



National Tertiary
Education Union

ENDING BAD GOVERNANCE **FOR GOOD**

NATIONAL TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION REPORT – NOV 2024



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“Despite UNE’s former VC leaving because she had been charged with a criminal offence, a farewell party was held for her on campus, at the university’s expense, and attended by senior executive and management.”¹

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/05/university-of-new-england-vice-chancellor-faces-calls-to-step-down-after-assault-charge>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How our public universities are governed is key to how effectively they deliver their core missions of education and research and to making sure they operate as a public good. However, the NTEU has found that Australian university students and staff are suffering under the yoke of poorly governed institutions. The constant merry go round of newly appointed and highly paid Vice Chancellors, Chancellors and senior executives have created inflexible, profit-driven bureaucracies at the expense of high-quality expert led education and research. Opaque senior appointments, prolific wage theft, heavy reliance on a casualised workforce, course and job cuts, and wasteful and inefficient spending have all served to reduce trust in university managements to an all-time low. Yet astoundingly university managers remain largely unaccountable to the communities they serve.

This report, informed by 100s of newly contributed worker stories, uncovers a myriad of governance failures in our public institutions, and is intended to help inform discussion about potential reforms that will help return universities to serving the public good.

To fix these problems the NTEU is calling on the Federal Government to hold a parliamentary inquiry into Institutional governance and workforce planning in our public universities.

THIS REPORT REVEALS THAT:

- » The average Vice Chancellor pay was \$1.049m in 2023, and **the average university now has 6 executives paid more than their respective state premier**, led by Monash University with a whopping 16 executives taking in more than Jacinta Allan.
- » **Universities have a pattern of poor workforce planning** and retrenching indispensable staff: the 11 universities that have proposed at least 2091 job losses in late 2024 previously retrenched almost 4800 staff in 2020 and 2021, only to add back 3600 staff by 2023 before then announcing another round of job losses in 2024.
- » University managements have made decisions against the public interest, like shutting down important courses and centres, with no accountability to the public.
- » University senior executives seem to have a free pass when it comes to egregious conflicts of interest, ones that would not be allowed in the public sector.
- » **Universities spent up to a whopping \$734 million in 2023 on "consulting" and professional advice or services in 2023.**
- » Insecure employment is out of control in higher education. With 68 percent of all persons working in the sector employed using casual or fixed term contracts.
- » Systemic wage theft is the norm: the total amount uncovered now stands at over \$226m in confirmed underpayments and \$168m in pending provisions with 142,000 workers affected across over 30 major institutions.
- » Poor governance (as evidenced in the many examples above) is generating unhealthy workplaces and leading to low workplace morale.
- » Some of these issues have been compounded by inadequate public funding in the aftermath of the 2020 "Job Ready Graduates" cuts to domestic student funding.

2023 VICE CHANCELLOR SALARIES

UNIVERSITY	2023 RENUMERATION MIDPOINT
Canberra*	\$1,785,000
Monash*	\$1,565,000
Melbourne	\$1,447,500
UNSW	\$1,322,500
Flinders	\$1,315,000
QUT	\$1,235,000
UniSA	\$1,235,000
Sydney	\$1,177,500
UQ	\$1,162,500
Utas	\$1,115,000
ANU	\$1,100,000
WSU	\$1,065,000
MQ	\$1,055,000
Adelaide	\$1,052,500
Deakin	\$1,050,000
ACU	\$1,045,000
Swinburne	\$1,045,000
Wollongong	\$1,045,000
Curtin	\$1,035,000
RMIT	\$1,005,000
Newcastle	\$975,000
Griffith	\$974,000
La Trobe	\$965,000
ECU	\$955,000
USC	\$945,000
UTS	\$905,000
UWA	\$904,000
Federation	\$895,000
Murdoch	\$865,000
JCU	\$847,500
SCU	\$847,500
VU	\$845,000
CSU	\$837,500
CQU	\$817,500
USQ	\$697,500
CDU	\$652,500
UNE*	\$575,000
PRIME MINISTER	\$587,000
Average	\$1,049,597

* VC has since changed. All data is from university annual reports and may be the mid-point of a range. It is not clear if the UNE amount is for a full year

THE OVERPAID EXECUTIVE CLASS AND THEIR RECKLESS SPENDING

Australians will be shocked to discover that the average Vice Chancellor earns almost two times more than our Prime Minister, and much more than their respective state premiers.

The latest data shows the average Vice Chancellor's salary in 2023 was \$1.049 million, with University of Canberra's outgoing VC Paddy Nixon taking in a \$1.785 million package from the struggling institution before his sudden departure in circumstances that have not been fully explained by the University of Canberra's management.² In contrast, the Prime Minister earns \$587,000, less than half of the top paid Vice Chancellors.³

- "University of Canberra head gets 71 per cent rise ahead of sudden departure" <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8699551/ex-university-of-canberra-vice-chancellors-18m-pay-questioned/>
- <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/how-anthony-albaneses-new-salary-compares-to-that-of-these-world-leaders/v77lv4iwj>

