

Victoria University NTEU elections

NTEU Fightback activists are involved in the Time for Change ticket at VU. Time for Change are running against the current leadership, who endorsed the wage-cutting “jobs protection framework” last year. As explained below, Time for Change aims to rejuvenate the branch and prepare seriously for the next EA round.

For President, vote for Bill Swannie.

For Vice President (Professional), vote for Fleur Taylor.

For National Council, four candidates are running for two positions. Vote 1 and 2 for Fleur Taylor and Bill Swannie – you must number at least two boxes to cast a valid vote for NC.

Fill out the form at tinyurl.com/electfightback to help with the Fightback election campaign.

Candidate Statements

Fleur Taylor

Candidate Statement – Vice President (Professional), Victoria University



I work in Respect and Responsibility, which coordinates prevention of gender-based violence programs at VU. I’ve been at VU since 2018 and have been a member of the NTEU Branch Committee since 2019. I’m a member of the NTEU Fightback/VU Vote No group that resisted the failed “Jobs Protection Framework” sellout last year (get more info at <https://www.nteufightback.site/resources>). I’m part of the VU Time for Change ticket in this election.

I’m running as Vice-President (Professional staff) because I want to contribute to building up the strength of our union branch in the lead-up to our next Enterprise Agreement (EA) negotiations.

The current EA, signed at the end of 2019, was a defeat for VU staff. It's good that we resisted the absolute worst that management wanted to do to us, but the overwork and stress suffered by staff, particularly teaching focused academics, is horrendous. The current EA also gave away important protections for staff facing restructure or redundancy – an all-too-common problem.

I want to help lead a renewed union branch at VU that approaches the next EA round with the objective of actually winning gains for VU staff.

Is this even possible, in an era of shrinking government funding, COVID budget impacts and endless attacks on workers' rights?

It's true that COVID has made university funding even more challenging – but when has there ever been a time when management has gone into EA bargaining saying “well, we're going really well this year, so this time we want to give more to staff”? Yet the University always seems to have funding for its corporate priorities, such as major capital works, expensive external consultancies and bloated executive salaries and bonuses for their ever-increasing team of senior management.

This has been true even in the last year – at the same time as VU staff were being asked to accept an Enterprise Agreement Variation that was sold as protecting jobs – but which amounted to a shopping list of all the working conditions that HR most hate, including paid shutdown leave over xmas, leave loading and important restructure and redundancy processes, such as the requirement to seek redeployment opportunities for affected staff, and protections around having your position description unilaterally altered by management.

We defeated that particular attack, but we have a long way to go to re-establish strong working conditions for the staff who do a vital job in supporting the education of future generations.

When it comes to negotiating the next EA, I am convinced we will not win true gains for members unless we are prepared to do more than just sit in an airless room being monstered by HR goons and heaved by officials from the NTEU National Office. The unions whose members are winning victories today are those whose members are prepared to campaign strongly for what they need, up to and including striking and picketing when required. We need branch leadership at VU that is ready to organise and argue for this kind of action to improve pay and working conditions for all staff at VU. My 25+ years' experience as a unionist, socialist and community activist tells me that we get nowhere unless we organise together, and prepare to fight.

If you agree that VU Branch needs a change – Vote 1 VU TIME FOR CHANGE!

Bill Swannie

Candidate statement – President, Victoria University



I'm nominating for the role of President of the VU Branch because change in the union leadership at VU is absolutely necessary at this time. As an academic in the College of Law and Justice, I have witnessed staff numbers shrinking, and workloads increasing in ways that endanger the health and safety of staff, and compromise their family life. While management pursues its 'transformational agenda', staff are not given the time and resources to carry out their work and to support the needs of students.

My goal is to increase union membership at VU, and to empower members to assert their rights. Workloads must not be allowed to endanger the health and safety of staff, and they must be determined fairly and transparently. Bullying and harassment of staff at VU must cease.

Since 2017, I have been an active member of the NTEU VU Branch Committee, and also the elected NTEU delegate in my work area. In this capacity, I have assisted members with a range of complex industrial issues. As an elected Health and Safety Representative in my work area, I have advocated strongly for the rights of staff regarding OH&S issues, and I have ensured that management complies with its obligations. Before starting at VU, I worked as a community lawyer and I fought for the rights of vulnerable groups such as public housing tenants. I currently hold leadership roles in professional associations and community groups. I am committed to leading the branch committee in a democratic, transparent and respectful way.

With your vote, and the support of the VU Time for Change team, I seek to empower union members at VU, and to improve your work conditions into the future. Together, we can make VU a great university at which to work.

Please contact me with any questions on Bill.Swannie@vu.edu.au

"I am happy to endorse Bill Swannie for President. Bill has been a union activist for many years and has got some great results for members. Bill's background in community law will also be a real asset in dealing with management and negotiating industrial relations matters. I think Bill will make an excellent President." Paul Adams, NTEU VU Branch President 2013 -2019

Fleur Taylor

Candidate statement – National Councillor, Victoria University

I work in Respect and Responsibility, which coordinates prevention of gender-based violence programs at VU. I've been at VU since 2018 and have been a member of the NTEU Branch Committee since 2019. I'm a member of the NTEU Fightback/VU Vote No group that resisted the failed "Jobs Protection Framework" sellout last year (get more info at tinyurl.com/electfightback). I'm part of the VU Time for Change ticket in this election, and am a lifelong unionist, socialist and community activist.

The National Council of the NTEU holds the responsibility for making decisions that affect the membership of the whole union in between national elections. Our branch can elect two councillors to this body.

I am running for National Council because I think the NTEU as a whole needs more activists, socialists and agitators in its ranks. The university sector as a whole has suffered from decades of government cutbacks and the response of the NTEU has not been as militant and as activist as it needs to be. The general approach has been for lobbying and back-room negotiations, which have clearly failed, as the university sector is in the worst shape it's ever been in.

Scandalously, last year the NTEU and its National Council attempted to force a so-called "Jobs Protection Framework" onto university staff. When faced with the challenge of COVID and the possibility of massive job cuts, our national union's first impulse was not to fight like hell, but to go to the Vice-Chancellors and say "we know you want cuts – can we please help decide which limbs to cut off first?"

If our union, and unions in general, are going to rebuild, we will not do that by offering concessions that make life even more difficult for our members – for our workforces that are increasingly women, increasingly casualised and increasingly overworked. We will rebuild by a strong industrial campaign that starts with a serious attempt to win gains for members through the next enterprise bargaining round, that begins for most universities this year, and for VU in 2022.

If this is the kind of energy that you would like VU to send to the NTEU National Council, then vote for me to represent our branch as a National Councillor.

Bill Swannie

Candidate statement – National Council, Victoria University

I seek your vote to represent union members at VU on the NTEU National Council. National Council is the main decision-making body of the union – it meets once a year to determine the policies and priorities of the union for the coming year. It also elects members of the National Executive.

During a time of great upheaval and uncertainty in higher education, it is vital for VU to have strong representation at National Council. I commit to representing the views of VU members at National

Council, and ensuring that the union does not sacrifice member's pay and conditions in shady deals made with vice chancellors.

I have been actively involved in industrial issues since 2017, when I became a member of the Branch Committee and was elected NTEU delegate in the College of Law and Justice. I am also the elected Health and Safety Representative in my work area. In these roles, I have advised, supported and represented members on a range of issues, and achieved success on many occasions. As a trained lawyer, I'm familiar with relevant laws, policies and procedures in the industrial context, and I'm a fierce advocate for the rights of workers.

I'm a proud member of the VU Time for Change team, and I will ensure that the union serves the interests of rank and file members, rather than the interests of a small group currently in senior roles in the union.

Please contact me with any questions on Bill.Swannie@vu.edu.au