

Strike now, build momentum, or lose conditions

Jean Parker

USYD management can afford to give us a real pay rise and protect research rights. But maintaining the momentum of escalating strikes remains the only way to secure these wins.

Vote to maintain strikes and pickets on Census day in Week 6 - Friday 31 March - and prepare for 72-hour strikes in Week 10

Management's pay offer is 3.7% p/a or an average **4.6% pay cut in real terms**. If we accept it, HEO4 Admin assistants would take home \$3,376 less than they did in the term of the last EBA and HEO6 Librarians would lose \$4,196 a year in real terms. Mark Scott is sitting on never-before-seen institutional wealth that dwarfs all other Australian universities. A large proportion of the \$1bn surplus that USYD made in the last financial year was a result of increasing the student/staff ratio from 1:16 to 1:21. Yet Scott will not grant a fair pay rise to the staff whose workloads increased to produce it.

Management's 25% Education Focused cap could see a massive increase from 220 EFs we currently have, or around 10% of the ongoing teaching workforce, up to 650 roles! This would **entrench the split between research and teaching**, cement the expansion of highly exploitative second-class academic roles with unsustainable workloads, and intensify the race to the bottom for all academic staff.

The strength of our strikes has extracted important wins like five days sick pay for casuals and better redeployment rights for professional staff. However, Management's package represents a diminution of our pay, our current protections for academic research, and professional hiring. Their EFR cap would create **permanent structural change to USyd's academic workforce** by creating two classes of academics: the research class and the teaching class.



Escalate or Pause?

Out of the momentum of our Week 3 strike, 600 NTEU members met on 23 March to discuss next steps. All present agreed that the partial settlement offer proposed by Management on 21 March represented an **unacceptable attack on our existing conditions**.

But the vote about whether to enact or defer our planned strike action was tied with 266 votes for and against. The NTEU Branch Committee (BC), which is democratically elected to lead the branch between members' meetings, created a compromise that incorporated the wishes of both sides by voting to uphold the Friday strike and postpone the Wednesday strike to week 7.

We know that a sizeable number of members hope that by suspending strikes we will encourage Management to bargain constructively and produce a reasonable offer quickly. This is mistaken. Management are only interested in negotiations if they're forced to. But they've told the bargaining team they're not in any hurry to finalise an agreement. Behind their handsomely paid fly-in-fly-out Clayton Utz lawyer, they're clearly determined to strip back our hard-won conditions and pay.

Despite all this, our campaign has grown, our membership has increased, and our latest strike was our strongest to date. **We have a clear plan of escalating strike action that can force concessions from management**. We have the strongest branch of the NTEU nationally, and university staff across the country are looking to us to get a win that can reverse the crisis of work intensification, defend wages in the face of inflation and win against precarious work practices. We can do this if we stay on the offensive and continue to build the power of our strikes.

Rank and File Action Bulletin #8

March 29, 2023

Support the majority motion



Fight on for improvements in EFs and fair pay

We're at a key moment in the campaign. After last week's strike, the NTEU is split: do we put a pause on strikes or do we continue to escalate?

Make no mistake - postponing the strikes means agreeing to the key attacks on Education Focused staff:

- A 25% EF cap that could see roles increase from 220 to 650, a massive transformation in the academic workforce
- 70% workloads, with a 2 year 10% "discount"

These are historic changes to the nature of academic work and the university, ones that will be incredibly difficult to claw back in the future. What we agree to today could hang over our heads in the years and decades to come.

Fighting on gives us the chance to win better EF conditions, internal advertising for professional staff, a fair pay rise, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment parity, and job security for our CET colleagues.

Our message is only just getting through on the EF attacks!

- Jagose's all-staff email shows they're worried.
- The email from the University of Sydney Association of Professors shows the support that is out there.
- The shocking email from the DVC who originally introduced EFs shows the cracks that are developing in management's position.

Now is the time to strike! The only way to defeat management is to add to this sense of crisis, and strike action is our key weapon.

Our strikes are working: management never wanted to increase pay, management never wanted to give casual staff sick pay, and they held out for months on pay for all hours worked.

Management's movement on pay was small, giving up just an extra 1.5% over the life of the agreement. Inflation has already brought our pay backwards by 5%, and under the current proposal we will still be behind 2021 real pay in 2026 when the agreement ends, and who knows what inflation will be doing then. And this at a time when the USyd surplus is through the roof. **If we can't get a pay rise now, when can we?**

So **vote yes** to the majority motion!

And **prepare to strike** this Friday and next Wednesday.

We need to build the power of our strike action, and anything you can do to help in the coming days and weeks will make a significant difference:

- Talk to your colleagues about the campaign.
- Bring any colleagues you can to the picket.
- Join morning leafleting.
- Download posters from the rafausyd.com website and put them up in your office.
- Hold a local area meeting (contact the branch organiser and she can help set you up).
- **Get in touch at the link below** and get involved!



