

Question - Casualisation

Senator DOLEGA: The Expert Council on University Governance's final report identified high workloads and insecure employment as direct risks to teaching quality and staff wellbeing. We heard from Western Sydney University at the hearing on 8 September that they have embarked on a decasualisation program that has converted 160 employees to ongoing contracts since 2023. What percentage of your university staff are employed on casual arrangements, and do you see the merit in improving the job security of your staff?

Prof. Jagose: Perhaps I can start by saying that we have also been working to decasualise, particularly our academic casual workforce. We guaranteed 330 new jobs under our previous enterprise agreement. I would have to take the exact figure on notice, but some 700-plus casual workers have converted to either fixed-term or continuing employment across that period. So, in a very similar way, I think the focus is there.

Senator DOLEGA: It would also be great to get an understanding of the amount that are fixed-term and ongoing, if you're taking that on notice. That would be great, thanks.

Answer: Casual staff form a critical component of the workforce at the University of Sydney, delivering lecturing, tutoring, marking and other temporary professional activities (i.e. staffing booths at Open Day) in support of our teaching and research. Casual academic staff make up the majority of casual staff at the University of Sydney and many of them are higher degree by research students, whose casual employment helps them meet living expenses while also developing important professional skills.

The nature of casual duties results in large fluctuations of 'active casuals' each month, with an 'active casual' defined as a casual staff member who worked at least one activity that month. To monitor work hours performed by our casual staff accurately, a Casual Full Time Equivalent (FTE) rate is calculated using standard Department of Education formulas.

At the end of the first half (H1) of 2025 (FTE):

Employment Group	FTE	%
Continuing	5,523	46%
Fixed-Term	3,983	33%
Casual	2,408	20%
Total	11,914	

Details:

- In 2024, the University had a monthly average headcount of 5,013 active casuals, ranging from 2,361 (January 2024) and 6,068 (May 2024). Our monthly average headcount for H1 2025 was 4,462, which is a decrease of 11% compared to 2024.
- In 2024, Casual staff accounted for a monthly average 2,680 FTE. This decreased in H1 2025 to 2,408 FTE (10% decrease).

- Academic casual FTE has decreased by approximately 10% and Professional by 20% in H1 2025 compared to the 2024 average FTE.
- Total casualisation rate (that is, the proportion of casuals in our overall workforce) has reduced by 2.7% from 23.1% in 2024 to 20.4% in Semester 1 2025.

Since 2023, coinciding with the University of Sydney's 2023 – 2026 Enterprise Agreement, the University has designed, developed, and funded a suite of initiatives aimed at reducing the University's reliance on casual staff, predominantly through the investment in continuing roles and the establishment of other employment types and pathways. This includes advertising 330 new continuing academic positions with a commitment that 25% of the new 'education-focused' positions and 50% of the new 'teaching and research' positions would be prioritised for existing long-term casual and fixed term staff ("Eligible Staff"). As of November 2025, the University has achieved our commitment to advertising all 330 of these newly funded, continuing positions.

The Provost indicated when giving evidence that "700-plus" university employees had converted to continuing employment. For the benefit of the committee, the total number of casual and fixed-term employees who have converted to continuing employment since the beginning of 2023 is 761.

Question – Engineering tutors

Senator FARUQI: I just have a couple more questions on one line of questioning. Also last week, it was reported that the university had breached TEQSA requirements in the Faculty of Engineering by having undergraduate courses taught by teachers with undergraduate qualifications, and, as a consequence, you have now lost a number of quality teachers. What has happened to these teachers now? What support have they been provided?

Prof. Jagose: Can I just check. With your question, when you say the 'quality teachers', do you mean—

Senator FARUQI: The quality of teachers, good-quality teachers—obviously, some of these teachers had been teaching for a while, but, because the university was breaching TEQSA requirements, they can no longer teach.

Prof. Jagose: So the 'good-quality teachers'—I'm just trying to see if I understand the question—are the teachers who were ineligible to teach under the TEQSA regulations.

Senator FARUQI: Yes, but they had been teaching for years, and I understand that they were teaching quite well, but the university was breaching the standards.

