



**National Tertiary
Education Union**
Let's aim higher

WA Division

NTEU WA Survey Report:

WA University Merger Proposal

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Decisive opposition (69% against)**
- **Fears about job losses, complexity, governance of new institution**

WA University Merger Poll: Results

Introduction

The Western Australian Government is examining a potential merger of Curtin University, Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia. The proposal follows the 2023 University Sector Review and the 2025 University Feasibility Study and Rapid Cost-Benefit Analysis. A business case, overseen by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet with advice from a 12-member Steering Committee, is to begin in late 2026 and be finalised in 2027, after which the Government will decide whether to proceed. The Government has pointed to declining local enrolments, low completion rates at some universities, limited regional participation and comparatively low research funding as reasons to consider a merger. It has said that if a merger goes ahead there will be no job losses for two years after the new university opens, apart from a small number of senior executive roles. Further information is available at www.wa.gov.au/universityreform.

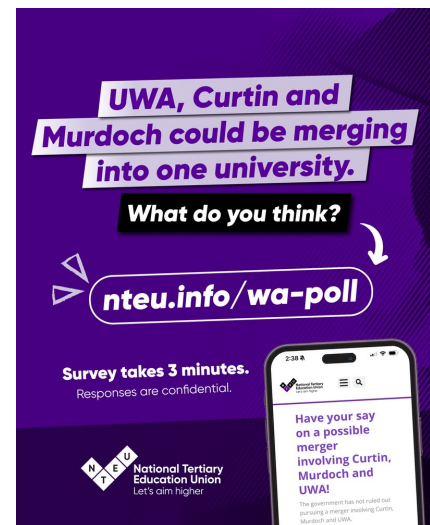
University staff will be among those most directly affected by any merger. The Government has said it will engage with staff as the business case is developed; to ensure staff views are on the record from the outset, the NTEU WA Division ran the WA University Merger Poll (“Have your say on WA Uni Merger”) from 17 July to 23 September 2026. The poll was open to staff at all WA universities, NTEU members and non-members alike, and asked for their position on a merger, their reasons for opposing it, and which safeguards will matter most if a merger proceeds, with space for written comments. In total, 936 staff responded. This report sets out what they told us.

At a glance

- **Opposition is decisive:** 643 of 936 respondents (68.7%) oppose a merger, versus 111 (11.9%) in support and 182 (19.4%) undecided. Opposition outweighs support by nearly six to one.
- **Opposition tracks proximity to the proposal:** it is strongest at the three named institutions (Curtin 75%, Murdoch 68% and UWA 66%) and lower at ECU (58%), which is not part of the proposed merger.
- **The most-cited reasons for opposition:** the South Australian precedent (51.6%) is the top reason, followed by the scale of job losses (50.2%), the size and complexity of the merger (47.9%) and distrust of the new institution’s governance (44.9%) follow closely behind.
- **Asked which safeguards matter if a merger proceeds:** respondents rated all twelve as important. Genuine staff consultation, protection of enterprise agreement conditions, independent scrutiny of job security and a public implementation plan lead the list (each averaging about 4.6 out of 5), and undecided staff rated most safeguards higher than either opposers or supporters (see Section 5).
- **The written comments echo this:** the loudest themes are student and teaching quality, research impact, executive pay and governance, and the loss of each institution’s distinct identity. Opposition is often framed as a principled defence of institutional diversity and an unmade case, rather than only self-interest (see Section 6).

About the poll

The poll opened on 17 July 2026 and closed on 23 September 2026. It received 936 responses, all of which are included in this report. Position on the merger was a single-choice question, so those figures sum to 100%. Reasons for opposing were multi-select (opposers could choose several), so those percentages are the share of opposers selecting each reason and add to more than 100%. Where a respondent listed more than one employer, their first-listed institution is treated as their primary university. Respondents came from Curtin (373), UWA (268), Murdoch (187), ECU (84) and Notre Dame (19), with a further five from other organisations such as private colleges and research institutes. Breakdowns by university focus on the three universities proposed for merger and ECU, the state's other public university; Notre Dame's responses are reported in the Section 2 table but are too few for reliable percentages in the charts, and responses from other organisations are counted only in the overall figures. Safeguard priorities (Section 5) were rated on a 1–5 scale in separate blocks for opposers, supporters and undecided respondents.