Sign Up Here to get the latest issue of the RAFA bulletin delivered to your email.

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.

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Why fight the 25% EF Cap?

Sophie Cotton

Last meeting, one member asked: what's the big difference between a 25% and a 20% EF cap? There is a big difference and it's whether EF growth is coming from casual contracts or from balanced contracts.

Ultimately, there is no need for any Education-Focused (EF) contracts. Balanced staff can already choose to alter their teaching allocation however they like, by choice, including a 60:20:20 allocation! The current arrangement already allows for a real negotiation between staff and managers. Management doesn't need a whole new employment category!

The issue this bargaining round is confronting however, is the **huge increase in casual labour** over the last decades, meaning many staff now get zero paid research time, and sit on insecure contracts.

As part of their casual conversion package, management are demanding that two-thirds of the 330 new jobs are EF, with only a third on balanced jobs. In order to deliver the 20% decasualisation, management are converting some casuals onto EF contracts, and given the

scale, this is an effective doubling of the current EF ratio of 10% to 20%.

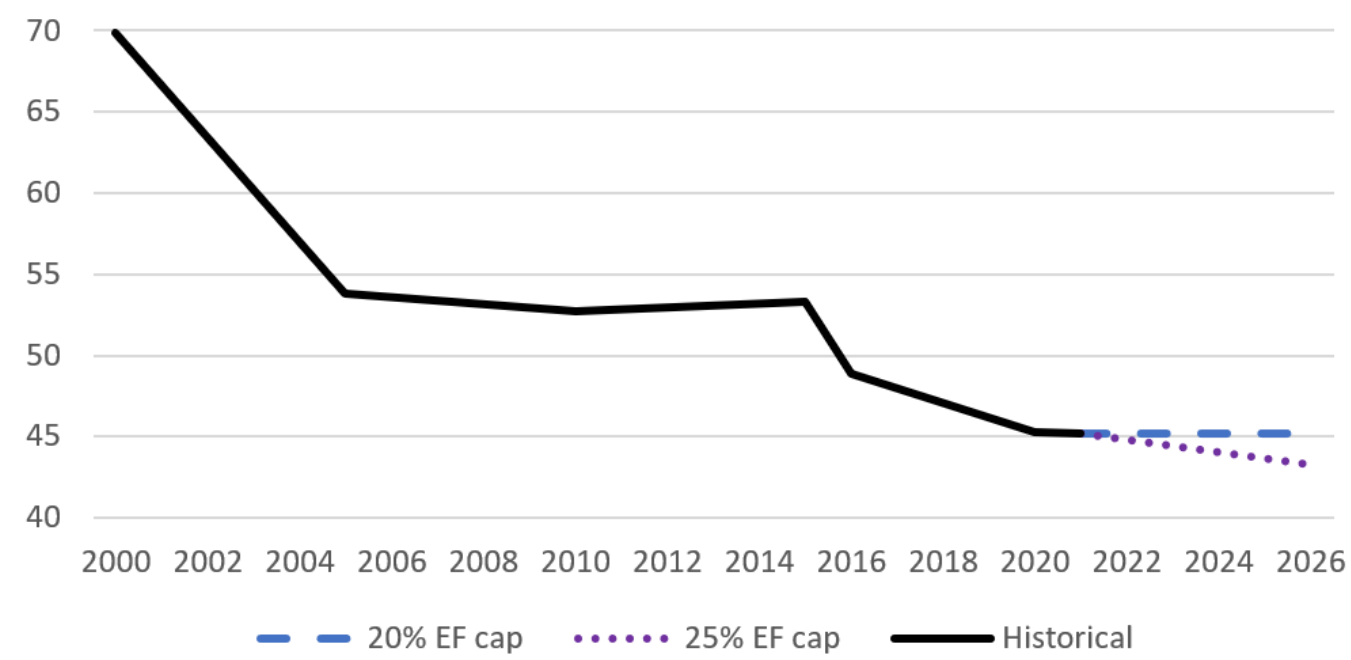
We must be honest: converting casual to EF is a compromise, aimed at addressing casualisation, but not in our desired way! It's not what the union wants, and it's something we need to revisit in the future!

But a 25% cap goes much further than this compromise, giving management an extra 200 EF jobs to play with. If management expands EF staff to 25%, it's statistically inevitable that some of this growth will come at the relative expense of balanced jobs. Balanced jobs have already decreased to 45%. This kind of EF expansion would bring them down further, either by spill-and-fill or just selective recruitment & attrition.

Converting casuals into EF jobs is a compromise. **Converting balanced into EFs is unacceptable.**

The demand for a 20% cap is purely **defensive**: it's about stopping EFs eating into the balanced workforce. It's about defending the research-teaching nexus against management's assault as much as we can! It's about holding out on decades of attacks. And it's a worthy fight for the union.

Balanced Roles (% of academic FTE)



Graph: projected balanced roles as a % of academic FTE under the two scenarios.

