

# What is driving the university job cuts across Australia? Labor's pro-corporate and war agenda

WSU and MQ Rank-and-File Committees  
15 July 2025

*The Western Sydney University and Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committees have called a national online meeting on Saturday August 2 to fight for a unified campaign by educators and students against the Albanese Labor government's intensifying cuts to international student enrolments and jobs, and the underlying pro-corporate, pro-military reshaping of tertiary education. Register here.*

For more than six months, despite determined protest rallies and demonstrations by staff and students at many of Australia's 39 public universities, managements have continued to unveil the destruction of both academic and professional staff jobs—now over 3,000 nationally.

Most recently, Charles Sturt University (CSU), one of Australia's largest regional universities, became the latest to foreshadow sweeping job cuts, following similar moves at Sydney's Macquarie University and Western Sydney University. In Canberra, the Australian National University has just unveiled the second of a series of planned cuts and closures, defying staff and student protests.

Others on the job destruction list include University of Canberra, University Technology Sydney (UTS) and University of Wollongong, as well as Tasmania, Charles Darwin, Federation, James Cook, Southern Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe and Swinburne.

But the leaderships 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 action by university workers and students, just as they did when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, permitting the destruction of more than 17,000 jobs.

In order to defeat the wave of job cuts and the elimination of courses for students, it is essential to understand the underlying agenda and to build new organisations—rank-and-file committees—to fight it.

These retrenchments are first and foremost a direct result of the Albanese government's reactionary cuts to enrolments by overseas students, on whose exorbitant fees the chronically-underfunded universities have increasingly relied for the past decade and a half since the Rudd-Gillard Labor government's funding cuts and market-driven "education revolution."

By cutting the enrolments, the Labor government is deliberately

applying financial pressure to the universities, in order to restructure them to align with "national priorities" set out in last year's Universities Accord report. That report insisted that both teaching and research must focus on serving the requirements of the corporate elite and the development of a war economy. That included meeting the needs of the AUKUS military pact and military-related industries in preparation for a US-led war against China.

The government is falsely blaming overseas students for the worsening housing affordability crisis affecting working-class households. It has vowed to halve the number of international students, to 270,000 a year, from the level of 548,000 in 2023. That means greater job losses for 2026 and 2027.

Moreover, as the Accord report recommended, July 1 saw the commencement of a government-appointed Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC). From January 1, each university's funding will be tied to a "mission-based compact" with ATEC, setting out how the university will contribute to Labor's "national priorities."

An example of what is coming is the government's AUKUS-related Nuclear-Powered Submarine Student Pathways program. It allocated \$128.5 million over four years to pay selected universities to train 4,001 students in related science and engineering skills from 2024 to 2027. "Growing a qualified and experienced STEM workforce to support Australia's nuclear-powered submarine enterprise" is one of the "national priorities".

Similarly, the Starmer Labour government in the UK is presiding over the elimination of 5,000 university jobs, also driven by international student cuts, while the Trump White House is threatening to defund universities that do not suppress opposition to the Gaza genocide and align with Trump's fascistic agenda.

In Australia, as elsewhere, these attacks have especially targeted arts and humanities, in order to stultify critical and historically-informed thinking. At Macquarie, bachelor's degrees in such crucial 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 decimated.

Critical research areas are being "disestablished" as well. ANU is planning to abolish the Humanities Research Centre and the National Dictionary Centre.

There is another significant contributor to the government's financial pressure on the universities. The number of commencing domestic undergraduate students fell to 262,396 in 2023, down by 8.9 percent since 2017. This is the lowest number of commencing domestic undergraduate students in the past 10 years.

That is largely due to the cost-of-living crisis, which has placed study beyond the reach of many working-class young people, combined with the punishing fees of nearly \$17,000 a year inflicted on arts, humanities, business and law students. Labor has maintained these fees as part of the previous Coalition government's "job ready graduates" program to push students into "priority" and "skills" courses such as maths, science, teaching and nursing.

In addition, the Labor government advised universities and researchers to comply with a Trump administration questionnaire threatening to cut off joint funding for research unless their projects served the needs of US foreign policy and military objectives. At least 11 universities have suffered research funding cuts as a result, which will mean deeper job losses.

University workers want to find means to fight the job losses. At WSU, an online meeting of NTEU members on July 3 voted by 99 percent for stoppages of up to 24 hours and by 78 percent for indefinite strikes against the management, which is threatening to axe up to 400 academic and professional jobs.

But the NTEU leaders kept these votes tied to seeking to negotiate an Enterprise Agreement (EA) deal with WSU management, which could take months. And the NTEU branch president David Burchell said the union would like to propose a cost-cutting "counter-package" that could include a "voluntary redundancies" program.

This is a standard practice of the unions—helping managements push people out the door via redundancy packages in order to stifle opposition to restructuring and job cuts.

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

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

On July 10, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke went further. They stood alongside Jillian Segal, a Zionist lobbyist and Labor's "Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism," as she unveiled an "action plan" that includes restricting or cutting off funding to universities that fail to sufficiently suppress staff and student opposition to the Israeli genocide.

A WSU and Macquarie Rank-and-File Committee statement, issued on June 24, concluded:

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

As the statement explained, 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.

To discuss and develop this fight, we will host a national online public meeting on Saturday August 2 at 3pm, titled "What is driving the university job cuts across Australia? Labor's pro-corporate and war agenda."

To join the meeting, please register here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/g697NOWHRESMvTcwQ1jMNw>

To support this campaign, 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](https://facebook.com/commforpubliceducation)

Twitter: CFPE\_Australia



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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