

# Australian university union agrees to job losses at Western Sydney University College

Our correspondents  
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*A meeting of Western Sydney University (WSU) staff and students will be held on Wednesday, June 12 to form a rank-and-file committee to fight the job destruction and restructuring at WSU College. To join the meeting, contact: cfpe.aus@gmail.com*

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has done a deal with Western Sydney University (WSU) management to help destroy scores of jobs at WSU College, the university's wholly-owned feeder college.

This has been done behind the backs of staff and students at WSU College and across the university as a whole. Virtually nobody at WSU even knows about the pro-business restructuring of the college.

The union's WSU branch president David Burchell sent emails this week to NTEU members at WSU College welcoming management's agreement to the union's request for staff members to be offered the chance to apply for a so-called voluntary redundancy.

This request was the central focus of a formal dispute notice issued by the NTEU, which will now result in a yet-to-be-seen modified management "change proposal."

This deal means the union will assist management to get selected people out the door via "expressions of interest" (EOIs) in redundancies. The clear purpose is to prevent a unified struggle, across WSU as a whole, to defeat the restructuring. This is a time-honoured method by which the trade unions strangle opposition to the slashing of jobs and conditions.

Burchell said the union was now "reassured" that its concerns would be addressed in management's final "change proposal," even though "jobs will be lost in the shift to the new structure."

WSU management is demanding the elimination of the equivalent of 17 full-time positions—or more than 10 percent—and a "spill and fill" regime to force staff

members to compete against each other for the remaining posts.

Those targeted by WSU include 15 teachers, around 6 First Year Experience Coordinators, 10 Learning and Teaching Coordinators, 7 managers and 6 technical officers. The heaviest cuts are to arts, literature and humanities.

In effect, the NTEU has signed off on the cuts and restructuring. Burchell wrote: "Following a dispute meeting with [WSU College CEO] Glenn Campbell and WSU HR director Matt Bond yesterday, we are reassured that, so far as we can tell, most if not all of the major procedural concerns raised by the NTEU around the initial change proposal appear to have been addressed in the final change plan."

According to Burchell, "the processes laid out in the final change plan should represent a major improvement on those in the change proposal," even though "jobs will be lost."

Cynically, Burchell claimed that the union would "continue to campaign" to "preserve and secure members' employment."

In reality, there has been no campaign whatsoever! In fact, the union has kept staff and students throughout the university in the dark about the attack at WSU College, which will set a dangerous precedent for use across WSU and the university sector if not defeated.

The truth is that the union opposes any campaign to "preserve employment." It is helping to eliminate jobs. What has been formed is essentially a partnership between the NTEU and management to stifle opposition by pressuring or encouraging staff members to apply for redundancies. The union is insisting that this is the only alternative to colleagues being compelled to compete against each other for the remaining jobs, often on lower pay grades and less

hours of employment.

A number of WSU and WSU College educators met this week and decided to convene a meeting this coming Wednesday June 12 to form a rank-and-file committee, independent of the NTEU, to organise the necessary campaign across WSU and the university sector more broadly against the job destruction and restructuring.

Members of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators' network supported by the Socialist Equality Party, have initiated this move and are calling for staff and students to join it across all WSU campuses. WSU College staff cannot be left to fight this attack alone. A stand must be taken for the defence of all jobs and conditions.

The NTEU is fully committed to facilitating the pro-business restructuring demanded by WSU management. The WSU NTEU branch's earlier written response to management's initial "change proposal" falsely claimed that its members support moves "to position the College better in the industry." That document called for an "EOI in redundancy process" under the NTEU's 2022 WSU College enterprise agreement with management.

In the 2022 agreement, which the NTEU rammed through small members' meetings, the NTEU agreed to assist the College "to remain competitive in the market," which meant "it may need to change its structure, operations, and priorities to meet business requirements."

Along with a redundancy process, all the other "concerns" mentioned in Burchell's email this week, such as "the availability of redeployment" and retention of staff "through the teachout of the old diplomas," are also about assisting management to implement its job-cutting.

There can and must be a unified fight across WSU against this management assault.

What is happening at WSU College is a warning of what is to come throughout the university sector. Universities Australia, the peak management body, declared this week that 4,500 jobs could be eliminated as a result of the cuts to overseas student enrolments being demanded by both the Labor government and the Liberal-National Coalition.

Universities Australia chief executive Luke Sheehy said universities are forecasting a collective shortfall of

at least half a billion dollars this year due to the measures being taken against overseas students, which would "inevitably" lead to cuts to campus infrastructure, research and jobs.

The move against overseas students is part of a wider turn by the corporate and political establishment to blame migrants and "foreigners" for the deepening cost-of-living, housing and social crisis hitting the working class in Australia, as it is internationally.

It is also in line with the Albanese Labor government's agenda of continuing to starve the public universities of funding—which has driven them to rely heavily on full fee-paying overseas students—and demanding further pro-business restructuring.

WSU College enrolments have dropped, essentially because its business model has been to offer students preparatory courses that lead straight into the second year of university degrees. That "market" has been undercut by all the country's chronically-underfunded public universities scrambling for enrolments, including by offering students vocational "micro" courses and alternative pathways into degree programs.

This financial squeeze is being intensified by the Labor government's Universities Accord. It demands the wholesale reshaping of tertiary education to satisfy the specific employment and research demands of big business and the preparations for war, such as the AUKUS military pact against China.

To fight this union-backed agenda and organise a university-wide and broader campaign to defeat the restructuring and job cuts, WSU staff and students—whether union members or not—need to form a rank-and-file committee, completely independent of the NTEU. If you agree, contact the CFPE to join this Wednesday's meeting to discuss forming a WSU Rank-and-File Committee:

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

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

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