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JANUARY-MARCH 2019

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## RED TAPE

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All members of CPSU NSW are also members of the Public Service Association.  
The PSA is the associated body that manages and resources CPSU NSW.



## DELEGATES GIVE SHARPE THE BLUNT TRUTH: NPWS IS IN TROUBLE

**LABOR'S SHADOW** Environment Minister, Penny Sharpe, visited the PSA to hear concerns from members in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

The MP, who several days later was appointed her party's deputy leader, said the "NPWS is what Labor governments do".

She said if Labor is elected, the loss of experienced staff under the present administration will be stopped.

"We need people with specialist understanding and knowledge," she told a meeting of Delegates. "We aspire for the NPWS to be one of the best in the world.

"We have to fix the mess."

"If this is the case, it will be a welcome development," says PSA Industrial Manager Nathan Bradshaw. "The current cuts to experienced staff have seen the NPWS lose thousands of years of experience and skills."

Ms Sharpe heard how cuts to senior staff had affected bushfire control, feral animal management and weed programs. The decline of park maintenance also put at risk tourism industries in small communities.

Delegates told Ms Sharpe that outsourced recruitment had failed, presenting the service with unqualified candidates for job vacancies. ●



## PSA ON THE FRONT FOOT IN POWERHOUSE FIGHT

**THE PSA** has publicised its campaign to keep the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo.

Industrial Officer Kerrie Butson was quoted in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article about the neglect of the facility, which has resulted in one valuable exhibit, the world's oldest steam engine, no longer working.

"The museum's facilities are all fit for purpose," Ms Butson was quoted as saying, "though staff need to be employed by the Powerhouse Museum to continue the maintenance program on a regular basis rather than knee-jerk reactions to urgent issues."

Staff at the Powerhouse unanimously voted to retain the Ultimo site and to open a related cultural institution in Parramatta.

The Berejiklian Government plans to turn the Ultimo site into flats and says it will eventually open a replacement in Parramatta.

At the most recent members' meeting, members expressed disappointment with the results of the most recent People Matter Survey. Notably, members were disappointed with the high rate of bullying at the Museum and 16 per cent approval of the grievance dispute process.



## PSA CHECKS OUT STATE LIBRARY

**A SAUSAGE** sizzle on the balcony gave members at the State Library the chance to talk about their conditions – and non-members the chance to join their union.

Delegates wowed members – and PSA staff – with their own salads to accompany the sausages cooked by Organisers.

PSA Organiser Davis Murphy says having events in an informal barbeque setting gives members the chance to relax and talk at ease to union staff.

"The PSA is helping to manage members' workloads," says Mr Murphy. "Large events such as exhibitions are creating a lot of work for the current staffing levels.

"We are also ensuring members know their rights when called in for meetings and over issues such as grievances." ●

# JUVENILE JUSTICE DISPUTE CONTINUES

**THE PSA HAS** written to the Minister for Corrections, David Elliott, demanding more be done to protect staff and inmates from dangerous detainees in the system.

"We need to take dangerous detainees out of the general population and place them into dedicated specialist units in the Cobham and Frank Baxter," says Senior Industrial Officer with the PSA, Julie Bond. "We are not looking to lock kids away in confinement for an extended period of time and they would still be given access to education, health care and, if required, deradicalisation programs. However, the one-size-fits-all approach is not working. Some detainees need tighter security.

"Surely the Government has an obligation to recognise the risk our members face and provide us a safer working environment."

The PSA believes the closure of the Kariong Centre has left a void in the care of high-risk detainees. ●



## CLARITY NEEDED FOR WORK BEHIND BARS

**THE PRISON OFFICERS** Vocational Branch (POVB) is calling for more clarity over the permissible use of force in the state's prisons.

"Using force is a requirement of the role," says PSA Industrial Officer David McCauley. "But there is a chance our members will face investigations, be suspended from duty, or terminated while aiding in maintaining the good order of a correctional centre. Surely there needs to be better understanding from Corrective Services NSW."

The lack of clarity adds to the stress Corrective Officers face under the Berejiklian Government's benchmarking program. The program, which the PSA believes to be a backdoor plan for more private-run prisons, has led to job losses and reduced ratios of staff to inmates.

"What we have seen in Parklea should be a warning that outsourcing Corrective Services is not in the best interests of the state," says Mr Cole. ●

# AGENCY STAFF INTAKE SPARKS JUSTICE ACTION

**WHEN THE** Department of Justice started hiring agency staff rather than employing Court or Sound Reporters, the PSA took action.

"The Department of Justice advised at the recent Joint Consultative Committee that it would not be employing Court or Sound Reporters to work in courts allocated to the newly appointed District Court Judges but would be engaging Agency Contractors instead," says Senior Industrial Officer Julie Bond. "The Department of Justice clearly does not value the skill and expertise our members provide to the justice system."

Ms Bond says the PSA has issued a directive that "Court and Sound Reporters not cover courts assigned to agency contractors".

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### McNALLY JONES STAFF LAWYERS

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**Note: Work related matters must be referred to PSA industrial staff in the first instance. They will advise if a lawyer is required.**

# 2GB BROADCASTS THE WRIGHT MESSAGE OVER DISABILITY SERVICES

**PSA ASSISTANT** General Secretary, Troy Wright, made a demand for a government-run service for people with disability on commercial radio network 2GB.

Interviewed in front of a live audience by Ben Fordham, Mr Wright informed the station's listeners that NSW is the only state or territory in Australia where the government had absolved itself of all responsibility for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

"Before the implementation of the NDIS, people with disability were cared for in a mixture of non-government providers and a large proportion – 40-odd per cent – were cared for in government-provided housing and accommodation through ADHC," said Mr Wright.

He said NSW used the NDIS as an opportunity to move out of the disability support sector and contract out group homes to private operators.

"NSW is the only state to do this – the only state to completely walk away from its responsibilities."

Paul Adderley, whose son Kenneth is a



**NSW IS THE ONLY STATE OR TERRITORY WHERE THE GOVERNMENT HAS ABSOLVED ITSELF OF ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOME OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN SOCIETY**

young man with severe disability, was also interviewed. He talked about the difficulties his family faces as the government refuses to guarantee funding for vital equipment such as breathing tubes.

Mr Fordham was scathing about the Minister for Disability Ray Williams's approach to the issue, likening it to applying plugs to a sinking boat.

"I know the people of NSW won't cop this – they won't cop it one single bit," said the broadcaster.

## NDIS FAILURE AFFECTS MEMBER

**A MEMBER** has experienced up close the disaster that is the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in NSW.

The member, whose daughter has high-level autism, has lost access to previously successful medical staff.

"They just give the money and send you off, without respite – which is vital for school holidays," says the member, who has no support from extended family.

The lack of assistance has been

compounded by a lack of workplace flexibility.

The member, who works in the Corrective Services field, says she has had more empathy for her situation from former prisoners than her management.

A combination of change to regime her daughter can't understand and workplace inflexibility has turned her against a job she once loved.

"I now hate the place with a passion," she says.



### SCHOOL CHANGES AHEAD

**THE DEPARTMENT** of Education has let a contract to Ernst and Young (EY) to undertake the Professional Learning Review.

EY has conducted focus groups and interviewed staff at more than 200 schools. The PSA has encouraged our members to be involved in this review.

Members of the Schools Departmental Committee Executive took part in an interview on 3 October 2018.

The recommendations for change put forward by the PSA included:

- update the professional learning policy to balance reference to teaching and non-teaching staff, and to distinguish between mandatory and non-mandatory learning
- a central repository of training materials, developed by the Department
- strive for equity across the state, independent of location
- conduct needs analysis with the Department to ensure adequate funds to design and deliver programs based on identified needs
- resource the SAS Staff Reference Groups with trainers who can support the work across the State
- support the role of principals and their role in professional learning
- create consistency in the approach to PDPs to ensure the formulation of appropriate, clear, relevant and transparent goals, conforming to roles and accountabilities and supportive of professional learning.

Members will be updated on the outcome of this review, which will now likely be considered by the Department in February 2019.

Pending its release, the Department has consulted with the PSA regarding a transitional arrangement for SAS and other non-teaching staff training which addresses many of the PSAs recommendations.

# PSA RALLIES TO OPPOSE CHILDREN PROTECTION WRONGS

**PSA ASSISTANT** General Secretary, Troy Wright, spoke at a rally outside Parliament House opposing government plans to streamline the NSW adoption policy.

The PSA believes the bill, which will have children adopted after two years of care, means birth parents who improve their family circumstances will still be locked out of their children's lives forever. With many Aboriginal children in care, the similarities with the Stolen Generation of the 20th century are also unsettling.

"This bill is a revolutionary change to our child protection system," he said. "There is not one dollar or one worker added in this bill to address the many kids

reported at risk who are not seen by anyone; there is not one dollar or one worker added in this bill to help families with early intervention to prevent kids going into care; there is not one dollar or one worker added in this bill to look over and assist kids in foster care, improve the foster care system and regulate it better so that shoddy, for-profit providers aren't gouging the system."

Industrial Manager with the PSA, Kris Cruden, believes the current system should be left as it is, with better funding for child protection, rather than the proposed "tick and flick" approach which will let the Government absolve



itself of responsibility for caring for some of the most vulnerable children in the state.

Ms Cruden also recommended the Government reverse its decision to close early intervention support, which helped keep children out of foster care in the first place.

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## FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

STEWART LITTLE

# MELBOURNE VICTORY SCORES A GOAL FOR VITAL PUBLIC SERVICES

**THE TSUNAMI** of seats won by the Daniel Andrews Government in Victoria in November shows voters are tired of the neoliberal slash-and-burn disdain for public services.

Labor campaigned on issues such as TAFE and vocational training, which hit home in outer suburban seats where people were rightly worried their children would have limited future work opportunities. Swings to Labor were huge in seats such as Dandenong (11.8 per cent), Frankston (9.5 per cent) and Mulgrave (8.8 per cent). In seats such as these, on Melbourne's edge, access to vocational education for many school leavers is the difference between a rewarding, well-paid career and a life bouncing between various low-paying jobs.

Other issues in the poll included access to early-childhood education, in-school dental care and public transport; issues that are the cornerstone of a society that looks after its members.

Even in the Liberal Party's heartland, the leafy seats of Melbourne's wealthy eastern suburbs, voters were brutal in their treatment of sitting members. This is the area that nurtured Liberal Party founder Robert Menzies, who talked about representing the "forgotten people". Since then the Liberal Party has certainly forgotten people, and now is the party of the outsourcer, of the big banks, of the polluter, and of the privatised utility. And voters of all stripes have woken up to this.

In 2019, the people of NSW will go to the polling booth and give their own verdicts on the Liberal and National parties and their vision for our state. TAFE, our cover story this month, is an issue in our state, again particularly in outer suburbs such as Penrith, where the local Liberal member must have watched the Victorian results with a degree of horror.

Ms Berejiklian has been quick to blame the federal party for its poll slump, yet NSW is the only state that has no public safety net



**ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR MANY SCHOOL LEAVERS IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REWARDING, WELL-PAID CAREER AND A LIFE BOUNCING BETWEEN VARIOUS LOW-PAYING JOBS**

for people with disability. It has sold its land-titling office, privatised prisons and Sydney is criss-crossed with half-finished public works delivered late by private contractors.