Prof. Jagose: TEQSA released a staffing guidance note, and that was our prompt to confirm whether we were complying, and we did find that, in the Faculty of Engineering, there had been a practice of employing senior undergraduate students. They have a four-year undergraduate degree, so they were employing, in some instances, senior undergraduates to teach junior undergraduate students, to the best of my understanding. The faculty went through a process of wanting to be compliant with the requirements and seeing to what degree we could offer other forms of employment to students who were no longer eligible to teach. I know there was discussion around them being used, for example, to work with colleagues on curriculum development, think about research assistants and so forth. I would have to take on notice the practical outcomes of that.

Answer:

Prior to the start of Semester 2 2025, we had made a concerted effort to identify former casual academics (CAs) who may have missed out on regular casual academic teaching opportunities because they were deemed ineligible to teach under the TEQSA regulations. We then contacted them directly and assigned suitable work that was within the given compliance framework.

In the School of Computer Science, some students who had either worked as CAs before or had been verbally offered CA roles in Semester 2 2025 were offered employment in a unit of study development role, to help unit coordinators develop new or refreshed teaching material. Others were asked to submit an expression of interest (EOI) in providing assistance to students in a learning hub where students can go to ask questions on any unit of study. Most of the eligible applicants were offered shifts at the learning hub, though not all accepted.

In the School of Aerospace, Mechanical and Mechatronics Engineering, students that had either worked as CAs before or had been verbally offered CA roles in Semester 2 2025 were offered employment in a unit of study development role; others were offered roles as workshop or lab safety officers.

In the other schools, students affected were engaged on a case-by-case basis.

Questions from Senator Farqui

- 1. The University of Sydney has initiated a “Professional Services Review” that appears to be sweeping in scope (covering all professional staff activities at the University of Sydney). Has the University, in the development of this program:
 - a. Have you had formal or informal discussions about substituting staff members with AI systems? Have you produced any documents to this effect? (If yes, please provide)****

Answer: No formal or informal discussions have been had about substituting staff members with AI systems.

The University has prepared a discussion paper as part of the professional services review which highlights opportunities for staff to save time and effort through better use of technology, digital tools and AI.

- 2. Please provide a breakdown of the time taken to investigate complaints made to the University.**

Answer: The average times taken to address complaints made by staff and students have been steadily falling in recent years. We are making concerted efforts to reduce the average completion times further.

For student complaints, the time taken to complete complaints has reduced from 28 in 2023 to 22 days in 2025.

For staff complaints, the time taken to complete complaints has reduced from 122 in 2023 to 76 days in 2025.

There are a few different drivers of the additional time taken to handle staff complaints when compared with complaints lodged by students, including:

- processes set out in the University's Enterprise Agreement,
- higher incidence of complicated matters that include external litigation, counter complaints, and
- health concerns.

Our complete complaints policy can be found [here](#). We wanted to bring to the committee's attention that this process includes a written preliminary response within 20 days. This means that community members that lodge complaints will hear from the University sooner than the completion dates listed above.

a. Are you confident you will be able to meet the new requirements in place under the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence? Please provide details of this.

Answer: The University of Sydney is committed to meeting the requirements of the Code.

We have a Vice-Chancellor sponsored Taskforce to oversee compliance, progress, and integration of the new requirements under the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence (the Code) into core operations.

The Taskforce champions a person-centred, trauma-informed approach and includes executive leaders and subject matter experts.

We have finalised consultation on our new Sexual Harm and Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Policy 2025.

We have finalised agreements with our Residential Colleges and are in the process of finalising agreements with our other student accommodation providers to ensure they are compliant. It will apply to the whole University, affiliated organisations, and entities operating on University land.

We have consulted on a Whole of Organisation Prevention and Response Plan (Plan), including an external review.

We recognise that preventing and responding to gender-based violence requires a sustained and adaptive approach. Accordingly, the Plan includes a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure our actions remain evidence-based, responsive to emerging insights, and aligned with best practice.

3. Please provide details of the departure of the former Chief Information Officer at the University of Sydney, and assessments of their performance prior to departure.

Answer: The University is unable to provide the information requested in this question, because:

- It is confidential;
- Its disclosure would unreasonably reveal personal information; and
- It would be prejudicial to the privacy or rights of that person.

4. Please provide a breakdown of ex-gratia payments made to staff, by work area.

Answer: This information is sensitive and private, as its publication may infringe on the privacy of individuals through inferences which could be made following the publication of the data.

