

Are you a casual uni worker? Here's why your employer is telling you there's no job security for you.

University casual workers all over the country received emails throughout September 2021 saying they did not qualify to have their job(s) converted to permanency. This might have been surprising to many people, so here's an explainer of the situation from the [Casualised, Unemployed and Precarious University Workers \(CUPUW\)](#).

Q: Who received this email?

A: If you are casually employed by a university (or have recently been), you will probably have received an email from your university employer. We don't know how many uni casuals there are in Australia — this is a tightly held secret by universities — but we know that likely tens of thousands of uni casuals received this notification.

Q: What's conversion, and why didn't I get it?

A: Conversion is a process by which someone in casual employment becomes permanent, because they've worked in a position long enough, and regularly enough, for it to be reasonably deemed an ongoing position. You were probably informed that you didn't qualify because your length of work or regularity of work doesn't meet minimum thresholds.

Q: Why is the university sending me this?

A: The Morrison Government has changed the Fair Work Act. These changes mean that employers were required to assess all the casuals on their books and notify them as to whether the changes made them newly eligible for conversion. The NTEU has a detailed industrial fact sheet [here](#) with more info.

The changes mean that universities [continue to owe casuals little](#), from an industrial law perspective. Universities increasingly are moving to casualise their workforces, and have embraced the opportunity to make casuals aware how disposable we are to our employers.

Q: Wow – I've been working for my university for many semesters. Why don't I qualify for better job security?

A: Great question. Basically, the FWA changes required employers to assess the casuals on their books and determine whether they're eligible for conversion, but that eligibility depends on the criteria of 12 months of employment and regular pattern of hours during the past 6 months. This doesn't work for many uni casuals, especially sessionals, who don't get contracts for longer than 1 semester. Therefore, you get no job security — even if your work is vital to your university.

Q: So what can we do about it? Uni workers deserve better than this.

A: With the industrial relations landscape as it currently is, employers have a lot of power over the job security of their workers. Changes to instruments like the Fair Work Act happen in direct relation to power — and casuals currently have next to none.

As a network of casuals bearing the brunt of this, CUPUW knows that the only way for us to change this is to build real power so that we can withhold our labour — the labour that keeps unis going — to force change. Many [reports by casuals](#), independent audits, and union awareness campaigns have made universities well aware of the problems with casualising such huge numbers of uni workforces, but little meaningful transformation has happened. *We need to organise*, and we're doing the work now.

Building big, strong Casuals Networks and a fighting NTEU is the only way forward. If you're a casual, unemployed or otherwise precarious uni worker, [join your Casuals Network](#) or [CUPUW](#). We can only win together and there's a lot to do.