In Victoria, many Liberal Party officials were lectured by voters on their lacklustre environmental credentials. Here in NSW, where the Ranger numbers in the National Parks and Wildlife Service have been slashed, a park in the Murray Valley is at risk of being degazetted, and the Darling River is being plundered, the ruling party is playing risky games with the state's environment. And voters will be noticing.

In Victoria, regional centres such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepperton installed Labor and independent candidates. In NSW, where seats such as Upper Hunter are on tight margins, neglect of local public services, and the resulting economic knock-on effects felt when these are cut, will be testing voters' patience.

The Berejiklian Government, with its healthy majority, should be sitting pretty next year. However, the Victorian result shows voters take their public services seriously. And if they wake up on 24 March with four years of opposition ahead of them, they can't say we didn't warn them. ●



# NEW BARGAINING APPROACH TRIALLED AT MACQUARIE

**THE CPSU NSW** is trying a new approach on behalf of members at Macquarie University.

Interest-based bargaining attempts to get parties to adopt a less adversarial approach to negotiations.

"It is based on common rather than competing interests," says CPSU NSW Industrial Manager Blake Stephens.

According to the Fair Work Commission, the new approach will:

- promote cooperative and productive workplace relations through interest-based approaches to bargaining for enterprise agreements
- develop new ways of resolving conflict or disputes at the workplace using interest-based problem-solving
- support the introduction of change, innovation and productivity improvement through new ways of collaborating outside of the bargaining cycle, and before a dispute occurs. ●



# CPSU NSW STANDS UP FOR FORESTRY

**A CPSU NSW DELEGATION** visited NSW Parliament House to make sure Forestry workers were not left out of the koala conservation debate.

Now a state-owned corporation, Forestry NSW has 100 years of sustainable forest management experience. CPSU NSW members include forest scientists, ecologists and geologists, as well as office-based staff with financial, commercial, administration and IT roles.

Forestry Delegates Nigel Fuller, Bob Aspden, Holly James and Steve Pickering, along with Assistant General Secretary Troy Wright and CPSU NSW industrial officer Rachel O'Shea visited Upper House Labor MPs Penny Sharpe and Mick Veitch to ensure their industry's survival was included in the party's plans to preserve the state's koala population.

"Forestry Corp members are concerned about their jobs, their communities and the future of a sustainable north coast timber industry," says Ms O'Shea. "They also care about koalas, which thrive on the leaves of replanted trees. The timber industry in northern NSW is compatible with increasing and preserving koala numbers in NSW.

"The harvesting of state forests also creates 'flow on' commercial industries in regional areas such as sawmills, timber

joineries, haulage, machine operators, mechanics and other small businesses. Every Forestry job directly supports another regional job."

The MPs were also reminded that the state's forestry industry is held to much higher environmental standards than the imported timber and other alternatives that would follow if local production was ceased.

"The native hardwood forests of northern NSW produce highly valuable and unique timbers found nowhere else in the world," says Ms O'Shea. "The timbers are used in the wharves and jetties of Sydney, in flooring, for power poles and in timber bridges. Without these timbers, these products will be replaced with steel and concrete alternatives, both leaving a much bigger carbon footprint. Flooring will be replaced by wood sourced from forests in southeast Asia with lower levels of environmental certification.

"Forestry has won more than 20 Gold and Silver regional, state and national tourism awards since 2012. It has valuable recreational uses. In state forests you can camp free, take your dog or even ride your horse. There are millions of nature-based tourism visits to state forests each year." ●

## KEEPING TIME



**IN NOVEMBER**, the Centre for Future Work marked Go Home on Time Day, alerting Australia's workforce to the amount of unpaid hours employees are gifting their bosses.

Want to know how much time you're handing over to the boss? Go to [gohomeontimeday.org.au](http://gohomeontimeday.org.au) and use the centre's online calculator. The results may be disturbing.



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

KYLIE MCKELVIE

# THE POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER

**IN NOVEMBER** we received a powerful reminder of the strengths of working together as a union movement.

The decision by the State Government to award 10 days' Family Domestic Violence (FDV) leave for anyone escaping an abusive relationship is the result of years of pressure from the union movement.

The PSA was a pioneer in FDV leave, getting five days' leave inserted into awards for state public servants. However, this could only be taken once all other entitlements, such as sick and holiday leave, were exhausted.

The We Won't Wait campaign, driven by the PSA, CPSU NSW and other public sector unions, pushed to get 10 days' leave for members, and for the entitlement to be accessible regardless of whether other entitlements have been exhausted.

As recently as October, the PSA and other

public sector unions were involved in round tables with Minister Pru Goward to sway her this was the right path for workers in NSW.

Thanks must go to the PSA staff and Women's Council for their work assisting the We Won't Wait campaign so far. The next step is to get 10 days' FDV leave for all workers in Australia through the National Employment Standards.

The PSA and CPSU NSW recently attended a conference for Women in Male-Dominated Occupations and Industries (WIMDOI).

While all women face challenges in the workplace, our female members in areas such as Corrective Services, National Parks, transport and Forestry face unique difficulties. From the practical, such as inadequate toilet and changing facilities, to the less tangible, such as a lack of female

mentors, these difficulties could easily send workers back to "women's jobs". But our members are forging ahead, with their union supporting them at every step.

The CPSU NSW and Electrical Trades Union formulated a ground-breaking leave policy for women who have experienced stillbirth in the male-dominated electricity company Ausgrid. Before then, the policy was women were expected to return straight to work after the trauma of stillbirth.

Many challenges face women getting into management positions, even in industries where gender is more evenly balanced or skewed towards females. Issues such as time taken out for caring duties or bias - unconscious or otherwise - against promoting women in their 20s and 30s for fear they may take maternity leave or those nearing retirement age. ●



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# VOTES UP FOR GRABS

## MEMBERS ARE ON THE LINE TO VOTE FOR A PARTY THAT SUPPORTS PSA/CPSU NSW ISSUES

At the NSW state elections in March, 85 per cent of members would be open to voting for a party that supported the PSA and CPSU NSW's campaign issues, according to the results of a phone call campaign conducted by the union.

Further, roughly 38 per cent of members are undecided about their voting intentions.

That's a double-edged sword for Labor.

The good news for them is a sizable voting block is potentially open to supporting the Labor Party.

The bad news is that despite the litany of disasters the Berejiklian Government has either continued with or directly introduced, Labor has clearly not articulated its position on a range of issues as well as it could nor has it sufficiently highlighted the real points of difference with the Government.

These were just two of the points that emerged from the union systemically calling members over the past few months.

The phone campaign made 1211 calls between 10 and 28 September.

A survey version of the call script was emailed or texted to the mobile phones of those members who could not be reached on the phone.

## WORKPLACE ISSUES

The issues members were most concerned about were casualisation and the temporary nature of public sector work, along with the 12 per cent efficiency dividend.

Members were least concerned about the lack of workplace flexibility.

Of the Justice members who were questioned about benchmarking, 67 per cent were highly concerned.

When asked about any other workplace issues currently of concern, the most common matters included bullying and harassment, lack of workers' compensation, absence of training, nepotism and wage gaps - including between genders and levels of seniority.

## ELECTION ISSUES

The election issue of greatest concern to members was job security.

Interestingly, although 89 per cent were concerned about the 12 per cent efficiency dividend, 20 per cent did not necessarily think dumping it was an important matter to be considered at the ballot box.

Members were also asked if they had any other issues of importance that they consider when voting.

The issues raised included public transport, road tolls in Western Sydney, improving workers' compensation laws, more funding for health and education and reinstating Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

## VOTING INTENTIONS

Forty per cent of members indicated they intended to support Labor at the next state election, while 38 per cent of members were undecided as to which party they would support.

Of those who were undecided, 63 per cent did not even know which party they are leaning towards at this stage, while 18 per cent were favouring Labor, six per cent the Liberal or National Party and 13 per cent others.



Assistant General Secretary Troy Wright was just one of the PSA/CPSU NSW staff who worked the phones, talking to members.

## COMMITMENT TO FIRST PREFERENCE VOTES

The majority of members at the state election are already strongly committed to their position.

Those who at this stage intended to vote for other parties are not quite as firm in their stance, with 38 per cent only mildly committed to voting for the Liberals or Nationals and 43 per cent planning to support an independent.

## LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING FOR A PARTY THAT ENDORSED THE PSA/CPSU NSW'S CAMPAIGN

Apart from their actual voting preferences, 85 per cent of members indicated they would be open to voting for whichever party supported the issues around which the PSA and CPSU NSW have been campaigning.

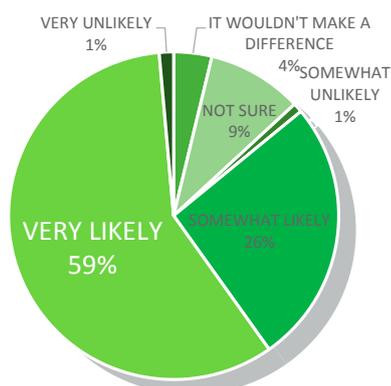
"It was an informative and worthwhile experience speaking to our members about the issues of concern to them with the state election looming," said PSA General Secretary Stewart Little.

"It was particularly gratifying to find that 85 per cent of members indicated they would be open to voting for whichever party supported this union's campaign issues.

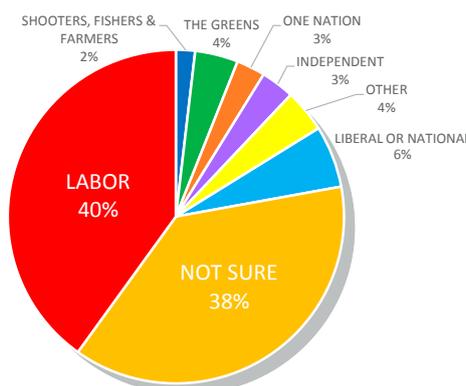
"That so many place that level of trust in their union is a heartening act of faith that I assure you will not be taken lightly.

"On the other hand, it seems that rather than simply being able to stroll over the line in March, Labor has some work to do to convince the almost 40 per cent of members we spoke to that they are worthy of their vote and support."

## How likely is it you would vote for a party that adopted PSA/CPSU NSW policies?



## Which party are you likely to vote for in March 2019?





## FROM THE ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

TROY WRIGHT

### THE STATE WE'RE IN

**THE ISSUES** confronting the committee in the course of the Inquiry into the Implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the Provision of Disability Services in NSW are intimidating both in sheer numbers and complexity. Our submission alone traverses many of the terms of reference of the inquiry, including relevantly for our members, the industrial ramifications of the forced transfer of ADHC employees to the private sector and the consequent issue of workforce sustainability.

Perhaps unusually for a union, we would like to concentrate our attention on an issue of public policy, that being the provision of a public sector "safety net" of service provision.

The issues regarding the design and operation of the NDIS are but one part of the committee's inquiry and, to some extent, the problems that arise there are beyond the control of the State Government alone. What we know already, however, is that any concerns that have arisen through the introduction of the NDIS have been exacerbated by the NSW Government's additional decision to cease any level of direct service provision in its own right.

The O'Farrell NSW Government, when negotiating the NDIS with the Federal Government, obtained a condition in the heads of agreement that no other state or territory was granted – that there be no residual service provision by the state. This effectively meant all public sector services within the responsibility of ADHC were to be privatised.