	UNIVERSITY	EXECUTIVES PAID MORE THAN THE STATE PREMIER	STUDENTS PER EXECUTIVE	STUDENT LOAD (EFTSL)
NSW \$416,440	Southern Cross University	5	2133	10,663
	Western Sydney University	15	2207	33,110
	The University of Newcastle	9	2666	23,996
	Charles Sturt University	7	2745	19,214
	Macquarie University	10	3097	30,966
	University of Technology Sydney	11	3236	35,594
	University of Wollongong	6	4060	24,357
	University of New South Wales	9	5409	48,682
	The University of Sydney	10	5821	58,209
	Deakin University	6	6371	38,226
	The University of New England	1	10183	10,183
VIC \$481,190	The University of Melbourne	15	3606	54,084
	RMIT University	13	4017	52,219
	Monash University	16	4043	64,686
	CQUniversity	3	4427	13,280
	Federation University Australia	2	4433	8,866
	Swinburne University of Technology	5	5823	29,115
	Victoria University	4	6005	24,019
	La Trobe University	4	6365	25,459
QLD \$427,561	University of Southern Queensland	5	2310	11,551
	James Cook University	5	2869	14,343
	Griffith University	9	3539	31,854
	The University of Queensland	12	3559	42,711
	Queensland University of Technology	10	3596	35,961
	University of the Sunshine Coast	3	3803	11,408
WA \$377,485	The University of Notre Dame Australia	7	1189	8,320
	Edith Cowan University	10	1976	19,757
	Flinders University	9	2019	18,174
	Curtin University	14	2507	35,096
	The University of Western Australia	5	4112	20,560
SA \$418,000	Murdoch University	1	15881	15,881
	Flinders University	9	2019	18,174
	University of South Australia	6	3762	22,570
	The University of Adelaide	9	2538	22,845
TAS \$301,397	University of Tasmania	6	2924	17,544
NT \$232,605	Charles Darwin University	12	636	7,635
	The Australian National University	13	1342	17,448
ACT	University of Canberra	3	3848	11,544
	Australian Catholic University	7	3417	23,918
Multi-State \$454,499		306 Total	3961 Average	25,954 Average

Numbers include VC's

For anyone trying to understand university executive salaries they appear as if they have been plucked from thin air by the opaque remuneration committees that set them – there is little relationship between university staff or student numbers, international ranking, financial performance and the respective Vice Chancellor salaries.

This trend has now extended beyond vice chancellors and into a new executive class. With the average Australian university employing at least half a dozen executives on salaries above that of their respective state premier.

The table below shows the salary of each state premier in 2023 and the number of executives each university had above that salary in 2023, along with how many students the institution had and the

number of students per senior executive. As shown, the number of students per senior executive varies wildly, raising questions about the value of money the community receives from the **306 senior executives in the sector earning more than their state premiers.**

University Councils have failed to justify these salaries to the public and, as a result, have undermined the credibility of our institutions. Current university governance systems encourage a cosy relationship between Vice Chancellors, the Councils they help appoint, and the remuneration levels selected by these councils. Public universities are publicly funded and should work for the public good. Corporate cultures and excessive executive largess go against these principles and undermine support for our universities.

It's not only the large pay packets that university execs award themselves that troubles staff, but their reckless largess with university money, which was a recurring theme in stories submitted:

"refurbishment of VC office. The refurbishment was done 3 times in one year with a spend approaching a million dollars."

"The fountains at [our new] engineering building were made of Italian granite which cost into the hundreds of thousands, meanwhile we have mass lay-offs and cuts to research funding. Our mountains are made out of granite here."

"The University spent over \$75,000 on an 'installation' for the fifth Chancellor. This has never happened since the first Chancellor commenced in 1975. The university hired an event management contractor despite having countless staff with event experience and the installation was followed by a VIP luncheon for 80 guests. This came at the same time as staff were advised that they could no longer travel, a hiring freeze was implemented and job cuts were imminent."

"Griffith University recently announced their purchase of the Treasury Casino building for \$67.5 million, *and* a round of redundancies and restructuring with devastating impacts on staff across the University. The University insists that they had to expand into Brisbane CBD and had to do it now, but it seems the only way they could realise that "strategic investment" by getting rid of staff."⁴



NEWLY THREATENED JOB CUTS: THE RESULT OF POOR WORKFORCE PLANNING

Higher education workers are looking down the barrel of redundancies this Christmas, with many more being threatened by university managements for 2025. Student choice is also on the chopping block, with the University of Wollongong looking to "delete or downsize" a whopping 25 disciplines.⁵ This new wave of attempted cutbacks has been a shock to staff and students given that managements' collectively imposed tens of thousands of redundancies and thousands of course cuts on the sector in 2020 and 2021.

These newly threatened job losses reveal a disturbing lack of workforce planning in universities. As shown in the table below, most of the universities announcing new job cuts in 2024 recently undertook forced redundancies in 2020 and 2021, costing tens of millions in redundancy payments, and then re-added more headcount immediately afterwards in 2022 and 2023. This kind of unproductive restructuring and churning of staff is usually undertaken upon the advice of highly paid consultants who need to justify their fees by recommending more restructuring (as will be discussed below). When these new structures

fail, staff are ultimately re-hired, beginning the cycle again. This new wave of cuts won't be waved through by staff and students without resistance.

As one university worker put it:

"Money wasted on redundancies during a previous restructure in 2021 – out of approx. 100 staff they gave us a new structure with 4 less jobs but instead of waiting until 4 people resigned, they displaced approx. one third of staff and 11 people took redundancies. Some managers spent most of the next year hiring."

5 Future Campus, 6 November 2024, "UoW to make history history? – Future Campus"

"In the library, a relatively new casual was given a full-time level 5 permanent contract one week before their mother was made redundant. Their mother was [a senior executive in charge of] the library portfolio. 2 other long-term casuals and 3 long-term full-time level 4s were made redundant in the following week."

