

Australia: Western Sydney University seeks to impose block teaching

A WSU Rank-and-File Committee member
21 September 2026

Western Sydney University (WSU) management last week unveiled a plan to introduce modular or block teaching across its campuses by 2029. It is giving staff two months, this October and November—during the height of the busy exam and results period—for supposed consultation on this major restructuring, with a final decision to be made next March.

The suggested “Western Momentum” model means even more intensive workloads for educators and subject coordinators, with all assessment and marking for a subject to be completed in just four weeks. Students would be required to complete four such blocks each semester, instead of four subjects over a 13-week semester, leaving no time for helpful feedback, let alone deeper or reflective learning.

The implications go beyond WSU, one of the largest universities in Australia and with a largely working-class student population. It signals a further offensive against jobs, conditions and the quality of education at public universities in Australia, on top of the destruction of some 4,000 jobs over the past two years under the Albanese Labor government.

Modular models were imposed at Victoria University in Melbourne in 2018, Southern Cross University in northern New South Wales in 2021, and partly at Murdoch University in Perth in 2022. A similar regime was then inflicted on staff and students at WSU’s The College, a feeder college, in 2025, with scores of educators’ jobs eliminated in the process.

In each case, block learning was justified as being especially suitable for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or “among non-traditional student cohorts” to use the language of the management’s Western Momentum website—as if working-class students deserve less than others.

On that site, the management claims that all these models have been “successful,” asserting that the evidence shows that modular learning improves subject pass rates by 10 to 15 percent, leading to higher student satisfaction and retention rates.

But peer-reviewed research has shown that block mode teaching, first introduced in some US universities in the 1970s, intensifies educators’ workloads and creates student concerns about the workload and difficulty in covering 12- or 13-weeks’ worth of content in four weeks.

Studies have raised concerns about educators’

fatigue—impacting preparation and delivery—and superficial learning at the expense of deep learning.

According to one study, “challenges included reduction in marked assessments and inadequate time for instructors to prepare new materials and adapt to the new teaching and learning environments.” Other problems “included decrease in time students spent studying outside of class time, students needing to juggle caring responsibilities struggling to complete the tight assessment requirements and inadequate time for students to revise papers or for instructors to provide feedback on assessment.”

At WSU’s The College, educators have reported onerous conditions for staff and students since January 2025. For a start, subject coordinators are required to teach nine hours of face-to-face classes per week and mark assessments continuously. The four-week block mode means that students have an assessment every week.

Assessments due on Friday of week 1 by 11.59 p.m., for instance, have to be marked by the next Wednesday evening. For full-time teachers who have more than 60 or 70 students, this is an impossible task.

This is the cramming model that the WSU management proposes: “Students may complete up to four modules, one after the other, in a semester (half a year). Semesters would be slightly longer for students, to accommodate 4 modules (16 weeks), possibly with a break in the middle, or between each module.”

The WSU Rank-and-File Committee was initially established in mid-2024 to oppose this cost-cutting plan at the WSU College. We correctly warned that this regressive model would be soon proposed for the entire university unless there was a unified struggle by staff and students throughout WSU and the broader working class against it.

But the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) opposed and blocked any organised struggle against the restructure, even removing members of the WSU Rank-and-File Committee from NTEU members’ meetings to stop them calling for unified action.

Then in August 2025, the NTEU and the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), struck a deal with the WSU management to call off a threatened

dispute and allow its pro-business “Reset” restructuring of the entire university to proceed, with the loss of some 187 jobs and the displacement of more than 600 professional staff.

This year, the NTEU and CPSU pushed through new enterprise agreements (EA) for both academic and professional staff, despite very low voting turnouts. The rank-and-file committee warned again that the EA deals would pave the way for further restructuring.

As well as inflicting another four years of sub-inflationary pay rises and more intensive workloads, the EAs provide for a closer partnership and collaboration between the unions and the management in “Managing Change.”

The wording in both agreements allows for more “fill and spill” operations that force displaced staff members to compete against each other for reduced numbers of jobs. And “employees can be subjected to more than one organisational change process that may result in the termination of their employment during the next four years if “any exceptional circumstances” arise, such as “substantial adverse changes in Government funding or major negative economic disruption.”

This attack on university workers and students is occurring in a definite context. The Albanese government is 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 military expansions.

On its Western Momentum site, the management declares that the switch to block teaching is in line with the Statement of Strategic Priorities issued by the Labor government’s new Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC). As the WSU site states, all universities must “align institutional strategy and growth to these priorities through institution-specific Mission Based Compacts.”

These priorities, to which university funding is being tied, feature “national priorities.” These are focussed on corporate- and government-driven “labour market demand” in listed industries, such as war-related “sovereign capability and food security, including advanced manufacturing and critical minerals.”

The financial pressure on Australia’s 39 public universities is forcing them all to scramble against each other for enrolments, including by offering students vocational “micro” courses, as well as accelerated block teaching.

These pressures are being intensified by the government cutting enrolments by international students, on whose exorbitant fees the universities have depended for over a quarter of their revenues, as part of Labor’s assault on immigrants.

This is being driven by Labor’s 2024 Universities Accord, which is reshaping tertiary education to satisfy the employment and research needs of big business and the preparations for war, such as the AUKUS military pact against China, while the government has already been backing the criminal US-Israeli

war on Iran, the escalating US-NATO war on Russia and the US-armed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The NTEU and CPSU are suppressing opposition to Labor’s entire agenda, which also includes banning any research or teaching cooperation with institutions in countries deemed to be threats to Australian national security or foreign relations, particularly China, Russia and Iran.

In fact, the unions are seeking a new round of enterprise agreements, like that at WSU, which will facilitate further restructuring.

For decades, the NTEU and CPSU have imposed one enterprise agreement after another in the universities, cutting wages in real terms, driving up workloads and assisting restructuring. This has not only affected university educators and all staff members, but also the students—left with larger classes, higher fees, narrower study options, less educational support and fewer services.

That is why university workers and students must build new genuine democratic forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the trade unions—to fight for first-class public education based on the needs of working people and society as a whole, not the dictates of capitalist governments, the corporate ruling class and the plunge into war.

To discuss these issues or to help build rank-and-file committees, contact us via the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators’ rank-and-file network initiated by the Socialist Equality Party:

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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