

University staff lift pay claim as inflation, cuts bite

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The NTEU says its decision to boost university pay claims from 12% over three years to 15% reflects new realities of skyrocketing inflation and workloads that are going "through the roof" following mass job losses during the height of the pandemic.

The union's general secretary, Matt McGowan, told *Workplace Express* today that the union executive moved late last month to increase the pay claim in the current bargaining round because it is "time for us to reflect the realities that are out on the ground".

While increases in the previous bargaining round of between about 1.8% and 2% a year were "reasonable in the context of a low inflation environment", McGowan says the union "can't accept those sorts of pay rises" now that inflation has "spiked" and the wages of university staff are "going backwards".

With the agreements of most universities nominally expiring between mid-last year and July this year, he says the union has already served more than 60% with logs of claims that also focus on improving job security for fixed term and casual staff, addressing workloads, reinforcing pandemic-related protections and strengthening academic freedoms clauses.

They also seek up to 30 days paid gender affirmation leave to support transgender, gender diverse and non-binary staff to affirm their gender identity and expression via social, medical or legal pathways.

A pay rise below inflation is a pay cut. We'll be fighting for real wage increases at universities across Australia, as well as [#securejobs](#), manageable workloads and flexible working conditions for all staff.

Join the NTEU here: <https://t.co/S6C43E5S5D> pic.twitter.com/8lhZzbMbo6

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Universities "cut deeper than needed": McGowan

McGowan says that while the bargaining round is "really just starting to kick off properly now", he is "not surprised that the early indications for the universities is that they're crying poor" as "this is the nature of the negotiations".

"From my point of view, the universities have cut deeply, most cases into their staff, and in many cases deeper than they needed to" in order to protect their bottom line, he says, adding that "at the end of the day, the staff should not continue to wear the responsibility for the pain that the sector has been suffering".

As a result of "significant job losses across the sector", McGowan says "productivity has clearly increased significantly".

"We have seen workloads for those who remain go through the roof" to the extent it is "not possible to do all of the work they are being asked to do," he continues.

"Now in that context, when people are working harder, productivity is higher and inflation is high, it's reasonable to expect that people will get a pay rise in compensation for the pain that they are suffering."

McGowan says it is "unreasonable" of universities to "basically say that they can't afford a decent pay rise that takes their pay forward rather than [giving] them a real pay cut".

University of Sydney academics and professional employees are planning to take industrial action for 48 hours on May 11 and 12 and McGowan says NTEU members at other universities are also considering applying for protected action ballot

orders.

University of Sydney staff will strike for 48 hours. NTEU members want secure jobs, an end to the endemic culture of unmanageable workloads, proper rights for casual staff, gender affirmation leave and a fair pay rise.

[@AlisonBarnes25](#) [@DamienCahill8](#) <https://t.co/f6MNUJ8M3B> pic.twitter.com/SJwaGTRXXN

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"Unsustainable" pay rises threaten jobs: AHEIA

Australian Higher Education Industrial Association executive director Stuart Andrews has labelled the union's pay claim as "totally unrealistic" given the challenges still being faced by universities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Andrews told *Workplace Express* today that the "vast majority" of the 32 universities it represents are currently bargaining but "not a lot a headway has yet occurred".

While the bargaining agendas of the individual universities differ due to their own circumstances and current agreement provisions, he says a number are "seeking to simplify their current EAs including with respect to change management, dispute settling, termination of employment and academic workload provisions".

Given many also had to significantly reduce staffing levels over the past two years, Andrews says he does not think "anyone wants that situation exacerbated by unsustainable pay increases through bargaining".

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