[REDACTED]

5. I understand that the University of Sydney subscribes to the UniForum benchmarking service. What steps has the USYD's leadership taken to satisfy itself that UniForum benchmarking scores are meaningful, reliable and rigorous?

Answer: UniForum is just one source of benchmarking data that the University uses alongside a range of other benchmarking data including other sources such as Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching (QILT) Student Experience Survey, and Higher Education Statistics.

These data sources allow the University to monitor and track sector trends and developments alongside internal data sources. Most recently, Uniforum data has been an input for the review of professional services. Staff have access to this data in the review discussion paper and have been asked to critically engage with this information.

Has UniForum data ever been used to inform (directly or indirectly) proposals or decisions to disestablish positions or to make staff members redundant at USYD?

If yes, please provide details of the positions impacted (or proposed to be impacted) and the role that UniForum data played in decision making.

Answer: No, UniForum data has not been used to disestablish positions or to make staff members redundant.

- 6. Has USYD's executive ever cited UniForum data in presentations or statements to the university's governing council? If yes, please provide details of how and when the UniForum data was cited and the arguments it was used to support.**

Answer: Yes, UniForum has been referenced in presentations to our Senate. UniForum has been listed as one of many benchmarking measures as a point of information for Senate, in relation to improvements in operational efficiency and service quality. Most recently, UniForum was noted as one of several data sources used in discovery for the Professional Services Review (as shared with the wider University community).

- 7. Does any member of staff at USYD have KPIs that are linked to UniForum data? If yes, please indicate what positions they hold and describe the KPIs in question.**

Answer: No, staff members do not have KPIs linked to UniForum data.

- 8. Does any staff member at USYD have full access to the underlying UniForum data and methodology? If not, does lack of access to underlying data and methodology inhibit USYD's confidence in UniForum reports and benchmarking scores?**

Answer: The University has a small team of staff members within Advanced Analytics and Planning with full access to the University's underlying data, as well as the de-identified and aggregated UniForum results. Comparative data is shared only on a de-identified and aggregated basis and does not identify detailed information of other Universities.

- 9. In the absence of access to underlying UniForum data and methodology, what steps does USYD take to validate the findings that UniForum provides?**

Answer: The UniForum data collection and benchmarking methodology has been shared with the University and regular updates are provided on changes to the UniForum methodologies. The University, with other UniForum members, can discuss, challenge, debate and refine the methodology, and this ensures benchmarks are as meaningful and reliable as possible.

- 10. How long has USYD subscribed to the UniForum benchmarking service? Please provide a year-by-year breakdown of how much USYD has spent on UniForum services.**

Answer: The University has subscribed to the UniForum benchmarking service since 2011.

[REDACTED]

11. Please provide a full list of documents, datasets and reports that UniForum has provided to USYD since the beginning of 2023. Please indicate which of these are available to all members of staff at USYD.

Answer: The University receives various types of information, including:

- Underlying university data via UniForum collection tools
- Results and reports via UniForum analytics tools
- Case studies and presentations from round table discussions between members
- Guidance materials for university staff to assist with data collection processes
- Updates on changes to UniForum methodology and tools

Uniforum results are not made available to all staff as they contain confidential information.

Details of the documents, datasets and reports produced by UniForum include confidential information sourced from other participating universities across several countries and cannot be shared with the committee.

12. Does your institution have any partnerships, investments or links with any weapons companies or associated entities?

Answer: The University is a not-for-profit entity and re-invests all available revenue into enhancing research and teaching capabilities.

We continually review and adjust our mix of investments to meet the high standards of probity and governance set out in our public-facing Investment Policy and the University's Integrated ESG Framework.

We do not invest in cluster munitions, tobacco, fossil fuels and power generation companies that aren't transitioning to low carbon.

We have introduced stricter rules around our investments and recently updated our strategies to improve environmentally, socially and financially responsible investment practices and reporting.

Going forward, our Investment Policy requires us to exclude and/or divest from direct equity holdings and publicly traded investment instruments that are in violation of international law.

The University does not exclude gaming companies in its investment policy.

13. Does your institution have any partnerships, investments or links with any fossil fuel companies or associated entities?

Answer: See answer to question 12.

14. Does your institution have any partnerships, investments or links with any gambling companies or associated entities?

Answer: See answer to question 12.

15. Does your institution have any partnerships, investments or links with any tobacco companies or associated entities?

Answer: See answer to question 12.