

## NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2020

I hope that you are all enjoying some down-time from teaching—if you have been teaching—and looking forward to the Christmas shutdown, which for some of you may be shorter than anticipated due to the Vice Chancellor's announcement last week. This is just a short update on some key issues for Academics in the current context.

### Access to pre-2020 funds in PGs

I hope that, like me, those of you in attendance at the Vice Chancellor's morning tea were thrilled to hear him settle—categorically—an argument that has been ongoing since the university management restricted the access of staff to their consulting PGs in order to bolster the University's cash flow. In line with the view that the UWA ASA and the NTEU have been actively arguing for, Professor Chakma stated very clearly that the money in those accounts belongs to the individual academics/professors who earned it, not to the University. While it may be that the University Finance needs to put some planning controls around how and when the funds are spent, I imagine that the VC's admission can only be closely followed by a restoration of access to the existing pre-2020 funds in PGs. In any case, we will be actively pursuing this matter in the coming months.

### Cost-Saving Measures (CSMs) will cease

Even if you weren't in attendance at the VC's thank you morning tea last week, I presume will have been appraised of the content of the announcement. In brief, the CSMs in the Enterprise Agreement Variation (EAV) that we voted to support earlier this year are to cease. This means that we get our normal annual leave loading (in the current pay cycle), our scheduled pay-rise of 2.6% will be paid as per the Enterprise Agreement (EA) in the pay cycle on, or immediately, after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, and staff will be able to amend their purchased leave agreement should they so wish beginning from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January (don't forget to make your decision by the 11th December deadline). This is a pretty happy outcome for staff, and for the university as a whole, but there are several salient points that it is important to appreciate.

The first is that the anticipated losses of around \$90 million from COVID-19 did not materialise, at least partially due to the amazingly dedicated work of academic staff and their professional support staff in successfully moving all our teaching online at very short notice, and in a way that kept the students engaged and encouraged them to re-enrol for 2<sup>nd</sup> semester.

The second important point to appreciate is that the VC's announcement is *not* an act of largesse or an expression of gratitude to the staff of this University, it is a *legally enforceable requirement of the EAV*. Of course, the VC may feel generous and grateful towards staff, but the end to the CSMs is mandated by the terms of the EAV that staff agreed to by a majority vote. According to Clause 31 of the EAV, the University is required to take its 'internally certified financial information and enrolment data' back to the Expert Assessment Panel (EAP) for review after six months. If the University is no longer in either of the relevant categories of financial hardship then it can no longer access the CSMs.

Which brings me to the third salient point, just because the CSMs can no longer be accessed by the university, the EAV as a whole still applies. This means that the Job Protection Measures remain in force until the end of the EAV, mid-way through next year. If you know of anyone who has been on casual or fixed-term contracts where the work remains but the employment has ended please make sure that they understand their rights and protections under the EAV. The NTEU cannot protect people from job loss if they do not know about it.

I realise that many staff had strong reservations about the EAV, a significant concern being that the CSMs might act as a thin end of a wedge to down-grade staff pay and conditions going into the next round of enterprise bargaining. I think it would be only fair to say—with the CSMs at an end but the job protections remaining—that eventuality has not been an outcome of this agreement.

### Academic Workloads

You will all appreciate that in a climate where schools/academic units have been asked to shave an average of 10% from their annual budgets, pressure is being put on academic workloads. It is crucial that academics understand the nature of the clauses from the EA and the EAV that pertain to workloads. The basic requirement of the EBA might be summarised as **“an equitable and transparent distribution of workload across a discipline, a School, and the University;”**

In the underlying EA, Clause 20 is particularly salient:

### **School Workload Models**

20.7 The Head will, in consultation with Employees of the School (or equivalent), develop School Workload Models providing for the allocation of academic work in each School (or equivalent) in accordance with the University Workload Framework.

20.8 School Workload Models will be:

- (a) used to allocate teaching loads within the School (or equivalent) on an annualised basis; and
- (b) finalised and communicated to Employees by the end of the preceding academic year.

And from the EAV, the clause of note:

15.4 In addition to any procedural requirements contained in clause 20 of the Agreement, the University must discuss the alteration of the Employee's workload with sufficient time for the Employee to prepare for the change in workload allocation.

Academic workload (including the University Workload Framework and School Workload Models) is monitored and reviewed by the Academic Workload Advisory Committee (AWAC), a committee Chaired by the SDVC or nominee (currently Professor Annette George). If you have reason to believe that any of the clauses of the EA that pertain to academic workloads have not been properly or adequately applied in your own case, or at the level of your School, please contact the AWAC with a detailed explanation of the case. Alternatively, you can contact UWA ASA or the NTEU anonymously and the matter will be taken up at the AWAC.

### **Academic Promotions**

Those of you who are among the 153 Academic staff members who applied for promotion using the new—partially developed—application process for 2020, will have been informed that the promotion assessment procedure has been stalled due to the overwhelmingly large number of applicants (three times the usual amount). When asked about this matter at Academic Consultative Committee (ACC), the SDVC explained that he was convening a number of targeted assessment panels, in addition to the Academic Promotions Committee. Unless you have been personally approached to serve on one of these panels, you won't have heard anything about them because there have been no calls for expressions of interest. The SDVC told ACC that he will be personally responsible for the choice of members of the panels, whose composition is entirely opaque. This, arguably unacceptable, delay in assessing the promotion applications bears particularly hard on those staff members who are teaching intensive and who have been waiting since 2016 for a promised promotion pathway for teaching intensive staff.

In the same meeting of the ACC, the clause in the EAV relating to academic Promotions (24.1) was raised:

24.1 The date of effect for the increase in salary arising from a promotion will be the date no earlier than the day after Schedule D ceases to apply or the University is no longer in either Category A or B, whichever comes first.

Basically, because the University has tacitly admitted that it has fallen out of the Categories, this means that, in a case where a promotion is awarded, the increase in salary takes effect immediately rather than at the end of the EAV. Let's hope the delay in the promotion process isn't allowed to run on so long that it acts as a cost-saving measure by proxy!