– From a worker from a university currently facing mass redundancies

THE HIRING AND FIRING YO-YO, BY THE NUMBERS

UNIVERSITY	REDUNDANCIES 2020-21	JOBS ADDED BETWEEN 21-23	NEWLY ANNOUNCED JOB LOSSES 2024
ANU	465	519	638*
Canberra	-	90	200
UTS	360	237	Up to 500*
Macquarie	450	155	Up to 97 FTE
Wollongong	200	101	200-300*
Sydney	375	797	Hiring restrictions
Newcastle	650	-12	Hiring restrictions
La Trobe	699	160	28-55
Swinburne	366	78	Voluntary early retirement program
Federation	92	116	163
Unimelb	683	1014	Hiring restrictions
JCU	63	-40	50-75
UniSQ	40	16	72 +
Griffith	317	392	49
UTAS	-	6	Numbers pending
TOTAL	4760	3629	2091

*NTEU Estimates.

CAPS CLAIMS JUST DON'T STACK UP

Several of the universities above, like the University of Wollongong, are trying to pass the buck for job cuts to recent government policy announcements, explicitly naming international student caps and the Universities Accord as justification for the cuts.⁶ Yet under the proposed caps the University of Wollongong will be receiving a large *increase* in student numbers in 2025 versus 2024. On top of this, **no major policy changes have come into effect under the Universities Accord that have negatively impacted university finances.** In fact, the government has formally proposed increased regional and low SES loadings, and the Accord report itself has proposed increased funding per student.

6 UoW Transformation FAQs, 23 October, 2024

"Management are paid an undisclosed bonus for spending less than the budgeted amount to teach the students we have. The result? Over allocation of students to lecturers, with the budget actually spent to teach students coming in at only 75% of budgeted amount. As it is, less than 10% of the fees paid by students goes towards the cost of teaching them."

WORKING AGAINST THE PUBLIC INTEREST

University staff constantly report to the NTEU the opaque, incoherent and inconsistent decision making coming out of university managements who have not acted in the interests of the community. This has been the result of continuing corporatisation of the sector and the centralisation of power in a handful of highly paid executives. For example, Southern Cross University recently announced the axing of all creative arts programs despite community opposition, and several workers told stories about being impacted by ACU's choice of speaker at a recent graduation ceremony, as reported by the ABC.⁷

Overall, class sizes are increasing, while student choice is often diminishing.⁸

Research has shown that where there is a higher proportion of staff representatives on a board organisations become more democratic and collegial in their decision making.⁹ Democratic institutions will be more likely to work in the public interest.

⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/melbourne-drive/acu-staff-member-devastated-by-graduation-speech/104503590>

⁸ <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/declining-staff-to-student-ratios-reveal-sorry-state-of-higher-ed>

⁹ Clark, B. (2023). Workplace democracy in action? Assessing employee board representation in Australian government agencies. *Australia Journal of Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12607>

Countless worker stories point to recent decisions made by university managements that have worked against the public interest:

"Our head of school pressured academics to increase student numbers in practical classes to reduce costs. Head discipline fails to intervene to support academics. The increase exceeds the health and safety recommendations signed by the same HOS. Subject convenor returns from leave and immediately readjusts the numbers as per the HS recommendation. This short term move by the HOS put students, staff and the general public at unnecessary risk as the subject involved vehicles operating on the public highway and practical classes taking place in the community."

"At a recent academic board meeting at [redacted] University there was a vote on whether to accept a proposal to change course architecture which has been highly contested. The Vice Chancellor attended the meeting and exerted pressure on undecided voters to accept the proposal. The Student Representative on the Board asked it to be minuted that there was no consultation with students on the proposal. The Vice Chancellor's response was to appeal to the claim that if there were 40 students here who were asked about the proposal he believed that they would all be in favour. So in summary [redacted]'s Vice Chancellor's evidence base for the change was the responses of 40 students who existed in his own imagination."

"I worked for a college when the TEQSA regulator came visiting for re-registration had staff stay all night fabricating student records. Because they'd never kept adequate records of grades etc. Thus, staff had to invent assessment grades to match the final awarded grade for each assessment; for every unit for every student, calculating the correct percentage weighting to match the final grade that was recorded. Everything was finished only a couple of hours before the TEQSA re-registration inspectors arrived."

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ARE THE NORM WHEN IT COMES TO TOP UNI JOBS

The corporatised culture of universities has normalised the common practice of highly paid university Vice Chancellors taking on large portfolios of external paid appointments. Often to a degree that would not be allowed for ordinary staff. On top of the issue of value for money these external interests raise questions about genuine or perceived conflicts of interest taking place. As it presently stands there is no university specific regulation regarding conflicts of interest and paid external appointments of senior executives.

This section will highlight a small number of examples from NSW noting, that the NTEU is also currently reviewing reported conflicts of interest by institutional managements in other states and territories.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

As was mentioned earlier in this report, John Dewar, interim Vice-Chancellor at the University of Wollongong (UoW), is currently attempting to impose mass job cuts on the UoW community. At the same time staff are being told they can no longer be afforded, UoW spent over \$14 million on consulting and professional fees, up from \$9.3m in 2022.¹⁰ John Dewar is also currently a partner at advisory firm KordaMentha. KordaMentha has been hired to conduct two independent reviews of UoW's structure, an overall operations review and a review of the university's people and culture.¹¹ As Vice-Chancellor, Dewar is the executive sponsor of these reviews and is tasked with overseeing their completion. NTEU notes that while at UoW, Dewar is on unpaid leave from KM.

