

Australian universities in crisis: Oppose Labor's cuts to international students and jobs

WSU and MQ Rank-and-File Committees
24 June 2025

The Western Sydney University and Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committees issued this statement calling for a unified national campaign against the Albanese Labor government's intensifying cuts to international student enrolments and jobs and the underlying pro-corporate, pro-military restructuring of tertiary education.

Staff and students at public universities across Australia face a deepening crisis. Over the past six months, despite protests at individual universities, managements have announced the destruction of more than 3,000 jobs—both academic and professional—mostly as a result of the Labor government's reactionary cuts to international student enrolments.

It is increasingly clear that worse is to come. Education Minister Jason Clare has boasted of cutting the number of new international students by 30 percent this year, but the government has vowed to cut them in half, to 270,000 a year, down from 548,000 in 2023. That means deeper cuts for 2026 and 2027.

As of January 1, moreover, each university's funding will be tied to a "mission-based compact" with a new government-appointed Australian Tertiary Education Commission, setting out how the university will contribute to Labor's corporate- and military-related agenda. That agenda was set out last year in the government's Universities Accord final report, which insisted that teaching and research had to be aligned to fill "skills shortages" and to meet "national priorities," including the AUKUS military pact aimed against China.

The universities known to have unveiled cuts to jobs and courses now include both Western Sydney University (WSU) and Macquarie University, as well as scores of others, such as the Australian National University (ANU), University of Canberra, University Technology Sydney (UTS) and University of Wollongong.

Others on the list include Tasmania, Charles Darwin, Federation, James Cook, Southern Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe and Swinburne.

Protests by staff and students have been held at many universities, including UTS, ANU, Wollongong, WSU and Macquarie. But the leaders of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), have opposed any unified fight by university workers and students against the wave

of job destruction and course closures.

These attacks have especially targeted arts and humanities. At Macquarie, for example, bachelor's degrees in such important fields of human endeavour and learning as archaeology, music, education and ancient languages will be eliminated, while sociology, ancient history, politics, gender studies, criminology and psychological studies will be cut back.

These nation-wide cuts cannot be explained, as the NTEU leaders have tried to do, as the product of poor management at each institution. The NTEU is claiming that university vice-chancellors are "scare-mongering" about the enrolment cuts, just as an excuse to slash jobs.

This is a blatant cover for the Albanese government. It is deliberately financially pressuring the universities into further restructuring along pro-corporate lines and for the needs of a war economy.

The Universities Accord report nominated "areas of national priority like clean energy, critical technology, minerals and defence." 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."

In the pursuit of this agenda, the Labor government is promoting foul nationalism that seeks to blame international students for the continuing housing affordability and cost-of-living crisis affecting working-class households, while the wealth of the billionaires, including the property developers, soars to new heights.

Clare doubled down on Labor's jingoism last week, declaring that he would make no apologies for demanding that the universities must be "unashamedly focused on Aussie kids." The attack on international students forms part of Labor's plans to halve overseas migration to 235,000 annually for the next three years.

The government is also punishing universities and students by almost trebling international student visa application fees from \$710 to \$2,000, slowing visa processing and imposing harsher English language requirements and "genuine student" tests.

This is cutting the revenues from full-fee paying international students—to the tune of \$4 billion to \$6 billion a year—to which universities have turned since the Rudd-Gillard Labor government's "education revolution" which cut their funding and forced them to compete with each other for students to survive.

In addition, Labor has continued the Morrison Liberal-National Coalition government's "job-ready graduates" regime, which tried to coerce students away from humanities by charging them higher fees. As a result, 42 percent of undergraduates still pay \$16,992 toward their degree each year, while the government contributes just \$1,286.

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

The Albanese government has also advised universities and researchers to comply with an invasive and lengthy questionnaire sent by the fascistic Trump administration threatening to cut off funding for joint US research unless their projects served the needs of American foreign policy and military objectives.

So far, according to media reports, at least 11 universities have suffered research funding cuts already, which will mean deeper job losses.

This is in line with the Trump regime's unprecedented offensive against immigrant workers, government jobs, social services, science, public health, public education and environmental protection, and its moves to cut off funding to Harvard and other US universities that do not comply with its dictatorial suppression of dissent, including over the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The Labor government, like the Trump administration, is also seeking to silence opposition to the ever-more blatant ethnic cleansing in Palestine, notably by Clare personally instigating moves to freeze the research grant of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a prominent critic of the Israeli war machine, at Macquarie University.

Together with every other capitalist administration, the Albanese government has slandered opponents of the genocide, including students and academics, as antisemitic. This is a warning of the witch-hunting measures to be used against all forms of dissent as the US and its partners plunge humanity into a wider war, now targeting Iran, for control over the Middle East and global domination.

While starving the universities of funds, the government is pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into military spending, including AUKUS, for a war against China, and backing the Gaza genocide, the criminal war on Iran and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

At the May 3 federal election voters overwhelmingly rejected the Trump agenda of trade war, war and massive government funding cuts, which they identified with the Liberal Party, but Labor is undeniably pursuing Trump-style policies.

The NTEU leaders are seeking to suppress discussion by staff and students on this underlying agenda. That was displayed at WSU on June 3, when NTEU national and state officials organised the physically blocking of WSU Rank-and-File Committee member Michael Head and International Youth and Students for

Social Equality (IYSSE) WSU club president Zach Diotte from speaking at a rally against the 300-400 job cuts at WSU.

At the same time, the NTEU is offering to assist the managements to achieve the required cost-cutting by other means, which will include supposed "voluntary redundancies," just as the NTEU has done in response to every previous attack on jobs and conditions. At the same WSU rally, the NTEU WSU branch president, David Burchell, issued a plea to management: "We are here to help."

To fight this agenda, there has to be a unified struggle by staff and students across the country against the job cuts and restructuring. This requires the formation of rank-and-file committees of staff and students at all universities, completely independent of the trade union apparatuses.

These rank-and-file committees can link up with workers in Australia and worldwide through the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. They can develop demands based on the needs of students and staff, not the dictates of governments and the corporate elite. These demands could include:

- halt and reverse the thousands of job cuts and the resulting skyrocketing 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
 - uphold the right to conduct research that is not dictated by the demands of corporate interests, governments and the military
 - free first-class education for all students instead of channelling billions of dollars into preparations for US-led wars

This is part of a broader necessary struggle against capitalism itself and its program of ever-greater corporate wealth and turn to war and Trump-style dictatorial rule.

We propose to call a national online public meeting at the start of semester 2 to discuss this campaign. To support this fight, we urge staff and students to contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators' rank-and-file network.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact