

Australia: Oppose the sellout union agreements at WSU! Build rank-and-file committees!

Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee
13 July 2026

The Western Sydney University (WSU) Rank-and-File Committee of staff and students calls for a No vote by all WSU academic and professional staff on the proposed union-management enterprise agreements in the July 27 to 30 all-staff ballot.

The WSU management is trying to push through new 2026–30 agreements that will facilitate more job destruction, further real pay cuts and increased workloads, on top of last year’s “Reset” restructuring, which cut nearly 200 jobs and displaced about 600 professional staff.

As our detailed reports on the academic and professional staff enterprise agreements (EAs) have revealed, they feature:

Deeper real wage cuts

Another four years of sub-inflationary pay rises—this time averaging just 3.5 percent annually. This is way below the soaring cost of living, fuelled by the ongoing impact of the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran.

Over the past decade, WSU staff already have lost an estimated 6 percent to 8 percent in real pay relative to the Consumer Price Index. When factoring in structural household costs, the loss in purchasing power is closer to 10 percent to 12 percent.

More restructuring and job losses

During the next four years, employees could be subjected to more than one “organisational change” that may result in retrenchment if any potential “exceptional circumstances” arise, such as “substantial adverse changes in Government funding.”

More “fill and spill” operations could force displaced staff members to compete against each other for reduced numbers of jobs via a “Comparative Assessment Process.” This “assessment process” would leave management able to pick and choose.

The management could place professional employees in any “suitable” other positions, even if that means a lower-paid job or transfer to another one of WSU’s far-flung campuses.

Increased workloads

The management could increase professional staff workloads due to “organisational change, the introduction of new workflows and processes, or changes to technical systems and infrastructure.”

Academics could be loaded up by their supervisors with extra teaching, beyond the nominal limit of 40 percent teaching.

Class preparation time would be cut. The only stipulation is that preparation time must be allocated for “non-repeat” lectures and tutorials to equal the corresponding teaching time. But preparation for classes takes at least three or four times that amount.

Worse treatment of casuals

For the thousands of sessional academics that WSU exploits to teach classes, there are no guaranteed casual conversions. There is just a promised overall 25 percent reduction in the reliance on casual academics—which was pledged but not met in the 2022–25 EA.

Artificial intelligence

The unions “acknowledge that the University may utilise artificial intelligence (AI) systems in the course of its operations.” This could see hundreds more jobs eliminated via the same retrenchment processes.

Accelerated misconduct processes

The processes for “unsatisfactory performance” or misconduct charges would give staff members less time to prepare and challenge victimisations.

“Misconduct” could be a breach of any university policy. “Serious misconduct” that could lead to sacking would be conduct that threatens “the reputation, viability, or profitability of the University.”

Despite a nominal clause protecting intellectual freedom to “express unpopular or controversial views,” these provisions could be used against dissenting staff members, including those falsely accused of antisemitism for opposing the Gaza genocide.

Illness or injury also could be used to sack a staff member. The

management could order a medical examination by a doctor it nominates if the employee's ability to perform their duties is "in doubt."

The role of the unions

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) have resorted to anti-democratic methods to ram through membership endorsements of these regressive EAs without giving them the time they need to read and discuss them.

That was on display at a small NTEU online members meeting at WSU on July 2. NTEU representatives bulldozed through a 45 to 18 vote, with 7 abstentions, to endorse the EAs. That was despite many objections that members began to raise about their contents and the fact that they were given barely three days to review the two documents, each more than 120 pages, and virtually no time—less than 10 minutes—to debate them.

This is typical. The same unions struck a deal with WSU management last August to call off all staff action against the disastrous "Reset" operation.

For decades, the NTEU and CPSU have imposed sellout EAs in the universities, cutting wages in real terms and assisting restructuring. This has also left students with larger classes, narrower study options, less educational support and fewer services.

Since the Hawke-Keating Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s, class sizes have mushroomed, with "tutorials" often having up to 70 students. The teacher-student ratio has soared from about 1:12 to as high as 1:70.

The latest proposed EAs at WSU are a spearhead of a planned wave of similar agreements by the unions to replace expired EAs at individual universities across Australia. According to NTEU representatives, WSU is "leading the charge."

These EAs are intended to cement the unions' places as arms of management after blocking all calls for unified action nationally against the restructuring and elimination of some 4,000 jobs throughout the 39 public universities over the past two years.

Politically, the restructuring is being driven by the Albanese government's pro-corporate and militarised reshaping of tertiary education, as outlined in its 2024 Universities Accord report. This blueprint demands the subordination of both teaching and research to the narrow profit requirements of employers and to the government's "national priorities," which include the AUKUS military pact and the mining and supply of strategic war-related critical minerals.

On behalf of the corporate elite, as its May 12 budget showed, the Labor government is maintaining the previous Liberal-National Coalition government's Job-ready Graduates scheme that sets punitive fees for arts and humanities students. Labor is increasingly starving the universities of adequate funding, along with public schools and public hospitals, and gutting the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other social programs, while allocating hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS and other war preparations, and seeking to stifle dissent.

Rank-and-file committees

To fight this offensive, university workers and students need to build genuinely democratic new forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees (RFCs), totally independent of the complicit trade unions.

Just quitting the unions in disgust, as many have done, is not an answer.

Instead, staff and students must actively take matters into their own hands. RFCs need to be formed everywhere.

These committees must be open to all students and staff, including the majority of university workers who are not union members. RFCs will become organising networks, providing and spreading information and analysis.

They will develop and fight for demands based on the needs of students and staff, and those of working people and society as a whole, not the dictates of capitalist governments, the corporate ruling class and the plunge into war.

RFCs can link up with educators and other workers in Australia and worldwide through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Our struggle on campus can and must be connected to the rising working-class resistance internationally and in Australia, as seen in the recent vote by Victorian school educators to reject another sellout deal between the Australian Education Union and the state Labor government.

We call for a No Vote as a first step. We propose a fight for the following initial main demands:

- pay increases of 35 percent to cover inflation and recover past losses
- reverse all the "Reset" job destruction
- maximum class sizes of 20
- halt all increased workloads and cuts to class preparation times
- permanency for all casuals who want it
- stop pro-corporate and pro-military restructuring
- halt the attacks on free speech and victimisation of anti-genocide staff and students
- ensure the right to teach and conduct research free of government censorship
- free first-class education for all students—scrap fees and debts
- billions for education, not war

We recognise that this is part of a broader global struggle against capitalism itself and its program of ever-greater corporate wealth and turn to war and Trump-style dictatorial rule.

To discuss or join our campaign, participate in this online lunchtime meeting:

Oppose the sellout union agreements at WSU! Build rank-and-file committees!

Tuesday July 21, 12:30 to 1:30 PM (AEST)

Register now.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact