

Nearly 400 “voluntary redundancies” sought at Western Sydney University

A WSU Rank-and-File Committee member

10 August 2025

Western Sydney University (WSU) management is pushing ahead with plans to eliminate up to 400 academic and professional jobs, or more than 13 percent of the university’s full-time workforce.

WSU’s National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) branch president David Burchell revealed last week that 381 staff members had expressed an interest in a “voluntary redundancy” scheme announced by management last month.

Management is now working with faculty and school deans to hand-pick the staff whose applications will be accepted, while still threatening forced redundancies as well.

This is another warning of the scale of the job cuts and sweeping restructuring being demanded throughout Australia’s 39 public universities. So far, more than 3,500 job losses have been unveiled across the country during the past 10 months.

The avalanche of job cuts is a direct result of the Albanese Labor government’s reactionary cuts to international student enrolments and its continuation of the previous Liberal-National Coalition government’s “Job-ready Graduate” program that financially penalises humanities students and the universities that enrol them.

These cuts come on top of years of under-funding by successive governments. They will intensify as the government’s new Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) ties each university’s funding to a “mission compact” to deliver the government’s “national priorities.”

These “priorities,” as set out in the government’s Universities Accord report last year, are focussed on tying both teaching and research to the narrow vocational demands of employers and the development of a war economy, including through the AUKUS

submarine program and the mining and refining of war-related critical minerals.

The NTEU apparatus is trying to block any unified fight by staff and students against this agenda. Instead, NTEU officials are trying to blame individual vice-chancellors for the job destruction, while assisting them to achieve their goals.

At a WSU NTEU members’ meeting on Thursday and in an email to members on Friday, Burchell criticised management’s supposed “voluntary” redundancy (VR) scheme, claiming that it “doesn’t fit with the Organisational Change provisions” of the NTEU’s enterprise agreements with WSU.

In reality, the “change” clauses offer little or no protection against retrenchments. All management has to claim is that the work of a targeted staff member is no longer required or can be accommodated within the workloads of remaining staff.

The truth is that management is taking advantage of the NTEU’s proposal last month of a VR scheme as a means of implementing the cost-cutting it demands, while stifling staff members’ opposition.

Management unveiled the VR scheme just after Burchell informed NTEU members at the university, via an email, that in backroom negotiations the union had suggested a “modest” VR “exercise” to Vice-Chancellor George Williams in order to cut jobs in “a decent and humane manner.”

As intended, the threat of impending retrenchments and the obvious lack of any genuine opposition by the NTEU and the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), has led hundreds of staff members to apply for a VR.

Burchell told Thursday’s NTEU members’ meeting that people had sought VRs because they had become “scared, anxious and distressed.”

His criticism of management's VR scheme was that it was not "strategic or targeted." Burchell said he and NTEU senior industrial officer Joshua Garva had held a series of meetings with Williams to propose ways to achieve "actual cost-savings."

Further, Burchell said the union "respected" the right of people to make "their own decisions about their futures." But this is precisely how the NTEU and CPSU have cooperated with university managements for years to cut jobs by pressuring staff into concluding that there is no alternative.

Last month, a meeting of NTEU members voted by 99 percent for stoppages and by 78 percent for indefinite strikes to fight management, but many staff members have no confidence in the union given its past record.

That vote indicated the readiness of university workers to fight. But the motion kept the dispute trapped in the framework of seeking another NTEU enterprise agreement with WSU. Burchell opposed a call by WSU Rank-and-File Committee member Michael Head for a unified struggle across the sector against the job cuts.

Thursday's NTEU meeting voted for the union branch committee to "consider our options for industrial disputation in relation to the University's 'voluntary redundancy' program, to ensure the process is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Organisational Change provisions of the Western Sydney enterprise agreements, unless the matter is resolved satisfactorily by the University within the next seven days."

This resolution still keeps staff caught in the straitjacket of impotent enterprise agreement clauses, while seeking talks to cement yet another deal with management.

The WSU and Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committees convened an online public meeting on August 2 to fight for a unified campaign against the Albanese government's intensifying cuts to international student enrolments and university jobs, and the underlying pro-corporate, pro-military reshaping of tertiary education.

As well as WSU, the confirmed job destruction list now includes Sydney's Macquarie University, Charles Sturt University, the Australian National University, University of Canberra, University Technology Sydney

(UTS), and the universities of Wollongong, Tasmania, Charles Darwin, Federation, James Cook, Southern Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe and Swinburne.

These cuts have especially targeted arts, social sciences and humanities, in order to deaden critical, cultured and historically-informed thinking.

This is part of a broader global decimation and transformation of universities. For example, the Starmer Labour government in the UK is presiding over the elimination of 10,000 university jobs, also driven by international student cuts. The White House is threatening to defund universities that do not silence opposition to the US-Israeli Gaza genocide and align with Trump's fascistic and militarist agenda.

Both the NTEU and CPSU are silent on the fact that, while starving the universities of funds, the Albanese government is pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into military spending in preparation for a US-led war against China, and still backing the Gaza genocide and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

A joint 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.

To discuss and develop this fight, 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

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