1. Overall position

More than two-thirds of respondents oppose a merger of Curtin, Murdoch and UWA (or any two of the three). Support sits at just over one in eight, with about one in five undecided.

Overall position on a WA university merger (n=936)

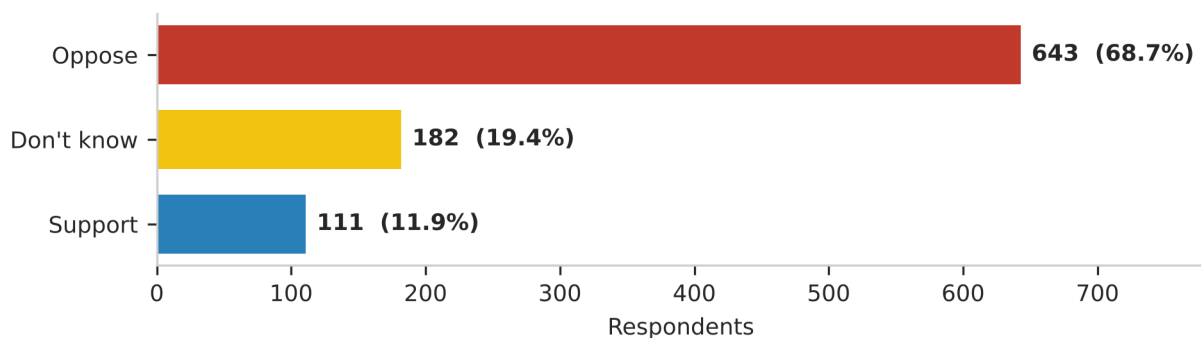


Figure 1. Overall position on a WA university merger (n = 936; poll open 17 July to 23 September 2026).

Position	Respondents	% of all
Oppose the merger	643	68.7%
Don't know	182	19.4%
Support the merger	111	11.9%
Total	936	100%

2. Position by university

Opposition is highest at the institutions named in the proposal and lower at ECU. Curtin staff are the most opposed and the most numerous group in the sample; ECU and Notre Dame staff, whose universities are not part of the proposal, are the most likely to be undecided or supportive.

Position by university

■ Oppose ■ Don't know ■ Support

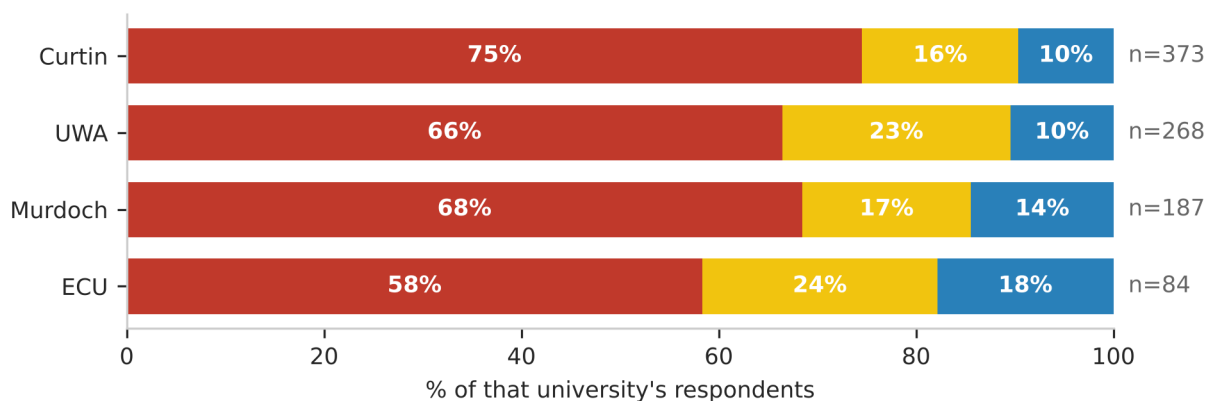


Figure 2. Position within each university, as a share of that university's respondents (Curtin, UWA, Murdoch and ECU; n = 912). Notre Dame is shown in the table below.

University	n	Oppose	Don't know	Support
Curtin	373	75%	16%	10%
UWA	268	66%	23%	10%
Murdoch	187	68%	17%	14%
ECU	84	58%	24%	18%
Notre Dame	19	42%	47%	11%

Note: percentages are within each university and are rounded. Curtin, UWA and Murdoch are the institutions proposed for merger; ECU and Notre Dame staff responded but are not part of the proposal.

3. Reasons for opposing: all opposers

All 643 opposers recorded at least one reason. The four leading reasons cluster tightly, each selected by roughly four to five in ten opposers. Concerns about research and teaching quality follow close behind the top four.

Reasons for opposing: all opposers

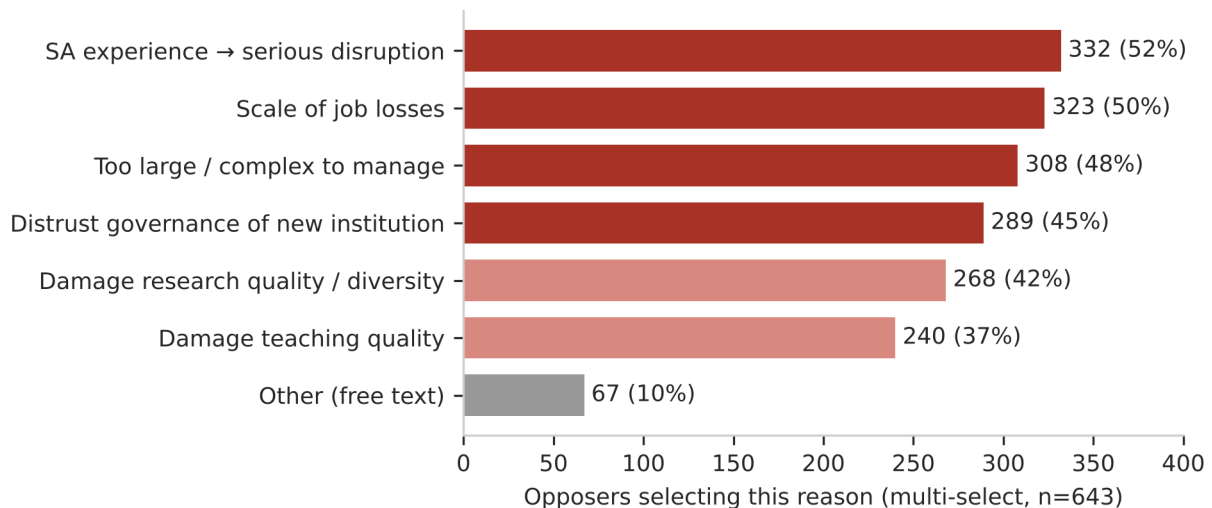


Figure 3. Reasons selected by opposers (multi-select, n = 643). The top four are shown in darker red.

Reason for opposing	Opposers	% of opposers
SA experience shows serious disruption	332	51.6%
Concerned about scale of job losses	323	50.2%
Merger too large / complex to manage	308	47.9%
Distrust governance of new institution	289	44.9%
Will damage research quality / diversity	268	41.7%
Will damage teaching quality	240	37.3%
Other (free text)	67	10.4%

Respondents' written comments show what sits behind the leading reasons. On the South Australian precedent, staff pointed to the practical disruption of the Adelaide University merger:

"The disruption and extra work this will cause academic staff. At Adelaide, the ethics committee was not set up for several months. It is also unclear who would have oversight of current and past ethics approvals. All accredited courses needed to be reaccredited as their course codes changed."

— Curtin, academic staff, opposes the merger

Concern about repeating the South Australian experience was evident even among those who support a merger:

"We cannot make the same mistakes of SA. Let's learn a lesson and make this the best possible outcome for all."

— UWA, academic staff, supports the merger

On job losses, staff saw redundancies as the likely route to the savings a merger is meant to deliver:

"A merger like this is all but a guarantee of redundancies - which is, to say, layoffs. The government is clearly looking for cost savings, and it wants to achieve those by cutting staff."

— UWA, academic staff, opposes the merger

On size and complexity, staff drew on their own experience of working in large institutions:

“It doesn’t make sense to have a market with one supersized and one tiny public university... Curtin is already huge and illustrates that merged departments and centralised processes undermine service quality and community.”

— Curtin, academic staff, opposes the merger

4. Reasons for opposing, by university

The reasons behind opposition differ by campus. ECU and Murdoch opposers lean most heavily on the South Australian precedent, Curtin opposers most often cite the merger’s size and complexity, and UWA opposers are the most likely to raise research-quality concerns. Job losses are a top-tier concern almost everywhere.

