



# Vote for 3 days to drive us to victory!

## Workers' rights, cost of living, crisis in higher ed: USyd takes a stand

We have come to a crucial moment in the campaign. Since a historic meeting of over 700 USyd NTEU members voted to strike in Week 6, management have only dug their heels in deeper on the expansion of 650 education-focused roles and a real pay cut of 4% amidst a cost of living crisis. We cannot allow one of the richest universities in Australian history to strip back real pay and remove hard-defended rights for teachers to be researchers, while they still refuse to commit to an Indigenous hiring target by the end of the agreement.

We need to build off our incredible momentum thus far in the campaign and make history by committing to 3 days of strike action in Week 10. This is the escalation necessary to wedge Management on a fair and inclusive agreement that brings the conditions and pay for all of us forward. We are sending an inspiring message of hope to University workers across the sector that **when we organise and fight, we can win**. Vote **YES** on the majority motion to keep up the fight!

**Make no mistake - a vote against the Week 10 strikes means agreeing to the key attacks on education-focused staff**, with 650 new roles enduring 70% teaching workloads with no transition rights to balanced roles for five years. Education-focused roles are being rolled out across the country to increase our productivity as workers, squeeze more students into the classroom and withhold the research-teaching nexus from all but an ever-shrinking class of top-league academics. Our fight over education-focused roles is the most substantial defense of good quality public education across the nation. A victory at USyd will strengthen members everywhere, and set a strong precedent in the fight for research rights and workload controls across the sector.

**USyd can afford to pay its staff a REAL wage rise!** Management's revised offer on pay still represents a real pay cut of over 4 percent, in a period where global inflation is fueling skyrocketing rent and cost of living in Sydney. An institution that accrued an operating surplus of \$1 billion in 2021 off the backs of rising student fees and increased staff productivity can more than afford to give us a pay rise. The continued determination of the NTEU's Sydney Uni branch is sending a message to workers everywhere that the answer to the cost of living gloom is a united fight in the workplace for a rise in pay.

**Now is the time to galvanize the branch for a vote to fight on, and strike for a fair pay rise in our agreement!**

We cannot give in now. Our success so far in the campaign, with nine vibrant strike days, record-breaking mass meeting attendance, and significant gains from Management - is a credit to the defiance and militancy of rank and file NTEU members. But we set out in this campaign to fight without relent for a fair agreement, and we can achieve that by upping the stakes of our industrial campaign until all our goals are met. **That's why we urge members to vote on Tuesday April 18th for three days of strike action in Week 10!**

We need to intensify our efforts as a branch to build the power of our strikes. Anything you can do to help in the coming days and weeks will make a significant difference:

- Talk to your colleagues about the campaign.
- Form a workplace contingent and 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!

**Connect the dots to build our impact:** Our next strike day will be on May 1st, or May Day, where thousands of construction and maritime workers will be striking for real pay rises and workers' rights. We can join this strike action to connect our fight for a real pay rise with other workers fighting for wage justice during the current cost of living crisis. Wednesday 3rd May sees a strike at UNSW and forms part of a Week of Action for higher education. The crisis in higher education and the failure of Federal Governments of all shades to provide adequate and sustained public funding is coming to public prominence. We cannot accept the latest offer from Scott and Jagose, but **by connecting with others fighting for quality education, and by committing to building our forces on campus, we can win against this management**.

**Contents:** *Don't fall for the scare-mongering!* Jean Parker; **Indigenous employment parity is a red line issue** Markela Panegyres; **Education-focused roles: what's at stake?** Nikki Wedgwood.

# Don't fall for the scare-mongering!

*Jean Parker*

## **Myth #1: We will lose out in a non-union ballot**

Those who want to accept the current agreement are creating a bogeyman to scare us into settling. They claim USyd management could win a non-union ballot (NUB). We need to be clear that a united, unrelenting fight from our members makes an NUB highly unlikely. In 2017, management were humiliated when they polled staff about whether to put their proposed agreement to staff in a non-union ballot. We are stronger and more organised than we were in 2017 and management know it. At Newcastle Uni when a NUB was put to staff, 89% of academic staff and 75% of professional staff rejected the offer and forced Newcastle Management back to the table. Even non-union members understand that unions deliver better pay and working conditions. A NUB would force all staff to pick a side, humiliate management, and offer new organising space for the NTEU in the face of such an anti-union move from Management.

## **Myth #2: We will end up in arbitration and go backwards**

The "intractable disputes" clause in the new Industrial Relations laws do not come into effect until June 6th, a month after our week 10 strike. This is untested legislation. It is not at all clear that: a) USyd would want

to go through this process; b) Our dispute, which has seen regular negotiation over two years - would be judged intractable; c) That we could go backwards from arbitration - Jargose's emails spell out what has been agreed, and in reality no industrial court will remove what has been already won. Even if we ended up in Fair Work, further strikes can only improve what Management is prepared to offer us and put us in the best position to come out with improved conditions.

