

Australia: Rank-and-file committee calls for staff, student and wider support to stop Western Sydney University College cuts

Our correspondents

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The newly-founded Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee (WSU-RFC) has launched a campaign to stop the destruction of jobs and the pro-business restructuring at WSU College, the university's wholly-owned feeder college.

A meeting of WSU staff and students and supporters last Wednesday voted to formally establish the WSU-RFC and call for the support of workers and students across the university and more broadly to defeat the cuts. The WSU-RFC will hold an online public meeting on July 31 to explain and discuss its campaign.

WSU management is demanding the elimination of the equivalent of 17 full-time learning and teaching positions at WSU College—or more than 10 percent—and a “spill and fill” regime to force staff members to compete against each other for the remaining posts.

The heaviest cuts are to English, arts, literature and humanities, thus depriving students of access to critical, broad-based courses, rather than just the narrow vocational ones demanded by employers.

All subjects in the re-badged “Destination College,” as of 1 January 2025, would be taught as four-week intensive blocks. This “block method” means even more onerous workloads for teachers and coordinators, with all assessment and marking to be completed in just one month.

This would also further erode the quality of the courses for students, making effective feedback impossible. Yet, as WSU College and WSU educators know, the WSU College plays a vital part in helping to prepare students, often from working-class immigrant backgrounds, for university study.

As its first task, the WSU-RFC is organising an information and publicity campaign, including posters,

leaflets and social media, throughout WSU, other universities and working-class communities in western Sydney, to call for a wider movement to defeat the restructuring and job cuts.

As yet, most WSU staff and students, and even WSU College students and their families, know little or nothing about management's deep-going attack on jobs and the rights of students to a decent education.

Members of the rank-and-file committee have faced repeated moves by the leaders of the main campus trade union, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), to block a unified campaign against management's “change proposal.”

The WSU-RFC founding statement, adopted in principle by Wednesday's meeting, states: “We are determined to fight for the defence of all jobs and conditions, against National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) efforts to isolate the WSU College workers. Virtually no staff members or students at WSU even know about the pro-business restructuring of the college, except for the campaigns conducted by us!

“In fact, the union is trying to help impose the job losses and stifle resistance by encouraging staff members to apply for redundancy packages. It is pitting people against one another by urging its members to start ‘individual cases’ with the NTEU, and by refusing to defend non-NTEU members.

“The majority of educators at the College are not NTEU members because they have no confidence in the union bureaucracy as a result of its previous betrayals.

“If there is going to be a fight to inform, alert and win the support of staff and students at WSU and across the education sector, it will have to come from us, not the

NTEU.”

The NTEU is partnering in the restructuring as per its 2022 enterprise agreement with WSU management, in which it pledged to assist the College “to remain competitive in the market,” which meant the College “may need to change its structure, operations, and priorities to meet business requirements.”

Unless the carve-up of WSU College is defeated it will set a precedent throughout the tertiary education sector, where up to 22,000 jobs are threatened by next year as a result of the Labor government’s moves to slash international student enrolments, making these students scapegoats for the worsening cost-of-living and housing crisis.

Enrolments have fallen at WSU College because the Albanese government is continuing to starve the public universities of funding, forcing them all to scramble for enrolments, including by offering students vocational “micro” courses and alternative pathways into degree programs.

This financial squeeze is being intensified by Labor’s pro-business Universities Accord agenda. The Accord demands the restructuring of universities to satisfy the vocational and research requirements of big business and military preparations, such as the AUKUS pact, for a US-led war against China.

The WSU-RFC statement explains: “With this committee, rank-and-file staff and students can take the struggle against this agenda into our own hands, democratically formulate demands and work together to organise the necessary actions.

“We will reach out to university staff and other workers across the country and throughout the world who are facing similar attacks. We will also welcome students to join the committee as their interests are directly affected in the fight for decent education.”

The initial demands proposed by the WSU-RFC include:

- the scrapping of WSU’s “change plan” restructuring
- the retention of all jobs, with no loss of pay or conditions
- no imposition of “block teaching”
- abolition of onerous workloads for all staff
- secure employment for all casualised and contract staff who want it
- academic freedom to research, speak and write without management, government or corporate

censorship

- free first-class education for all students instead of channelling billions of dollars into AUKUS and other preparations for US-led wars

We appeal to all WSU staff and students, whether union members or not, who agree with us to join our campaign and participate in the work of the committee. To do so, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [@CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)

Advance notice: Public meeting
WSU Rank-and-File Committee
STOP THE WSU COLLEGE CUTS!
Wednesday, July 31 - 7 p.m. on Zoom
Click here to register



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact