



Withdraw ‘untruthful’ Senate inquiry submission: Call

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The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has misled a Senate inquiry into wage underpayment.

The Australian Higher Education Industrial Association (AHEIA) said an NTEU submission to the inquiry, which is due to report in June this year, contains unsubstantiated allegations, vague comments, confected opinion and self-serving statements.

Furthermore, the union, which often talks about governance in higher education, has demonstrated a clear lack of understanding of the area in its submission. Further, last year the NTEU was rebuked by the Fair Work Commission in relation to eligibility of office holders and union elections – evidence of poor governance practices.

AHEIA’s executive director, Craig Laughton, said an NTEU proposal that it be investigator, judge, jury and beneficiary in wage underpayment matters reeks of conflict of interest and a total lack of understanding in the basic tenants of good governance – it is preposterous in the extreme.

In its submission the NTEU seeks “incentive payments” for identifying wage underpayment issues – in the words of the NTEU, “it sees itself as the cop on the beat”.

“In its submission to the inquiry AHEIA refutes the self-serving propositions of the NTEU and places on the record its support for the present legislative framework, led by the considered guidance of the independent regulator, the Fair Work Ombudsman, that properly protects the rights of workers,” Mr Laughton said.

The NTEU claim or implication that:

- universities have engaged in ‘wage theft’ is manifestly untrue;
- ‘wage theft’, or systematic wage underpayments, forms part of a university ‘operating models’ is false;
- it represents the whole sector is significantly overstated; it represents fewer than 10 p.c. of higher education employees; and
- it uncovers most wage underpayments is untrue – the overwhelming majority of such matters are self-reported and remediated by universities.

An NTEU proposal that it should automatically receive ‘incentive’ payments from penalties under the Fair Work Act for wage non-compliance is a shameful cash grab from an already cashed up union with some of the highest membership fees in Australia.

Further, an NTEU recommendation that it have almost unfettered access to all employee pay records is preposterous and is a gross invasion of employees’ privacy.



AHEIA calls on the NTEU to engage constructively in the present round of enterprise bargaining, to:

- support the simplification of enterprise agreements across the sector to reduce complexity, which has been the leading cause of wages errors across the sector;
- reduce unnecessary prescription to enhance sector productivity; and
- avoid provisions that cannot be readily activated in payroll systems.

Mr Laughton said the NTEU should withdraw its incorrect and self-serving submission to the Senate inquiry

“It is time for all parties, including unions and members of parliament, to stop recklessly using the term ‘wage theft’ in respect of Australia’s higher education sector. Factually, this assertion is utterly unfounded. The continued unjustified attacks on the sector create significant psychosocial hazards for the teams of dedicated people across the sector attempting to administer an industrial framework built on highly complex enterprise agreements, that is, in key respects, fundamentally broken,” Mr Laughton said.

Ends

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