Representatives of both the Government and the Department have repeatedly claimed this was a decision made because of the introduction of the NDIS. The experience and position of other states and territories shows this to be untrue and to claim so is misleading. It was a voluntary abrogation of responsibility, leaving the provision of most basic and essential services for the most vulnerable people in society to the whims of "market forces".

The provision of social services for those in the community who rely on them must be the core business of Parliament.

Differing views may be held as to how this responsibility is to be approached, but what is clear is that the abandonment of public sector service delivery by the state as is being done in the disability sector is a unique experiment. Our health sector, our education sector and our child protection sector, notwithstanding the Tune Report, all rely on a mix of government and non-government service delivery. A total privatisation of any of these fields would be considered outrageous. Yet somehow it has been decided that this is an efficient and appropriate model for disability services.

### We're here to help

From the announcement of this proposal up until its implementation, the PSA repeatedly raised concerns with any interest group that would listen that this was a proposal doomed to fail. Without a public sector safety net providing services to those beyond the capacity of the private sector, the PSA predicted people would land in other, less appropriate services such as the state's hospitals, its aged-care system, its child-protection agencies and even corrections. To consider it in the crudest terms, effectively the cost to the State Government of providing services to people with a disability will be transferred from a specialised agency in ADHC to other less appropriate services and sectors. Our submission includes numerous examples of this occurring already, only 12 months after implementation. Rather than being a proposal doomed to fail, sadly it is already a policy decision that is failing and will continue to fail without dramatic intervention.

Our submission is not ideological. Rather it contains many case studies and examples of the current system's shortcomings as provided by our members.

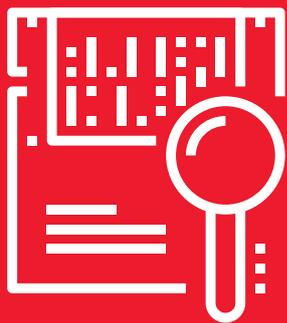
I would like to highlight the example of one young woman, Ms Kym Flowers, a 34-year-old woman who has cerebral palsy, and her family, Lee and Penny.

Ms Flowers has been a resident of a non-government supported accommodation service up until this year. Her diabetes recently worsened and she now requires insulin treatment five times a day. On account of her disability Ms Flowers is unable to administer this treatment herself and as it must be supported then by a registered nurse, she is beyond the capacity of her non-government service provider. Ms Flowers is passed between NSW Health and the NDIA who claim her needs be funded as a disability and health issue respectively. In the meantime, with no government-operated accommodation available any longer in her area and no comprehensive wraparound case management service of the kind that previously existed under ADHC, Ms Flowers has been a resident of Sutherland Hospital for more than six months.

Our calls for the re-establishment of a public sector safety net in our submission are not new. Nor is this position any longer isolationist, it has been supported by other stakeholders, including regulatory bodies, non-government service providers and parents and carers themselves.

But we recognise our calls in our submission for the re-establishment of, and investment in, public sector service provision as a safety net would require brave decision-making beyond politics. We hope our submission today emboldens the committee to make that step.

*This is an edited version of Troy Wright's submission to the Inquiry into the Implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Provision of Disability Services in NSW.* ●



## LIVING COSTS SURGING 395 PER CENT FASTER THAN WAGES, ACTU RESEARCH FINDS

**NEW FIGURES COMPILED** by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) show the cost of electricity, gas and childcare are increasing up to 395 per cent faster than wages, revealing the extent of the household budget “squeeze” facing workers.

The ACTU analysis, compiled from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) cost of living data, found electricity has increased by 10.4 per cent in the year to June 2018, followed by utilities at eight per cent, gas seven per cent and childcare six per cent.

When these increases were compared to the rise in the wage price index, of 2.1 per cent in the year to June, electricity costs grew 395 per cent faster than wages, utilities 280 per cent, gas 238 per cent, and childcare 185 per cent.

PSA and CPSU NSW members have received higher wage rises than the 2.1 per cent average.

“It is evident that the cost of living for these essential items has sky rocketed,” the *Australia Needs a Pay Rise* report said.

“This is why the ACTU is campaigning for a living wage to replace the minimum wage.

“The living wage then needs to be adjusted over time to reflect changes in the prices of these ‘basic necessities’.

“This would help ensure that no-one working full-time lives in poverty.”

The report recommends using alternative Australian Bureau of Statistics measurements for wages and salaries, such as the “average earnings per hour indicator ... as part of the National Accounts”, which revealed wage growth had been “around one per cent per annum for the last three years”.

“This measure captures a wider range of payments than the WPI, because in addition to basic wages it includes allowances, superannuation and redundancy payments.

“Moreover, this indicator takes into

account changes in the composition of employment.

“This is important because changes in who has a job can produce misleading impressions about what is happening to wages.”

### More workers depend on ‘basic safety net’

“One factor contributing to the wage crisis has been a collapse in the proportion of workers covered by collective agreements, especially in the private sector,” the report goes on.

Enterprise bargaining peaked in 2011-12 and since 2013 “there has been a sharp drop in the number of employees covered by a collective agreement”, the report found.

“In fact there are now nearly 700,000 fewer workers covered by a collective agreement than was the case five years ago,” the report said. “And over that period total employment has expanded so the proportion of workers that had the protection of a collective agreement declined even more sharply.”

This meant the number of workers on an industry award had “increased significantly

... which merely provides a basic safety net of protections”.

“The demise of enterprise bargaining over the last half decade coincides with the sharp decline in wages that is evident in the various wage indicators referred to in this report.”

The report recommended the following reforms:

- Restoring collective bargaining;
- Instituting a living wage;
- Raising public sector pay; and
- Ensuring industrial laws decrease the number of insecure jobs.

### Low wages ‘product of a broken system’

ACTU secretary Sally McManus said the study revealed “people are feeling the pinch as their budgets are stretched further than the official data suggests”.

“It is no coincidence that wages are going backwards at the same time as the number of workers covered by collective agreements has collapsed,” she said. “We need to reverse this trend to bring back fairness to the workplace and raise Australian living standards.” ●





## NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY DEAL FINALISED

**AFTER 18 MONTHS** of negotiation, CPSU NSW members at the University of Newcastle have a new enterprise agreement.

"We were pleased to tell members there was no loss of current conditions," says CPSU Industrial Manager Blake Stephens. "Uppermost in our minds during the long process was the desire to ensure current conditions would either remain as they are, or be enhanced."

### Enhancements and new entitlements

- » 10 days' Domestic and Family Violence leave separate and in addition to personal leave entitlements
- » new internal advertising of new HEW 5 and below professional positions in the first instance;
- » an increase in super contributions to 17 per cent for all fixed term staff with effect from 30 September 2021
- » enhancements to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment provisions, including doubling some leave provisions and increases to language allowances
- » CPSU NSW representation on Diversity Working Group to address LGBTI+ concerns
- » retention of existing detachment periods with a new enhanced option for detached staff to access a professional external outplacement program
- » longer notice periods for senior staff to four weeks
- » a minimum two-hour payment for casual staff for orientation activities – plus additional payment for mandatory training as directed.

### Enhanced Parental Leave entitlements

- » additional week of paid leave for parents' partners
- » a new entitlement of two weeks' paid leave provision for loss of a baby between 16 and 20 weeks' pregnancy
- » an additional two weeks' paid leave for loss of a baby from 20 weeks' pregnancy
- » 12 weeks' surrogacy leave, plus receiving parent gets access to adoption leave benefits
- » use of up to two days' personal leave per annum for volunteering activities
- » limited cash-out of annual leave in specific circumstances
- » post-implementation review of Organisational Change.
- » improved pathways for more secure employment
- » a new job security clause
- » new specific externally sourced career development and job seeking programs to support all staff seeking to secure fixed term and ongoing roles through competitive recruitment
- » a pay increase of two per cent per annum over the term of the agreement. ●

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS 2019

### Prison Officers (Vocational Branch) Advisory Group Election of State Executive 2019-2021

Nominations are hereby called for the following positions on the State Executive of the Prison Officers (Vocational Branch) Advisory Group.

**Chair**

**Vice**

**Chair**

**Country Vice Chair**

**Secretary**

**Assistant Secretary**

Persons nominated must be members of the above branch and be financial members of the Association as at 25 January 2019.

### NOMINATIONS AND CLOSING DATE

Each nomination must be seconded by two other members in the same electorate as the nominee.

Nominees, nominators and seconders must be financial members of the Association as at **25 January 2019**.

Nominations must be submitted via Survey Monkey

**[www.surveymonkey.com/r/POVStateExec2019](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/POVStateExec2019)**

**The Survey Monkey link for nominations will be emailed to all eligible members on Thursday, 30 January 2019.**

Nominations will close on **Thursday, 28 February 2019**. Forms must be completed via Survey Monkey by **5pm on 28 February 2019**.

If there is a ballot, candidates who wish to have a profile available for voters to read should provide a brief statement of 300 words or less stating how they will best represent members' interests.

Space is provided for this purpose on the form available through Survey Monkey.

**J Campbell**

for **G R Bensley**

Deputy Returning Officer

## NO SCHOOL VISIT BY THE GRINCH

**THE PSA** Elected Delegates and PSA staff have stopped a plan by the Department of Education to pay holiday leave loading after Christmas.

All SAS Staff will be paid their annual holiday leave loading on 13 December, rather than after Christmas Day.

"Congratulations to your elected Schools Departmental Committee Delegates who have achieved a great result for all our members in schools," says PSA Industrial Manager Kris Cruden. "SAS Staff have always received their leave loading in the first pay period, and many will budget Christmas with this in mind."

The Department has also proposed a way to ensure that SAS Staff will continue to receive their leave loading in the first pay period in December in future. ●



## Garden employees get back pay

**THE PSA HAS WON** Botanic Gardens & Centennial Parklands employees a Christmas bonus, winning up to \$1500 for the non-payment of uniform allowances.

The allowance is available as an ongoing payment for all eligible Gardens staff in the future.

In October the PSA met with management to negotiate a framework to expedite a settlement on this issue.

The PSA has also been working to ensure Garden staff on 38 hours maintain their nine-day fortnight arrangement.

Gardens staff have indicated this is a flexible work condition that provides mutual benefits to both the Gardens and its staff. The PSA and members remain steadfast to protect this important provision. ●



## TEMPS EARN FULL-TIME STATUS

**DESPITE THE** decision by management at Housing to not directly convert long-term temps to ongoing roles, the PSA's high-calibre, long-term temp members were all successful in the recruitment process.

"Our members proved their capabilities against external applicants and that they deserved to be directly appointed to ongoing roles before the department resorted to external recruitment," says PSA Industrial Officer Katy Ambler.

The HCC advised the PSA 73 ongoing Client Service Officer roles were filled, with all long-term temps succeeding via comparative assessment with external applicants. A 12-month talent pool has been created for those not successful in gaining an ongoing role.

The PSA is advised by the Deputy Secretary that more contract roles of up to four years also will be available. This is thanks to additional funding to cover that period. ●



# PSA HOPES NEW RANGERS FIRST OF MANY

**AFTER YEARS OF CUTS** to staff levels in which 100 Rangers and 30 Area Managers lost their jobs, the PSA has cautiously welcomed 44 new Ranger positions in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

During the recruitment process 11 Temporary Rangers applied for ongoing roles. Seven were appointed and a further four were unsuccessful. Fifty-six per cent of offers were to female applicants.