Regardless, the role of partner suggests a high-level role in the company. More transparency is needed to properly understand his true stake in the firm and material interest in the contracts awarded.

UoW has not specified, or even confirmed conflicts of interest, only stating in general that "any potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interest have been and will continue to be managed in adherence with UOW's Conflict of Interest Policy".¹²

¹⁰ University of Wollongong Annual Report 2023, 2024, p. 90

¹¹ <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/8751802/conflict-of-interest-claim-uow-v-cv-is-a-partner-in-review-firm/>

¹² <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/8759526/uow-interim-vice-chancellor-faces-conflict-of-interest-questions/>

UNIVERSITY OF NSW – QUESTIONS OVER DONATIONS

University of New South Wales (UNSW) Chancellor David Gonski, and the Gonski Foundation, were long-term donors to UNSW prior to his appointment as Chancellor.¹³ However, it is not possible to find dollar amounts or the timing of these donations as they are not explicitly disclosed by UNSW, with an earlier website showing a full list of donors taken down. In 2023, donations surpassed \$110 million, from 4042 donors.¹⁴ This is a pattern that has also been present in Victoria, for example University of Melbourne's previous Chancellor, Allan Myers, was a major donor to the university prior to his appointment as Chancellor.¹⁵

These kinds of appointments raise questions regarding transparency of senior position appointment processes and the public interest.

SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

The appointment of Southern Cross University's (SCU) Vice Chancellor, Tyrone Carlin, exemplifies the NTEU's concerns over transparency and potential conflicts of interest. It also raises questions of accountability and performance. However, the issues underpinning the Union's concerns were ignored and there was instead an unquestioned ascension to a highly paid Vice Chancellorship.

The NTEU understands that while Carlin was previously employed full time as deputy VC at University of Sydney, he also served as president of CPA Australia. The role of CPA president was classified as 3.5 days per week and was remunerated at a rate of \$390,657 per year. This was on top of Carlin's full time senior executive role at the University of Sydney. University of Sydney policy prohibits Academic staff spending more than 20% of their time or 1 day on externally remunerated activities – yet this does not seem to apply to senior management.¹⁶

Carlin also received \$72,000 per year as a director of Teachers Mutual and was on the board of Urological Society of Australia and NZ. In October 2017, he resigned from his deputy VC role at the University of Sydney, returning to teaching.

The following year, he was hired as deputy VC at SCU. In August 2020, then SCU VC president Adam Shoemaker advised he would be stepping down. On the same day, Carlin was recommended to become VC by the SCU council, ascending to the role without competitive process. This occurred after the council elections had been held but before new councillors had begun their terms.

¹³ <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2011/05/million-dollar-donors#:~:text=Published%20on%20the%2027%20May%202011.%20UNSW%20Chancellor%20David%20Gonski>

¹⁴ University of New South Wales. (2024). Annual Report 2023., 2024,pg. 52

¹⁵ <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2016/11/allan-myers-appointed-next-unimelb-chancellor/>

¹⁶ Aston, J. (2020, August 30). Alex Malley stain can't hold back Tyrone Carlin. The Australian Financial Review. <https://www.afr.com/rear-window/alex-malley-stain-can-t-hold-back-tyrone-carlin-20200830-p55qjs>

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST TRICKLE DOWN FROM THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE TO RUN RIFE INSIDE INSTITUTIONS

Conflicts of interest are running rife inside of institutions – this is a symptom of weak governance. The result of this is that trust in managements is at all-time lows.

The real personal experiences of workers in our universities speak to this:

"A review panel of external reviewers recommended the disestablishment of a successful centre and to have it replaced with a new centre. The lead of the review panel was then hired to run this new centre at a professorial level. Two women senior lecturers lost their roles and an older male professor got a new job and a funding line to create new roles for less experienced postdocs to do similar work."

"A research centre was reviewed by a panel of 3 external members. They recommended the centre be disestablished and a new service-provision hub be established in its place, with all new staff including the director. The Chair of the panel who made this recommendation was then hired to be the new Director of the Hub he had recommended be established."

"Our entire team of professional staff had to attend this completely pointless workshop on how to use LinkedIn. But we later found out that a manager level academic who arranged the entire thing was friends with the person who runs the workshops and charges thousands of dollars to facilitate them."

THE CONSULTANCY ADDICTION: PAYING A HIGH PRICE FOR BAD ADVICE

Universities have been notorious consumers of paid management advice from large consulting firms, with very little transparency regarding how much has been paid out and to which firm for what advice, and if this represents value for the community.¹⁷ It is often the case that consultants' expensive reports are "commercial in confidence" and are therefore concealed from scrutiny by staff and the public.¹⁸ As detailed in a previous NTEU report, several universities have brought management consultants onto their councils via their power to appoint members.¹⁹ At the University of Wollongong the Vice Chancellor is partner at a consulting firm, one the university has hired to advise the university on the current round of job cuts.²⁰

And of course, the consultants' never-ending advice is laced with self-interest, as two academics put it:

"Apart from their lucrative fees, consultants enjoy the prestige of rearranging and re-engineering "corporations of knowledge," in ways that both gratify the neoliberal imaginary and ensure their own ongoing employment."²¹

NTEU research has found that **universities spent up to a whopping \$734 million in 2023 on "consulting" and professional advice or services**, an amount that would likely go a long way towards solving the current jobs crisis. To take one example, at the University of Canberra, which is imposing up to 200 job losses this Christmas, there was a \$9.5m increase in consultancy spending in 2023.²²

It should be stressed that due to the absence of reporting requirements it is not possible to determine where the funds listed below went outside of Victoria or the disaggregated amounts for consulting versus professional services which may not be related to consulting.²³

"There is no meaningful governance. They bring in friends, consultants, school friends, paid them big bucks to tell them how to run the Uni.... Not a single thing delivered successfully, with millions gone down the drain as academics try to manage projects... Then brought in austerity measures because of their pure incompetence and negligence".

