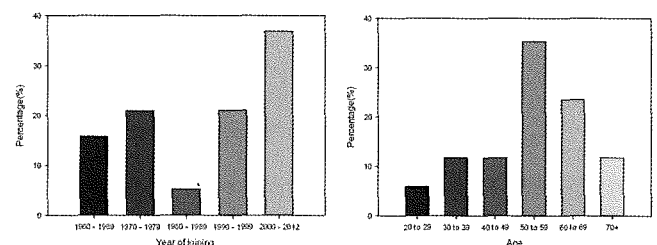


Figure 2 and 3 Proportion of respondents joining the AIP each decade, and a histogram of the ages of the respondents

The members were asked to rank the importance of a number of the branch activities with 1 as the most important. The results for this part of the survey are shown in Table 1 below.

Activity	Average	Mode
Professional Contacts	2.12	1
Public Lectures	2.39	2
Scientific Visits	3.75	5
Postgraduate Conference	4.06	5
Social Activities	4.06	6
Women in Physics Public Lecture	4.5	6

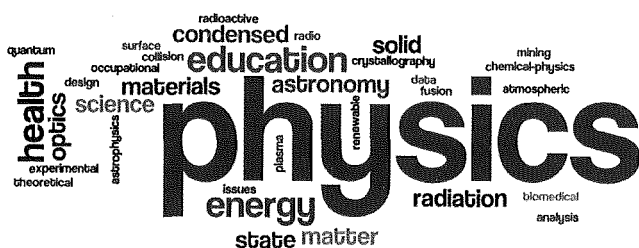


Figure 5 Word cloud from responses to areas of expertise

The respondents not surprisingly listed the main field of expertise as Physics, with many expanding on this to give a broad coverage of expertise in WA including education, health, energy, solid state materials or condensed matter and astrophysics.

Although there was a fairly low response rate to the survey we can see some general trends from members of the AIP in WA. People are joining the AIP primarily for networking purposes, maintaining professional contacts and to support the professional body. Some respondents joined at least partly because it looks good on their CV. From the small response rate and a recurring theme in answers to some questions, we can see that physicists are very busy people. Finding time in a busy schedule to actively participate in branch activities is therefore very difficult. There is a vast range of expertise present in WA, ranging across the breadth of the physics discipline from quantum through to the astronomical.

Recommendations for future membership surveys

For any future membership survey we would recommend asking how many hours per week, on average, physicists are working, and then compare this with other professions. We would also recommend distributing the survey tool as widely as possible to get in touch with both AIP members and those who are not members. We would like to find out what people expect of their professional body and why some choose to be members while others do not. Some other questions, which could be included in a future survey, are from the 1996 survey conducted in South Australia (personal correspondence, Olivia Samardzic) and include:

- If you aware of any reasons why colleagues have chosen not to join the AIP, please indicate them below.
- Are you affiliated with other professional bodies?
- In the activity section also include
 - o AIP Conferences
 - o Bragg Medal Awards
 - o Employment Clippings Service
 - o FASTS support

- o Monthly Lectures
- o Physics Course Accreditation
- o Social Events
- o Special Event Support
- o Student Travel Subsidies
- o The Physicist
- o Women in Physics Groups

- Are there other activities that you believe the AIP should be involved in?
- Should the AIP be a professional society or a philanthropic type of society, or both?

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. AIP membership

- a. In which year did you join the AIP?
- b. Current grade of membership?
- c. Reasons for joining?
- d. Most important benefit of membership?
- e. Least important benefit of membership?

2. Please rank the importance of the following (1 as the most important)

- a. Professional Contacts
- b. Social Activities
- c. public lectures
- d. Postgraduate conference
- e. Scientific Visits
- f. Women in Physics public lecture
- g. Any other suggestions?

3. Do you read the Australian Physicist?

- a. If so, about how much (%) of it do you read?
- b. What are your favourite sections?
- c. If you do not read it, why not?
- d. How can the Australian Physicist be improved?
- e. Would you read it if it were only available on-line?

4. Do you read the AIP's monthly email newsletter

- a. If so, what are your favourite sections?
- b. If you do not read it, why not?
- c. How could it be improved?

5. Please rank the importance of our public activities (1 as the most important.)

- a. Public education campaign
- b. Public lectures
- c. Media Liaison
- d. School visits (both ways)
- e. Attracting students to physics or science in general
- f. Taking a role in public debates on community or scientific issues.
- g. Advocacy role
- h. Other? Please specify

6. Your Profile (optional)

- a. Age?
- b. Gender?
- c. Occupation/s?
- d. Qualification/s and year/s awarded?
- e. Job title?
- f. Employment field?
- g. Salary range in \$k (please circle) 0-20, 20-40, 40-60, 60-80, 80-100, 100-120, 120-140, 140-160, 160-180, 180-200, above 200
- h. Area of Expertise?
- i. Circle your willingness/ability to be a public advocate for physics and physics related matters (i.e. willingness to be contacted by reporters and others interested in your area of expertise)

Yes. No. Depends on:

7. If you have any other comments, suggestions, or concerns, please write them here.