## **Myth #3: Our campaign will lose momentum**

Our campaign is building power, as is clearly demonstrated by our most recent members' meeting not only being the largest meeting in NTEU history, but also voting to commit to further strikes. Picket attendance by members has been stable over nine days of strikes - but now we need to significantly increase picket numbers to send a strong message to Management. Across the country higher education workers are noticing the line in the sand we are drawing, and support from other unionists is growing. Newcastle and Curtin branches are still fighting after defeating non-union ballots and Melbourne Uni and UNSW are just moving into action. Every member has a role to play in recruiting colleagues, building support for, and attending, strikes. If we do this we can successfully defend against Management's attacks and win an agreement that takes our conditions, and the whole sector, forwards.

# **Indigenous employment parity is a red line issue: we must say NO to an agreement that leaves First Nations staff behind**

*Markela Panegyres*

Management's so-called "final" offer fails First Nations staff because it refuses to make an enforceable commitment to population parity in Indigenous employment.

Attaining a parity target was a goal set by the NTEU National Indigenous Caucus through national consultation and is fully supported by our branch. During bargaining, we offered management a realistic mechanism to implement this target, which would count the target as achieved if the new First Nations Joint Consultative Committee was satisfied that sufficient efforts were being made to achieve it. But management is refusing this reasonable compromise.

Last year, we took historic industrial action on May 24 when we went on strike for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff—a first for an Australian university. If we accept this offer we will let down First Nations colleagues to whom we pledged support at that action.

As unionists we must intensify our fight for First Nations justice and cultural safety.

As many students and staff recognise, our current campaign is an intersectional struggle for an inclusive and truly democratic university. There can be no justice in the workplace without First Nations justice in the workplace.

## **Three reasons why First Nations employment parity is a red line issue**

### **1) The University is built on stolen First Nations land, wealth and knowledge: by refusing to commit to parity, management continues the colonial project**

Like other academic institutions around the country USyd was built on a foundation of invasion, genocide and land theft. Gadigal people were pushed off land on which USyd was built just 18 months after the invasion in 1778.

There was no acknowledgement that the land held spiritual, cultural and pedagogical importance to the Gadigal people, who along with the other clans who used the site and surrounding areas, were devastated by the invasion and occupation. Historians John Cleverley and Yuin woman Janet Mooney write in *Taking Our Place* (2010) that by the end of 1791 "most of the [local] community was dead from smallpox, respiratory diseases or scurvy ... and the handful of survivors would lose access

to their land and its resources — clean water, food, medicine and sacred sites, and to the Elders whose duty it was to pass down the clan's learning."

USyd's Oxbridge-style Great Hall and Quadrangle were built with stolen materials. The timber used for the Great Hall's woodwork was stolen from ancient cedar forests on land belonging to the Bundjalung people in Northern NSW, and the stone and marble in the buildings was stolen from quarries on Gadigal and Gundungurra land respectively.

Early founders of the university, William Charles Wentworth and Charles Nicholson were wealthy colonists who had made their fortunes from stolen land. Wentworth was actively involved in the slave trade and openly racist, once describing Aboriginal people as occupying "the lowest place in the gradatory scale of the human species".

## **2) First Nations people have historically been excluded from Australian universities: refusing enforceable targets continues this exclusion.**

Although USyd is located between important First Nations communities at Glebe and Redfern, their interaction with the university has been minimal. Even after the (official) colonial period ended, the institution remained a hostile, unwelcoming place for First Nations people.

In 1988 there were still only six First Nations employees and only six First Nations students were enrolled in a degree.

Only 1734 First Nations students have graduated since 1971, according to USyd records (records on cultural background began in 1971).

## **Education-focused roles: What's at stake?**

*Nikki Wedgwood*

The Provost's justification of the substantial expansion of education-focused roles (EFRs) on the argument that they promote 'educational excellence' has now been thoroughly discredited by The University of Sydney Association of Professors. Exposed is the real motive behind management's substantial expansion of EFRs: a cost-cutting mechanism to amplify their already eye-watering operating surpluses. Even the person responsible for the introduction of EFRs – former DVC (Education), Emeritus Professor Derrick Armstrong – has spoken out against management's exploitation of these roles to develop *'a teaching workforce through which the University can reduce its costs by extractive labour'*.

### **What are Management proposing?**

- Lifting the cap on EFRs to 25% of the non-casual teaching academic workforce – an overwhelming

Compare this to the total number of students who have graduated — 400,000 since the records began.

