

TO: QTU MEMBERS

End of school year for remote centres

Today marks the end of the school year for QTU members in remote locations.

As members head off on a well-earned break, the QTU encourages them to disconnect and enjoy their holidays. We will attempt to keep members informed of any changes that may impact on them through the QTU website and social media. Current information about the Queensland COVID roadmap and restrictions was in Newsflash 27.

Thank you to all members for your hard work and dedication this year. The pandemic continued to disrupt learning, however our members have continued to do all they can to provide students with the best possible opportunities to learn. We hope you stay safe over these holidays and enjoy a well-deserved break.

Vaccine mandate

Over the holidays, members are encouraged to ensure they comply with the Chief Health Officer's (CHO) vaccination mandate, which was announced earlier this week. To do so, members should have their first dose of the COVID vaccine by 17 December and be double vaccinated by 23 January 2022.

By now, members should have received an email survey regarding their vaccination status. This email was sent from the HR portal to the email address members have registered for payroll, i.e. your preferred email address. The email may appear different from the usual department emails as it comes from QED QLD. Failure to respond to this survey does not remove the requirement for members to follow the CHO directive. It is the CHO's view that the vaccine is necessary to mitigate the risk of members becoming seriously ill from COVID should they be exposed to the disease in the course of their employment. Members can direct questions to the CHO on the following email: DLO@health.qld.gov.au

How was the Union's position on the vaccine mandate determined?

One of the core values of the QTU is to be democratic. As other states across the country started to mandate vaccines for teachers, the QTU State Council determined the Union's position on vaccines. State Council is made up of more than 100 classroom teachers and school leaders and TAFE teachers and tutors. The position of the Council was clear - the Union should not oppose a mandate based on health advice and issued by the CHO.

The Union's position has been available to members for more than three months, with members being able to seek changes to this position through branch and area council meetings. No such amendments were sought.

Consequently, as the Union has done throughout the pandemic when the CHO determined to mandate the COVID vaccine for education employees the QTU has advised members to follow the health advice and comply with the directive.

We appreciate that not all members may agree with this position, however another of the Union's values is to be courageous.

This means that, even though some members may not agree with the Union's democratically determined position or do not wish to comply with the health directive, we believe it is important to provide members with the correct advice and inform them of the potential consequences of their choices.

As with all lawful directives, if members fail to follow the mandate they face the possibility of disciplinary action from their employer. The QTU continues to work with the department to respond to member questions. Members may also ask these questions directly to the Department of Education (their employer) on the following email: staffvaccinationstatus@qed.qld.gov.au

Members are also reminded to be aware of the potential impact of their comments and statements online. For information about avoiding the pitfalls in an online environment, please read the [QTU's legal advice](#).

If the Union won't oppose the mandate, what will it do for its members?

As a member-focused organisation, the QTU has advocated for the rights of members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- access to special pandemic leave
- special quarantine leave
- increased cleaning in state schools
- access to hygiene products such as hand soap, hand sanitiser and personal protection equipment such as face masks
- ensuring that workers and students who are ill do not attend the workplace
- negotiating for student free days to prepare for remote learning
- ensuring that school attendance during major lockdowns was restricted to vulnerable children and the children of essential workers
- the ability to work from home for the majority of members during the recent lockdowns caused by the Delta variant
- advocating for members to be prioritised for vaccination, resulting in teachers and school leaders being added to Phase 1b of the vaccination rollout earlier this year.

We have sought extensive legal advice about the individual rights of members in the face of a CHO mandate, and will continue to meet with the government to discuss consistent processes for state government employees who are seeking medical exemptions to the current mandate and a consistent approach to the management of non-compliance with the directive.

We will also seek additional legal advice about any remedies available to members who believe they are unable to comply with the directive.

Additionally, financial members who need assistance in navigating the public service exemption process and any potential employee disciplinary procedures imposed by the government will be able to access the QTU legal service (NB - you must be a financial member at the time you seek this assistance).

Being part of a union for teachers, by teachers, is what professional teachers and school leaders do

The QTU was established by teachers and school leaders in January 1889. This means that for almost 133 years the QTU has been the voice of the profession. The QTU Executive and other decision-making bodies are comprised of classroom teachers, heads of program, school leaders and TAFE teachers and tutors. The more than 48,000 members of our Union are not only proud of our profession, we also celebrate our profession.

Recently we asked members to celebrate our profession by reflecting on their one teacher or school leader – the person who made a difference in their lives and learning.

As teachers and school leaders, we make decisions every day to ensure our students have a safe place to learn and we have a safe place to work. This is one of the many things that unite us.

The final increase of the current agreement will be paid to members on 1 January 2022. Additionally, the new salary step, experienced senior teacher 2 (EST2), will be introduced for classroom teachers, and the number of steps for heads of program and school leaders will reduce from three to two, allowing for earlier progression to the top step of the classification. When school returns, primary and special school classroom teachers will also receive an additional half-hour non-contact time.

Wins like these are only possible through the strength of our 48,000 plus members campaigning for improved teaching (and therefore learning) conditions.

The QTU is a Union that delivers on its values of being democratic, courageous, member-focussed, professional and united.

This strength in unity will continue to be important in 2022, as we commence negotiations for a replacement agreement and campaign to address teacher shortages, improve resourcing to schools and eliminate occupational violence. We will also ensure the full implementation of the current TAFE certified agreement and commence consultation with our TAFE members in preparation of the development of the claim for TAFE EB11.

For now, these campaigns can wait while our members take the time to rest and rejuvenate, ready to return in 2022 and continue to make a difference in the lives of the students they teach. On behalf of the QTU I would like to thank you once again for all the work that you continue to every day for your students and each other. State schools and their teachers and school leaders truly are great.

Authorised by:

Kate Ruttiman
General Secretary