



THE
**PROFESSIONAL
STAFF UNION**

Message from Sydney Uni CPSU to UNSW Professional Staff

Dear UNSW Professional Staff member,

As a Professional Staff representative at the University of Sydney, I was concerned to read the unreasoned and simplistic statement of intent from the UNSW NTEU Branch regarding a single enterprise Agreement model, a statement which appears to blindly follow the NTEU national model with little regard to local requirements.

As a staff representative who is currently experiencing the significant disadvantages to Professional staff brought about by the recent imposition of a single agreement upon those Professional staff at the University of Sydney, I feel I must respond.

Firstly, the fundamental element missing in this communication from the NTEU UNSW Branch is any sort of reasoned argument. It is a series of statements based on a plainly erroneous premise, and in the end, provides not an iota of evidence at its base.

In fact the whole basis of the argument appears to be that hard work is not needed to negotiate better conditions for Professional staff at UNSW – the suggestion appears to be - if we surrender our independence to the Academics, we can sit back and simply wait to be better off.

This has not been the experience at the University of Sydney.

If Professional Staff conditions have fallen behind those of academic staff at UNSW, the fundamental question to ask is: why?

No attempt is made to explore this vital question.

The obvious conclusion is that in negotiations in the previous Bargaining round at UNSW, less emphasis was placed on securing conditions for Professional staff than for Academic staff. This suggests a bias in favour of Academic staff, a bias that will be formally locked in if the independence of a separate Professional Staff Agreement is surrendered in favour of an instrument that rolls significantly different conditional requirements into a single uniform set.

The communication explains that the NTEU “*will seek the higher standard wherever inequities exist between professional and academic staff conditions.*”

My question is: why is this not possible to seek the higher standard wherever inequities exist under a separate Professional staff agreement?

Of course the answer is simple – it is perfectly possible – it is simply a matter of will, and it seems that the NTEU does not have the will if it doesn't involve a local strategy that parrots its inflexible national strategy.

The NTEU points out that there are many single Agreements around the country, but fails to mention that there are also many separate Agreements.

Since the beginning of the Enterprise Bargaining system the University of Sydney existed very well on separate Agreements for Academic and Professional staff – in fact we are often cited as having the premiere working conditions in terms of Australian universities, and this was built on the back of a separate Agreement system.

It was only in the previous round of Enterprise Bargaining that the NTEU succeeded in superimposing its national strategy over our local objectives at the University of Sydney.

In this current round of Bargaining, the first under a single Agreement, staff at the University of Sydney look like being locked into an extremely poor salary increase regime for the next five years – a below Sydney CPI figure of approximately 2.55% per annum when calculated from the end of our last salary increase in mid-2012.

CPSU @ UNSW

- **Representing Professional Staff at UNSW for over 60 years.**
- **Support Professional Staff at UNSW to self-determine pay and conditions.**
- **Ensuring lived experience, on the job experience and self developed knowledge is recognized and rewarded for Professional Staff at UNSW.**
- **Providing an independent voice for Professional Staff amongst the professors, academics, students, graduates, businesses and governments.**

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It is however vital to note that, out of concern for lower paid University of Sydney Professional staff in the current economic climate, the Vice Chancellor at Sydney raised the prospect of providing a salary increase as a flat payment of \$3160 per annum to each staff member, rather than as a percentage of each staff members individual income.

The CPSU calculated that this would have meant a significant advantage to 86% of Professional staff at the University over a percentage increase. Indeed for those that most needed it – Professional Staff at HEO levels 1 & 2 – a flat \$3160p.a. salary increase approach would have represented a pay increase of more than 26% over the period in question.

However under our new single Agreement system, this would have also affected Academic staff. Academic staff are already paid significantly more than Professional staff.

Our calculations were that approximately half of Academic staff would come out better off than a regular percentage increase. This of course means that approximately half of the Academic staff would have come out worse off than a percentage increase.

Under separate Agreements, no problems – 86% of Professional staff get a better deal, and there's little difference to the Academic deal.

Under a single Agreement, this was NOT possible. This would have posed a significant disadvantage to Academic staff. Despite the University initially raising this idea, it could not be progressed as it would have disadvantaged Academic staff under our single Agreement model.

At the University of Sydney it is arguable that the adoption of a single Agreement has been the single most defining element that has led to an outcome for Professional staff that equals a real term pay cut over the next five years in the current negotiation process. Had we had a separate Agreement, allowing Professional staff to negotiate independently where circumstances *require* an individual approach, there's a good chance we'd have been significantly better off.

With separate staff Agreements there is flexibility to adopt specifically tailored measures for Professional staff while still working very closely with our Academic colleagues and their representatives to ensure an outcome that improves the lot of all staff. With a single Agreement model, this flexibility, and along with it a good measure of Professional staff independence simply disappears. Being stronger together does not need to involve surrendering our independence as Professional staff.

And finally, let us not forget that at the end of the day, a single Agreement involves handing a tremendous amount of power to make decisions regarding Professional staff working conditions into the hands of Academic staff. While I do not by any means suggest that our Academic staff brothers and sisters will be generally anti-Professional staff in their approach to this (and this has not been the experience at Sydney), wherever there are conflicts of interest in such areas, it is only to be expected that Academic staff will support their own interests, and via their strong voting bloc, often directly at the expense of Professional staff interests. This has been the overriding lesson at the University of Sydney.

Regards,

Grant Wheeler

President, CPSU University of Sydney branch.