

29 May, 12.05pm

All staff email from Professor David Lloyd, Vice-Chancellor and President

Dear colleagues

I write following what can only be described as extraordinary times in recent weeks for higher education in Australia. Some of you may be aware that negotiations were recently advanced between the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and AHEIA – the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association. The outcome from these negotiations, if ratified and adopted, would have superseded some provisions in existing Enterprise Agreements in those universities accepting the changes proposed, for a period of 12 months, up to June 2021, and with the possibility of extension of the changes out to the end of December 2021.

Without any comment on the merit of the content of the proposed agreement itself, I highly commend those involved in its negotiation and drafting for their efforts and, importantly, acknowledge the good intent with which the national agreement was attempted.

Several universities have already considered the document and for varying and individual reasons, decided not to progress its uptake, and made those intentions publicly known. This in turn led the NTEU to this week withdraw the document from consideration by its membership – another step that would have been necessary for its ultimate ratification.

The 'rejection' of the agreement by these institutions has been followed by a number of universities announcing restructuring and job reductions. This has, of course, heightened anxieties within the sector as the scale of the COVID-19 challenge and its impact on university operations becomes ever more apparent.

Of course, the actions and choice of others do not chart or determine the course of our university.

We did review the proposed final agreement as we wanted to ensure that we fully understood its provision. In so doing we could determine whether it provided the right way forward for UniSA. Our view is that the national agreement was negotiated with good intent but without the specifics of individual institutions and their existing EA provisions to hand. Having had the chance now to consider where it's landed, we do not feel it provides the right mix of measures for UniSA. Our preference therefore is to manage our way through the current situation in partnership, consultation and with the input of our staff, to address our specific circumstances without recourse to the national agreement as currently structured.

Instead, we will work within the framework of our existing Enterprise Agreement. We will continue the open and frank discussion with our staff which is in line with our core ethos as a University and we will continue the respectful and constructive engagement with our local NTEU branch, with whom we have enjoyed productive relations over many years now.

In telling you this I want to draw your attention to [my earlier message](#) to you and ask that you read it once more.

Our circumstances have not changed. In terms of the impact of COVID-19 UniSA is very fortunate to have a better underlying financial position than some universities. We have taken measures which ensure we can successfully navigate our way through the rest of this year, managing through non-salary reductions, putting in place measures in regard to discretionary spending, travel, pausing of uncommitted minor and major capital works and through management of recruitment needs. These measures help to limit our liabilities and continue to deliver for our students, our partners and wider community.

We are wholly committed to minimising the impact of COVID-19 linked revenue decreases on our staff and to maintaining staffing levels to the best of our abilities.

To do this we must carefully monitor the evolving situation and plan and act in accordance with fact, not fear. We are taking a measured approach in how we respond to the immediate impact and looking ahead, we will think through and contemplate an appropriate range of responses necessary to bolster the medium and longer term financial stability of the University – in keeping with our culture and the UniSA way of getting things done.

In saying this, I am mindful of the extraordinary efforts made by our staff to respond to so many challenges so far – in working successfully through the AOT, through taking the institution online in response to the health crisis and keeping research going for the benefit of business and community. It is not appropriate that we over-react to external challenge or ever discount these efforts and commitment. The planned pay increase for staff which was negotiated under the current enterprise agreement will be awarded as planned in June of this year. Any interventions for 2021 or beyond will be proportionate to the actual impact on our revenue and in line with our strategic intent.

I'm sure you're looking forward to returning to on-campus activities. Our students certainly are. Working within the boundaries of physical distancing we will have a blend of face-to-face and online engagement which will signal another step on the road to restoring normal business. It's too early to say if this crisis will change the way we work forever locally, but I've no doubt that it will influence our future thinking and strategy as we deal with global ramifications and changes to behaviour outside of our control.

As the future unfurls, I am very proud to reflect on the fact that we have great academic staff in our educators and researchers and exceptional professional staff supporting them – all committed to delivering for end users, our students and partners, external and internal. We have a strong, can-do culture and alignment to a mission of equity, participation and excellence. We acknowledge challenge and we rise to meet it. We have done that many times before and we will certainly do so again.

Stay well, enjoy the weekend.