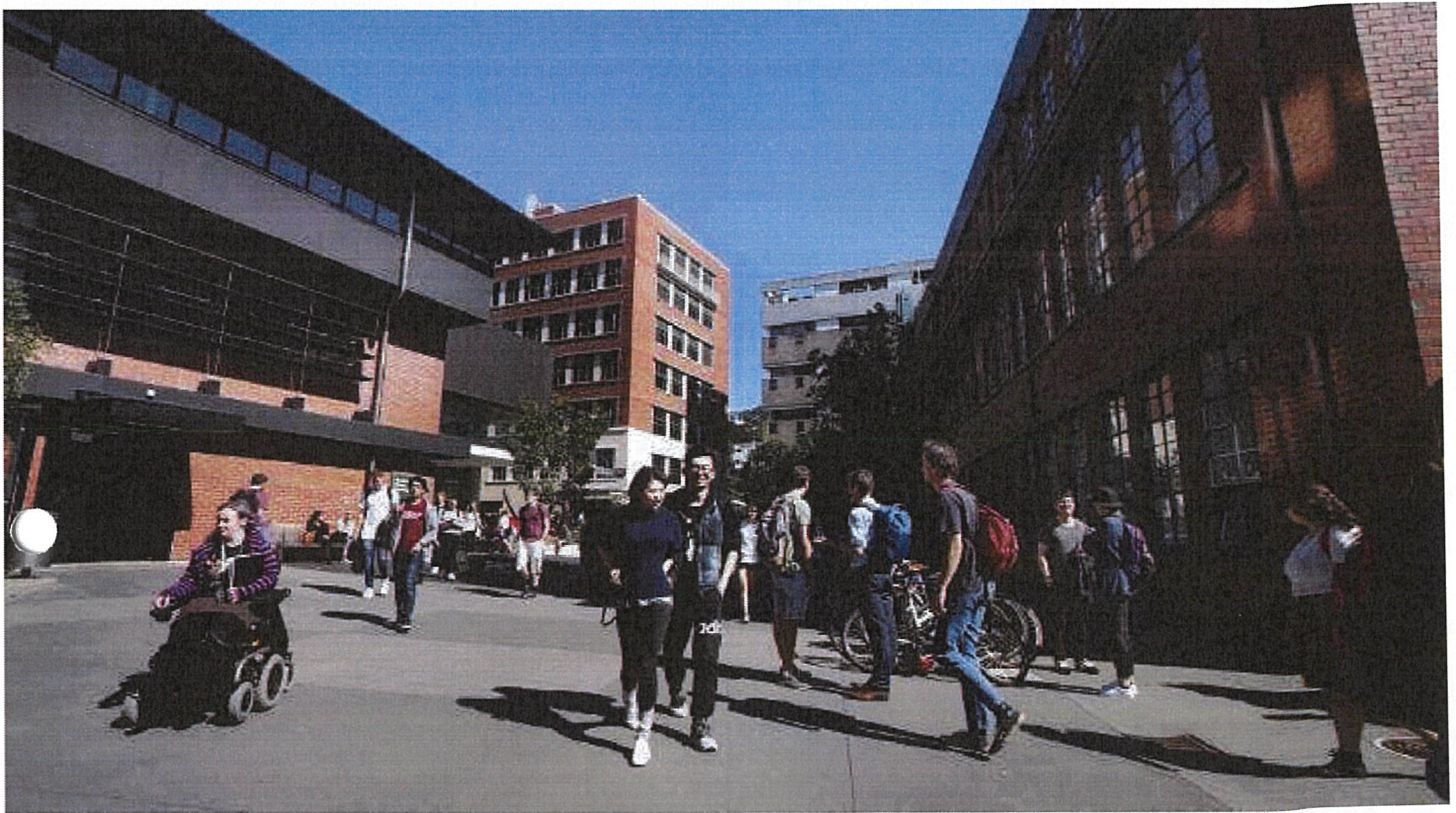


(Williams, K. & Gill, S., 2022)

University staff to stage half-day strike as pay negotiations stall

Katarina Williams and Sinead Gill • 17:46, Oct 04 2022

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MONIQUE FORD/STUFF

Tertiary Education Union members on strike this week include tutors and academic staff, through to secretarial and IT workers, librarians, payroll and finance staff and laboratory technicians. (File photo)

- About 7000 staff across the country's eight universities will walk off the job from Thursday.

