The past few months have been busy for the Institute, with some notable achievements. These include: strengthened international links, especially with the New Zealand Families Commission; completion of key publications such as fact sheets for National Families Week and to mark our 30th anniversary, and In the Driver’s Seat II, the latest follow-up study of the driving behaviour of young adults, based on analyses of Australian Temperament Project (ATP) data; and our recent biennial conference.

2010 AIFS Conference

From 7–9 July, the Institute held the 11th AIFS Conference at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. In this 30th anniversary year, the conference was the focus of our celebrations of a major milestone in the life of the Institute. To mark the occasion, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Hon. Anthony Byrne MP, launched Families Then and Now: 1980–2010, an extended fact sheet that explores Australian family trends from the 1980s to the present.

The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, delivered the official opening address. The speech focused on paid parental leave, a policy area that has been informed by the Institute’s research on work and family balance spanning its three decades. Around 450 delegates from over 100 organisations attended the event. The program included 129 oral presentations and symposia and 40 poster presentations. Unfortunately, once again, many worthy submissions could not be accommodated in the program. As for previous conferences, a selection of papers, including the keynote speeches, will be published in future editions of Family Matters and many of the presentations are available on the AIFS website <www.aifs.gov.au>.

Each day’s program started with a keynote address:

- Professor Bob Goodin, from the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, delivered a very thought-provoking speech entitled Who’s Really Time Poor?, based on his book Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom.

- Professor Aletha C. Huston, from the University of Texas, addressed the topic Children in Poverty: Can Public Policy Alleviate the Consequences? and discussed issues at the heart of the current social inclusion policy focus in this and other countries.

- Professor Jane Millar, from the University of Bath, presented data from her recent studies of lone mothers and children in low-income working households in an address entitled Desperately Seeking Security: UK Family Policy, Lone Mothers and Paid Work, which highlighted comparisons between UK and Australian social policy approaches.

A plenary panel session closed each day of the conference. These stimulated lively discussions on a range of topics, including Family Law; Family Violence; Addressing Family Disadvantage; and Fair, Flexible, Family-friendly Workplaces. The panel lead speakers included Judge Peter Boshier, Principal Judge of the Family Court of New Zealand; Ms Naomi Eisenstadt CB, from the United Kingdom; and Ms Elizabeth Broderick, the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner Responsible for Age Discrimination. They were ably supported by eminent panelists, including Professor Richard Chisholm AM; Dr Rae Kaspiew; Ms Anne Hollonds; Patricia Faulkner AO; the Hon. Lilly D’Ambrosio MLA, Victorian Minister for Community Development; Tony Keenan, Chief Executive of Hanover Welfare, Victoria; Melinda Cilento, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Business Council of Australia; and Ged Kearney, Incoming President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).

On behalf of the Institute, I would like to thank all those who attended the conference, the keynote speakers and panelists, and the presenters and delegates, who collectively ensured that this was another very valuable event. I would also acknowledge the support of the Australian Government departments of the Attorney-General (AGD); Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR); Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); and Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C); as well as the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and the many other organisations who contributed by taking exhibition space or providing satchel inserts.

An event of this magnitude requires many months of planning and preparation. My special thanks go to the Conference Committee, comprising Sue Tait (Chair), Dr Matthew Gray, Dr Daryl Higgins, Dr Angela Tidmarsh, Nancy Virgona, Larissa Williams, Chye Ong, Carole Jean, Brigit Maguire and Ren Adams. I would also thank all the other staff of the Institute who assisted with the thousand-
and-one tasks required in the lead-up to and throughout the conference.

Again, this year, the international keynote speakers generously agreed to participate in a series of seminars and meetings in Canberra in the week following the event. These were very well attended and received.

Reform of Australian Government administration

The recent review of Australian Government administration is another subject engaging staff of the Institute. Towards the end of April, the Institute was fortunate to have Ms Liza Carroll, Deputy Secretary, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and member of our Advisory Council, address our staff on the reform, its likely implications for the Institute and our role in supporting several of the initiatives that emerge from the review. Given her leadership role in support of the Advisory Group who undertook the review, Ms Carroll provided invaluable insights into the review and its intended outcomes. With the release of the review report, Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration, it is evident that the steps the Institute has taken to engage proactively with government, research and community organisations are consistent with the proposed approach of promoting knowledge flows to enhance the innovative and strategic policy capability of the Australian Public Service. I have accepted appointment as a member of the APS200, the group that will work closely with the newly formed Secretaries Board to progress the reform of Australian Government administration.

National Families Week

National Families Week was celebrated on 15–21 May this year, timed to coincide with the UN International Day of Families on 15 May. I was again an Ambassador for the week. The event, now in its eighth year, is Australia’s major annual celebration of the importance of families. The theme for 2010 National Families Week, The Best Start: Supporting Happy, Healthy Childhoods, provided an opportunity for the Institute again to release a fact sheet about the role that families and communities play in giving children the best possible start to life. The fact sheet generated a considerable amount of media interest, sparking a healthy debate in the media and community about how much time fathers spend with their children.