17 <https://www.smh.com.au/education/they-were-carnivorous-the-universities-spending-millions-on-consultants-like-pwc-20230620-p5dhzk.html>
18 Verhoeven, D., & Eltham, B. (2023). "Nosferatu": Are corporate consultants extracting the lifeblood from universities? Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 46(2), 327–349.
19 NTEU Governance report
20 <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/8751802/conflict-of-interest-claim-uow-v-cv-is-a-partner-in-review-firm/>
21 Verhoeven, D., & Eltham, B. (2023). "Nosferatu": Are corporate consultants extracting the lifeblood from universities? Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 46(2), 327–349.
22 <https://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/policy-and-legislation/key-university-documents/annual-reports/docs/University-of-Canberra-Annual-Report-2023.pdf> p 89
23 While QLD does have a requirement to report total consultant spending in basic categories it does not require disclosure of amounts spent at specific firms.

CONSULTANT SPENDING

STATE	UNIVERSITY	CONSULTANT EXPENDITURE*
NSW	Charles Sturt University	\$10,784,000
	Macquarie University	not discernable
	Southern Cross University	\$30,178,000
	The University of New England	\$31,714,000
	The University of Newcastle	\$75,886,000
	The University of Sydney	\$12,100,000
	University of New South Wales	\$28,444,100
	University of Technology Sydney	\$34,059,000
	University of Wollongong	\$14,034,000
	Western Sydney University	not discernable
VIC	Deakin University	\$3,928,193
	Federation University Australia	\$7,185,177
	La Trobe University	\$19,266,213
	Monash University	\$16,268,673
	RMIT University	\$1,795,271
	Swinburne University of Technology	\$1,732,131
	The University of Melbourne	\$28,321,026
	Victoria University	\$1,531,000
QLD	CQUniversity	\$1,661,000
	Griffith University	\$36,387,000
	James Cook University	\$15,690,519
	Queensland University of Technology	\$40,468,000
	The University of Queensland	\$37,637,669
	University of Southern Queensland	\$4,709,000
	University of the Sunshine Coast	\$2,577,441
WA	Curtin University	\$20,009,000
	Edith Cowan University	\$20,360,000
	Murdoch University	not discernable
	The University of Notre Dame Australia	\$7,371,000
	The University of Western Australia	\$41,681,000
SA	Flinders University	\$5,743,000
	The University of Adelaide	\$35,466,000
	University of South Australia	not discernable
TAS	University of Tasmania	\$23,406,000
NT	Charles Darwin University	\$34,417,000
ACT	The Australian National University	\$62,654,000
	University of Canberra	\$16,735,000
Multi-State	Australian Catholic University	\$9,733,000
GRAND TOTAL		\$733,932,413

* All figures are from 2023 annual reports, figures for Vic and QLD are from consultancy spending disclosure reports. Amounts from annual reports may combine consulting and professional services spending, which may include non-consultant related spending.

The poor value for money that consultants offer has not gone unnoticed by Higher Education workers:

"The executive commissioned a review into our department to save money. The person performing the review didn't seem to have ever done a review before. Review questions that everyone in the entire team had to respond to included phenomenally vague questions, and other questions that could have been easily answered by looking at the course outline etc. The review was 6 months late in delivery and consisted of a 14-page Word document riddled with spelling and grammatical errors. Several staff members' names were misspelt. The review concluded that I, and others, were not qualified to teach some of the areas that we teach. We most definitely are. It recommended that people from another department, with the same or lesser qualifications, would be more qualified to teach that area. It also recommended that we should join professional organisations - I'm already a member of the relevant professional organisations, and this was never covered in the review. The executive then took 6 months to consider the review and made a big announcement that they had approved the recommendations of the review. What a waste of salary. Part of the implementation of the review has now demanded that we teach into completely different topics, which seems insane given the original recommendations about us not being qualified to teach into our area of specialty."

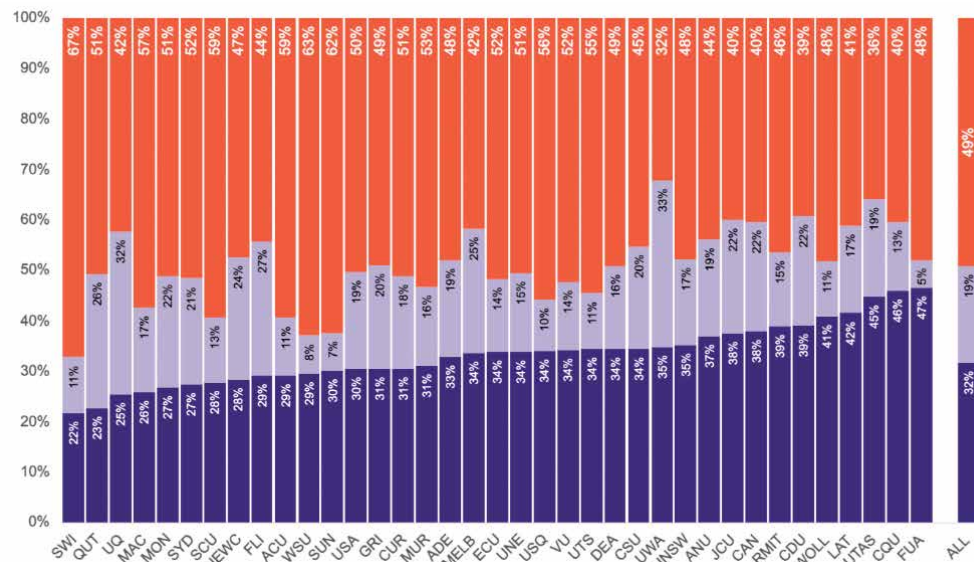
"our institute was 'reviewed' externally 7 months ago and the boss asked to stand down (3 other staff were on stress leave). A new part time boss was appointed who still hasn't contacted all her staff after some 4 months. We do not know whether we have jobs, we can't get people to answer emails, we can't even get leave approved. Incidentally, the external reviewer didn't even bother to speak with all of the senior staff before handing down his report. We just want some clarity so that we can get on with our jobs and help the university, or at least get on with our lives."