Further to this the Ranger talent pool has almost been exhausted. This being the case, NPWS representatives have indicated that there would most likely be additional recruitment to fill further vacancies in the Ranger ranks. The PSA encourages unsuccessful applicants to seek feedback from hiring managers first before reapplying for further positions.

The PSA has advised temporary Rangers

who were unsuccessful to discuss their further employment and status of their contracts with their immediate supervisors. Parks representatives also acknowledged Rangers fulfil a critical role within NPWS structure.

“Obviously we’d like to see Ranger numbers return to the levels they were before jobs cuts decimated our service,” says PSA Organiser Kim de Govrik. “But any intake of Rangers is welcome. Hopefully these jobs are the first of many to come.”

The PSA has also welcomed NPWS’s proactive approach to deal with bullying in the workplace. The body has advised there will be a new package to educate managers and staff on acceptable behaviour. There will also be visits to work sites around the state. ●



## BROADCASTER AND PSA GET SHERIFF’S OFFICER BACK TO WORK

**THE PSA** and broadcaster Ray Hadley publicised the sacking of a Sheriff’s Officer, Glenn Elliott-Rudder, who was captured on CCTV breaking up a fight outside a court in Wagga.

Rather than forcefully apprehend and handcuff the attacker, Mr Elliott-Rudder assessed the situation and lightly pushed the woman away from her victim. He was later suspended for his actions, even though they had defused a potential conflict within minutes of it starting.

Mr Elliott-Rudder’s position was restored after the PSA publicised his case on Mr Hadley’s radio program.

## IRC FULL BENCH KEEPS POWER TO INTERPRET DOCUMENTS

**THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS** Commission (IRC) clarified its powers to interpret instruments and other documents and to make consequential orders resolving industrial disputes in arbitration.

The decision was made by the full bench of the IRC in an appeal by the PSA against an earlier ruling by Commissioner Newall that the IRC cannot interpret documents such as a Premier’s Memorandum under the IR Act. The appeal was successful and the full bench overturned the decision.

There will be more on this decision in the next issue of *Red Tape*. ●

## THE WORKPLACE THAT FIGHTS TOGETHER WINS TOGETHER

**A GROUP OF WOMEN** at Nepean Police Area Command have found their strength in a union.

General Administrative Support Officers (GASOs) were in dispute with their management about flexible rosters at the Command, which is an amalgamation of the former Penrith and St Marys Local Area Commands. Without any negotiation, management informed the GASOs they were going to implement a combined nine-day fortnight roster with the commencement of Nepean Police Area Command.

Nepean GASOs were left feeling like they were not being heard and sought PSA HELP. PSA Organiser Roland Harris organised around the issue and got existing members to sign up their colleagues, achieving 100 per cent membership among the GASOs at Nepean.

GASOs at Penrith previously worked a nine-day fortnight, while staff at St Marys worked an eight-day fortnight. After trialling both rosters in the combined command, all GASOs indicated they preferred an eight-day fortnight roster, but at the end of the trials management tried to implement a

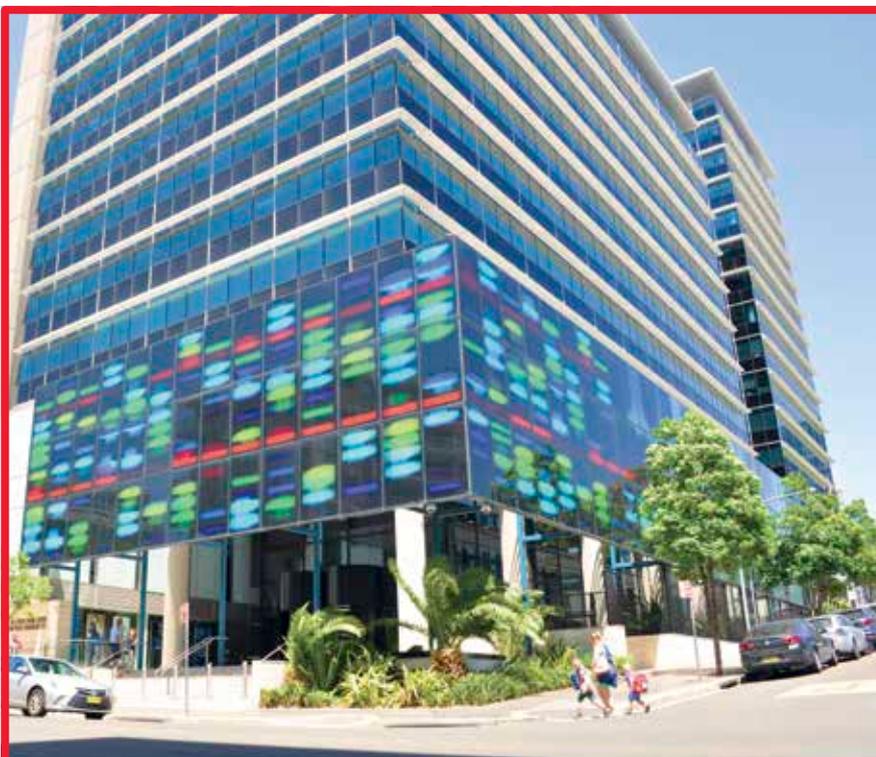
nine-day roster without negotiation.

With support from the PSA, NSW Police was forced to restart negotiations prior to GASOs having to implement work bans.

As a result, a new hybrid roster, which is a combination of eight-day and nine-day fortnights, is being trialled and is likely to be implemented permanently. This shows the usefulness of the strategy of organising around industrial issues.

Industrial Officer Andrew Wright said that the winning strategy has been a combination of collective action, effective industrial strategy, and an organised workplace.

Local delegate Paula agreed noting, "It has been a long road but coming together and standing strong to have our voices heard ended with a positive outcome". ●



## POLICE SECURITY IMPROVED

**WORK FROM THE PSA** has led to recent security upgrades to Parramatta Police Headquarters.

Special Constable members at the site raised concerns with PSA about the design of a traffic box, in particular the fact that the design had the door swinging outwards into exiting traffic. This presented a serious work health and safety risk to members in the event of a car colliding with the door as staff exited the traffic box.

Following several meetings between the PSA and NSW Police, as well as the involvement of SafeWork NSW, the swing of the door was reversed.

## TWO YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS END WITH WATER NSW DEAL

**AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS** of tough negotiation the CPSU NSW bargaining team – Tim Budd, Andrew Harrison, Scott Butler and Richard Wheatley – reached agreement with WaterNSW.

Management offered a new "unified" enterprise agreement to replace the existing SWC Enterprise Agreement and other copied state awards.

The two per cent annual increase in wages builds on the 3.3 per cent (2017) and 3.5 per cent (2018) increases secured by the CPSU NSW, and is a substantial improvement on the Corporation's previous offer and provides scope for growth in real wages over the life of the agreement.

Recent inflation figures show the Consumer Price Index tracking at 1.9 per cent, with basic necessities such as electricity (increases of up to 20 per cent year on year), health care (up 3.2 per cent), education (up 2.8 per cent) and transport (up six per cent) all putting pressure on household budgets.

"Negotiating unified employment conditions for WaterNSW staff has been a complex process and must be viewed in the context of a hostile political environment," says CPSU NSW Industrial Manager Blake Stephens.

# Rebuild our TAFE



**FOR MANY DECADES,** Australia's vocational education was internationally recognised as one of the best in the world. Well-resourced, high-profile TAFEs were the "anchors" of vocational training – embedded in cities and regions right across the country. They provided high-quality, job-relevant training; they liaised with employers and industries to meet future labour force needs; they were accessible to young people from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In short, the TAFEs were a crucial building block of Australia's postwar economic prosperity.

Then a meeting of the Council of Australian Governments, the peak intergovernmental forum, made formal agreements requiring all funding for vocational training be 100 per cent competitive throughout Australia. Suddenly TAFE colleges were competing against privately run institutions for every dollar.

On the assumption that private markets always know best, for-profit operators were supported to set up shop, attract students with often-dodgy promises (like 'free' iPads) – and cream off as much as they could in profits and commissions. Of course, this artificial "market" was never required to actually stand on its own two feet: it was subsidised from the beginning with enormous government resources, delivered through many channels (including the scandalous VET FEE-HELP).

A disaster in vocational education has been unfolding in slow motion ever since. The new system makes it impossible to maintain the first-class training

infrastructure and top-quality staff they were once famed for. Public faith in the value of vocational education has been shaken by repeated scandals – such as the frequent collapse of fly-by-night training operators, leaving thousands of students and their families in the lurch – and by the general lack of cohesion and stability. With the perceived value of vocational education tarnished, governments shifted an even



## A DISASTER IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION HAS BEEN UNFOLDING IN SLOW MOTION

larger share of post-secondary resources to university education – despite growing evidence that skilled trade workers, not university graduates, will be in shortest supply in the labour market of the future.

TAFE is now in deep crisis, facing a loss of critical mass in many locations, inability to attract students (confused by the incoherence of the overall system) and both retrenchment and low morale among staff. This crisis could be terminal without urgent action to restore stability to TAFEs and dismantle the phony market that has decimated vocational education.

The failure of Commonwealth vocational policy has been compounded in NSW by repeated funding cuts imposed by Premiers O'Farrell, Baird and Berejiklian. In total, these governments cut \$130 million from annual state support for the TAFE





## ON THE FRONT FOOT: THE CPSU NSW STANDS UP FOR TAFE

**THE CPSU NSW** has been on the front foot to save TAFE.

Delegates, members, staff and supporters have been at railway stations, bus stops and shopping strips throughout the state, letting people know just how badly vocational training has been neglected in the state.

CPSU NSW Organiser Shane Jobbers has travelled the state, visiting campuses, railway stations and town centres drumming up support for the organisation he once worked for. He has left a trail of signs in his wake alerting voters to the state of TAFE.

"We have covered south, west, north and east of the state," he says. "We've done it all; Nowra, Bega, Wollongong, the Hunter, Armidale, Tamworth... the list goes on.

"The reaction we are getting is positive. People are surprised as they often weren't aware of the state of the TAFE system.

"People who do know the situation are concerned about campuses being replaced with Connected Learning Centres and trades being lost."

Connected Learning Centres are a one-stop shop in smaller centres where students are expected to log onto a computer and study their course remotely. There are no lecturers, libraries of any

consequence or other resources usually associated with an educational facility. These are what is left when existing TAFE campuses are closed down and the land sold off.

Campaigning has taken place in a variety of regions, from wealthier suburbs in the east to more blue-collar suburbs, yet the reaction has been uniformly in favour of rebuilding TAFE.

"We are getting so much upbeat feedback from commuters and people on the street," says CPSU Communications Manager Marianne Ledic. "So many of them understand TAFE is an important part of people's lives. We have had parents worried about their kids' prospects, tradies who remember what TAFE did for them and people worried that NSW is losing its skilled workforce.

"Even a private vocational college owner has wished us luck with our campaign.

"We are getting positive feedback from MPs who are concerned about TAFE – and who see that the electorate shares these concerns."

The CPSU NSW has set up a website – [ourtafe.org.au](http://ourtafe.org.au) – that can alert users to campaigning information, news updates and background information on the Government's decimation of a once-great learning model.

