

Enterprise deals branded arcane, complex and largely redundant

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The main industrial association for Australian universities is pushing for an overhaul of enterprise agreements, describing them as arcane, overly complex and largely redundant.

The Australian Higher Education Industrial Association argues the modernisation and simplification of industrial agreements already has a precedent after the University of Canberra produced a new-style agreement last year.

“Universities contribute significantly to the nation’s economy, yet are hamstrung in their operation by enterprise agreements which are lengthy and complex documents,” said Stuart Andrews, executive director of the AHEIA.

“Typically they are of between 100 and 200 pages, and full of detailed prescription as to how things are to be done or not done. They are a far cry from being a modern set of flexible and efficient workplace arrangements suited to the challenging and evolving environment in which universities need to operate now and into the future.”

Mr Andrews said the situation was further inflamed by the fact most of the 40 or so enterprise agreements in public universities were “remarkably similar” and included provisions which were largely unaltered from when they were first inserted into federal awards more than 25 years ago.

He said the University of Canberra had broken new ground last year when it negotiated a “a streamlined plain-English enterprise agreement which is largely principle-based, devoid of a lot of prescription that previously existed, and which has a focus on achieving and rewarding excellent performance”.

He said the vice-chancellors of Western Australia’s four public universities had jointly announced last April they would be “seeking to replace their existing enterprise agreements with new agreements which contain provisions which are simple, contemporary and fair”.

“Bargaining at those four universities is still continuing some eight months after it commenced, with apparent little headway having been made in trying to convince union negotiators that the time has arrived to remove outdated industrial provisions which are a relic of the past. Other universities and their many important stakeholders are looking on with interest,” Mr Andrews said.

“The time has arrived to remove the shackles. The time has arrived for all parties involved in enterprise bargaining to draw a deep breath, to reflect on the drain on time and resources that these unnecessary complexities create, and to put in place simplified provisions, either in the agreements themselves or in university policy, depending on the subject matter: simplified provisions which are easy for employees, their supervisors and managers to understand and to apply, and which don’t end up in messy litigation ... too often been the case in recent years.”

Online article: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/enterprise-deals-branded-arcane-complex-and-largely-redundant/news-story/8fd6eee0803b182a30af636f2789aad1>