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Union members are striking over pay, which they say have not kept up with inflation or revenue increases across the sector. The union is proposing an

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Thousands of staff across New Zealand's eight universities will stage a half-day strike on Thursday as part of **strike action over failed pay increase negotiations**.

It marks **20 years since the first and only time all universities have held strikes in unison** and comes just weeks out from the end of term and students' exams.

An estimated **7000 academics, researchers and general staff** from Auckland, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Canterbury, Lincoln, Massey, Otago, Victoria and Waikato universities will take part in the strike action. It does not include polytechs.

South Island universities and Massey will only be partaking in strike action for two hours, while others like AUT will not enter or release marks into the student management system until October 21.

Tertiary Education Union (TEU) members say they are angry and worried about the future of the sector, with the union calling for an 8% pay rise for its members amid concerns of a widening gap between wages and inflation.

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The TEU's Victoria University branch president, Dougal McNeill, said while there was an "absolutely overwhelming mandate" from its 1300-strong membership in Wellington, the decision to walk off the job was not taken lightly.

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"We don't want to do this, but if we have to, we will."

Union members worked in roles across the campus, ranging from tutors and academic staff, through to secretarial and IT workers, librarians, payroll and

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pleasure in the prospect of going out.”

DAVID WHITE/STUFF

Dougal McNeill, the Tertiary Education Union's Victoria University branch president, says the decision has not been made lightly.

McNeill said they were “working in solidarity with students” and members had been blown away by support from the students' association (VUWSA).

A statement issued by the association expressed its full support for the strike action.

“Staff working conditions are student learning conditions – although strike action might cause some temporary disruption to students, systematic underpaying and undervaluing of university staff will cause worse issues in the long run,” it read.

Tutors especially, who had to juggle both being a student and staff member, were some of the lowest paid in the country; having received no pay rise in the past three years..

University staff had “worked incredibly hard” during the pandemic, often through illness and continued funding and support cuts, VUWSA said.

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TEU members, pictured on September 21, at the University of Otago vote on strike action. (File photo)

The Wellington student association didn't want to lose university staff from this sector overseas or to another industry.

"This week's strike action – and further action in the future if necessary – is important, and is not just about supporting our staff, but our students and wider university community."

Negotiations between the union and the university sector began in July, but months later still had not reached an agreement.

Underpinning contract negotiations was the need for pay rates to keep pace with annual inflation – a figure **which reached a 32-year high of 7.3% in July**.

Although the eight universities have different collective agreements, the unions have co-ordinated so strikes will take place in unison. Across the sector, 87% of union members were in favour of striking.

The decision to strike followed **a vote on September 21 by union members**.

Current Otago branch president of the TEU, Craig Marshall, was also president during the 2002 strike, also over for an 8% pay increase.

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HAMISH MCNEILLY/STUFF

TEU's Otago branch president Craig Marshall was also president during the university's 2002 half-day strike. (File photo)

“Basically the problem is exactly the same as now. Universities are underfunded... essentially, the funding is controlled by the Government,” he said.

He said it wasn't so much that the universities weren't giving staff a big enough slice of the cake, rather the cake was already being stretched too thin.

“The issue now has been compounded by previous Governments, [which were] keen to offset costs with overseas students.”

That was **millions in revenue universities hadn't recouped**, he said.

Marshall said underinvesting in staff wasn't a short-term problem, but one that got worse overtime, particularly as locally trained personnel went overseas for better wages.

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Nearly 700 university staff are losing or leaving their jobs because of a financial hole left by falling foreign enrolments. (First published March 2021)

In 2002, the University of Otago union members went on strike for half a day, with plans to continue stoppages and **'work to rule's if the strike didn't work.**

He said it resulted in them getting what they wanted - the Government gave universities more funding, "inflating the size of the cake a little."

While a strike has the backing of many, including student associations, some students say they have been left in the dark about it, and fear getting further behind with their studies.

