

Student Centre staff members' meeting elects representatives

The Student Centre is an example for how union members can organise at the local level and build a stronger union. We had our first meeting this year in September where we recently elected four representatives to organise union work. We have doubled our members since the beginning of the strike campaign.

The Student Centre has a large and heavily casualised staff, and recently the union has been responding to casuals losing their work for no apparent reason. Management had previously indicated there would be ongoing work for casuals, and this lulled staff into a false sense of security that the contracts would be renewed, as long as they agreed to be available for three days a week and could work on campus. In fact, twenty new casuals were recently trained.

However, earlier this month a number of staff received generic emails informing them they no longer work at the Student Centre whilst they were completing a shift. Their upcoming shifts were suddenly removed from the roster. In at least some cases, there have been no responses to requests for explanation/feedback from management.

This is a kick in the teeth for our new casual employees who have worked hard over the past three to six months, and who have endured sparse work periods of three hours a work or even zero hours in a week during our off-peak periods.



Call out for next issue and contact RAFA

Do you have a report from your workplace area at the University of Sydney? RAFA would love to hear from you. Let us know the challenges you face, the types of conversations you and your colleagues are having, and your ideas to take the struggle forward by writing to: rafausyd@gmail.com, contact us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, or call Jean on 0449 646 593.



Get involved here! Link to resources for joining RAFA and accessing NTEU materials:



Rank and File Action Bulletin #2

Editorial – Attacks on existing conditions, no pay offer, bad decasualisation offer: We need to escalate in 2023!

This strike represents our 5th and 6th days of strike action – which is a truly incredible achievement. It shows how serious USYD staff are about improving our conditions and those of our students, and staring down an intransigent and increasingly hostile management. With this strike, alongside supportive students, we have taken a stand against the use of Zoom teaching to break our strike – which management has consistently promoted. We are hearing growing reports of classes called off and staff joining the union. This increases the power of our action today and creates disruption for management.

And, as we saw in the all-staff email from Provost and Deputy Vice Chancellor Jagose on Monday, our efforts are hitting a nerve! Jagose describes our campaign asking colleagues not to strike-break as “disappointing and unacceptable”! We say management’s attack on internal hiring for professional staff is unacceptable! The attack on 40/40/20 is unacceptable! Their woeful decasualisation offer is unacceptable!

Despite the sector-leading efforts of our branch, there remains a massive amount of distance between a fair agreement and the current offer. If we are to avoid a non-Union ballot or sub-par agreement in the summer holidays, we need to be prepared with a clear strategy for the rest of semester and for probable action in 2023.

Members meeting next week (Thurs October 20)

After the strike we need to come together to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this week’s action and to decide on actions for the rest of the semester. Bring all your colleagues to the members’ meeting online and in Chemistry Lecture 3 at 1pm on Thursday October 20th to debate the immediate next steps of our campaign.

Contents

- Current decasualisation offer: inadequate!
- What are we fighting for?
- Strikes are building our power
- Work area report: the Student Centre
- How to get involved

We are proposing the following time-table of industrial activity:

Stop-work mass face to face meeting and rally Week 13

A 2-hour walk-off to meet together and vote on extending the campaign into 2023 followed by a rally and BBQ.

February 2023 re-ballot to widen bans

The branch has already started discussing running a new Protected Action Ballot (PAB) to widen the actions we can take to include a range of bans – including marking bans and work-to-rule (not working overtime).

Strikes remain the strongest display of unity of the branch. But bans on marking and releasing results, or ‘flat marking’ campaigns (100% for everyone), are a serious escalation with the potential to create serious havoc for the university, and the kind of crisis that can force further wins. We need to be prepared to win that ballot convincingly: having these bans on the table only increases our power.

If we’re serious about winning our demands, we need to be prepared to increase disruption in 2023. This means pursuing curriculum bans (that include not providing course descriptions) wherever possible to make the beginning of semester difficult. We should be prepared to use February 2023 to start calling around the membership to vote for the new bans. This should double as building a strike for early in the semester. This recipe of hitting 2023 with dates for strikes and a new ballot gives the best chance of mounting pressure, and supports the work of NTEU bargaining reps as they meet with management’s overpaid lawyers over summer.

March 2023 strike and NTEU National Week of Action

Last week the NTEU National Council voted to support a National Week of Action across all campuses for March 2023. This puts our campaign in the broader context of the fight against the crisis in higher education, for increased public funding from the Albanese Government, and for a sector-wide improvement in job security and overwork.

Current decasualisation offer: completely inadequate!

Management are talking up their offer of 300 new jobs as a solution to the crisis of casualisation at USYD. The reality is very different. Under their current proposal, the army of long-term casuals who hold up teaching and research here have no privileged access to the 100 balanced 40/40/20 teaching and research jobs on offer! This is a far cry from the over 800 balanced jobs the union proposed to substantially tackle exploitative casualisation.

