

**Submission
No 66**

INQUIRY INTO ENHANCING VICTORIAN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Organisation: Young Workers Centre

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Alison Marchant MLA

Chair
Legislative Assembly Economics and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria
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Dear Chair,

On behalf of the Young Workers Centre (YWC), I thank the Committee for their invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry into University Governance.

The YWC was established in 2016 by Victorian Trades Hall Council and affiliated unions, as a one stop shop for creating safer, fairer workplaces for young people aged 30 and under. The YWC educates young workers on their workplace rights, provides assistance in resolving workplace issues, and supports young people campaigning for change. The team of lawyers, organisers, educators, and researchers seek to empower young people working in Victoria with the knowledge and skills needed to end workplace exploitation and insecurity for all. The YWC also operates a Community Legal Centre (YWCLC), which provides free legal advice and representation to young workers. The most common referrals involve wage theft, unfair dismissal, discrimination, bullying & harassment, and sexual harassment.

The YWC endorses the Joint Reform Proposal proposed by the National Tertiary Education Union, the National Union of Students and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations in full. The reforms contained in this proposal would represent a major step in the right direction for young workers in the higher education sector: reducing psychosocial hazards, preventing wage theft, and protecting worker voice and consultation. All of these steps are urgently needed.

Higher education in Victoria is in crisis, and the YWC is seeing the impact of this on young workers clearly. Over 97,000 university staff have been affected by wage theft in Australia, early career researchers have borne the brunt of this.¹ Some of the most notorious incidents of wage theft against academic staff in recent years have taken place in Victoria: including at Monash, the University of Melbourne and Deakin University.² On top of wage theft, young researchers in Victoria have also had endure unprecedented levels of job insecurity and precarity due to widespread casualisation in the sector. The transformation of secure teaching / research jobs into casual or fixed-term arrangements has inflicted constant stress on young workers.

¹ Australian Historians Association, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into University Governance, p. 2.

²https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/Union_scores_major_win_for_secure_jobs_at_the_University_of_Melbourne.aspx,https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/NTEU%20scores%20massive%20win%20in%20Monash%20University%20wage%20theft%20case.aspx
https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/deakin_underpaying_staff.aspx

Young workers in higher education face work environments that routinely fail to meet acceptable standards of workplace psychosocial safety. 82% of academic staff report high or very high levels of emotional exhaustion.³ 71% report working more than their contracted hours.⁴ Young workers' health and safety cannot be assured, or even expected, in an environment where work intensification, academic isolation, workplace surveillance, and an aggressively competitive struggle for secure work is the norm.

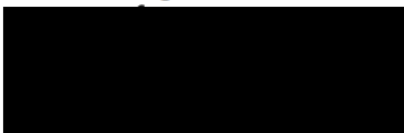
Failures in university governance play a key role in all these crises. Underlying these failures is the persistent sidelining and marginalisation of young workers' voices. University governing bodies must be held accountable to the university community that they serve. Current arrangements encourage a climate of impunity. Serious issues that could've been foreseen and prevented by young workers go unchecked when their voices are not considered in decision-making. Existing settings for university governance produce the following adverse outcomes:

- A lack of staff and student voice in key decision-making institutions.
- An absence of formal institutional forums that can represent staff and student views or allow them to hold leadership accountability.
- Centralisation of power by senior managers who do not have any professional experience working in the sector.
- A lack of transparency over the content of University Council meetings.

The tertiary education sector should exist precisely to elevate the contributions and insights of young scholars and students. It is, instead, facilitating exploitation, job strain and perpetual insecurity. Victorian students and young workers engaged in the tertiary education sector deserve far better than existing university governance arrangements can offer.

The YWC is proud to endorse the Joint Reform Proposal and urges the Victorian Government to adopt it in full.

Kind regards,



Yolanda Robson

Director

Young Workers Centre

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³ <https://stresscafe.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Census-Overview-Report-12-02.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.