"Three years into a 5 year contract at [redacted], the VC [redacted], who has frequently said he has only one KPI, to get the university in the black, has failed to do so. After multiple major change programs each year, some developed by consultants, the university continues to be 10s of millions of dollars in the red. There is no apparent holding to account of the VC by the Council - their only real job is to ensure the VC as CEO does his job, and clearly the Council has failed in this Governance role."

COMPOSITION OF ESTIMATED HEADCOUNT STAFFING BY CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

Australian Universities 2023

■ Casual*
■ Limited Term
■ Permanent/Tenural



*Calculated as 6 times FTE

INSECURE EMPLOYMENT IS OUT OF CONTROL IN OUR UNIVERSITIES

Higher education is one of the most precarious industries for workers in Australia. According to the latest data released by the Department for Education the majority of workers in the sector do not have secure, permanent and ongoing employment.

NTEU modelling suggests that 68 percent of all persons working in the sector have been employed using casual or fixed term contracts, often to perform ongoing work for very long periods.²⁴

When only looking at non-casual workers, 37 percent are in fixed term contracts.²⁵

This is an extremely high level of fixed term employment and compares to only 3.4 percent in the broader economy.²⁶ This is also much higher than the 8 percent share of fixed term employment made up of the broader ABS defined "Education and Training" category. Higher education disproportionately contributes to the high level of fixed term employment in the category, with the ABS recording 89,000 out of 1.07m Education and Training employees as fixed term. If we are to roughly mix data sources, it becomes apparent that **over half of fixed term workers in Education and training come from the small higher education sub-sector**, which only makes up around 10-20 percent of the overall category.

And the trend is getting worse, with the number of fixed term staff in the sector almost doubling since 2000 whereas the number of continuing staff has only grown by 58%.

Job insecurity has fuelled the wage theft crisis in universities, with many workers fearing reprisal for speaking out:

"At first, I hesitated to involve the union when a fellow casual academic and I were denied pay for hours we had clearly worked throughout the semester. This refusal blatantly violated the newly established Enterprise Agreement, so I assumed it would be a straightforward resolution. Despite the risk of being targeted for exposing such mismanagement, I never imagined the disastrous outcome that awaited us. We were both blacklisted, losing all future work opportunities, which cost us thousands of dollars. How can such inept management continue unchecked? Why don't all universities implement a transparent, merit-based process for allocating casual contracts instead of favouring their cronies?"

²⁴ The Department estimates that 15 per cent of annualised "full time equivalents" were consumed by casual employment in 2023, and 30 percent by fixed term – the number of people this represents is much higher because: 1) most of these workers are only in paid employment for teaching periods 2) the hours the vast majority of casually employed teaching staff are paid fixed amounts by the task contracted not by the actual hours worked.

²⁵ Chart and statistics derived from <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/staff-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2023-staff-data>

²⁶ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/working-arrangements/latest-release#fixed-term-contracts>

"This year I signed my 14th contract after thirteen consecutive 1 year contracts and I have been informed that the university will never carry the risk of employees at [my research centre] for longer than 2 years at a time."

UNIVERSITIES WITH OVER \$10M IN CONFIRMED WAGE THEFT

YEARS ACTIVE	STATE	UNIVERSITY	NUMBER OF STAFF AFFECTED	TOTAL UNDERPAID
2014 onwards	VIC	The University of Melbourne	30,428	\$49,000,000
2009 onwards	NSW	University of Wollongong	12,420	\$18,000,000
2014-2022	TAS	University of Tasmania	3,701	\$15,206,000
2014 onwards	NSW	The University of Sydney	13,040	\$14,827,457
2014-2023	NSW	The University of New South Wales	1,500	\$11,000,000
-	VIC	Monash University	2,251	\$10,825,000
2013-2024	WA	The University of Western Australia	8,205	\$10,626,000
-	VIC	Deakin University*	Not disclosed	\$10,000,000
2009-2016	VIC	RMIT University	3,700	\$10,000,000

*NTEU Estimate only (Deakin)

SYSTEMIC WAGE THEFT IS THE NORM

The Fair Work Ombudsman has found 'entrenched non-compliance' in Australian higher education and identified universities as a 'regulatory priority'.²⁷ As emphasised by the Australian Universities Accord Review, 'institutions have an obligation to ensure appropriate governance settings' to avoid staff underpayment.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has told universities that 'we expect Australian universities to invest in governance frameworks and practises that will ensure compliance with workplace laws' and has highlighted 'trends of poor governance and management oversight, and a lack of centralised human resources functions and investment in payroll and time-recording systems' (emphasis added).²⁸

The vast majority of public universities in Australia have been caught out underpaying staff in recent years. This is a clear demonstration of poor sector governance. These practices have affected all types of workers but have particularly affected the lowest paid casual workers.