Reasons for opposing, by university

■ Curtin (n=278) ■ UWA (n=178) ■ Murdoch (n=128) ■ ECU (n=49)

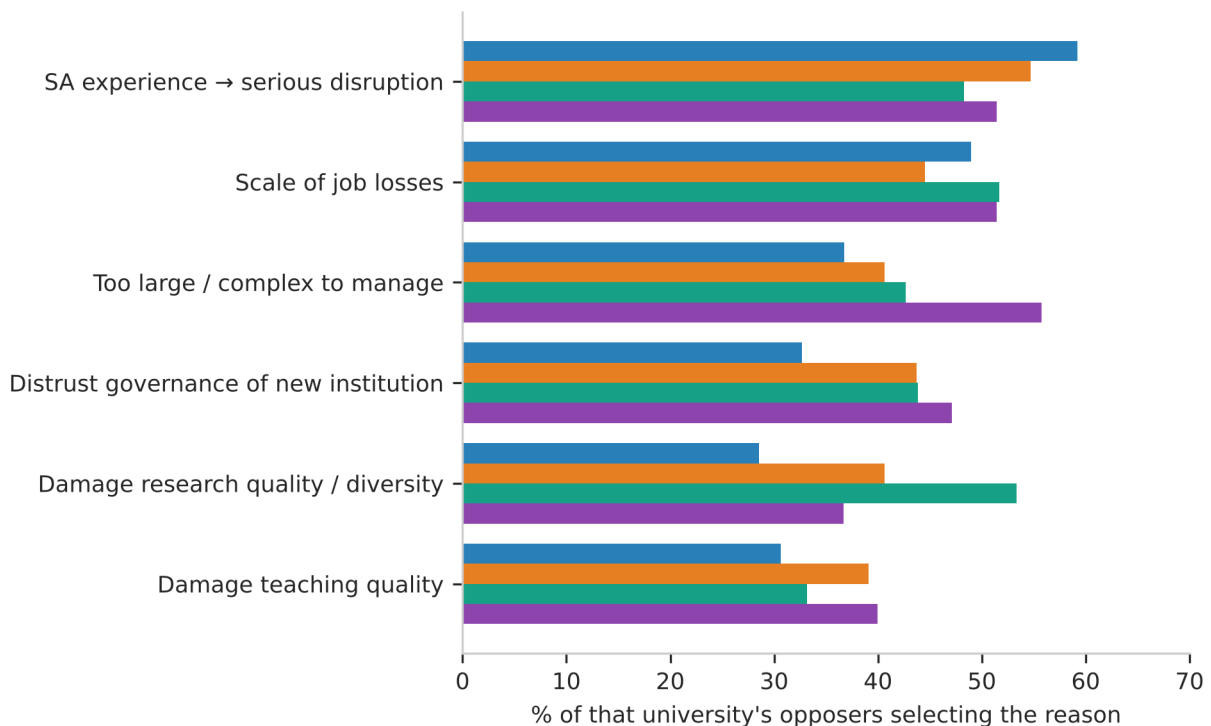


Figure 4. Share of each university’s opposers selecting each reason.

Reason	Curtin (n=278)	UWA (n=178)	Murdoch (n=128)	ECU (n=49)
SA experience → disruption	51%	48%	55%	59%
Scale of job losses	51%	52%	45%	49%
Too large / complex	56%	43%	41%	37%
Distrust governance	47%	44%	44%	33%
Damage research quality	37%	53%	41%	29%
Damage teaching quality	40%	33%	39%	31%

Note: within each university, percentages are the share of that campus’s opposers selecting the reason; rows exceed 100% because opposers could choose several. Notre Dame is omitted from the breakdown as the base is too small to report.

5. Priorities if a merger proceeds

Every respondent was asked to rate twelve possible safeguards from 1 (low importance) to 5 (essential), on the premise that the government proceeds with a merger. Endorsement is very high across the board: every safeguard averaged above 3.9, and ten of the twelve were rated 4 or 5 by more than three-quarters of those answering. The top tier combines process and job protection: broad and genuine consultation with staff before the new institution is designed (mean 4.66; 82% rating it essential), protection of existing enterprise agreement conditions (4.65; 81%), independent scrutiny of job-security commitments (4.62; 79%), a public implementation plan with milestones and accountability measures (4.59; 75%) and a binding commitment to no forced redundancies (4.53; 74%). Lowest-rated, though still backed by a majority, are increased elected student representation (3.92; 44% essential), a Parliamentary Committee investigation (4.05; 54%) and full public release of the Harding Review and MacTiernan cost-benefit analysis (4.21; 61%).

