

# Australia: Deep course and job cuts at University of Technology Sydney

Our correspondents  
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Despite protests by staff and students at public universities around Australia, damaging cuts to courses and jobs are continuing under the Albanese Labor government.

Among the most shocking cuts are at University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). There is outrage there because UTS management has suspended and stopped new enrolments for nearly a fifth of its courses, notably in international studies, social sciences, education and public health, and threatened to sack 400 staff—about a tenth of the workforce.

The UTS offensive has only deepened since about 200 people, mostly UTS staff, joined a campus rally in March to fight the looming job cuts, including a delegation of about 50 staff from the nearby University of Sydney.

The scale and thrust of the restructuring at UTS is an indication of the depth of the assault on university education everywhere. At least 19 of the country's 39 public universities have unveiled similar attacks, in one form or another, in the past 10 months.

At UTS, the axed courses include 33 degrees in the social sciences, mainly in international studies that are essential for preparing students to live and work in an increasingly international world; all education programs, from Bachelor through to PhD level, despite an acute national shortage of teachers; and core public health programs, at a time of immense need to deal with pandemics, climate change impacts, growing health problems and worsening health inequality.

Even as the job cuts have risen above 3,500 nationally, however, the two main campus trade unions, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and Community and Public Service Union (CPSU) have worked to block calls, particularly by the rank-and-file committees at Western Sydney University and

Macquarie University, for unified action against the cuts and the underlying measures of the Labor government.

At UTS, the NTEU has falsely claimed to have produced a win for staff by having the cuts briefly delayed by lodging a dispute at the federal government's Fair Work Commission (FWC), a pro-employer tribunal.

"We haven't stopped the cuts yet, but we have made incredible progress together and had Fair Work acknowledge our right to transparent, genuine consultation," the NTEU reported on its UTS campaign website.

In reality, the FWC only resulted in a two-week "consultation" period, which ended on August 27, to satisfy the cosmetic requirements of an "Initial Consultation" clause in the NTEU's enterprise bargaining agreement with management.

As at Western Sydney and other universities, the "change proposal" and "consultation" clauses in union enterprise agreements provide little or no protection against job destruction. Instead, they allow for the retrenchment of staff "as a last resort."

Supposedly, UTS management will also provide "additional evidence" for the rationale of the cuts and appoint a team of six staff to develop "alternative proposals."

Staff members have a warranted mistrust of management. One UTS worker told the WSWs: "For years, management have told us that the financial basis of the university is strong. Now they are telling us the university is in financial crisis. They were lying earlier, or they are lying now. Either way, they are lying."

The anger at UTS has been intensified by management not identifying the specific jobs to be axed, creating uncertainty and anxiety. Management

also released insulting advice to supposedly reduce stress, such as: “do that task you’ve been dreading, like washing delicates, organising receipts for your taxes, or cleaning a bathroom.” Additional advice included “bake a dessert” and “brush or floss your teeth every day.”

Moreover, just four years ago, during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 500 UTS staff were made redundant as the NTEU volunteered job and salary cuts nationally while strangling opposition throughout the university sector.

Far from making “incredible progress” now at UTS, the NTEU is covering up, and trying to prevent a fight against, the root causes of the cuts and restructuring at UTS and across the country, which lie in the Labor government’s agenda.

The NTEU’s UTS campaign site makes no mention of the Labor government, let alone the measures that the government is taking to radically gut and refashion the universities.

There was the same silence on Labor’s role at the March UTS rally by all the speakers, including Paddy Gibson, a member of the pseudo-left Solidarity group and the NTEU branch committee, and Yasmin Johnson, from the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative student club.

What they all are trying to hide is that the retrenchments at UTS and elsewhere are, first of all, a direct consequence of Labor’s reactionary cuts to enrolments of overseas students, whose fees have been relied upon by universities to overcome the shortfall in funding over decades, carried out by Labor, Liberal-National, and Greens-backed Labor governments.

By cutting international enrolments, the Labor government is forcing universities to restructure to align with “national priorities” as set out in the Universities Accord in 2024. That report insisted that teaching and research must focus on serving the requirements of the corporate elite and the development of a war economy, including meeting the needs of the AUKUS military pact and military-related industries in preparation for a US-led war against China.

From 2026, each university’s funding will be tied to a “mission-based compact” with the government’s new Australian Tertiary Education Commission to lay down how the university will contribute to Labor’s “national priorities.”

Universities Australia, the employers’ group,

reported last year that funding for universities had fallen in real terms by \$2 billion since 2020. Labor is intensifying this financial pressure on universities. It is continuing the previous Liberal-National government’s “Job-ready Graduates” scheme that has hiked the cost of three-year humanities degrees to more than \$50,000, while cutting the funding to universities for delivering them.

At UTS, management’s stated intention is to cut costs by \$100 million per year. Its cost-cutting program is called the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI), which was developed by corporate consultants KPMG at a cost of \$5 million. But that is entirely in line with Labor’s program.

As at UTS, opposition exists throughout the universities to the job destruction, course closures, pro-corporate restructuring and suppression of dissent, including over the Gaza genocide. But the NTEU and CPSU leaders have opposed any unified action by university staff and students, keeping them straitjacketed by the anti-strike enterprise bargaining laws.

That is why we are calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees (RFCs) at every university. University staff, along with students, need to form their own organisations of struggle to develop and fight for demands based on the educational and financial needs of students and staff, not the dictates of the Labor government, the financial markets and the war machine.

To discuss these issues and how to form RFCs, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network:

**Contact the CFPE:**

Email: [cfpe.aus@gmail.com](mailto:cfpe.aus@gmail.com)

Facebook: [facebook.com/commforpubliceducation](https://facebook.com/commforpubliceducation)

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

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