The National Tertiary Education Union's latest [Wage Theft Report](#) released in June 2024 revealed the shameful depth of this scourge. The headline figures at the time were shocking. The report revealed \$213 million in underpayments and \$168 million underpayment provisions across Australia's higher education sector. More than 131,000 university staff were underpaid.

Since that time these figures have grown. New instances of wage theft have been revealed at ANU, Macquarie, Murdoch and Curtin totalling \$9.8 million and affecting an additional 11,000 staff.

The total amount uncovered now stands at over \$226m in confirmed underpayments and \$168m in pending provisions with 142,000 workers affected across over 30 employers – with figures not revealed for confirmed cases at JCU and six investigations still ongoing.

On top of this clear-cut wage theft the perhaps even more insidious practice of mandatory unpaid hours is rife in universities. A recent study confirmed that staff are expected to work for several years above their level before they are considered for reclassification.²⁹

²⁷ Australian universities accused of 'entrenched non-compliance' with workplace law over staff underpayment | Australian education | The Guardian
²⁸ Fair Work Ombudsman takes Uni Melbourne to court (campusmorningmail.com.au)
²⁹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07294360.2024.2412656>

Systemic underpayment particularly affects staff employed under "casual" arrangements (even though they are usually performing core university work over long periods of time). These staff are often paid late and must routinely stay on top of HR departments to ensure they are paid the correct amount, as one staff member put it:

"At the beginning of year I submitted the hours I worked as a casual (I had been there for ten years). When my pay didn't arrive I checked with the pay officer who responded that the coordinator of the subject had not submitted some paper work related to casual pay and I should contact them to urge them to submit it. I responded that as a casual I didn't believe that was my role-and that maybe university administration should do that. This led to a ten week wait to be paid. I was only paid when I copied in the head of school and pointed out that I should be paid within 30 days under the Fair Work Act and I was about to lodge a dispute."

"When I worked at [redacted], I had issues with my first pay, which took months to resolve. I eventually discovered they had set up my pay using a draft employment contract, which had the wrong start date and salary level in it. I never got an answer as to why they were working off a contract that didn't have my signature on it. While trying to resolve the underpayment/overpayment issue (they overpaid me by a week but the following week underpaid me due to incorrect increment recorded on the contract), my 'case' was bounced around the payroll department from one labour-hire staff member to another, with no continuity and no handover notes provided. After I signed and lodged an agreement for repaying the overpaid salary, I noticed nothing had been deducted from my salary, so I queried it. There had been yet another change in personnel and my form hadn't been lodged. So we had to recalculate the repayments and start again. Something as simple as incorrect pay over one pay period took 4 months to resolve.

Practices such as re-classifying work performed by casuals to cut costs are seen as standard "efficiency" measures in Australian universities:

"I taught a tutorial in a subject for a number of years. Then one year the tutorial got rebranded as a 'workshop'. The content and required teaching stayed the same. My rate of pay however changed from the 'tutorial' rate of \$160 per tutorial and all associated activity to 'other academic activity' rate \$51 for the same work."

I went to a meeting that was called urgently to manage a unit that needed to be taught because a permanent lecturer had resigned, but I was not paid. I asked for payment, but my email was never responded to."

"I was teaching units for a number of years on a casual basis, including designing all the lectures and tutorials. I was not paid at the correct pay rate of designing the unit. A full-time permanent staff member was hired, and I was told near to the beginning of semester that I would no longer be needed. I was not even put on a casual availability list. I received no thanks for my work."

BAD MANAGEMENT AND WORKING IN HIGHER ED

"The university structures and services that support [academic staff] are being stripped away and the activities they find joy in eroded."³⁰

Major NTEU surveys covering tens of thousands of staff have found that higher education workers are suffering under a corporatised culture that has entrenched systemic unpaid overtime, controlling forms of managerialism, and a willingness to ignore the mental health of staff and students.

One NTEU survey found that 75 percent of higher education workers perform unpaid overtime, with 40 percent of professional staff reporting that they have never received overtime or time off in lieu for working overtime. The same survey found that around 40 percent of all work performed by casual staff is unpaid.³¹

NTEU's 2023 report into sexual harassment in universities found that almost one in three (29 percent) respondents had experienced some form of sexual harassment, up from 19 percent in 2018 – a rise of almost 53 percent.³²

³⁰ <https://theconversation.com/where-has-the-joy-of-working-in-australian-universities-gone-184251>

³¹ NTEU 2020 State of the Uni Survey Report, 2021

³² https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/Sexual_Harassment_Survey_Report.aspx

**Submissions made by higher
education workers in October 2024
reveal how poor governance has
contributed to staff misery:**

"I am being required to undertake the work of two people now that my counterpart commenced maternity leave. No staff are being replaced due to the VC's 'natural attrition' approach to restructure the workforce. In total, we are down three people in my team. This is having a serious effect on my health - I have had to take five weeks stress leave, and my anxiety levels are so bad that I need to take medication. I'm not sure how long I can hold out doing the work of two people."

"As a course coordinator, you are expected to; manage the course, manage student queries, manage academic integrity, write two in semester assessments and two exams, navigate casual staff (with marking and teaching), deal with student complaints, respond to student e-mails within 48 hours, moderate the marking (sometimes being cohorts of 100s students), double mark fail marks- all for 2 hours per week (12 weeks)."