How important is each safeguard if a merger proceeds?

■ 5 – essential ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 1-2 – low importance

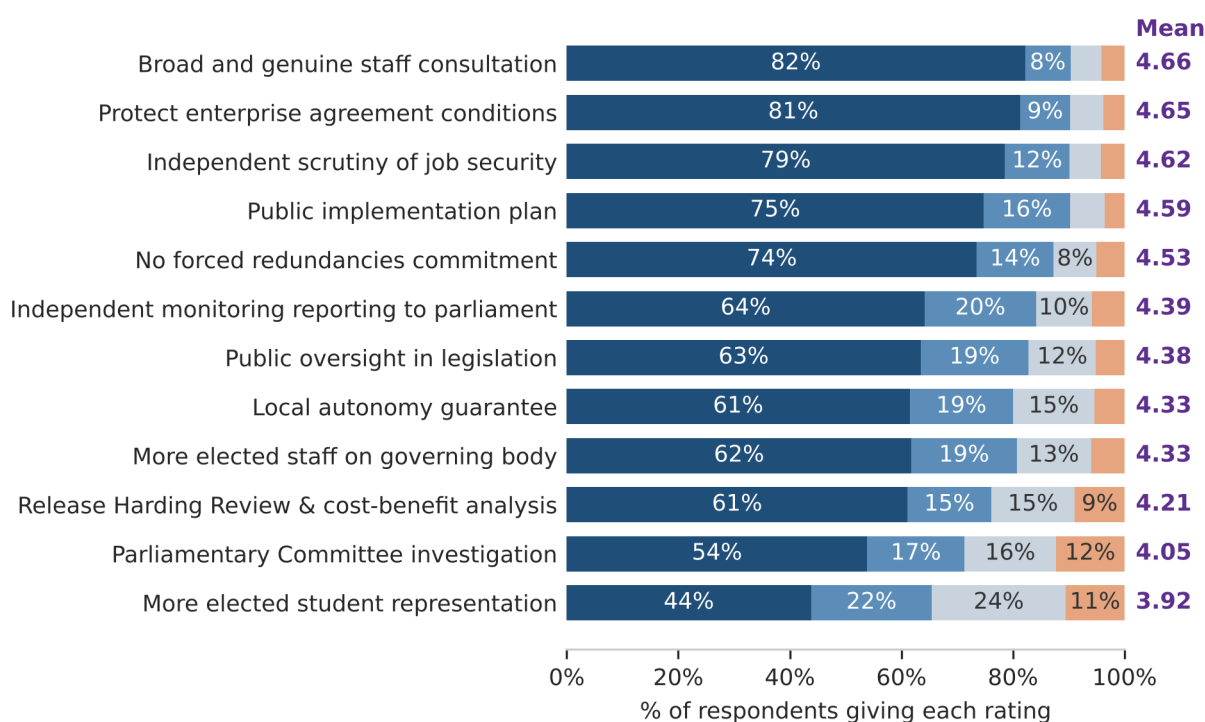


Figure 5. How respondents rated each safeguard (bar labels are % of respondents answering; n = 907–922 per item), sorted by mean rating. Mean ratings by position are shown in the table below.

Safeguard (if a merger proceeds)	Mean (all)	% rating 5	Oppose mean	Don't know mean	Support mean
Broad and genuine consultation with all staff	4.66	82%	4.65	4.80	4.49
Protection of existing enterprise agreement conditions	4.65	81%	4.62	4.74	4.67
Independent scrutiny of job-security commitments	4.62	79%	4.58	4.81	4.47
Public implementation plan with milestones	4.59	75%	4.52	4.79	4.63
No forced redundancies during transition	4.53	74%	4.55	4.63	4.20
Independent monitoring reporting to parliament	4.39	64%	4.36	4.46	4.41

