

A photograph of a diverse group of women seated in an audience, clapping and smiling. They are dressed in professional attire. The scene is captured from a side profile, showing their engagement and positive reactions. A large yellow graphic element is on the right side of the image.

Towards our next
100 years.

WACL
• FOUNDED IN 1923 •

Today

Some context

(Very) topline findings from recent research

What's happening next

Our industry is changing rapidly

- Advertising and communications now embrace many specialist disciplines that simply did not exist 15 years ago ,creating a vibrant culture of innovation in adtech, gaming, production, etc.
- Career expectations have transformed: we're working for longer, we're working differently, we're learning what a post-Covid hybrid world means!
- Margins are tighter and the day job is busier
- Issues like sustainability and D&I are now everyone's business and leaders have an urgent need to drive rapid change
- We are making (slow) progress towards a more gender equal world – but not everyone is progressing equally

WACL is feeling the pressure

- For younger women (future members) the Club is in danger of looking out of step with the industry, making membership less appealing
- There is a very real reputational risk to WACL if our gender equality mission is perceived to serve only a small group of women
- The Club's volunteer-led infrastructure is creaking: as our activities grow to help us deliver our purpose, WACL 'jobs' get bigger and the demands on time and resource are becoming unmanageable
- Growing pains have come with the Club's growth
- (Oh, and Covid hasn't helped!)

A photograph of a social gathering, likely a club event. In the foreground, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a green and white floral patterned shirt, is smiling and looking towards the right. She is holding a small round object, possibly a cookie or a drink. To her left, another woman with long dark hair is also smiling. The background is filled with other people, some out of focus, suggesting a busy, social atmosphere. The lighting is warm and indoor. A large, solid yellow triangle is positioned on the right side of the image, partially overlapping the text.

In 2023 we are 100.

How do we ensure the Club is on the firmest possible footing as it prepares for its next 100 years?

In 2021 we gathered lots of feedback

A survey of the Club's membership to establish a benchmark for where we are in terms of diversity and inclusion

Four 'listening groups' with different cohorts of the membership

Over 60 one to one interviews, providing additional feedback

Numerous emails and conversations with WACL members, observers, allies and critics

We've learned a lot

Our diversity lags the industry and the working population on some key (protected) criteria e.g. ethnic background, LGBTQ+

We have higher levels of education and far higher levels of private education than the industry and the population

There are some persistent issues around belonging and 'risk-taking'

Many of the Club's processes / ways of working are opaque and some feel out of step with the modern world

It's hard to keep up with what's going on

The cost of participation is a significant barrier

The 'reality' of the purpose is uncomfortable for some, and not yet clear to all

Concern that the Club's growth is in danger of overwhelming the 'core' benefit of membership - support and friendship

Not all members feel valued or respected by others

Some of the verbatims on diversity

I don't feel there are issues about diversity...but the club has got a bit 'public school girl love in' over the last 8 years or so.... It doesn't feel like a professional woman's organisation, more a girlie love club

Associate members should be re-named to reflect age and experience. I believe the club to be ageist

I believe everyone is making the best effort to be inclusive and make change

I'm very supportive of the move to increase diversity in the Club: it keeps us relevant and influential in our industry

As a feminist organisation I think we need to have a broader discussion in a safe environment to explore some of the really challenging issues and differences of opinion about trans women

I sit on boards these days, I hope that I'm an ally and an advocate for all things to do with inclusion, diversity, but I don't necessarily connect with a position or a platform that WACL has adopted. I think we could have some nuanced and interesting debates about what the right interventions are.

I am a sound believer in diversity, so where are the disabled members?

'I definitely felt as an odd woman out in terms of being a woman of colour and being foreign, and again, not having the deep and long standing histories and relationships with others in the room. I only went to a handful of events. But I really felt that really consistently at those events.'

Observations on inclusivity in WACL

From the outset and for many years as an observer, it does feel like there is a certain type of woman who would fit in best; however that is changing and it's the experiences of lots of new members who will determine whether or not WACL is inclusive

By nature of its membership, WACL is and always has been inclusive. A group of intelligent fun women helping one another, doing a lot for the next generation, networking, building relationships and having fun along the way! Please let it stay that way!

I think we need to ensure people from different class background are also made to feel comfortable - the Savoy effect could be daunting as a first impression of the club

I get the feeling that there's an "in crowd", which I believe the club is aware of - in a way this is to be expected because of the strong friendships/relationships, however it does mean that the club could work harder on making everyone feel an equal sense of belonging

I think this questionnaire proves what I now feel as a longstanding member of WACL. It has become far too much a campaigning organisation and has become rather dreary. The fun and camaraderie has gone out of this. Too much trying to be on message.

WACL has a narrow focus because of the gender bias, the professions it draws from and its history, I imagine we are still more intimidating than we would like and strangers can feel isolated I expect, however only a small effort is required to be welcomed and it's a deeply supportive and friendly environment with that small effort

I'd like to say that WACL has improved hugely on D&I. I remember being warned by a member never to talk about my sexuality as it wouldn't go down well. That's certainly not the case now.