"My Head of School and School Manager were working on a staff review for 12 months without the school's executive or management team knowing anything about it. We were then blindsided when we were told that we would lose 4 positions (professional staff) at the end of 2024 with no consulting timeframe and no change management plan in place to show the direction of why these cuts were made. HR advised them to keep it quiet and to not share with the staff. Completely and utterly disgusting."

"It took 12 years of casual/sessional work in Higher Education before my employment was converted into a Scholarly Teaching fellow position, and only then with active NTEU support. During that time ALL term breaks were filled with pressure cooker marking deadlines and course preparation. How come you might ask? Teaching in four courses every term equivalent to a 1.5 EFT load with three major assessments per course and a two-week marking turn around expectation giving important valuable feedback for each student - that was the killer!"

WHERE DO THINGS CURRENTLY STAND?

To fix our universities we need change from within, and to make this change possible we first need governance reform, which requires support from government.

As it presently stands each university in Australia is established under a state-based Act.³³ These acts set out the governance structure of each university, including the selection and appointment methods used to fill positions on governing bodies.

Presently, there are 545 council positions across the 37 public universities in Australia. Of these 366 are appointed, 137 of are elected, and 40 are ex-officio (not including Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors).³⁴ Non-elected positions are generally paid an allowance or stipend.

COMPOSITION OF AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY COUNCIL POSITIONS

Appointed	366	68%
Elected	137	25%
Ex officio	40	7%
Total Positions	545	100%

[New evidence collected by the NTEU](#) shows that the boards that oversee the operations of Australia's public universities have become stacked with unelected members brought in from big business.

In April 2024, of 545 positions on university governing bodies, 366 have been appointed. Of these, 143 are corporate executives or consultants from for profit organisations. In contrast only 137 have been elected from the staff, students and graduates (alumni) of the institutions they serve.

One university has three former executives from heavy industry and two from financial services on its governing body, more than the number of current staff members.

Corporatised university governance currently coincides with record levels of insecure employment and wage theft in the sector, and persistently out of touch levels of remuneration for senior managers.

The Accord Interim and Final Reports acknowledged the relationship between these issues and poor governance. The Accord has called for reforms to university governance, to finally make universities exemplary employers, and to bring more sector experience onto governing bodies.

The simplest option for achieving this would be for the federal government and the states and territories to agree to a set of national minimum standards for the number of elected staff and student positions on each Council or Senate. There should also be consideration of public and higher education sector experience in board appointments, rather than the current preference for consultants and corporate.

³³ ANU is under a Federal Act

³⁴ Ex-officio position holders are entitled to their positions based on them holding some other office. For example the respective chair of Academic board, or the Archbishop of Sydney (in the case of ACU)

MAKING BETTER UNIVERSITIES

To restore universities to public institutions working for the public good, university governance must be democratised and university decision making processes made more transparent.

Therefore, the NTEU is calling for:

- 1. A Federal Parliamentary inquiry into public university governance and workforce planning**, with the findings of the Inquiry referred to both the Minister and to the Expert Council on University Governance.
- 2. The Minister's Expert Council** which will advise the Minister on governance reform, needs to reflect a diversity of expertise, with emphasis on experts who understand Higher Education workforce needs, concerns, and issues, as well as from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the public sector/not-for-profit sector. Influence from private, corporate, and business interests' groups should be minimised.

The NTEU's message to Government is that the pathway for governance reform and restoring universities to being public institutions working for the public good requires three major changes to university governance principles:

- » university leadership to be more accountable to their communities,
- » improved democratisation, constituent representation and collegiality in governance bodies and structures, and
- » university decision making process be made more open, transparent, and accessible.

To achieve these changes the NTEU proposes the following measures be adopted as part of a new regulatory framework for university governance:

1. There be transparent appointment processes for University Council membership, with the size and composition of a university governing body's membership legislated in a university's enabling Act and reflecting the institution's mission and the diverse constituencies to which it is accountable.
2. The majority of university board membership comprise the university community, via democratically elected staff, students, and alumni.
3. The majority of non-university board members to have public sector experience, and that appropriate attention is given to gender balance and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

4. Members of university governing bodies have the right to represent the interests of their respective university communities, embodying the concept of universities as distinctive public institutions.
5. The principles of open and ethical governance are adhered to, and that university governing bodies have a right to the full and timely provision of information about the operation of the institution and its controlled entities.
6. That where information is necessary to act in the best interest of the university as a whole, members of governing bodies can uphold their obligation to keep constituencies informed about deliberations and seek their views and advice.
7. That university governing bodies do not unreasonably discriminate between governing body members, and all members have a right to serve on relevant committees and sub-committees and there are formal programs of professional development for members.
8. In keeping with community expectations of public institutions VC remuneration levels be capped at the relevant state premiers. This will help restore public trust in our institutions.
9. Improved, publicly available reporting on institutional data related to workforce planning and institutional governance. This would include universities' usage of all forms of insecure employment, including fixed term, contract, and gig employment, as well as other data related to workforce management and governance processes.

In addition, to restore public trust in our institutions, government must consider:

1. Requiring clear transparent reporting of executive remuneration (at all senior levels).
2. Requiring clear and transparent reporting of external appointments and conflicts of interest for senior executives.
3. Requiring disclosure of consultancy arrangements (as in the Victorian model).

BETTER **FAIR** **ACCOUNTABLE** **UNIVERSITIES**



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nteu.au/join