

# Adelaide University: Labor government's pro-business Universities Accord in action

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The 2026 academic year at the newly-created Adelaide University, a merger between the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia, has begun amid chaos and course cuts.

Students and staff have taken to social media to express their frustrations and concerns. The dominant mood is distrust of managerial promises, of opaque processes and of the official channels for redress. Many students fear the merger will lengthen degree pathways, add extra compulsory micro-credentials or bridging units, and therefore increase their fee debts.

There is confusion over timetabling, compressed or shifted teaching blocks, and last-minute changes that disrupt planning, assessment and part-time work. There is also widespread anxiety that humanities, social sciences and smaller specialised courses will be cut or marginalised in favour of vocational STEM and industry-aligned programs.

Academic and professional staff describe workloads as dramatically increased, with fears of forced redundancies, higher casualisation and pressure to absorb extra teaching without commensurate staffing or pay. Many staff members challenge management claims that the merger will improve outcomes, arguing instead that it primarily serves cost-cutting and business-industry alignment.

One staff member commenting on Reddit said: "Everyone is extremely stressed, tired, and overworked. I've seen a coworker end up crying due to work related issues. In my area alone, 2 people have already quit this year, and another 3 are looking for new jobs." Another said: "People are resigning daily, morale is at an all-time low, and many staff are experiencing significant burnout, stress, and emotional exhaustion."

Under the merger arrangements, the management committed to "no compulsory redundancies or retrenchments as a consequence of creating the new institution" until mid-2027. Even this limited commitment is not worth the paper it was written on. The commitment was made before the Albanese Labor government placed increased financial pressure on universities through its cuts

to international student enrolments, which has intensified the destruction of thousands of jobs throughout Australia's public universities over the past 18 months.

The "guarantee" only applies to permanent or continuing appointments. One person commented on social media: "Don't believe the stories saying there are no job cuts. I know several people in one of the merger universities who are not having their fixed term or casual contracts being renewed due to the merger." With an average of more than 14 percent of staff in the higher education sector on fixed-term contracts, the potential impact on staff members is huge.

Casual academic staff have also taken to social media, complaining that they had not yet received contracts but were already working. One wrote: "I have worked more than 30hrs without a contract so far and the best the university can offer is to send a generic email saying it won't be processed for another 2 to 3 weeks! So, no pay until then. Also, the students can access the course page, but me as a casual academic can't access it... It's absurd!"

While university managements frame mergers as efficiency drives, the Adelaide merger is being used to cut courses, expand vocational micro-credentials and steer resources toward industry, particularly areas linked to the military and "national security."

The two universities had over 5,000 courses last academic year. In 2026, there will be less than 3,000. Specialist courses such as the Bachelor of International Development have been discontinued, with students moved into a more generic Bachelor of Arts degree.

Students have reported that not all their previous studies have been credited toward their new degrees, which means they will have to take additional units and time to complete their degrees. One mother wrote on Reddit: "My son's course no longer exists. Instead of phasing it out, it's just gone. There is no alternative offered. He's more than half-way through and he's had a headache in trying to enrol in anything to continue."

The merger of the two universities, a project championed

by South Australian state Labor Premier Peter Malinauskas, fits squarely inside the federal Albanese Labor government's Universities Accord, a blueprint to subordinate higher education to corporate profit, workforce pipelines and the military-industrial complex.

The university is replacing lectures with "asynchronous digital activities" and introducing trimesters that compress teaching into shorter blocks. Reports indicate that the move to trimesters was opposed by 83 percent of staff, no doubt due to the intensifying workloads and conditions that have led to course cuts and job losses at other universities.

These changes dovetail with a move toward generic core subjects, "stackable" modular degrees and micro-credentials designed to minimise contact hours and recycle content. Academics report being pressured to design course content that can be chopped into micro-credentials.

The merged institution is pursuing deeper industry and military ties. The university's research strategy aims to "build a national defence industry research centre, featuring world-class facilities to co-locate Adelaide University, industry and government in a secure space to develop innovation-led learning and create sovereign capability and the workforce of the future."

One example is a new "whole-of-university strategic partnership" agreement with Saab, a global aerospace and armaments conglomerate. According to the media announcement, it will focus on "future capabilities including distributed command and control, autonomous systems and hypersonics," and feature student "internships" and "work-integrated learning."

The partnership will "utilise the Sovereign Combat Systems Collaboration Centre at Mawson Lakes which was established in partnership with the Australian Government to develop and integrate sovereign capabilities at speed."

Such partnerships with weapons manufacturers demonstrate the higher education sector's growing alignment with the military-industrial complex.

These outcomes follow the policy architecture of the Universities Accord, which ties funding to "mission-based compacts" that compel universities to deliver government-designated priorities—chiefly vocational, STEM and defence projects.

Former Labor leader Bill Shorten and other pro-business figures have openly called for a "re-imagining" of universities to supply the skills demanded by the AUKUS military pact, which is directed against China, and the development of a war economy.

On social media, a number of university staff have expressed low confidence that union leaderships can or will prevent job losses and restructures. They are right to do so. Both the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) have repeatedly assisted managements to implement restructures and job cuts via "voluntary redundancies."

For years, the union bureaucracies have suppressed university workers' hostility to the restructuring of universities, limiting action to individual campuses and blocking calls for a unified struggle against the corporatisation and militarisation of education.

The unions are complicit in Labor's agenda because they agree with it. In its submission to the Universities Accord panel, the NTEU called for a higher education sector that "provides the graduates with the necessary skill sets for future productivity."

The assault on conditions at the merged Adelaide University is part of a global offensive. Governments everywhere are channelling vast sums into rearmament and demanding that universities produce labour and research for war economies.

In order to fight this agenda, university workers and students need to form rank-and-file committees (RFCs), independent of the unions, to link up with workers in Australia and worldwide through the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. This is part of a broader necessary struggle against capitalism itself and its program of ever-greater corporate wealth and a turn to war.

For discussion and assistance in forming RFCs, educators and students should contact the Committee for Public Education, the educators' rank-and-file network.

**Contact the CFPE:**

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