



Sense of urgency needed in enterprise bargaining

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Manufactured delays in finalising enterprise bargaining (EB) are costing university staff.

The Australian Higher Education Industrial Association (AHEIA) said two consistent themes are emerging in the bargaining process this round.

“We’re seeing slow starts to the process and manufactured delays once an in-principle agreement has been reached,” the executive director of AHEIA, Craig Laughton said.

“Despite many enterprise agreements reaching their nominal expiry date, formal bargaining activity across the sector is subdued.

“Only 46 per cent of AHEIA members presently are engaged in formal EB, even though 12 agreements will expire over the coming weeks. Universities are ready to go. Member feedback describes lengthy delays in scheduling and/or rescheduling meetings and;

- extended periods between bargaining sessions;
- slow responses to proposals and drafting;
- difficulty obtaining decisions from union representatives; and
- approvals that appear to require extensive internal (to state and/or national officials) escalation before negotiations can progress.”

Mr Laughton said there clearly is a resource issue for the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).

“The NTEU doesn’t have enough competent people to run its side of bargaining. There are cases of negotiators being flown in from other states to run the negotiations, for example,” he said.

The second trend is that after an in-principle agreement has been reached a quasi-negotiating period restarts, in some cases delaying the finalisation of an agreement by months.

“Agreement drafting sessions have become mini-bargaining meetings,” Mr Laughton said.

“Eighteen months into the present bargaining cycle, only one EA from the 16 active bargaining environments has been approved by the Fair Work Commission.”

Staff expected the enterprise bargaining process to be efficient and deliver results – that is more pay and improved conditions. There must be a sense of urgency.

Mr Laughton said universities were doing their best to expedite the process but were facing roadblocks and delays, not of their making, along the way.

Staff are the losers.

Ends

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