

# University job cuts continue under re-elected Australian Labor government

**Mike Head**  
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The Albanese government's second term, following its May 3 election win, is already seeing further job cuts—both academic and professional—throughout Australia's 39 public universities as a direct result of Labor's cuts to funding and international student enrolments.

In the latest announcement, last Friday the University of Tasmania management said it will cut 13 arts and humanities staff, including through forced redundancies, and scrap dedicated tourism courses, as part of a proposed restructure.

Division secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union's (NTEU) Tasmanian Branch Ruth Barton told Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio Hobart that university staff are feeling angry and disappointed.

Similar damaging cuts, course closures and restructuring, in one form or another, are still emerging across the country, now totalling more than 3,000 jobs. These include up to 400 at Western Sydney University, 400 at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), up to 650 at the Australian National University (ANU), 200 at the University of Canberra, and at least 150 at the University of Wollongong.

Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory cut all its department budgets by 10 percent and said it will axe up to 20 staff due to declining international student enrolments. There are job losses either announced or threatened at other universities, such as Macquarie, Federation, James Cook, Southern Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe and Swinburne.

Protests by staff and students have been held at many universities. But the leaders of the NTEU and the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), are opposing any unified fight by university workers against what has become an avalanche of job destruction, especially in arts and humanities.

Instead, the union bureaucrats are trying to keep staff members in the dark about the true extent of the job cuts, isolate the opposition to individual universities and cover up the role of the Labor government, whose re-election they actively backed and welcomed.

Three Labor government moves are driving the assault.

One is Labor's reactionary nationalist attack on international students, on whose fees the universities have become dependent because of chronic under-funding, especially since the previous

Rudd-Gillard Labor government of 2007 to 2013.

The Albanese government has imposed severe international student caps, enforced by lengthy visa processing delays, and trebled the non-refundable international student visa fee to \$1,600.

Education Minister Jason Clare boasted to the *Australian* last week that the government's caps, implemented via an edict known as immigration Ministerial Direction 111, had sharply reduced the number of international student visas.

"Direction 111, as well as the increase in the visa fees to students, has helped us to reduce student visa applications by about 30 percent this year, so that's working," he said. "I'm keeping a close eye on that, and I'll work closely with Julian [Hill], who's now the assistant minister for international education."

In the year to February, there were 261,400 international student visa applications, down from 380,000 in the previous corresponding period. That is a cut of 118,600 or 31 percent.

Before the election, the Albanese government was vying with the Liberal-National Coalition to outdo each other in making international students, along with immigrants, scapegoats for the cost-of-living and housing affordability crisis which is continuing to hit working-class households.

Now that the election is out of the way, Clare's comments indicate that the offensive will intensify.

As well as triggering job losses, this is causing trauma for international students, reflected in soaring numbers challenging visa refusals or cancellations through the government's Administrative Review Tribunal (ART). The number waiting for hearings rose to 26,687 at the end of February. That was up more than tenfold from 2,244 in August 2023, despite applications costing students \$3,496 apiece.

Secondly, universities are receiving lower per-student funding due to the Labor government's continuation of the previous Morrison Coalition government's pro-business "Job Ready Graduates" program, which seeks to coerce students into vocational courses to meet the requirements of employers.

Over 40 per cent of all domestic students—and a large majority of those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, including Indigenous students—now pay tuition fees of \$16,992 a year for degrees in the arts, social sciences and humanities,

including law, history, business and English. The government subsidy paid to universities is just \$1,286 a year.

That has deepened a \$10 billion cut to university funding over the past decade, starting with the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments of 2007 to 2013 and taken further by the Coalition governments from 2013 to 2022.

Students are also suffering. Twenty years ago, the average student debt was \$12,550, according to the Australian Tax Office. Today, it has risen by 145 percent adjusted for inflation, to \$30,000. In 2023, more than 86,000 people had a student debt of between \$60,000 and \$70,000, cumulatively worth \$5.5 billion.

Before the election, the Labor government promised to drop the Job Ready Graduates imposts and reduce student debt by 20 percent. Neither promise has yet materialised, and even if they do, they will do little to relieve the pressure on students and universities.

A third Labor government step behind the job losses was to advise university researchers to comply with an invasive lengthy questionnaire sent by the Trump administration threatening to cut off funding for joint US research unless their projects served the needs of US foreign policy and military objectives.

This is in line with the Trump regime's unprecedented offensive against government jobs, social services, science, public health, public education, environmental protection and "diversity, equity and inclusion" programs, and its moves to cut off funding to US universities that do not comply with its fascistic agenda of suppressing opposition, including to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

It is not yet known how much funding and jobs have been terminated in Australia as a result.

In the face of this financial and ideological assault, the NTEU is seeking to divert the hostility of university staff away from the Labor government by blaming highly-paid individual university chiefs and administrators for the job losses.

The union is promoting hopes that a delayed Albanese government-initiated Senate inquiry into "university governance" will result in the lowering of such remuneration packages. But even if that were to happen, it would not touch the sides of the financial squeeze on the universities.

And while it is true that university vice chancellors are paid exorbitantly—some more than \$1 million annually—that is because they are implementing the corporate and military-related agenda of the Labor government and the political establishment as a whole.

The Albanese government's financial pressure is aimed at forcing the universities to integrate themselves more fully into the demands of big business and the military, as set out in Labor's Universities Accord, which ties funding to "national priorities," including the AUKUS military preparations for war against China.

The Accord report nominated "areas of national priority like

clean energy, critical technology, minerals and defence" as needing "more skilled professionals." All these fields are related to the geo-strategic interests of Australian imperialism and its commitment to US war plans.

One of the models endorsed by the Accord report was: "To support AUKUS, the University of South Australia is partnering with the South Australian Government, the Australian Industry Group and the defence industry to develop university degree apprenticeships to support the construction of nuclear-powered submarines."

By atomising and suppressing the widespread opposition to the job cuts, the NTEU is reprising the role it played when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. An estimated 4,760 people were made redundant within the universities, facilitated by the union leadership's offer to accept thousands of job cuts.

The Labor government, like the Trump administration, is also seeking to suppress opposition to the genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, including by minister Clare instigating moves to freeze the research grant of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah at Macquarie University.

To fight this agenda, the Socialist Equality Party is calling for, and helping form, rank-and-file committees at universities. This is essential so that staff, along with students, can form their own organisations to develop and fight for demands based on the educational and financial needs of students and staff, not the dictates of the corporate elite.

We urge staff and students to contact the Committee for Public Education, the educators' rank-and-file network, to discuss how to form rank-and-file committees:

#### Contact the CFPE:

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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