Sound familiar? Many of these issues are not new

Ten 'Nettles' the Club needs to grasp (2017)

- Defining the Club's purpose
- Adding a WACL Voice (to that purpose)
- Valued benefits of membership: different people derive value in different ways
- Issues surrounding charity fundraising
- Concerns about membership size/growth
- Role and purpose of Associate members
- Introducing and inducting new members
- Engagement with, and contributing to, the Club: "3 event rule"
- "Cliquesy-ness"
- Recruitment to, and roles of, the Executive and Sub-Committees

When WACL does not live up to expectations (2004)

- **Difficult for new members under 5 years to 'break in' - criticism of cliques**
- **Perceptions of a tiered system of membership**
- **Feeling that the club does not accommodate or facilitate changes in member working status**
- **The language and attitudes of the club can seem (ad) agency focussed**
- **The charity emphasis can overwhelm the true purpose of the Club**
- **Criteria for the club membership unclear and can appear subjective**
- **Some feel the club recruits the job title not the person**
- **Too few opportunities to network**
- **While there are many great things about the club there is an underlying feeling that it needs: to evolve; to embrace the needs of the broader membership; to become more professional as a club in and of itself**

A photograph of a large crowd of people at a sporting event. In the foreground, a woman with long blonde hair is seen from the side, wearing a white ribbed sweater, with her right arm raised high. To her right, another woman with blonde hair is wearing a black floral patterned top and has her hand near her face. The background is filled with many other people, mostly out of focus. A large, solid yellow diagonal shape is on the right side of the image.

Underneath all the
concerns is a very
strong commitment
to, and deep love for
the Club.

Deep love for WACL

The people have been amazing. I've met lots of really nice women and have started to make those relationships when you go out to dinner with people, that sort of thing. So it's already been amazing.

So if I speak for myself, I feel hugely grateful and privileged and fond of WACL. I've been a member for a very long time.

The other thing I found really positive is the breadth of the type of event that I've been to, some of the talks and everything else, I've found absolutely fascinating.

I think overall I have just felt like I've been scooped up by some amazing women who have said come and join us... I feel like I'm in the tribe and already making connections. What I know is we're going to be life long friends with some of them.

Being part of peer mentoring has made me feel valuable and valued again.

I do admire all the campaigning work that has been done, particularly the gender pay gap. That takes a lot of time. I think it's absolutely fantastic. All the TimeTo stuff. .

So, what next?

- Some core principles
- Pause: give the Club a chance to breathe and reflect
- Introduce some easy-ish and quick-ish changes
- Get some big brains on the big issues

Some core principles

- We remain committed to our purpose to accelerate gender equality
- Gender equality is only meaningful if it is for all women, so we must keep paying attention to diversity and inclusion in our membership and in our activities
- Always member-first: we are a Club not an organisation and we recognise that it is the friendships forged and the support networks created that make the Club unique



Pause, breathe, reflect

- No more new members until Rania's year
- No new major campaigns in this WACL year
- Take more time to consult on the proposed changes to the Constitution

Some easy-ish and quick-ish changes

- Ratify one member, one vote at the next AGM
- Change the name of 'Retired Associates' to 'WACL Fellows' (or equivalent/better)
- Commit to a on-going programme of members-only affordable events
- Rationalise our comms channels (double down on email, FB group and website for member comms)
- Create a more formal engagement process for campaigning
- Clarify our membership proposition

Big brains on the big issues – 4 new working groups

New members

Louise Johnson

How do we manage growth in the future?

Is the existing process right?

How do we ensure everyone understands it?

How do we improve the induction programme?

Finance and funding model

Rachel Bristow

Can we create more funds to support admin and infrastructure?

How do we put the Club on a firmer financial basis as we head into our next 100 years

Kate &
Rania

Governance

Rania Robinson

Are our appointment processes fit for purpose?

How do we create consistency from year to year?

How should the Exec be structured?

How should all this be reflected in the Constitution?

Comms and consultation

Lori Meakin

How do we ensure that everyone is aware of and understands any recommendations for change and feels their voice has been heard?

How you can engage with the process

Today

Tell us the 3 issues you think are the most important to consult on.

Tomorrow

Read the full research debrief and member FAQs on the website.

(AND PLEASE GET YOUR PROFILE UP TO DATE!)

April /May

Look out for more formal consultation opportunities as our working groups share their recommendations

AGM (July 5th)

Have your say. Use your vote.

Let's do more of what WACL does best

'Great partnerships are based on love" were the words shared by Sandi. I can't think of a better description of what we try to do at WACL through supporting each other and campaigning for change. And always with love.'

Jan Gooding, reflecting on Sandi/Catherine dinner.

'WACL inspires, supports and campaigns for all women. It provides an essential network and example to everyone in the industry.'

Cilla Snowball CBE.

