Írta: Gabriella Gombár
2020 május 31. (vasárnap) 14:48

AUSTRALIA

Hundreds of university jobs lost already due to pandemic

Geoff Maslen 26 May 2020 https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200526140135897 Share The coronavirus has led to hundreds of academics and general university staff in Australia losing their jobs. Many more are expected to join them following a massive fall in revenues as foreign student numbers plummet.

The foreign students were mostly from China where the numbers enrolling in Australian universities fell from 46,480 in April 2019 to a mere 30 in April this year. The enrolment collapse is largely a response to Australia imposing tighter immigration controls to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

In Victoria, 300 staff at Deakin University were effectively sacked, while a further 182 at Central Queensland University accepted a voluntary redundancy package.

The pandemic caused by the coronavirus is having a serious impact on businesses around the world with patients in 185 countries now suffering from the infection. In the United States in the past six weeks more than 30 million people have filed for unemployment benefits.

Preventable sackings

But the announcement from Deakin University that more than 300 staff would lose their jobs could easily have been prevented, according to Dr Alison Barnes, president of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).

“The government found AU$60 billion [US$40 billion] ‘behind the couch’ on Friday, yet on Monday more than 300 people were going to be out of work,” Barnes said.

A miscalculation by federal Finance Department staff massively overstated government spending on higher education by a staggering AU$60 billion. “[The government] could have saved these jobs with the stroke of a pen using the AU$60 billion they thought they had already spent,” Barnes said.

“But now more than 300 families will be in line at Centrelink [a federal office for the unemployed] instead of at work.

“It’s not too late for federal Education Minister Dan Tehan and federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg to use the spare AU$60 billion to save tens of thousands of jobs in higher education.”

Barnes said that if the two politicians did not act, they would wear the job loss crisis confronting higher education “like a stinking albatross around their necks”.

Referring to Deakin University, Barnes said it was a major employer in regional Australia so the impact of the sackings would be disproportionate for an industrial city outside Melbourne where Deakin has a campus.

“The impact these mass sackings will have on regional communities is disproportionate and devastating.”

NTEU Branch Vice-President Steve Davis said it was “incredibly disappointing” that the university had chosen to sack people in the way it had.

“They want to achieve a balanced budget but Deakin workers are collateral damage,” he said.

The union noted that the 300 figure of those made jobless did not include a large number of casual and fixed-term workers who had already been sacked or stood down at Deakin University.

The NTEU estimated that their numbers would be in the hundreds.

Satellite campuses to shut down

Central Queensland University announced that more than 180 staff would “voluntarily separate” from the university, while three “satellite campuses” would be shut down as part of efforts to slash costs by AU$28 million (US$18.6 million) annually.

The staff losses occurred as the state’s largest regional university tried to balance a AU$116 million revenue loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A university source said Central Queensland University was “considering a deal” with the NTEU that could prevent forced redundancies. It also plans to close three of its satellite campuses in Queensland.

Central Queensland University Vice-Chancellor Professor Nick Klomp ruled out any “forced staff cuts” until negotiations between Australian universities and the NTEU were finalised.

“COVID-19 has caused businesses of all kinds to rethink their operations to ensure their long-term sustainability, which is exactly what we are doing,” Klomp said.

The cost reduction would recover almost AU$28 million annually for the university, he said, adding that this would not cover the full projected revenue shortfall.

Sector unstable

The NTEU is negotiating with vice-chancellors across Australia to try to limit forced redundancies and job losses.

Last week, the union announced a package that involved a salary cut of 5%-15% for full-time

staff across the nation's universities.

This is part of a union plan to save 12,000 jobs, limit forced redundancies, and prevent universities from standing down staff without pay.

"Having close to 200 Central Queensland University staff lose their jobs proves how unstable the sector is and shows how unsafe university workers feel," a union spokesman said. "It's pretty clear that people in higher education are extremely anxious. Their jobs are on the line.

"There is a massive shortfall in international student revenue, somewhere around four to five billion dollars across the sector. That's going to lead to job losses. There's no way of avoiding that."

Follow University World News on Facebook