The CPSU NSW's overall campaign aims to get people talking about the state of the TAFE system and lobbying MPs over its fate. There is also a postcard campaign, where people can send cards to their local MPs demanding they do more for a government-run vocational training provider.

"People need to know that even if they never set foot in a TAFE college, they still depend on a well-funded, efficient public vocational education system," says NSW Industrial Manager Blake Stephens.

"Do the people of NSW want qualified tradespeople they trust working on their homes, on their cars and with their children? Do they want young people in their communities to have affordable pathways to rewarding careers, without massive debts, or to languish in long-term unemployment? Will people ask they get closer to their retirement age want access to further training to keep their jobs, to reskill for new jobs or to nurture hobbies for a rewarding retirement?"

"All these depend on well-funded, and publically run TAFE system that is not competing against cut-price private colleges or competing against other public education providers who leave their students with a large debt bill." ●

system in NSW, already reeling from the loss of student revenues arising from the Commonwealth policy. And the elimination of more than 5000 TAFE positions here since 2012 is destroying the ability of NSW TAFEs to provide the full range of services and support that vocational students deserve and need – despite the heroic efforts of remaining staff to take up the load.

In NSW, TAFE employees are left to languish for years in casual and long-term temporary positions, while managers stand in the way of staff taking their accredited flex time.

The Centre for Future Work recently reviewed the history and consequences of the failed marketisation of vocational education in Australia, in a special report presented to the 2018 National Manufacturing Summit held at Parliament House in Canberra. The Centre's report focused on the problems for workforce development in manufacturing as a result of the breakdown of Australia's vocational education system. Along with mining, construction and hospitality, manufacturing is one of the economic sectors most dependent on vocational training. However, the root causes of the VET crisis and the obvious solutions, are relevant for all sectors. Here, excerpted from the full report, are highlights of the Centre's research and a list of immediate priorities for repairing the system.

It is impossible to exaggerate the severity of the crisis facing national vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, including NSW. It has been wracked by a devastating combination of policy errors and fiscal mismanagement, including:

- A long-term decline in state and Commonwealth fiscal support, with government post-secondary education expenditures increasingly concentrated in the university sector.
- A devastating and failed policy experiment with the marketisation of vocational education services, whereby control over course offerings, course delivery and student recruitment was decentralised to a supposed "market" dominated by for-profit training providers. As leading Australian economist John Quiggin has bluntly summarised, "Worthless qualifications have proliferated, driven by incentives and exploited by fraudulent for-profit enterprises."
- Despite the language of "accountability"

used to describe this experiment, private provision of VET is enormously subsidised by government – including through poorly controlled support to students that clearly wasted public resources and fostered unethical and unproductive practices by for-profit VET providers. This subsidy exploded more than 50-fold between 2009 and 2014, to more than \$1.3 billion a year. Billions of dollars of those payments are now unrecoverable because of the failure of private providers and the uselessness of credentials which students obtained.

- Another consequence of marketisation has been the near-collapse of TAFEs as a reliable, quality, publicly-accountable core provider of vocational education. Forced to compete for students and funds against for-profit providers and further undermined in most states by funding cutbacks by state governments, TAFEs struggle to clarify their mandate and maintain a critical mass.

These factors have devastated the vocational training system in all parts of Australia's economy, but some sectors have been especially hard hit because of their reliance on technicians and trades workers and their rapidly-evolving requirements for skilled labour. However, all parts of the economy ultimately depend on a reliable supply of first-class trained graduates and hence all will be damaged if the crisis is not fixed.

## Falling enrolments

The marketisation of vocational education reached its crux in the first half of this decade, following the extension of VET FEE-HELP payments. After a short-lived surge in enrolments, especially in non-trades training programs, total



participation in vocational training, including both apprenticeships and traineeships, has fallen sharply. Belated reforms to student assistance plans, imposed in the wake of numerous scandals among for-profit providers, reinforced the decline in enrollment – because there was no commitment of resources to TAFEs and other more genuine VET streams, as alternatives to dodgy for-profit providers.

## Funding cutbacks

Reductions in funding for vocational education have sparked a destructive vicious circle: reduced enrolments lead to further funding cuts, further damaging the quality of vocational training, further reducing the incentive for students to enrol and undermining the confidence of employers in the whole system.

Funding cuts occurred even as the size of the workforce and associated training needs have steadily expanded. Expressed in real per capita terms, therefore, the decline in funding has been even worse.

## TAFEs decimated

Under marketised delivery, TAFEs were meant to compete on the same ground as private providers for publicly subsidised student dollars. But private providers did not face the same infrastructure requirements or costs and could entice students with often-misleading promises, gimmicks and incentives. TAFEs were stranded by the shift of resources to private VET provision and the shift to universities. This reinforced the vicious circle: cash-strapped campuses had to pare back their own offerings, further undermining their reputation with students and employers alike.

Total hours of training offered by TAFEs in Australia declined by 30 per cent from 2009 through 2016 under the marketisation experiment, in contrast to a near-doubling of privately provided hours over the same period. This decline was exacerbated by a simultaneous 10 per cent decline in real funding from government for each hour of TAFE training. TAFE staffing levels have also been decimated in line with falling enrolments and budgets. More than 15,000 TAFE positions were cut nationally over the past five years – with one-third of the losses occurring in NSW.

## Curriculum challenges

In the context of chronic underfunding and the misallocation of resources through failed marketisation, the need for VET providers



**TAFES CAN ONCE AGAIN SERVE AS ANCHORS OF THE WHOLE VOCATIONAL SYSTEM – BUT ONLY IF OUR GOVERNMENTS HAVE THE POLITICAL WILL TO ADMIT THEIR PAST MISTAKES**

to continually upgrade and modernise their course offerings and to develop entire new qualifications in line with the emerging needs of the economy, has largely gone unmet. The skills most needed by modern employers are more complex than particular qualifications. Rather, employers are seeking a more comprehensive set of skills and attributes, reflecting the more challenging, judgment-based and technology-intensive nature of modern jobs. Quality vocational education therefore requires constant attention to the modernisation of curricula, skill sets and entire qualifications. But without energetic leadership and adequate resources to modernise the content and structure of VET offerings, it is not likely these changes will be realised.

A related problem is the increasing concentration of training around small, fragmented content units. The marketised user-pay delivery model for VET in Australia exacerbated this problem, since it is less expensive for students to enroll in narrower, "bite-size" topics – as compared to undertaking full, comprehensive

qualifications. Employers may also be more willing to fund employees to attain these "micro-competencies," rather than support them to attain broader, more complete qualifications, certificates and diplomas.

Competency-based, fragmented packages of knowledge address narrow, company-specific requirements; they don't allow workers to accumulate comprehensive, recognised and portable qualifications. This inhibits the ability of the workforce to respond, adapt and redeploy in the face of changes in product demand, technology and personal circumstances.

Our interviews with key informants from various economic stakeholders confirm widespread concern with this fragmented vision of VET provision. And this approach runs counter to the identified need of workers to possess a range of skills and competencies which can be flexibly applied to evolving and complex workplace challenges. The greater the extent to which training is focused on employer-specific micro-competencies, the less will workers be able to transfer their skills to other firms or sub-sectors; this further reduces the capacity of the sector to respond to changes in sectoral and occupational composition.

**Precarious work**

A final factor that has contributed to the failure of vocational training is the visible shift across the labour market toward more precarious forms of employment. This includes a growing incidence of part-time work, which now accounts for almost one-third of all employment, the widespread use of temporary jobs and labour-hire firms and

the contracting out of many functions to independent operators who are nominally self-employed, but heavily reliant on a particular dominant "customer".

Across Australia's economy as a whole, the share of employment which reflects one or more of these dimensions of insecurity now exceeds 50 per cent. Very few temporary, labour-hire, or contract workers would have access to any forms of support for acquiring vocational skills. Ironically, these are the same workers who would benefit most from the more secure and permanent forms of employment that good VET could help them attain.

For CPSU NSW members at TAFE, there are hundreds of long-term temporary, casual and agency employees, who the union is fighting to give employed more securely. While these efforts are often successful, it is small groups of members at a time. While this effort is time-consuming, the CPSU NSW is determined to ensure as many members as possible have secure work. ●



**TAFE NSW JOB LOSSES**

For job losses: the figures below show that up to 4,708 jobs (30%) have been cut since 2012.

**Employees FTE\***

2012/2013	15658
2013/2014	13108
2014/2015 **	11375
2015/2016	10589
2016/2017	10470
2017/2018	10905
2018/2019***	10950

**Enrollments**

2012	579719
2013	555452
2014	535089
2015	431868
2016	543309
2017	516700

\* underestimates job losses

\*\* Oct 2014 John Barillaro takes over Skills portfolio and TAFE transferred from Education cluster to Industry

\*\*\* forecast



## MIND THE GAP

### THE PSA AND CPSU NSW PUT MENTAL HEALTH ON THE WORKPLACE AGENDA

**ATTENDEES AT** the first ever PSA and CPSU NSW Mental Health Conference vowed to ensure the Government – and any future Government – take a stronger line on creating safer workplaces.

The PSA and CPSU NSW is building an emphasis on mental health in the workplace.

“The conference is a great way to make sure workers, their colleagues and, most importantly, their employers, take mental health in the workplace seriously,” said General Secretary Stewart Little.

Speaker Carmel Tebbutt, from the NSW Mental Health Coordinating Council, was the first guest speaker. She talked about how the roles many PSA and CPSU NSW members have at work puts them at greater risk of mental health stress.

“Many PSA members work in very high-risk roles, whether it be in Child Protection, Disability Services, Juvenile Justice or Corrective Services,” said Ms Tebbutt, a former Deputy Premier of NSW.

However, she pointed out that mental health issues can strike in any workplace, and that “one in five Australians experiences mental ill health in any given year”, making it the country’s “largest single cause of disability”.

However, despite the prevalence of mental stress, Ms Tebbutt said “many people did not seek help because of stigma”. She said that workplaces are critical in breaking down this stigma and creating a supportive environment for mental health problems. And this support will help the balance sheet, too.

“There are financial benefits to promoting mental health in the workplace, returning up to four dollars for every dollar spent,” she said. “Simple strategies such as increased job control and formal therapeutic training would produce a collective \$4.6 billion saving for Australian workplaces.”

Craig Hamilton, from mental health advocacy group Beyond Blue, talked about how “most of the area around mental health is not seen – it is below the water line”.

Mr Hamilton, a former sports broadcaster, talked about his own battles with bipolar disorder, which reshaped his previous attitudes that fighting mental illness involved “getting on with it”.

“I realised not even 12 months later it is not as simple as saying ‘just get on with it or just get over it.’”

While he conceded society “has made steps forward” in removing the stigma, Mr Hamilton said there was still a way to go

before conditions such as his are “treated the same way as the common cold” and that people don’t “reel backwards” when confronted with a colleague admitting to poor mental health.

He talked about developing strategies to read his own symptoms and the importance of keeping his employer informed about his mental illness.

“Mr Hamilton’s talk shows us how important it is to keep bosses in the loop when dealing with mental illness at work,” says the PSA and CPSU NSW’s Stewart Little. “This is why we are talking to SafeWork about getting mental health risks managed in the same light as physical risks in workplaces.”

