

Sydney's Macquarie University axes jobs and courses in line with Labor's pro-business agenda

A Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee member
18 June 2025

Sydney's Macquarie University unveiled cuts to jobs and selected courses on June 3, becoming the latest Australian public university to do so as a result of the Labor government's reactionary caps on international student enrolments.

In the immediate future, 33 positions are to be eliminated in the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), and 42 in the Faculty of Arts, ostensibly to reduce costs by approximately \$15 million per year. In April, Vice-Chancellor S. Bruce Dowton announced that savings of the order of \$50 to \$60 million per year were needed, so these retrenchments are just the start.

The redundancies are coupled with major curriculum changes, leaving substantially reduced options for students, in line with Labor's restructuring of universities to meet "national priorities."

Bachelor degrees in such important fields of human endeavour and learning as archaeology, music, education and ancient languages will be eliminated, while sociology and ancient history will be cut back. Majors in politics, gender studies, criminology and psychological studies will not be available in the Bachelor of Arts program.

Within the FSE, programs will be cut in electronics engineering, applied mathematics, statistics and IT. Management said it is "divesting" of areas deemed not to "align" with the university's "focus areas."

As a result, for example, within mathematics, students will have no options about choices of subjects in the second and third years of their degree. Only a minimum of subjects, three in their final year, will be offered, regardless of the mathematical interests of the students.

So far, more than 3,000 job cuts have now been

unveiled at universities nationally due to Labor's moves to cut international student enrolment in half by 2026, on top of its continued under-funding of universities.

Macquarie management referred to "operating in a financially constrained and uncertain policy environment" and experiencing "turbulence."

The Labor government is financially pressuring universities to align both their teaching and research more completely with the needs of business and the development of a wartime economy. Its Universities Accord final report, released in February 2024, laid out the need for students to fill "skills shortages" to meet "national priorities," including the AUKUS military pact aimed against China.

The main campus trade union, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), is covering up the role of the Labor government and opposing any unified struggle against the job cut avalanche. The NTEU leaders claim that "bad management" is to blame for the cuts at each university. The union is offering to assist the various managements to find ways to cut their budgets.

The NTEU is in basic agreement with the alignment of education with business interests and the military. In its Accord submission, the NTEU stated that higher education "provides the graduates with the necessary skill sets for future productivity."

On June 5, the NTEU held an "all staff meeting" at Macquarie to oppose the job cuts, with NTEU National President Alison Barnes taking part, along with Greens politician Jenny Leong. A Labor politician had even been invited to speak, but declined.

Barnes said little apart from expressing sorrow that the cuts were taking place. Leong asserted that there

was “absolutely no reason” for cuts. Barnes claimed Macquarie staff had the full support of Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) President Sally McManus. Like all union bureaucrats, McManus works closely with the Labor government and has sold out every workers’ struggle she has intervened in.

About 300 staff members joined the meeting. In their usual fashion, however, the NTEU representatives allowed only minutes at the end of the event for discussion. After more than an hour, Macquarie Rank-and-File Committee member Chris Gordon was finally permitted to speak.

Gordon placed the redundancies in their broader context and drew attention to the NTEU’s role in facilitating job cuts. He noted that at a rally at Western Sydney University, where up to 400 positions are threatened, rank-and-file speakers had been blocked while the NTEU branch president, David Burchell, told management: “We are here to help.”

Gordon referred to the Trump administration’s attacks on education, and noted that while Albanese was not Trump, Labor was pursuing Trump-like policies. In particular, the Labor government had advised universities to comply with Trump’s insistence that research funding had to meet US national priorities.

Trump’s attacks on immigrants were being echoed in Australia too, with Education Minister Jason Clare boasting of cutting international student enrolments by 30 percent this year.

Gordon said the Albanese government had also slandered opponents of the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, including students and academics, as antisemitic. Clare had intervened personally to ask the Australian Research Council to freeze its grant to Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a critic of the Israeli war machine, at Macquarie University.

Gordon said the NTEU has not conducted any broad defence of Abdel-Fattah, but was apparently “working behind the scenes.” Rather than secret talks, he stated, a public defence of her and other victimised academics must be conducted.

The NTEU motion put to the June 5 meeting expressed “horror” at the cuts and asserted there was “no clear financial need” for them. It proposed a June 18 lunchtime “sit in,” appealing to management to modify its measures.

What is needed is a unified struggle throughout the university sector against the cuts to jobs and international students. Rank-and-file committees (RFCs), independent of the trade unions, are essential to fight for this and to halt Labor’s transformation of universities into fully corporate entities serving a war economy.

RFCs can link up with educators globally via the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and develop demands based on the needs of students and staff, not the dictates of management, governments and the corporate elite.

In its opening 2025 statement, the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network, outlined a proposal of initial demands that included:

- halt and reverse the thousands of job cuts and the resulting sky-rocketing workloads across the tertiary education sector
- stop the cuts to international student enrolments and defend the right of all students to higher education
- end the victimisation of Randa Abdel-Fattah and other academics who oppose Israel’s genocide in Gaza or the bipartisan support for US militarism
- free first-class education for all students instead of channelling billions of dollars into preparations for US-led wars

To discuss these issues and how to form rank-and-file committees, please contact the CFPE.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

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