

## Report on LTU management town hall - 2 June

La Trobe University Vice Chancellor John Dewar confirmed at today's town hall meeting that he will ballot all staff on Monday 15 and Tuesday 16 June, seeking approval for an enterprise agreement variation (EAV) based on the National Framework.

The official "access period", when all employees are meant to have access to the detail of how much our pay will be cut and conditions reduced, will start this Friday 5 June.

Late in the afternoon, the NTEU branch at La Trobe finally sent out the actual clauses we will be voting on (available [here](#)), as well as an indicative wage chart for academic staff and some propaganda material targeting NTEU Fightback - No Concessions (you can read our response in our document on pay cuts at La Trobe).

Dewar's presentation clarified some things, but left plenty of questions unanswered - we have a selection of outstanding queries below. Given that La Trobe is the first institution to test out a Framework deal in a post-Framework context, there are lessons being learnt by management teams - and activists - around the country.

### Wages

Our much talked about fears about the scale of wage cuts remain. While Dewar ruled out enforced reductions in fraction (hours), management confirmed they will apply a 10% pay cut on income above \$30,000. The slide that flashed up briefly on the screen showed a HEW 4 wage would be cut by "only" 5.47% overall because of this threshold.

This figure, and a stray mention of pay cuts of 12% a little later in the presentation, demonstrate that management are certain that they are a "Category B" institution, and therefore able to impose pay cuts of up to 15% under the terms of the variation. Clause 19.2 allows pay cuts of "an amount equivalent to a maximum total of 15% of an employee's salary in any given pay period".

It was also explained at the town hall that wage increases from our existing enterprise agreement, increments and pay rises due to promotions would all be suspended (clauses 20 and 23) Unlike the cuts to pay rates that management can impose, there is no \$30,000 threshold for these reductions to EA entitlements.

For a worker on HEO4.3 (about \$65,000 p/a) a calculation using the terms of the agreement shows they will lose a total of \$174 per fortnight from July 1 onwards: a very significant cut to wages. The NTEU has finally produced figures of their own, which lowers this figure by about \$40 per fortnight by excluding the effect of suspending EA pay rises.

All of the projections from management also showed the variations running for the whole of next year - management seem to assume that they will be extended to the end of 2021, which takes us well into

the bargaining period: the current enterprise agreement expires at the end of September next year. The “temporary” cut is looking less temporary by the day.

### **Major change and disputes**

There was a strange silence in the presentation about the most significant attack in the Framework, along with wages: the effective gutting of clauses around major change and dispute resolution.

This subject is dear to Dewar’s heart. Dewar’s previous effort at slashing jobs, the 2014-15 “Future Ready” restructure, got bogged down in disputes which went all the way to the Federal Court. The opportunity to implement further sweeping neoliberal restructures, with a five day window for finalising a slimmed down consultation process before arbitration kicks in, must be one of the main attractive features for VCs like Dewar. The EAV may be sold as “temporary”, but the job-cutting restructures that it facilitates certainly won't be.

We’ve got a whole section on how workers can use these clauses to campaign against restructuring and redundancies in the document we posted yesterday on our website, *Fighting back against job cuts*.

There was some discussion of the financial standing of the university in which the finance spokesperson repeatedly declared the institution was at no risk of insolvency, receivership, or anything other dire outcomes. It was also implied that the only perceived obstacle to getting renewed bank loans was “a bit of extra paperwork”. Seems preferable to massive cuts!

### **Blackmail**

The most predictable element of the presentation was the blackmail. Vote to cut wages, or we will sack 225 of your colleagues. We’ve written (at length, in *Fighting back against job cuts*) about the alternative to submitting to this blackmail - resistance. There are simply no guarantees that giving in to the blackmail around jobs will actually save jobs, and Dewar’s track record on this score, even in the “good” times, shows us where he wants to take things. The best time and place to draw a line is here, now, by Voting No.

As well as the document on fighting job cuts we posted on June 1, check out our new more detailed resource - *La Trobe workers fightback - Vote NO!* available on our website. Please pass them on to anyone you know who works at La Trobe.

After all the spin, so many questions remain unanswered. One report suggested 600 questions were posed, with many of the trickiest not put to the VC or even shown on the screens of staff watching. The best we saw was along the lines of “how can you justify having million dollar salaries when the institution is sacking people”.

One question we’d like to hear an answer to: after a 20% pay reduction, what will your salary be over the next year? (perhaps Dewar could pay himself as a HEO4.3, and then cop a 7% pay cut from July?).