“When people come up and speak about mental health, it does break down the barriers,” said PSA Senior Vice-President and Prison Officers Vocational Branch Chair Nicole Jess about Mr Hamilton’s presentation. “It is going to make it a lot easier for us in our workplaces to talk about it.”

“Prison officers don’t like to admit when they have a problem. This is one step in moving forward to assist all of us in our workplace.”

Victorian Secretary of the CPSU, Karen Batt, talked about how her home state’s government is tackling mental health at work,

## STATISTICS

**Data published by the State Insurance Regulatory Authority shows government workers have a worse workers' compensation experience than other industry sectors:**

- 2015/16 there were 393,442 State Government employees (10.3 per cent of the NSW workforce) who accounted for 18.1 per cent of all compensation claims
- there were 50,805 claims in the government sector for the three-year period to 2015/16, which cost \$863M and resulted in 644,470 weeks of lost work time

PSA and CPSU WHS Industrial Officer Ian Tuit says that the picture for mental diseases is "far worse for government workers":

- the average claim from the government sector cost \$16,997 and resulted in 13 weeks of lost work time. The average mental disease claim for the government sector cost \$59,125 and resulted in 33.7 weeks of lost work time

Mr Tuit said, "These data show the importance of preventing mental health problems in the workplace. Psychological injuries are costly to workers and their families."

Allison Corrigan, Senior Caseworker in FACS and a PSA Delegate, talked about the mental health challenges she and her colleagues face working with Child Protection services.

"I have tragically witnessed two of my colleagues at the Help Line die from suicide," she said. "Both were colleagues and one in particular was a dear friend of mine. They died while doing their job."

"Workers compensation statistics for NSW show the government sector has the highest incidence of mental health injuries."

Erica Rubic, from SafeWork NSW, talked about her organisation's "road map, which sets out a strategic direction for Work Health and Safety in NSW".

She said the strategy aims to "protect against harm, reduce unnecessary compliance costs and secure safety standards".

Ms Rubic said the road map has exceeded its original targets, "so we recently published new, more ambitious targets; a 30 per cent reduction in fatalities, 50 per cent decline in serious injuries and illnesses, and a 50 per cent decline in serious musculo-skeletal injuries".

"We are encouraging all workplaces to go above and beyond the legislative requirements and regulations."

She said the challenge for managers and workers is to understand that the workplace can have a positive or negative effect on employees' mental health.

"We spend approximately one-third of our adult lives at work, so SafeWork sees this as a great opportunity to use the workplace

reduce the impact and severity of mental illness on working-age people."

Ms Rubic said workplaces that improve mental health reap many benefits, including a more productive workforce.

She said SafeWork has found the NSW public sector has a very poor performance for mental health in the workplace, "so we need to get our own backyard fixed up before we go to NSW businesses as the Government and tell them they need to be doing this".

Kirsty Membreno from the Police Association talked about that union's resilience program.



**"THE SYSTEM HAS BEEN DAMAGED BY PRIVATISATION, POOR REGULATION AND UNHEALTHY COMPETITION"**

"Obviously policing is a very dangerous job," she said. "When you have a look at the work they do, there is no doubt they get injured, both physically and psychologically. That is a particular concern for us."

Reacting to this, the Police Association has formulated its resilience program to prevent injured workers just being dumped from the force with a lump sum payment and no back-up support.

"We had to do something different," said Ms Membreno. "It was no longer just

highlighted by the fact the state's Police Minister, Wade Noonan, took three months' leave "to cope with the constant exposure to details of unspeakable crimes and traumatic events" he experienced on the job.

Ms Batt talked about the importance of using injury data to make sure mental health issues are properly dealt with.

Among the big challenges her members face is adequate recognition of vicarious trauma.

Ms Batt said unions have a big role to play in keeping the issue of mental health in the workforce in the legislative arena.

"You can make a change to what is happening," she said. "All political parties should commit to rolling out a charter for mental health and wellbeing as something fundamental they will do if elected in March 2019."





acceptable only to train Police Officers to be physically fit and proficient at what they do.

“Psychologically, we needed to do something. We needed to place pressure on the Government and the NSW Police Force. But for us, as a union, we had to also have a look at our own backyard and not just look at the entitlements.”

She said the Police Association’s resilience program was drawn up after psychological health had been ignored “for many, many years”.

“We travelled to Canada to look at how they deal with psychological risk,” she said. “Canada is recognised as a world leader for their approach to psychological risk in the workplace.”

“We used a lot of the material from the Canadians and we developed what we called a Career and Reliance Education Program.”

The Police Association partnered with the NSW Police Force to roll out the resilience package.

Jon Goddard, the Member Support Coordinator for the Police Association, talked about his role in “looking after our people”.

“The doctors treat, the insurance companies manage and pay out, but how else could the Police Association jump in and help members in this time of need?” he said. “We have a system called the Police Association Welfare Assistance scheme.”

Mr Goddard talked about the challenges facing Police Officers, many of whom are totally focused on their jobs, and are involved in “a complex workers’ compensation system”.

There were four workshop presentations at the conference. Academic Dr Carlo Caponecchia talked about practical approaches to managing psychological risks. SafeWork NSW Inspectors Jasmina Budisa and Megan May spoke about the role of the workplace safety regulator. Brad Parker talked about the highly successful MATES suicide prevention scheme, while Andy Smith, Bevan Hanlon and Brodie Green from Corrective unions in Western Australia and New Zealand talked about their strategies to prevent members taking their own lives.

“Feedback from participants was that the conference gave them information on

**PSA and CPSU WHS Industrial Officer Ian Tuit says that workers can contact SafeWork on 13 10 50 to discuss a problem or request a visit from a safety Inspector. “Their website [www.safework.gov.nsw.au](http://www.safework.gov.nsw.au) has publications on risks like bullying, violence, fatigue and mental health.” The PSA can also be contacted for WHS advice and support on 1300 772 679.**

how to better recognise and manage psychological risks in their workplaces,” says PSA and CPSU NSW WHS Educator Suzanne Mann. “Members are always asking us for assistance on mental health issues. So we are really pleased the union was able to provide first-class speakers with practical advice. We are already planning for next year’s conference.” ●



 **The following organisations provide crisis support and assistance:**

- **Mental Health Line 1800 011 511**
- **Lifeline 13 11 14**
- **beyondblue 1300 224 636**
- **Headspace 1800 650 890**
- **Salvo Care Line 1300 363 622**
- **Mensline 1300 789 978**
- **Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467**

# DUBBO MEETING HIGHLIGHTS REGIONAL STRENGTHS

**THE PSA AND CPSU NSW** held a Central Council meeting in Dubbo for the first time.

The second regional meeting held in regional NSW since the present executive was elected. The current PSA/CPSU NSW Executive's election campaign had included a commitment to take Central Council meetings to the regions.

In addition to the Central Council meeting, the meeting also held a candidates' forum for the state seat of Dubbo.

The attendees heard campaign pitches from Labor's Stephen Lawrence, National Party candidate Dugald Saunders and former mayor Matt Dickerson, who is running as an independent.

Current member Troy Grant, the former National Party leader, is retiring at the next state election, which will be held in March 2019.

All three candidates were in agreement about the need for the next administration to commit to creating jobs in regional NSW and to strengthen public services in the bush.

In a video to members, General

Secretary Stewart Little later talked about the vital role the public sector plays in regional areas of the state.

"It was just so good to highlight the important role that our members play in regional communities," he said. "Not just because of the frontline services they provide, but also the critical role the public sector has in those regional economies."

"The forthcoming election has to be about jobs. It has to be about regional jobs. It has to focus on the jobs that have been cut and privatised by the current Government."

In an interview with the local paper, the Daily Liberal, Mr Little pointed out there had been local job cuts, including "a 20 per cent cut at the Taronga Conservation Society, with 20 jobs gone and a 25 per cent cut to the environment sector overall among others including cuts to the NSW Industrial Relations unit in Dubbo, the State Emergency Service and Juvenile Justice".

Another candidates' forum was held in Broken Hill, part of the massive seat of Barwon, on 10 December.

## COUNTRY AREAS BRING UNIQUE CHALLENGES

**Regional cities, small towns and country areas often have less diverse economies than capital cities, making them more vulnerable to changes in specific industries. Large-scale job losses as the electricity-generation industry was outsourced, for example, had particularly severe effects on the Hunter Valley.**

**Public sector jobs, therefore, play an important role in stabilising local economies. The facility in Parkes that processes licences, for example, injects money into the local community as its staff spend money in local businesses and create demand for other services, stimulating more employment.** ●



# A WOMAN'S PLACE IS EVERYWHERE



**STORIES FROM PSA** and CPSU NSW women working in male-dominated industry took centre stage at a union event held in November.

The PSA/CPSU NSW's Nicole Jess and Phoebe Dangerfield were among speakers at the NSW Women in Male-Dominated Organisations and Industries (WIMDOI) conference. Opened with a Welcome to Country by the PSA's Ann Weldon, the event talked about the particular difficulties faced by female employees in workplaces dominated by men.

The PSA and CPSU NSW's many female members in male-dominated workplaces face a variety of challenges. Some are practical – fewer toilet and change facilities, for example.

Others are less apparent at first glance. There are fewer female mentors, while bias, unconscious or otherwise, will have males promoted faster than their female colleagues. More sinister challenges include inappropriate posters and material in common areas, sexist comments and harassment and social ostracism.

Chair of the PSA's Prison Officers Vocational Branch (POVB), Nicole Jess is the first woman to head a corrective officers' union body in Australia. Her powerful speech to WIMDOI talked about her rise in the ranks of a male-dominated industry long associated with toxic aggression and machismo – to the extent that a physical

fight was seen as a legitimate way to resolve issues.

"I can remember a time when the three centres on the Silverwater Complex were having a complex meeting," she said. "There were mostly men present as the other two centres were male centres. Our female members were being overshadowed by the males.

"At the meeting, I asked a question which went against what one of the male delegates was trying to put forward. He offered me out to the car park to sort out the disagreement. I am not really scared of anything other than spiders, I said to him, 'Let's go', knowing I was in trouble if I wimped out I would have lost respect from everyone.

"He was put in his place by members who knew me and he lost his argument."

Ms Jess pointed out that strong, well-organised women have an important role to play in campaigning against privatisation and outsourcing, even if they aren't working for the organisation.

"Cessnock Prison, in my opinion, was saved from privatisation by the wives of members at that centre," she said. "They got together and met with local members, met with media and rallied nurses, teachers and other professions to join the campaign."

Ms Jess compared her rise in the PSA ranks favourably with the bosses she

regularly locks horns with. "There are no female directors," she says. "There are only two female assistant commissioners and in the 30 years I have been a prison officer there has never been a female commissioner."

She urged women in fields such as hers "to support each other and encourage younger females to become union members".

Phoebe Dangerfield, an Industrial Officer who works in the universities and TAFE fields, talked about the way her union has placed women's issues on the agenda in workplaces.

Ms Dangerfield cited the "delegate-driven through personal experience" cessation-of-pregnancy leave won by the CPSU NSW Ausgrid. The provision gives parents six weeks' leave if the child is lost between 16 and 20 weeks, and 16 weeks' leave if carried any later.

This was used as an example of "show and tell" negotiating, where management was presented with the stark reality of stillbirth and the expectation that parents will simply return to work soon afterwards.

