

University of Newcastle bulletin – Combined Staff Consultative Committee (CSCC)

This committee is set up under the current Enterprise Agreement to review the implementation of the agreement and any workplace issues arising from it. The CSCC met on 31 January 2018.

Dr Glenn, Dean of Central Coast Campus, reported on the NewSpace post-occupancy four-month review, in which more than 1000 responses were received to a survey of staff and students and a range of issues identified as challenges and areas for improvement. Dr Glenn will report again after the 10-month review.

The DVC(A) Darrell Evans spoke at length on preparations for the Organisational Design Project (ODP) Stage 2, outlining his vision of the student journey and the processes and systems that could be needed to achieve it. After a period of consultation with 200 staff and students, he is now ready to commence developing processes and designing structures, focussing on Academic Division and the Faculties. There is no timeline for this at present.

The meeting also received a report from Dr Goldie, Associate Director Health and Safety, on the operation of the EAP scheme. There has been an increase in 2016-7 in the number of new clients, staff members rather than family, and an increase in the number of work-related issues for which assistance is being sought. This, it may be observed, coincides with ODP Stage 1 and the many restructures that came with it.

Enterprise bargaining update

The ninth meeting of the Enterprise Bargaining teams was held on 7 February 2018, the first for

the year. To date we have 20 out of 73 clauses agreed in principle, most of which were uncontentious matters that simply needed to be checked for currency and accuracy, and the parties agreed to roll them over into a new agreement. We have no interest in prolonging the discussion unnecessarily and would like to depend on the willingness of the parties to move to a result in the next few months, rather than the 12 or 18 months that have typified negotiations in the past. It is already close to a year since your last increase.

Pay rises

Salaries are traditionally the last item for negotiation after all other claims have been dealt with and costed. The higher education sector generally will suffer considerable revenue loss under the funding changes being imposed by the Federal Government and nobody at the bargaining table wants to see the university indulge in another round of cost-driven job cuts. There is, at the same time, widely felt concern about the effect of repressed wage growth on the economy. As a minimum we will be seeking a pay outcome that keeps you ahead of projected cost of living increases over the life of the agreement. We have to trim our sails to catch the current wind.

Rights, conditions and entitlements

The over-riding consideration that arose from our member surveys was that members want existing conditions preserved, and improved if possible, and a fair pay increase. The university has flagged it wants to “simplify” several clauses to “streamline



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processes”. We have to keep a close eye on what might fall through the net – the text of the current agreement stems from decades of EB negotiation rounds each addressing concerns experienced in the operation of the agreement to date. There is a cumulative wisdom in the way clauses have evolved, that simplification runs a risk of ignoring.

Performance concerns, unsatisfactory performance, misconduct, discipline, inquiry officer, and committee of inquiry

The university tabled some parts of this nexus of clauses and flagged other changes. We have very serious concerns that important elements of the current procedure, built up from decades of experience, are in danger of being jettisoned. We will revisit these clauses over coming weeks and no doubt the details will change, but at the moment the university proposes to delete performance concerns from the sequence, truncate the unsatisfactory-performance process so that in the space of only three paragraphs you could be facing dismissal, delete committees of inquiry altogether and leave decisions to a single person. They argue that the unfair dismissal regime of the Fair Work Act removes the need for an internal process as detailed as we currently have. In counter, we wonder why the university would choose an expensive litigation process over an in-house investigation.

Suspension without pay

One very alarming issue arising from this for Professional Staff is the proposed ability for the university to suspend a staff member without pay pending an investigation.

Although this has been allowed in the Academic Agreements for quite a long time, it has never been a feature in our General Staff or Professional Staff Agreements since bargaining began. We have always objected to a concept that imposes a penalty at the commencement of an investigation rather than at its conclusion when a case has been proved. It is a severe penalty in fact, because, although not receiving salary while a protracted investigation is under way, the staff member would also be ineligible to seek any Centrelink or other welfare benefit since they are still employed by the university. Pressure would exist to make the staff member resign. We indicated we will resist this part of the proposal strenuously and argued for retention of the current wording.

Union rights

We also want to improve the formal recognition of your delegates and their ability to represent you in any meeting with the university, and we want clearer access to promote the CPSU NSW to new staff during induction to ensure your colleagues are aware of the work the union does and encourage them to join you. You can also play your part in this by talking to new staff about the union.

Next meeting

Our next meeting on 7 March 2018 will deal further with the university’s claims on Performance Conduct and Discipline, Resignation and Termination.





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Become involved

Please take the time to read through your current Agreement to identify opportunities for improvement and contact your bargaining representatives to discuss any concerns you have. We will be calling General Meetings or conducting further surveys as necessary when the issues under discussion require further direction from you. At the end of the negotiation you will be asked to vote on the package and we want that to be an informed and deliberate vote by staff whose working lives are covered by the Agreement. Ask your colleagues to stand with you by joining CPSU NSW [HERE](#).

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Please note:

CPSU NSW members are also members of the Public Service Association of NSW. The PSA is the Associated Body for, and resources and manages, the CPSU NSW.

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