



Menu

UWA deal going to ballot as Murdoch pursues termination

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As University of Western Australia employees prepare to vote on a new deal providing pay rises of 4.6% over four years plus two \$1100 top-ups to base rates, the NTEU is calling for other universities in the state to use it as a model.

The union's WA division says its members unanimously endorsed the proposal at a meeting last Friday, ahead of a ballot of about 3600 academic, general and professional staff commencing on Wednesday.

According to a joint statement by the NTEU and the UWA issued earlier this month, the \$1100 increases in January next year and 2020, on top of 1.25% in 2019, 0.75% in 2020 and 2.6% in 2021, will provide a "more equitable distribution" across all classifications.

"For employees in lower level classifications it will mean an increase of up to 9.5% while those employed in the highest classifications will receive a 5.9% increase," the union and UWA say.

The salary of entry-level professional employees, currently sitting at \$47,380, will rise by 9.5% to \$51,877 in January 2021 under the deal, compared with a 6.6% increase for those at the top classification, taking them from \$118,658 to \$126,477.

Entry-level academic staff get an 8.1% boost, taking them from \$67,352 now to \$72,780 in 2021, while the salary of a top-flight academic will rise 5.9% from \$182,804 to \$193,613 over the same period.

The union says the proposal, which covers the academic, general and professional staff via two agreements, also:

- establishes a new definition of serious misconduct "that is offset by the exercise of intellectual freedom as a defence";
- replaces an academic review committees for misconduct and unsatisfactory performance with new appeal mechanisms that include a capacity to dispute disciplinary penalties (this will also apply to professional staff);
- supplants an academic review committee on redundancy with an internal appeal on whether it is genuine; and
- provides a plain English, simplified draft deleting clauses that confer no rights or impose no obligations;
- simplifies change management arrangements so they are triggered once there is a definite proposal;
- lowers the threshold for staff to be directed to clear excess annual leave; and
- recognises domestic violence and allows staff to take any form of leave at short notice if they have experienced it; but falls short of providing dedicated leave.

With the university also committed to increasing superannuation to 17% by 2021 for all fixed-term employees, NTEU divisional secretary Gabe Gooding said the agreements are an indication of what can be achieved "when all parties approach bargaining constructively".

The NTEU is lauding the breakthrough amid bitter negotiations with WA's Curtin and Edith Cowan universities and while it awaits a decision on Murdoch University's application to terminate a 2014 agreement (see related articles [here](#) and [here](#)).

"Given that all four public universities in WA commenced with a common agenda the union believes that these agreements at UWA offer a model which should facilitate prompt settlement at ECU and Curtin and demonstrate what can be achieved with cooperation and creativity," Gooding told *Workplace Express*.

UWA vice-chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater says the agreements take into consideration the need for change at the university, while at the same time recognising the contribution of employees.

"Our university has to modernise its processes and procedures, and staff members are driving that change," Professor Freshwater says.

"These agreements provide fair and equitable outcomes that reward employees for their valuable contribution to our future."

The current UWA agreements nominally expired in September last year, the same month that employees received a final pay rise of 3.25%.

Last September the NTEU avoided a Federal Court injunction by removing and promising not to re-publish a series of statements about bargaining with Murdoch University (see [Related article](#)).

Last June, Murdoch, Curtin and Edith Cowan universities also disputed an NTEU bargaining update linking a vice chancellors' [joint statement](#) calling for "simple, contemporary and fair" agreements, to an "already signalled" view that simple means removing rights from agreements (see [Related article](#)).

The FWC agreed that the NTEU notice misled members and undermined collective bargaining, but it decided against issuing good faith bargaining orders because the union "set the record straight" despite refusing to retract its statement or admit error.

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