The CPSU NSW's gains in the state's university campuses were also mentioned. These included increases for Domestic and Family Violence Leave at the Australian Catholic University, UTS, Wollongong, the University of NSW and at Macquarie.

There have also been improvements to Parental Leave, Surrogacy leave, Stillbirth Leave and, in the case of UNSW, Gender Re-Assignment Surgery Leave.

Ms Dangerfield pointed out the importance of ensuring bargaining points were presented as something that will benefit all workers, and not just 'women's issues' – pointing out benefits such as conversion clauses, parental leave, superannuation, the chance to bond with children and the chance to return to work in a part-time capacity can be enjoyed by all workers.

Other speakers included the Secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Sally McManus, who told the room, "if he can do it, you most certainly can".

Unions NSW's Emma Maiden also talked about reforming the workplace to make it more inclusive to women.

Other attendees at the event included workers in the maritime industries, transport and construction.

Transport Workers Union (TWU) NSW official Ashma Khan talked about how

unions such as hers help Muslim women feel empowered in the workplace, telling the conference "wearing the TWU flag gives me strength and confidence".

Labor's Shadow Minister for Skills and Education, Prue Car talked about another area covered by the CPSU NSW, the TAFE system. She committed an incoming ALP Government to restoring the provider and reversing cuts to the vocational system that have been inflicted by the past eight years of Liberal National Government.

In closing the conference, Emily Mayo of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union expressed a desire that in the future, "more of the men in our movements and in our world would deeply understand the privileges they have".

PSA President Kylie McKelvie says the conference was a great success and will be a regular event on the union calendar. "Until we have pay equity, an equal number of women in management and an absence of calls to unions about sexual harassment, WIMDOI is here to stay." ●



## ACTU releases sobering statistics on sexual harassment

**MORE THAN 60 PER CENT** of women have been sexually harassed at work, yet fewer than half of those harassed have reported the incident, according to the interim results of a survey being run by the peak body for working people, the ACTU.

Of those who answered questions about their experience of sexual harassment, 61 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men said they'd experienced sexual harassment at work.

Harassment included crude or offensive behaviour, unwanted sexual attention, inappropriate physical contact and social media harassment.

The survey also found that 64 per cent of people had witnessed sexual harassment at work.

Despite the prevalence of sexual harassment revealed by the survey, of those who'd witnessed sexual harassment in their workplace two-thirds did not make a formal complaint, and 40 per cent didn't tell anyone at all. More than half feared negative consequences if they spoke up.

"For many people – mainly women – today in Australia this is not the reality. Our workplace laws have failed women who are experiencing harassment at work," says ACTU President Michele O'Neil. ●

## UNION STAFF ON COURSE TO FIGHT DISCRIMINATION

**A NUMBER OF PSA** and CPSU NSW staff attended a course on workplace discrimination by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board.

Staff went through various successful and unsuccessful discrimination cases.

"The informative course gave our staff an insight into the definition of workplace discrimination, with examples that had succeeded in front of the Anti-Discrimination Board, as well as those that had not," says PSA and CPSU NSW Training Office Anne Kennelly.

Staff have also performed in-house courses on keeping sexual harassment out of the workplace. ●



President Kylie McKelvie and Elanor Canning from Legal Aid were among the PSA/CPSU NSW delegation at the round table.

## The testimony from Donna

*"Quick girls, lock yourself in the ladies' toilets and don't make a sound. Your father has just pushed past the security guard at the gatehouse and is on his way here," said Mum. Trembling and crying we did as we were told. With no relatives and little help, Mum was forced to take us to work with her when she left our violent father as Christmas school holidays had just started. She worked in a large company canteen.*

*The security guard called the police. It happened just before lunchtime and the canteen was packed with workers. His aim was to steal my sister and I away from my mother. She had left after we had intervened at age seven to stop him choking her. She slept in a single bed in our bedroom between my sister and I as we were her only protection between living and dying.*

*Even when Mum saved enough money for a bond and we were able to escape, his relentless physical and mental abuse had us sitting in the dark each night, too afraid that he might find the unit we were living in. Mum had no money, except for her wages and no-one she could leave us with during the day. So on this day not only did she have to endure the indignity and humiliation of all of the company's workers witnessing this event, she also had to deal with the damage this did to her children.*

*Had she had an opportunity for paid leave she would have been better able to organise our care and our father would never have had cause to visit her workplace as we would never have had to be there. Not everyone has the support and means by which to leave a domestic violence situation. Sometimes it is a matter of life or death if you don't leave and it has to be done quickly. Please take this opportunity to support paid domestic violence leave so people like our Mum and us at the time as little children never have to suffer like we did that day. The impact of his violence in the lives of my sister and I led us to not ever having children of our own.*

*We could never put another child in the situation we found ourselves in on that day. Paid domestic violence leave would have made a difference to us all. ●*

## UNION WIN MEANS WE WON'T WAIT ANY LONGER

**THE PSA AND CPSU NSW** celebrated a win for members with the Government agreeing to improve Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) leave to all public servants from five paid days to 10 paid days.

This agreement comes after a push by the PSA, CPSU NSW, Unions NSW and the ACTU over the past few years to have the 10 days' paid leave included in all awards as part of the We Won't Wait campaign.

Members will no longer have to exhaust other leave before accessing the 10 available days.

In October the PSA and CPSU NSW, along with members from Corrective Services, Legal Aid and Unions NSW met with Domestic Violence Minister Pru Goward to ask for the provision.

PSA member Donna – whose surname has been withheld – gave an insight into her life as the child of a woman fleeing family and domestic violence. She used her experience to point out that too often women are forced to choose between staying in a dangerous domestic situation and forgoing paid work. Her testimony is right.

"This is a win for members, that we always hope our members won't have to use," says General Secretary Stewart Little. "Unfortunately with the estimated death toll for 2018 of 65 women killed in domestic violence situations so far, it is still unfortunately more necessary than ever.

"The PSA welcomes this win as it provides support and security for victims of domestic violence whilst they transform their life to escape domestic violence."

The award clause (Clause 84.11 in the Crown Employee Public Service Conditions of Employment) provides paid leave so members in a family and domestic violence situation can be absent to undertake actions such as seeking legal advice and court orders, seek refuge and moving of house, changing school for children and be confident that their job is secure and they will have money to make these adjustments.

The amendment is to come into effect from January 1, 2019 and is welcomed by the PSA which has been asking for this improvement for years.

## Attendees thanked for gifts

**THE UPLIFT PROJECT** and Share the Dignity have thanked the PSA and CPSU NSW for their efforts collecting bras and sanitary and beauty products at this year's Women's Conference.

In a letter to conference attendees, Uplift Project's NSW Co-ordinator, Anna Davis, thanked the participants for donating bras for women in developing countries, particularly the South Pacific.

"Thank you so much for your generous financial and material support of the Uplift Project, and for the opportunity to raise awareness of the charity at this Women's Conference," she wrote. "May I please refer you to our website - [www.upliftbras.org](http://www.upliftbras.org) - for information on donating bras and assisting us in meeting shipping costs."

The letter also described the Uplift



Project's history: "Since 2005, Uplift has collected and distributed over a million bras to countries including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Philippines, Bali, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Botswana, Uganda and Pakistan.

"Within Australia, bras and underwear have been transported to the Northern Territory and Kimberley regions and to women's refuges and other organisations assisting women."

At the Women's Conference, attendees brought new and used bras for the Uplift Project, as well as sanitary items, shampoos and other products for Share the Dignity, which hands them on to homeless women and those experiencing domestic violence.



## GENDER GAP SHOWS WORK TO BE DONE

**AT PRESENT RATE** of improvement, women have a 19-year wait ahead before the gender pay gap is dead and buried.

The Workplace Gender Equality (WGEA) report released in November shows that the gender pay gap remained at an unacceptable 21.3 per cent for average full-time total remuneration, or \$25,717 per annum, despite a slight narrowing of 1.1 percentage points.

The report found gaps still persist in every industry, occupation, and manager category. It also found access to parental leave had not improved - with the provision of primary carer's leave actually going backwards.

The consistently high gender pay-gap feeds directly into alarmingly low retirement savings for many women, who on average are retiring with 47 per cent less superannuation than men.

"More needs to be done so we get true pay equity in our workplaces," says PSA President Kylie McKelvie. "Unionised workplaces are more likely to have lower pay gaps. All the conditions of employment Australians enjoy today are the result of union pressure. Together workers and unions

can fight to cut the pay gap. It is vital more workers in NSW join their unions today."

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is calling for all political parties to commit to structural reform of Australia's workplace relations rules to make them fair for women, including overhauling the collective bargaining system, introducing 10 days' paid family and domestic violence leave, and introducing flexible work rights.

The ACTU has also called for stronger powers for the Fair Work Commission to proactively tackle gender inequality, including the establishment of a new expert Gender Equality Panel, giving the Commission the power to hear and determine sexual harassment and sex discrimination claims, and implementing stronger pay equity provisions.

"The ACTU expects all political leaders to make closing the gender pay gap a priority and we know that changing the rules in our workplaces is key in making that happen," says ACTU President Michele O'Neil. "A gap in pay between men and women of \$25,717 is still too high - there should be equal pay for men and women."



**AS THE STATE** Government continues in its quest to tear down office walls and herd people into smaller, open-plan spaces, evidence is mounting that this approach is affecting productivity.

A recent British report has found that open-plan offices are having a detrimental effect on the way workers communicate.

The report, published by the Royal Society, found "rather than prompting increasingly vibrant face-to-face collaboration, open architecture appeared to trigger a natural human response to socially withdraw from officemates and interact instead over email and instant messaging".

The Royal Society research with one company found that interaction between workers dropped by a massive 73 per cent once they were moved to open plan. It also noted that employees adopted strategies such as large headphones to isolate themselves from others.

In an article for the ABC, Assistant Professor of Organisational Behaviour, Bond Business School, Bond University, Libby Sander, wrote, "When employees can't concentrate on their work, their desire to interact and collaborate with others is reduced."

Unsurprisingly, surrounding workers

with loud phone calls, vocal disagreements between colleagues, birthday cake morning teas, football-score-related interruptions and loud printers and copiers make it harder for workers in open plan to concentrate. And many of our members suffer under increasingly unrealistic workloads, making it harder to complete tasks and increasing the likelihood of errors, adding to workplace stress.

Researchers at the Auckland University of Technology found that "co-worker friendships are actually of worse quality in hot-desking and open-plan office arrangements, when compared to those with their own offices or who share offices".

And stress and frayed relationships are just two of the ways open plan is a Work Health and Safety (WHS) disaster.

"Putting everyone in close proximity may save the Government spending on premises, but it also makes it easier for employees to share the flu season," says WHS Industrial Officer with the PSA and CPSU NSW, Ian Tuit. "Advocates argue that open plan makes people share information more readily. But the research shows this is not happening. Instead they're sharing cold and flu bugs, chicken pox and conjunctivitis."

Privacy is also a big loser in open plan,

which is why the concept has met with resistance in areas such as Legal Aid and the Crown Solicitor's Office (CSO). In environments such as these, where client confidentiality is a priority, the ability to close a door is vital.

As one member at the CSO told the PSA, "A fundamental requirement of any legal practice is the maintenance of client confidentiality. This is even more important at the CSO where we deal with highly sensitive government matters, PII, health records and police records. Often, there are statutory requirements for the secure maintenance of some government records including things like original title deeds. How can the CSO guarantee client confidentiality and secure retention of documents in an open plan environment with such minimal storage capacity?"

