

Universities Australia volunteers to channel students into war drive

Eric Ludlow

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Behind the backs of students, Universities Australia (UA), the body representing the country's university managements, has urged the Albanese Labor government to establish "internships" to funnel students—including international students—into the Australian military.

UA is seeking to involve the 39 public universities more fully into preparations for Australian participation in US-led wars, by also ramping up their partnerships with weapons makers and military research contracts with the Australian and US governments.

UA presented a submission to the government's "Defence Strategic Review." The submission marks a new stage in integrating Australian universities into the military-intelligence apparatus.

UA proposes increasing military-funded undergraduate places at universities. It calls for defence sponsorship of more students who would be committed to military service after graduation, and internships in defence organisations.

The submission also effectively offers up students from "strategic allies" as military recruits. It advocates "opening up currently restricted internships and roles to the 100,000+ international students from *allied countries* studying in Australia [emphasis added]."

UA highlights that a quarter of Australia's 400,000 international students come from "Australia's key strategic allies": India, Japan, UK, Canada and the US.

The Albanese government's review aims to "meet the nation's security challenges through to 2033 and beyond." It is preparing a huge expansion of military spending on top of the AUKUS plans to acquire long-range nuclear-powered submarines, hyper-sonic missiles and other weaponry from the US and UK for use against China.

The review is part of the Albanese government's bid to hold up its end of US-led plans for war against China—plans in which Australia is key in the Indo-Pacific region—as well as participation in the US-NATO imperialist war already underway against Russia in Ukraine.

Recommendations from the review are expected to be delivered in early 2023 by ex-Labor Defence Minister

Professor Stephen Smith and former Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston. But the Labor government is anxious to bolster Australia's role in US war aims well before the review is finalised.

In an "exclusive" interview in Murdoch's Australian newspaper earlier this month, Albanese vowed that his government would spend whatever is "necessary" to acquire long-range missiles and other hi-tech weaponry—all of which would be critical for involvement in a US-led war against China.

However, in Australia, like other countries, there is a crisis over the military's inability to recruit among younger layers of the population. In the first of three speeches that Defence Minister Richard Marles is scheduled to make ahead of the publication of the review, he warned this month that the military is short thousands of uniformed members.

"[A]s we think about how we reconfigure our Defence Force for a very different strategic environment inevitably we will have to make some hard choices," Marles said, adding "urgent action is required ... because right now we have a defence personnel crisis."

Some of the "hard choices" being considered by the Australian ruling elite were spelled out earlier this month when ex-Prime Minister Tony Abbott called for compulsory national service for high school graduates.

Youth, who are overwhelmingly anti-war, are not rushing into the military, so UA has come up with a solution—draft students from other countries!

UA's submission begins ominously, referring to a "critical juncture" characterised by "skill shortages, economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions"—challenges which the document claims "threaten our national security."

It continues: "This is being driven by the rapidly evolving threats in the Indo Pacific and, more specifically, by foreign powers intent on disrupting the post-WWII rules-based international order which underpins Australia's values and interests." This is a thinly-veiled threat against China.

The submission outlines plans to "address these challenges."

Since 2016, the WSWs has published numerous articles outlining the partnerships between Australian universities and the government's defence department, as well as deals with the world's largest arms manufacturers.

The submission decries that the current level of involvement is not enough. In essence, more must be done to fully transform universities from educational institutions into props for the military and corporations.

UA notes the current contributions of universities. In this, it includes "soft diplomacy"—in other words, the work of universities to advance Australian imperialist interests internationally. It also lists countering purported "foreign interference," noting the setting up in late 2021 of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce—an anti-democratic formation to censor international research, primarily aimed at collaborations with Chinese universities.

The submission refers to the federal Defence Science and Technology Group's (DSTG) University Partnership program, in which almost every Australian university has enrolled. The program was established in 2014 to "provide a uniform model for universities to engage with Defence on research projects."

The submission states that "these relationships will need to develop far beyond those existing with DSTG." UA argues for the expansion of the DSTG, or creation of a complementary entity, as well as the streamlining of the processes for universities to partner with arms manufacturers.

As a case study for such collaborations, the submission refers to the recently-announced "Defence Trailblazer Concept to Sovereign Capability" program between 52 defence contractors and the University of Adelaide (UofA) and University of New South Wales (UNSW).

The program is aimed at the "commercialisation" of universities through their partnership with military companies. The Defence Trailblazer package includes \$50 million from the federal Department of Education, \$50 million each from UofA and UNSW, and \$143 million from defence companies.

The program will focus on research in "disruptive technology areas" identified as "strategic priorities." These will include quantum technologies, hypersonics, information warfare, cyber technologies, robotics, autonomous systems, artificial intelligence and space technology.

Already such research and development is underway in partnerships with the world's largest arms manufacturers such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing and BAE Systems.

But recruitment, research and development are not the only ways in which UA envisages universities aiding the war effort.

Universities are also key ideological battlegrounds. The

ruling elite is attempting to condition students for military conflict through the establishment of pro-military thinktanks and the promotion of academics who act as mouthpieces for imperialism.

The submission hints at the development of militarist ideologues, saying "workforce planning principles" should be extended from science and technology programs "into the humanities, arts and social sciences, and could even extend to the creation of a new form of knowledge worker reserve force."

Universities have for decades been undergoing a transformation—under Liberal-National and Labor governments alike—into pro-business institutions pumping out job-ready graduates to suit the needs of the ruling elite. Increasingly, these needs include preparations for war.

This process has been facilitated by the trade unions, above all the National Tertiary Education Union, whose bureaucrats have raised no opposition to this orientation. In fact, they have embraced the Labor government's "Accord" review, which seeks to further subordinate the universities to the requirements of Australian capitalism.

The same can be said of the student union leaders who, by their silence, expose their support for the integration of universities into the military-intelligence apparatus.

There is deep opposition to war among students and working-class youth, but this can find no expression in the pro-war, pro-capitalist unions and establishment political parties.

The only organisation with an anti-war perspective is the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). The IYSSE has fought consistently against the pro-imperialist war drive against Russia and China, and the militarisation of universities.

The IYSSE understands that the fight against war requires a struggle against the whole capitalist nation-state system, and for world socialism. This requires the mobilisation of the international working class, the only social force that can overthrow capitalism.

This perspective will be elaborated in a global online webinar organised by the IYSSE internationally on December 11, 5am AEDT, titled: "For a mass movement of youth and students to stop the war in Ukraine!"

Register for the webinar today.



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