CET report: fight permanent job cuts

Luke Alexander

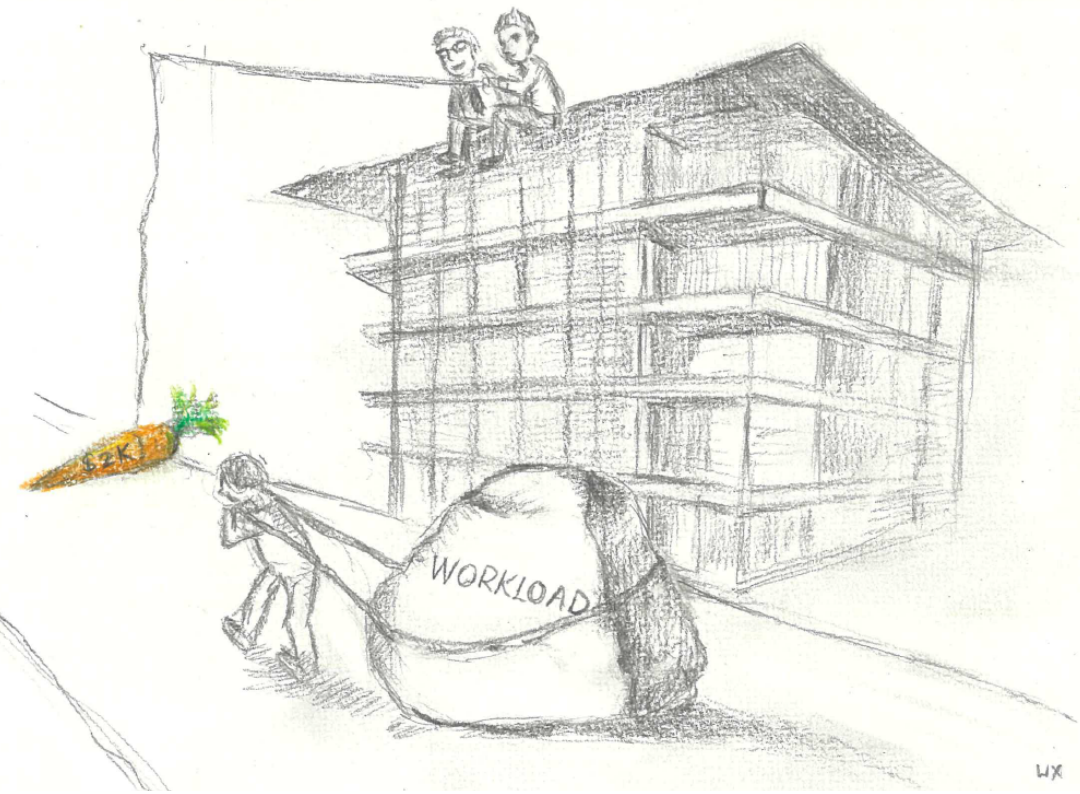
The Centre for English Teaching (CET) at the university has been hit by a number of issues in the past few years, but the looming management threat to cut continuing teacher levels is the biggest one yet. CET workers have already had to weather the downturn in international student numbers over Covid, leaving casual teachers without work for months or years at a time. CET also merged with the newly formed Learning Hub, formed to replace the sacked Learning Centre academic staff with a lower number of staff employed on professional staff contracts.

CET workers are now in their own bargaining with management over Schedule 5 of the EBA, a part of the EBA that specifically applies to English language teachers at the centre. The previous Schedule 5 stipulated that the Centre employ 31 funding contingent continuing teachers, a figure which was rarely met by management over the course of the agreement. The NTEU's position is to maintain 31 continuing teaching positions and to remove the funding contingent nature of the work. While management have agreed to convert funding contingent roles to more permanent roles, they are seeking to reduce the number of continuing teacher positions from 31 to just 9. This is an improvement on management's original offer, which was for zero continuing roles!

The reduction in roles would not be by retrenchment but rather through natural attrition, but nevertheless represents a creeping casualisation of work at the Centre. With the current number of continuing teacher positions at 22, maintaining 31 roles would provide opportunities to long term casual teachers to take continuing roles. Currently casual teachers at the Centre work on zero hours contracts, which means they never know if they have work from one 5 week term to the next.

Maintaining 31 continuing roles would also offer the best learning conditions for international students studying at the Centre, as more teachers would be available to work on course content and assessments at the Centre. No doubt these cuts to student learning conditions are beside the point to managers motivated by KPIs to reduce costs and increase revenue.

Management may offer some semblance of a partial settlement for academic roles in the broader university bargaining, but the fight for a better and fairer university is still very much going on at CET. CET workers are determined to fight these cuts, but require your solidarity to do so. Support the strikes, and support CET workers by signing the petition here.



What's the price of the \$2k bonus?

- 70% workloads for Education Focused Staff.
- A blowout in EF roles.
- An average real pay cut of 4.6% agreement to agreement.
- No guarantee for First Nations parity
- Internal advertising

Illustration by Wendy Xin