Safeguard (if a merger proceeds)	Mean (all)	% rating 5	Oppose mean	Don't know mean	Support mean
Public oversight and accountability in legislation	4.38	63%	4.30	4.64	4.40
Local autonomy guarantee for areas and teams	4.33	61%	4.43	4.37	3.70
More elected staff on the governing body	4.33	62%	4.28	4.43	4.44
Full public release of the Harding Review and cost-benefit analysis	4.21	61%	4.07	4.56	4.44
Parliamentary Committee investigation before legislation	4.05	54%	4.03	4.25	3.80
More elected student representation	3.92	44%	3.93	3.91	3.94

Note: means are on a 1–5 scale; “% rating 5” is the share of all respondents answering the item who rated it essential. Shaded cells mark the group with the highest mean rating for each safeguard.

How the groups differ. Undecided respondents rate nine of the twelve safeguards higher than either opposers or supporters, most sharply independent scrutiny of job security (4.81), a public implementation plan (4.79) and public oversight embedded in legislation (4.64). These are therefore the conditions most likely to matter to the group whose position is still open. They are also far keener than opposers on releasing the Harding Review and cost-benefit analysis (4.56 versus 4.07). Supporters rate most safeguards much as everyone else does but stand apart on three: a guarantee of local autonomy (3.70, against 4.43 among opposers), a Parliamentary Committee investigation (3.80) and a no-forced-redundancies commitment (4.20), consistent with written comments that favour streamlined structures. Opposers’ ratings should be read as conditional: some said in their comments that no safeguard would change their position.

Academic versus professional staff. Academic and professional staff rate the safeguards almost identically. Professional staff place slightly more weight on public oversight in legislation (4.49 versus 4.31), independent scrutiny of job security (4.68 versus 4.57) and protection of enterprise agreement conditions (4.71 versus 4.60), in line with their greater concern for job security in the written comments.

6. Themes in the open-ended responses

This section draws on the written comments respondents could add: opposers' "Other" reasons for opposing, and the "any other priorities that are missing?" box shown to every respondent. In total 264 of the 936 respondents left a substantive written comment. Each comment was read and coded to one or more themes (Figures 6 and 7 are based on 258 comments coded in detail); because a comment can touch several themes, the percentages sum to more than 100%.

The major themes

Concern for students and teaching quality is the single most common thread, followed by research impact, executive pay and governance, and the loss of each institution's distinct identity. A cluster of process themes (consultation and transparency, and the argument that no clear case for a merger has been made) is also prominent, alongside transition disruption, staff wellbeing and job security.

% of each group's comments raising each theme

Student experience & teaching	34%	41%	19%	19%	34%	34%
Research impact	19%	21%	15%	19%	23%	14%
Executive pay & governance	17%	17%	17%	19%	17%	17%
Loss of diversity/identity	14%	19%	4%	6%	13%	16%
Consultation & transparency	13%	10%	13%	26%	13%	12%
Transition disruption & wellbeing	11%	11%	13%	6%	8%	15%
Job losses & security	10%	9%	10%	16%	8%	12%
No rationale / no evidence	9%	12%	6%	0%	9%	10%
ECU exclusion	6%	5%	6%	10%	6%	6%
Protect services/workload	6%	6%	8%	3%	6%	5%
Cost / waste of money	5%	6%	0%	6%	5%	6%
Distrust govt/process/guarantees	3%	4%	2%	0%	3%	3%
	All (n=258)	Oppose (n=175)	Don't know (n=52)	Support (n=31)	Academic (n=154)	Professional (n=104)

Figure 6. Share of each group's written comments raising each theme. "All" covers all 258 substantive comments; remaining columns split them by position and by staff type. Cells are shaded by prevalence.

The comments themselves illustrate these themes. On students and teaching quality, staff worried about what a larger institution would mean in the classroom and for different student cohorts:

"A guarantee that course offerings will not substantially reduce, and that teaching will be appropriately resourced. There should be hard limits on class sizes, so that we don't end up with 100 students in a tutorial class, with a single academic."

— Curtin, academic staff, opposes the merger

“The universities (e.g. UWA and Murdoch) serve very different student cohorts and I am deeply concerned that a single institutional approach will not effectively serve the different needs of these students... Some cohorts need more support and this is why different universities have a place.”

