

# Australia: Union trying to rush through sellout deal at Western Sydney University

A WSU Rank-and-File Committee member  
1 July 2026

On Monday, after five months of closed-door discussions with management, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) finally released to its members at Western Sydney University (WSU) copies of its proposed 2026–2030 enterprise agreements (EAs) for academic and professional staff.

In typical anti-democratic fashion, the NTEU is now trying to push an endorsement vote through a hastily called members' meeting on Thursday, even though many staff members are currently embroiled in marking or finalising results for the Autumn semester.

In an email to members, NTEU Branch President David Burchell said the EAs had already been “approved” by the NTEU national executive. But rank-and-file members had not even seen the agreements, let alone had the time to study them, or the right to vote on them.

The WSU Rank-and-File Committee will be campaigning for a No vote at Thursday's meeting and, even if the meeting endorses the deal, for a No vote by all WSU staff, union and non-union members alike, when management puts the agreements to a ballot.

Now that the documents have been published, it is clear that they inflict another four years of sub-inflationary pay rises—this time averaging just 3.5 percent, way below the soaring cost of living. They also provide no protection from the kind of restructuring that saw nearly 200 jobs cut at WSU last year, along with almost 4,000 at universities nationally.

Ever since the end of January, the NTEU national office had touted a vague “in-principle” agreement at WSU as a pace-setting “win” for its members across the country. This interim deal was struck with management behind closed doors, while many members were away on summer leave.

In March, NTEU General Secretary Damien Cahill sent an email to all NTEU members claiming that enterprise bargaining at several universities, including WSU, had

“already secured strong pay rises, better job security, and new workplace protections.”

This is a warning that the NTEU will seek to impose a WSU-style blueprint, if it is endorsed, at universities across Australia.

According to Burchell's email: “We believe the Agreements potentially provide important improvements to members' rights and conditions, especially in conversion, organisational change, casual rights, academic workloads and pay.”

This is false. First, on pay, the proposed agreements deepen real wage cuts. The increases in the last EA imposed by the NTEU at WSU, covering 2022 to 2025, averaged less than 3 percent a year, while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) peaked at 7.8 percent in December 2022 and remained above 3 percent throughout the agreement's life.

More broadly, workers' wages throughout society as a whole have fallen in real terms for a decade, including under the Albanese Labor government, even as measured by the CPI, which does not count skyrocketing house prices, mortgage payments and rents.

Far from protection against further restructuring, the proposed WSU agreements, which the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has also signed up to, provide for a closer partnership and collaboration between the unions and management in “Managing Change,” via a joint “Implementation Committee.”

The wording allows for more “fill and spill” operations that force displaced staff members to compete against each other for reduced numbers of jobs.

For example: “If after calling for expressions of interest in voluntary redundancy, there remain more directly affected Ongoing Employees than there are substantially the same positions in the new structure, then placement into those positions will be determined using a Comparative Assessment Process.”

This leaves management able to pick and choose through “a merit-based comparative assessment,” supposedly on the basis of experience, skill, education, qualifications and training.

The “job security” clauses are meaningless. Employees can be subjected to more than one organisational change process that may result in the termination of their employment during the agreement’s lifetime if “any exceptional circumstances” arise, such as “substantial adverse changes in Government funding or major negative economic disruption.”

The proposed EAs are on top of the deal that the NTEU and the CPSU struck with WSU management last August to allow its “Reset” restructuring to proceed, with the loss of some 187 jobs and the displacement of more than 600 professional staff.

This year, as well, the WSU management has already been implementing the “in-principle” EAs, as a fait accompli, with the unions’ assistance, including the imposition of job cuts and more onerous workloads for both academic and professional staff members.

There is widespread anger and concern among WSU staff members over unfilled vacancies and severe understaffing, including in student services, student advising and IT services. Academics have reported to us increased teaching loads.

The Albanese government is driving pro-corporate and pro-military restructuring across the sector. It is cutting international student enrolments and starving the universities of adequate funding, along with public schools, public hospitals, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other social programs, while allocating hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS and other war preparations.

Class sizes have continued to grow due to the Labor government’s refusal to halt the previous Liberal-National Coalition government’s Job Ready Graduates (JRG) scheme, which slashed per-student funding for humanities, social sciences, business and law degrees, and inflicted astronomical fees—up to \$17,000 per year—on students in those courses.

The government’s financial squeeze on the universities, which tightened in its May 12 budget, is directed at further subordinating the universities, both in their teaching and research, to the employment and war preparation requirements of the corporate elite and the military-intelligence apparatus, as outlined in Labor’s 2024 Universities Accord.

The Accord blueprint ties each university’s funding to

“mission compacts” on specified national priorities, featuring war-related ones such as the AUKUS military pact, strategic technologies and critical minerals.

This agenda is being enforced by the NTEU and CPSU. They have imposed one enterprise agreement after another that have cut wages in real terms, driven up workloads and facilitated such restructuring.

That is why educators and students have to build new democratic forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the trade unions—that will develop and fight for demands based on their needs, and those of working people and society as a whole, not the dictates of the corporate ruling class and the war machine.

These demands could include:

- real pay increases to compensate for past losses
- reverse the thousands of job cuts and increased workloads
- stop the pro-corporate and pro-military restructuring
- defend free speech against the victimisation of anti-genocide and anti-war staff
- free first-class education for all students.

To win such demands requires a broader struggle by the working class against capitalism itself and its program of ever-greater oligarchic wealth and turn to war. It means a fight for democratic working-class control to reorganise society along socialist lines in the interests of humanity, not the corporate ruling class.

To discuss these issues or to join and help build rank-and-file committees, contact us via the Committee for Public Education, the educators’ rank-and-file network:

**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)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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