Currently, USyd has only 0.9% First Nations students enrolled compared to the national average of 1.72 % — still a dismal number. According to USyd's 2021 annual report, (the 2022 report is yet to be published) only 443 students identified as First Nations out of a total student body of 74,862.

### **3) USyd has a dismal record on First Nations employment: this needs to be redressed**

Unacknowledged and unpaid First Nations labour and knowledge were used by the university from its beginning. Nineteenth century ethnographers, anthropologists and archaeologists regularly exploited the labour and knowledge of First Nations guides, interpreters, assistants and scientists whose knowledge was ultimately used to advance their own research standing.

Currently, only 80 staff at the university identify as First Nations, out of approximately 12,318 total staff. This is far below parity with the First Nations population nationally, which is 3.2% according to the 2021 census.

Shamefully, just 15% of First Nations staff have secure contracts. Pathways to promotion are scarce and there are very few opportunities for self-determination or leadership. Only a very small number of First Nations staff are in senior academic positions, management positions or on decision-making committees.

Moreover, many First Nations staff report a lack of cultural safety on campus, which has thus far not been adequately addressed by management.

### **It's time for USyd's management to pay the rent – and at the very least commit to employment targets and cultural safety.**

~650 positions – that will drastically change the shape of entire departments and faculties. This would enable almost every new job over the course of the next Enterprise Agreement to be advertised as an EF role, thus enshrining serious overwork in the EA. EFRs are already being advertised.

- A 70% maximum teaching load for EFRs.
- Revoking the right of future and presently employed EFRs to convert to a balanced 40:40:20 role in the first five years of employment.

### **What are the NTEU's counterclaims?**

- EFRs must be capped at 20% of the non-casual teaching workforce in order to secure the present proposition of balanced teaching and research roles.
- EFRs must not exceed a 60% maximum teaching allocation, as recommended in the 2020 Goodman Report to be enshrined in the Enterprise Agreement.

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# Education-focused roles: What's at stake? (cont. previous page)

Nikki Wedgwood

- EFRs must have improved transition rights to enable the reasonable movement into balanced teaching and research roles for those who wish it.

## Why must we vote against accepting Management's EFR claims?

Accepting Management's EFR claims and the subsequent debilitating workloads and radical restructuring of our workforce is too high a price to pay. Here are just some of the unacceptable impacts of Management's current EFR claims on our colleagues' conditions.

**Declining Education Quality** – Recently, a colleague in an EFR told me they coordinate ten units a year. Another EFR colleague admitted to me that such high teaching loads forced them, however reluctantly, to cut corners in their teaching. The teaching loads required of 70% teaching roles has a marked negative impact on the quality of students' education. As yet another EFR 70:20:10 academic – whose weeks regularly demand 67 hours of work – has described it, the equation of EFRs in their proposed shape with teaching excellence is ludicrous.

**Unsustainable Overwork** - teaching loads in EFRs are almost twice as high as 40:40:20 roles and are impossible to complete in a standard working week. For instance, in marking weeks, during which EFRs must complete in excess of 200 hours of marking over the semester, the amount of work demanded of EFRs is not only impossible but perilous. Given the expectation of a two-week turnaround on marking to ensure students receive timely feedback, this not only short-changes students but demands a clearly unsustainable level of overwork.

**Workforce Restructure** – Research is impossible for EFRs due to their excessive teaching workloads. By increasing the proportion of EFRs to 25% of the non-casual teaching academic workforce, Management creates two classes of academics: research rockstars and teaching packhorses.

Their proposal radically restructures the USyd workforce and permanently severs the research-teaching nexus.

**Teaching-Research Nexus** – the idea that non-experts are best placed to teach upcoming generations of Australians is paradoxical. *The University of Sydney Act (1989)* specifies as one of the university's objectives 'the promotion of ... the interaction of research and teaching' for this very reason.

**No Work-Life Balance:** Such unmanageable workloads make any work-life balance a fantasy. As one single parent of two children told me, she has to do two all-nighters a week during semester just to barely keep on top of her teaching load. Another EFR reported having to work from 4am until 8pm every day. Such perilous work hours lead to burnout and to deteriorating mental and physical health.

**Brain Drain:** burnt out by punitive workloads and denied the opportunity to perform research, many junior academics leave academia altogether, taking with them their talent, their hopes, and their academic training of nine or ten years in higher education. Management's proposal squanders the university's future.

Management's current proposal for EFRs is disastrous and does irrevocable damage to The University of Sydney. It exacerbates and entrenches already unacceptably high levels of overwork and divides the academic workforce into two tiers, severing the teaching-research nexus and stunting the career paths of up-and-coming academics.

As one EFR puts it: *"these roles, at least the way they are currently configured, are just going to take passionate early career academics and run them into the ground. No time to research... but also no time to teach well - an incredibly demoralising proposition for people being hired under a smokescreen of 'teaching excellence'."*



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