



NTEU claims Future of Higher Education Workforce Report a lost opportunity

Posted 8 February 2016 by [Jeannie Rea \(NTEU National Office\)](#)

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) says that today's release of a report entitled Australian Higher Education Workforce of the Future undertaken by PWC on behalf of the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association (AHEIA) adds little, if anything, to the understanding of the workforce issues confronting our universities.

The report is falsely premised on the assumption that staff working at our universities are about to be exposed to challenges of real world after having spent decades operating in some isolated, highly protective cocoon of an ivory tower.

This assumption will come as a great surprise to university staff. The reality is that staff have adapted to continuous external and internal challenges over decades with the outcome being that our universities have flourished and become Australia's third largest export industry earning almost \$20 billion last year and excelling in terms of the quality of research they produce.

The report also fails to address the most fundamental workforce issue confronting Australian universities and that put simply is that there just aren't enough staff to all work expected of them. Last year's NTEU State of the Uni report on workloads showed that across Australia university staff contribute in order of 27million hours of work for which they are not compensated.

To insinuate that this equates to inefficiencies that can be overcome through a more agile, flexible, professional, specialised, technologically savvy workforce demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding and lack of respect for the staff working in Australian higher education.

The report sees staff and the industrial instruments that try to protect their pay and working conditions as potential impediments to change, whereas recent history shows that staff have been the catalyst and facilitator of monumental change which has seen our universities achieve a strong international reputation for both teaching and research.

Instead of acknowledging and trying to understand the drivers of this success the report recommends that universities follow corporate governance and decision making structures models of the Australia business sector, which the Coalition government has acknowledged is amongst the least innovative in the world.

Unfortunately, this was a missed opportunity to take a serious look at workforce planning in higher education sector, where it seems to still only be the NTEU saying that excessive workloads and the increasing reliance on casual staff doing more than half the teaching and research staff on rolling short term contracts undertaking much of the research is unsustainable.

PWC met once with the NTEU late last year, but our commentary and analysis based on, it must be agreed, considerable expertise is almost completely ignored. And Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment is not mentioned at all.

NTEU National Executive will discuss the report and its implications later this month.

Jeannie Rea
NTEU National President
5 February

Online article: <http://www.nteu.org.au/article/NTEU-claims-Future-of-Higher-Education-Workforce-Report-a-lost-opportunity--18319>