

Management's offer takes key conditions backwards – we need to escalate to win!

Statement from Branch Committee members Alma Torlakovic, Lucy Nicolls, Jennifer Huch-Hoogvliet, Jeremy Heathcote; and NTEU Fightback Sydney Uni

USyd NTEU members are being told we're close to a settlement. But the truth is, **both the current offer from management and many positions endorsed by the bargaining team represent a massive weakening of key conditions.**

We should refuse to settle for what's on offer. We should continue with the planned strikes in week 10. And we should urgently discuss how to escalate our industrial action to win. Despite a recent billion-dollar surplus for management, we're facing an unprecedented crisis of overwork and job insecurity. Unprecedented action is required to defeat management's attacks and begin to tackle this crisis. With the pay and conditions at Sydney University setting the standard across the entire sector, any concession here is a concession for all Australian universities

The proposed package represents a historic attack on our conditions

- **Accepting management's pay offer** would mean a HEO 5 (tier 5) worker **falling \$100 per week behind inflation** by July 2024, based on Reserve Bank inflation estimates. Over the life of the agreement, management's offer would leave this worker \$20,000 behind inflation.

- **Priority internal advertising would be scrapped for professional staff** at HEO 8 and HEO 9 – around a third of all professional staff positions. This endangers career paths and lets management drive "culture change" by hiring head-kicker corporate managers into these positions.

- **40:40:20 positions still under threat.** Management wants 650 "Education Focused Roles" – up from the 120 EFR cap in our previous agreement (expired July 2021). It's shocking that the union bargaining team want to accept around 520 of these positions (20% of all non-casual teaching roles FTE). EFR roles are notorious for chronic overwork and can be used to replace existing 40:40:20 positions. As an NTEU fact sheet states: *Nothing in the Enterprise Agreement would prevent management from determining that whole disciplines or sub-disciplines should be strategically 'teaching-focused,' and initiating a change management proposal to spill all*

existing 40:40:20 positions and fill them with EFRs.

- **"PhD Fellow" positions.** There have been no clauses released – even to the NTEU Branch Committee – about wages and conditions for these workers. What has been released suggests they will be much like the "grad student" workers who do so much of the low-paid teaching work at US universities. Without a cap on these roles, many existing casuals (and even 40:40:20 staff) risk losing work to these lower-paid positions.

- **Redundancy payouts cut** – for every four weeks on "extended redeployment" all academic staff, and professional staff at HEO 8 or above, will lose one week of redundancy pay.

"New enforceable rights"?

We're being told there are substantial gains in the package. But the closer you look, the more illusory many of these "gains" become.

First Nations staff

- Population parity (i.e, that more than 3.8% of staff be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) was a key demand. There is zero commitment to this target from management, just more unenforceable smoke and mirrors.

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Workload

- **For professional staff**, the most concrete claims – like having all vacant positions advertised within four weeks – have been rejected. Instead, we're urged to accept a workload committee of three people (including only one union rep) to investigate overwork. It's misleading to talk about "new enforceable rights" in this area.

- **For casual academics** there's no improvement to unreasonable rolled-up rates for lectures and tutorials: impossibly small time allocations for preparation and other associated work will continue.

- **For academic staff**, workload committees remain. While these were "won" five years ago, there is not a single example of these winning meaningful relief on workload.

Casuals

- **20% reduction?** Management have only committed to "reasonable endeavours" to reduce the proportion of casual employment by 20%, according to the most recent info provided to the Branch Committee. This is not a legally enforceable commitment.

- **Minimum shift engagement:** was under threat; final status unknown

- **Sick pay:** Management have promised a policy of sick pay for casuals within a year (i.e., this will not be written into the legally enforceable EA). The wording of this commitment hasn't been released, so it's impossible to judge how enforceable this is.

- **Payment for "all hours worked"**. The draft clause puts a new requirement on workers to alert management in advance if they are unable to do the required work within the existing hours allocated. Of course, management can then tell casuals not to do this work irrespective of the impact on students' education.

Casuals will be left with the same dilemma: do the job they want to do (and which students deserve) on unpaid overtime, or do the rushed job management will pay for. This clause risks being largely meaningless unless there are extra hours given for the work required

(including readings, attending lectures, and preparation).

Overall

There are gains on leave entitlements including parental leave, emergency services, and gender reassignment. Some changes will slightly rein in petty tyrants in middle management.

But none of our key conditions, including internal advertising and caps to EFRs, should be traded for these minor improvements. And the detail on many substantial items is weak or entirely missing.

The alternative: escalate to win

The biggest industrial dispute in the US last year was an all-out five week strike by 48,000 staff at the University of California. They won a 50% pay increase for the lowest paid workers, to be phased in by late 2024.

It's time we started talking about similar action. Workers have always had to create a crisis for our employers if we want to win. In the past, workers at USyd have been able to win the best conditions in the country through a series of one-day strikes. However, it's clear we're now in a new environment. We need to dramatically escalate if we want to maintain our conditions, pass them onto those who come after us, and set the standard for the whole sector.

What's in the agreement?

Good question! Despite our numerous attempts to have the clauses of the agreement released to all members, so far the bargaining team has refused to do so.

We've put together a detailed summary of all the key proposed changes to the agreement and what they mean for staff. Scan the QR code to learn more.



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