In the Driver’s Seat II

On 15 April, the Institute published In the Driver’s Seat II: Beyond the Early Driving Years, the second report arising from the collaborative partnership between the Institute, the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria (TAC) and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV). The report explores the driving experiences and practices of young Victorian drivers, drawing upon data collected as part of the Australian Temperament Project. This second report focused on young people’s driving behaviours at 23–24 years, with comparisons of males and females and of young people in differing occupations with differing levels of educational attainment and from urban or rural areas. It also explored the consistency of driving behaviours from 19–20 to 23–24 years; the links between drink-driving and other types of risky driving, and between risky driving and substance use; the overlaps between crash involvement, high-level speeding and fatigued driving; the influence of parents on young people’s car purchases; and the links between young drivers’ personal characteristics and their behaviours behind the wheel.

Strengthening cross-Tasman collaboration

In June, I travelled to Wellington to deliver the opening keynote address at the Annual Research Seminar hosted by the New Zealand Families Commission. My presentation, entitled Research-Informed Family Policy: From Rhetoric to Reality, co-authored with Elly Robinson, highlighted the ways in which the work of the Institute has informed policy development and practice.

I also had a series of productive meetings with research staff of the Families Commission, focusing on some of their current research priority areas, as well as a very valuable set of meetings with Acting Chief Commissioner Bruce Pilbrow, Commissioner Gregory Fortuin, and the Chief Executive, Paul Curry. As a result of these discussions, we have agreed to formalise our relationship with a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and develop an initial collaborative project.

I especially welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Hon. Paula Bennett, NZ Minister for Social Development and Employment, and Minister for Youth Affairs. I provided a briefing for the minister on the legislative base and governance model for the Institute, its origins, major research projects and its current dissemination initiatives, including its clearinghouses and key strategic priorities.
Queen’s Birthday Honours

I was very pleased to read of the following awards in the recent Honours list:

- Dr Don Edgar, our Founding Director, received a Medal in the General Division of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his service to education and to the Institute;

- Ms Glenys Beauchamp, a past member of both our Board of Management and Advisory Council, received a Public Service Medal (PSM) for her leadership in the Australian Government’s response to the Victorian bushfires; and

- Dr Judy Cashmore, a member of the Reference Group for the National Child Protection Clearinghouse and a research collaborator, was made an Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AO) for her contributions to the protection of children and children’s rights.

On behalf of the Institute, I have extended our heartiest congratulations to these outstanding Australians.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies: Thirty Years On

The Fact Sheet Families Then and Now: 1980–2010, which was released at our recent conference, shows the significant changes in Australian families over the years since the establishment of the Institute. In the early eighties, some wondered whether the family would actually survive. The marriage rate was declining and more people were living together. The divorce rate had also increased dramatically when the Family Law Act came into force in 1976—the same year the fertility rate fell to below the replacement level for the very first time in this country. These fertility trends reflect the changes in family formation across the past three decades. Compared with 30 years ago, parenthood today tends to start later in life, couples tend to have fewer children, both parents are likely to be in paid employment and an increasing proportion depend on paid child care. Despite these changes, the family unit has thrived and continues to play a central role in shaping the health and wellbeing of Australians. The Institute’s role in tracking these trends and providing evidence to inform policy has grown steadily over the decades, building on the pioneering efforts of those who laid the foundations for the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Staff movements

Diana Smart, General Manager (Research), retired at Easter this year, having held the reins of both the Australian Temperament Project and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) since 2000 and 2004 respectively. Ms Smart is a psychologist whose professional research interests include child and youth adjustment, developmental transitions and pathways, and the fostering of social competence and social responsibility. We wish her well in her retirement and look forward to working collaboratively with her as a consultant from time to time, on a range of Institute projects.

While Diana will be sorely missed, I am very pleased to have recently appointed Dr Ben Edwards as the Institute’s manager of our longitudinal projects, including LSAC and ATP. Since he joined the Institute in 2004, Dr Edwards has project-managed several major studies. With his design and statistical analysis skills, and his knowledge of neighbourhood and community influences on children’s development and family functioning, I am confident that Dr Edwards will very effectively lead the LSAC team as we work to implement the next waves of this landmark longitudinal study.

After five-and-a-half years with the Institute, Dr Leah Bromfield, Senior Research Fellow, has accepted a new position as Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) at the University of South Australia. This is a great acknowledgement of her eminence in the field. She joins Professor Marianne Berry, who will take up the position of Director of the Centre on the retirement in August of its Foundation Director, Professor Dorothy Scott.

Dr Bromfield has successfully managed the National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC) since 2005, and in 2009 also took on the concurrent management of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA). She has led the NCPC most effectively and strengthened the Institute’s collaborative networks, including with the ACCP. Dr Bromfield has helped to ensure that the NCPC enjoys a strong leadership position nationally.

We look forward to continuing our close working relationship with Dr Bromfield and her colleagues at the University of South Australia. Her many contributions to AIFS are greatly appreciated and we wish her every success in her new position. She will be greatly missed.