After four days of industrial action, and under the threat of two more, management have committed to reduce the casual workforce (excluding graduate students and those employed non-casually elsewhere) by twenty percent, and also to create 300 continuing academic positions (over and above positions already budgeted in 2022 including vacant budgeted positions), over the three year period following the start of the agreement. This will include at least 100 balanced teaching and research positions. The positions will be determined by the University and take into account the needs of the area and strategic alignment. Additionally, there will be a category of an education focused role (essentially replacing the existing EF/Academic Fellow categories). We welcome that, in the fifteenth month of bargaining, management are finally talking about job creation. But their proposals are completely inadequate to the seriousness of the problem. The main issues are as follows.

- **Casuals don't have adequate access to the new roles**, even though they are supposed to be about decasualisation. In fact, casuals have no privileged access to the 100 balanced (40/40/20) roles whatsoever! Management would also remove the existing agreement's Academic Fellows clause, which provides an entry pathway to balanced roles. And as for the up to 200 Education Focussed Roles (EFRs) being created, just a quarter (up to 50 jobs) are "specifically designated" to current USYD long-term casuals. This is completely unacceptable.

- **Education Focussed Roles need workload protections**. The current offer would see teaching workloads for teaching-focussed academics capped at an unsustainable 70%. A recent Education Department report interviewed 98 academics on 70-80% workloads and recommended that face-to-face teaching itself should be capped at 60%.

- Education Focussed Roles (EFRs) need to be able to shift to a balanced, teaching and research role. This issue remains unresolved.
- The university needs to make up for sackings and VRs anyway. There were 137 academic Voluntary Redundancies during the pandemic, and from 2020-2021 the total academic headcount fell by 229 (including casuals). Even if we had guarantees that these 300 new jobs were truly above projected/required rehires, and even if each of them went to current casual staff, **300 jobs is less than half the number that we originally put to management in order to convert the work currently performed by casual academic teachers**. We absolutely welcome new recruitment, but to properly address casualisation, the details matter a great deal.
- The University is currently required to fill 120 Academic Roles. Subtracting this number from the 300 newly created positions means that the number being offered by management is not as generous as it may appear, especially when combined with the lack of priority for internal applicants for T&R roles.

We also will need a better deal on EFR workload, and a commitment to safeguarding the proportion of 40:40:20 academics in the overall teaching academic workforce. Management want this offer to finalise the decasualisation issue. We won't accept this. In particular, we require strengthened conversion provisions that eliminate the 'future needs' of the area and financial grounds as grounds to reject conversion.



What are we fighting for?

1. More than 800 academic permanent, quality jobs for current academic casuals

We need a serious reversal in the decades-old trend that has seen insecure blow out to 74% of the workforce (mostly casuals). We're demanding hundreds of quality academic roles that are targeted to current casual workers, and a decrease in reliance on casual employment. Management are demanding they be education focussed roles, but we need these new jobs to include balanced (40/40/20) positions, and for casuals to have a genuine opportunity to win the roles.

2. Retain internal hiring and controls on overwork for professional staff

Management are continuing to pursue a massive attack on professional staff job security and career progression, by removing the priority internal advertising of vacancies. Management are serious about removing this right, and we need to campaign. We are also fighting to lengthen the professional staff redeployment period from 12 weeks, which is very low.

3. A pay rise above inflation

Having sacrificed and slogged during the COVID disruptions and lockdowns, we are now going backwards financially every pay packet, with the costs of food, petrol, rent and childcare continuing to skyrocket. For casual staff and those on lower pay brackets, we are currently forced to choose between heating our houses and buying groceries.

Strikes are building our power

Strikes have undoubtedly won us the main concessions we have extracted from management. We've stopped attacks on workload committees, had wins on flexitime, flexible working arrangements, and a workload panel for professional staff, and are midway negotiating a sick leave clause for casual staff!

We've seen big numbers of staff joining the NTEU, reaching our highest ever membership, and new members getting involved in the strikes, local area meetings, and leafleting. See reports on the growth of membership among Student Centre staff (next page). The strong showing for the militant left

Inflation is currently 6.1% and Treasury forecasts it could reach 7.75% later in the year. This year it was revealed USYD has a staggering one billion dollar surplus, and the Vice Chancellor Mark Scott is on a one million dollar salary. We need a pay rise that accounts for the work we do and goes above inflation.

4. An enforceable First Nations employment target of parity with population

We are fighting for USYD to employ First Nations staff at representative population levels. We've won 7 days of cultural leave and some promises of increases, but management are still resisting the idea of targets.

5. Improved casual rights

We need to see serious improvements for current casuals. This means a real protection against wage theft and the abolition of piece rates. It means winning paid sick leave for casuals (so far management have only said they are "seriously considering" the idea). And it means winning equal 17% superannuation for casual staff.

6. And of course we need to stop management's attack on the 40/40/20 workloads

Academic staff should not be coercively assigned to other allocations.

in the NTEU branch elections also reflects the support for the strike campaign.

USYD NTEU Membership 2022