— Murdoch, academic staff, opposes the merger

On research, the concern was that distinct research strengths would be diluted:

“Differences in institutional philosophies will lead to diluted outcomes... Curtin concentrates applied research which is valuable in itself. But a merge with UWA may de-emphasise pure research.”

— UWA, professional staff, opposes the merger

On executive pay and governance, staff argued that a merger would not fix existing problems and might delay solving them:

“The merger will not address any of the known concerns around university governance and senior executive remuneration. It will make it harder to address these concerns for the duration of merger discussions, university establishment etc, which really kicks the can down the road for a decade.”

— Curtin, professional staff, opposes the merger

And on institutional identity, staff with experience across the sector stressed how different the universities are:

“I’ve worked for all three universities and they all have a unique and distinct culture. I think any merger would be like trying to combine oil and water.”

— Murdoch, professional staff, opposes the merger

How themes relate to support and opposition

Two themes are essentially unique to opposers: the loss of institutional diversity and identity (19% of opposer comments, versus almost none among supporters) and the view that no rationale or evidence has been provided (12%). This suggests opposition is as much principled (institutional diversity as a public good, and an unmade case) as it is about material self-interest. A minority of opposer comments were explicitly entrenched, stating that no guarantee would change their position. Supporters, by contrast, are focused on how a merger is done rather than whether it proceeds: their comments are dominated by consultation and transparency (26%) and by streamlining governance and executive overhead, and they are the group most likely to raise ECU’s exclusion and the two-versus-three-university question. Undecided respondents sit between the two, weighting job security, transition resourcing and research impact: the practical conditions on which they might move.

Academic versus professional staff

The contrast is modest but consistent. Academic staff place more weight on research impact (23% versus 14%), on institutional identity, and on the ranking-dilution argument that merging a higher-ranked institution with lower-ranked ones erodes standing. Professional staff place more weight on transition and wellbeing (15% versus 8%) and on job security (12% versus 8%) and raise a concern specific to their roles: that duplicated professional services will be cut and their own teams may not survive a merged structure. Concern for the student experience is shared equally (34% each), as are executive-pay and consultation themes.

By university

Themes by university (% of each campus's comments)

Student experience & teaching	41%	25%	32%	34%
Research impact	18%	25%	12%	21%
Executive pay & governance	24%	13%	11%	17%
Loss of diversity/identity	15%	11%	18%	17%
Consultation & transparency	14%	14%	7%	17%
Transition disruption & wellbeing	6%	13%	11%	17%
Job losses & security	9%	11%	12%	3%
No rationale / no evidence	8%	9%	12%	7%
ECU exclusion	4%	3%	2%	28%
Protect services/workload	8%	8%	4%	0%
Cost / waste of money	8%	5%	4%	0%
Distrust govt/process/guarantees	5%	1%	4%	0%
	Curtin (n=93)	UWA (n=76)	Murdoch (n=56)	ECU (n=29)

Figure 7. Themes by university, as a share of each campus's written comments.

Curtin comments are the strongest on teaching quality and on executive pay and governance: a quality-plus-accountability framing, often with a sense that Curtin would subsidise the others. UWA comments stand out for research impact, frequently paired with the argument that UWA's inclusion is about covering its own governance and financial problems. Murdoch comments lean on protecting a distinct mission, with its First Nations and low-SES focus and staff wellbeing raised repeatedly. ECU comments are dominated by the fear of exclusion (of being left behind or reduced to a "super-TAFE"), which helps explain why a majority of ECU respondents (58%) oppose a merger their own university is not part of.

Feedback on the poll and the union

A small number of comments (about seven) offered feedback on the poll itself. Some committed opposers disliked being asked to rate safeguards on the assumption that a merger proceeds, and others noted that the position question could not distinguish support for a two-university merger from a three-university one. None of the comments that mentioned the NTEU were critical; several respondents wanted the union to fight the merger or to sit on any oversight body.

Union members versus non-members

Respondents were 83% NTEU members (781) and 17% non-members (155), and the two groups took essentially the same position: 68.4% of non-members opposed a merger against 68.8% of members. Opposition to a merger is shared by union members and non-members alike. Non-members differ mainly in composition rather than view: they skew more towards professional staff (52% versus 40% of members), and non-member opposers lean more on research- and teaching-quality concerns (53% and 44%, versus 40% and 36% of member opposers) and slightly less on job losses (46% versus 51%).

Authorised by

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