However, despite members taking industrial action, the CSO went ahead with tearing down office walls and imposing an unpopular work environment on employees without consultation.

Legal Aid staff in Parramatta successfully averted a proposal to place them in an open-plan environment. Yet the Justice Department is now planning to impose the idea on staff in the Grants Division in Haymarket.

"For some reason what is unacceptable in Parramatta is fine for the Grants Division in Haymarket," says PSA Organiser Kirra Jackson. "A report by Polaris Coaching recommended against open plan and hot desking for staff in that area. Even worse, the Polaris report was commissioned after the People Matter Survey found a high level of dissatisfaction in the Grants Division.

"There have already been issues with the level of noise in the work environment. Imposing more open-plan workspaces will cut productivity and increase stress." ●

## Register updated after union pressure

**THE PSA AND CPSU NSW** have successfully forced the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) to update its information on Work Health and Safety (WHS) entry permits.

"In May the register published on the IRC website was dated October 2016," says WHS Industrial Officer with the PSA and CPSU NSW, Ian Tuit. "Clearly, a

register published 18 months prior is not up to date. Given that WHS entry permits are held for a three-year period and the published register is 18 months old, it was likely that half of all NSW WHS entry permit holders were not on the published register."

After intervention from Mr Tuit, the register was updated.

"The integrity of the WHS Entry Permit Holder system relies on the register being up to date," he adds. "Employers and the public are entitled to check that union officials are properly authorised to inquire into suspected contraventions of the WHS legislation. It's remarkable that the IRC failed to meet its legal obligations by not keeping the register updated." ●

# SafeWork finds unsafe conditions in FACS

**THREE WIDE-RANGING** Improvement Notices have been issued by SafeWork on the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS).

Workers at the FACS Community Service Centre (CSC) at Coffs Harbour were found to be at serious risk of psychological injury from their work. Three legally enforceable Improvement Notices issued by SafeWork on 12 October 2018 describe the nature of the risk:

*Workers are exposed to a risk to their health and safety from psychological injury resulting from an existing culture/behaviour of bullying, harassment and intimidation of workers by managers (past and present) during the period May 2012 to present at the Coffs Harbour Office of FACS (unsafe environment/unacceptable workplace behaviours) as the current Respectful Workplace Policy (no bullying, harassment or discrimination) is not being followed as per the FACS Code of Ethical Conduct.*

*Workers may be exposed to risk to their health and safety from psychological injury due to the inconsistent approach by management to one on one and group supervision (de-briefing) at the workplace.*

*Workers are exposed to a risk to their health and safety from psychological injury as there appears to be a lack of appropriate consultation in relation to identifying and minimising risks of psychological injury and resolving WHS issues at the workplace.*

Staff at a FACS CSC provide a range of important functions to the community. These include service, support and programs around child protection, domestic and family violence, mental health issues, alcohol and other drug use and intellectual or learning

difficulties. This work can involve significant risk of psychological injury as workers are exposed to verbal abuse, threats of physical abuse, unrelenting pressure from excessive workloads as well as the inherent risk of vicarious and secondary trauma from investigating and supporting victims of horrific domestic violence, physical abuse and chronic neglect.

Enforceable directions in the SafeWork Improvement Notices mean that all managers and workers in the FACS Northern Cluster must be provided "information, training and instruction regarding the *Respectful Workplace Policy* (no bullying, harassment or discrimination)". Management has also been directed to properly consult with staff on work health and safety (WHS) issues.

By 23 November 2018 the department was obliged to show SafeWork how it would consult with staff on WHS matters, provide appropriate training, and implement a safety system for managing psychological injury risks. The PSA has written to the FACS Secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter to request a meeting to discuss how FACS plans to address the WHS issues covered by the Notices across the whole of NSW. The PSA has also recommended the establishment of a high-level taskforce as part of the FACS action plan.

Members in any workplace with WHS concerns should consult with their Health and Safety Representative and PSA delegate as a first step. The PSA will also provide support and advice to members seeking the intervention of SafeWork to address WHS concerns. SafeWork can be contacted on 13 10 50 for WHS information and to make a report of unsafe work. ●



## Private practice

**PSA AND CPSU NSW** members are reminded that medical appointments are confidential and employers and insurance companies have no right to demand to sit in on appointments.

"We have been hearing disturbing stories from members where bosses

or insurers are pressuring them to be present at what should be a private conversation with a medical professional," says PSA and CPSU NSW WHS Educator Suzanne Mann. "A worker is entitled to have a private and confidential appointment with their doctor without the employer or insurer present.

"If the employer and insurer want a

case conference with the worker and doctor, this can occur, with notice, following the worker's individual consultation with their doctor."

If an employer or insurance company is applying pressure to sit in on a medical appointment, members are urged to call the Member Support Centre on 1300 772 679. ●



## UNION AID ABROAD CONTINUES ASBESTOS FIGHT

**EMMA BACON**, of Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA), has visited the PSA/CPSU NSW to gain support for the fight against the global asbestos trade.

Ms Bacon talked about the role industry lobby groups – who even have the backing of Donald Trump – have played against bans on the hazardous material.

Countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and Laos have experienced campaigns of misinformation and back door imports of asbestos, leaving a time bomb of future cases of asbestosis.

Ms Bacon warned that even Australia is at risk, with Border Force finding weekly illegal shipments of the material in products such as building supplies and, alarmingly, toys.

She says Union Aid Abroad wants to make 2019 “the tipping point” for the trade.

General Secretary Stewart Little, himself a supporter of Union Aid Abroad, has urged staff and members to support the campaign. Go to [apheda.org.au](http://apheda.org.au) for more information.. ●

## OVERWORK A WHS ISSUE

**THE CPSU NSW** is urging overworked members to report unrealistic workloads to their Work Health and Safety representatives.

“We have heard from members in libraries, in customer service, info points... all saying the same thing: we are overworked, under-resourced and we cannot continue with this level of work intensification,” says CPSU NSW Industrial Manager Blake Stephens. “If you think – as we do – that you are under unreasonable increasing work demands and pressure; if you think that your workload has increased resulting in feelings of stress and overwhelm; if you think TAFE NSW is placing unreasonable work expectations upon you, then we ask that you submit your concerns through WHS Hotline. Report all incidents to the WHS Hotline – 1800 316 600.

“It is important that TAFE NSW understands the extent of this problem. Your employer has a duty of care to you and your colleagues, to ensure that your work environment is safe and healthy. The more stressed and overwhelmed you become, the greater the risk that your health and wellbeing will suffer.”

Mr Stephens says the CPSU NSW is still taking workload issues to management, but additional information sent to the WHS team will ensure “the message gets across loud and clear”. ●

## General Assistants make their voice heard

**THE GENERAL ASSISTANTS** Advisory Group (GAAG) has raised three work health and safety issues with the Department of Education (DoE).

General Assistants (GAs) have been applying for chemical safety handling training and accreditation as part of their performance development plans. While some schools are agreeing to pay for the training, other schools are not.

The union is attempting to have a standard approach applied across the state.

The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) allocation was last reviewed in 2012. Delegates believe that it is time for this to be updated. Delegates also seek an extra allocation of shirts, introduction of shorts and an enhancement of the funding reimbursement for boots.

Members advised the DoE has a new supplier for exam desks. The new models are larger and heavier. This presents an issue from a handling perspective but also with regard to set up/pull down time and storage. The PSA submitted that the new desks may require two people to set up for exam time. This would be a problem if the school only has one GA.

The DoE advised the desks were in contract and that the desks may have been purchased off contract. The PSA submitted that due to the WHS concerns, schools who utilised Local Schools, Local Decisions to make off contract purchases needed to undertake risk assessments with their GAs if purchasing heavier desks.

The DoE offered to provide WHS risk assessments to schools. However, the PSA put that the preferred position is to have the standard Sebel desks purchased by all schools.

A teleconference with the DoE was arranged for 16 October 2018. Delegates participated with PSA staff at the teleconference.

The DoE has undertaken to consider the PSA's feedback and will come back with a response. These matters have some complexity and there may be a need to meet again with the DoE to try find a consensus position if possible.

The PSA has vowed to continue fighting for a safe workplace for GAs. ●





## YOUNG WORKERS ON THE TRAIN

**THE PSA** and CPSU NSW Training Unit ran training courses specifically for young workers for the first time in 2018.

The course was devised as part of the union's Young Members Strategy and was offered to members aged 35 and younger.

The initiative comes on the heels of a successful 2018 for the unit, which for the first time offered Health and Safety Representative (HSR) training. Members required to undertake HSR training could nominate their union to provide the training, rather than commercial suppliers.

"The past year also saw a bigger emphasis on regional training," says Training Officer Anne Kennelly. "We also saw bargaining training for staff in Disability Services as they moved to a new system."

As Disability Services staff move from the Department of Family and Community Services to non-government providers, they move from the Industrial Relations Commission's jurisdiction to the Fair Work Commission, which works in the federal sphere. This requires a different approach to bargaining.

## COURSE DATES

**Care & Resilience** – Wednesday 13 February

**Role of the Delegate** – Tuesday 19 February

**Dealing with Bullying** – Friday 22 February

**WHS** – Tuesday and Wednesday 26-27 February

**Women in the Union** – Friday 8 March

**Introduction to the Union** – Tuesday 12 March

**Dealing with Member Issues** – Thursday 21 March

**WHS (Wagga)** – Thursday and Friday 21-22 March

**Achieving Workplace Flexibility** – Wednesday 10 April

**Public Speaking** – Tuesday 9 April

**Care & Resilience** – Thursday 2 May

**Role of the Delegate** – Tuesday 7 May

**Dealing with Restructures** – Tuesday 14 May

**WHS (Coffs Harbour)** – Wednesday and Thursday 15-16 May

**Meeting/Negotiation Skills** – Friday 17 May

**Dealing with Workplace Bullying** – Wednesday 5 June

**Introduction to the Union** – Tuesday 11 June

**WHS** – Thursday and Friday 13-14 June

**Role of the Delegate** – Wednesday 19 June

## COURSE OUTLINES

### ACHIEVING WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Looks at the benefits of workplace flexibility and what flexible work practices exist in the NSW public sector.

### CARE AND RESILIENCE

Provides information, strategies and resources to build personal resilience and enhance mental health awareness.

### DEALING WITH BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

Designed to assist members and delegates in dealing with bullying and harassment at work.

### DEALING WITH MEMBER ISSUES

For delegates who want to develop their ability to assist members with individual workplace issues.

### DEALING WITH RESTRUCTURES

Covers Government guidelines that inform the restructure process, how the PSA responds to restructures at the consultation and implementation stages, the role members and delegates can play, discussion around specific restructures and case studies. Fact sheets and other resources are provided to assist members in the workplace.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE UNION

Covers the basics of the PSA/CPSU NSW and the union movement.

### ROLE OF THE DELEGATE

Discusses the role of the delegate and active members: what delegates do, delegate protections, organising skills, recruitment, working with issues, union values and involvement. Any member can learn from this course and is welcome to apply.

### WHS

Making the workplace safer.

### WOMEN IN THE UNION

A course aimed to empower women members.

Register online at [psa.asn.au/trainingyou](http://psa.asn.au/trainingyou)

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