

TO: QTU MEMBERS

Negotiations regarding school closures continue

At its meeting on Monday evening, QTU Executive noted progress had been made on the following at yesterday's meeting with the Education Minister.

- Vulnerable workers should go home and work from home (Chief Health Officer (CHO)).
- A CHO directive requiring parents whose children are ill with flu-like symptoms to keep them home under pain of a fine (similar to an infectious diseases directive).
- Freedom of teachers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to travel on leave, irrespective of community lock-downs.
- Vulnerable students in special schools and SEPs to be kept at home (though case-by-case assessment might be needed).
- Agreement about timely consultation in relation to the start of term two.

The meeting was attended by the Education Minister, the Health Minister, the CHO and the Department of Education Director-General. The Premier joined by teleconference and spoke about the issues. This is in itself a mark of respect for members and the issues that they are raising.

School "closure"

QTU Executive has NOT called for members to strike if schools do not close

Executive continues to negotiate with the government about school closures and has made the Premier and Minister aware that it is the position of the QTU that the current uncertainty around school closures and the failure to address the health and safety concerns of teachers and school leaders is unsustainable.

The QTU has agreed that any closure will take the form of student free days on which students (with one exception) will not attend but teachers will attend or work from home.

The exception to students not attending school is the children of essential workers (which would include teachers). One guesstimate was that this could include 30 per cent of students. The CHO said that the modelling indicated absenteeism from the health workforce of 35 per cent if schools were fully closed. The continued attendance of the children of essential workers (definition pending) is a very firm position of government.

Executive accepted continued negotiation on that basis.

The QTU position at the end of the meeting with the state government was:

- the closure or partial shut-down of schools is inevitable

- transition time is needed before continuing education can be provided through alternative learning programs
- it is better to undertake the initial transition preparation before Easter.

There was no government acknowledgement of what the QTU sees as the inevitability of a shut-down of schools for students. The department emphasised that teachers would have to be available for some form of work in order to be paid as usual.

The Premier indicated that any change in the position of schools would have to be put to the National Cabinet, which next meets this evening.

Executive has determined that it will reconvene this week to consider the outcome of ongoing negotiations with the government.

Who is “vulnerable” and what action should be taken?

The following list, developed from advice provided by Queensland Health, identifies that those most at risk of serious COVID-19 infection are:

- people with compromised immune systems (such as people who have cancer)
- people over 60, particularly when combined with a chronic medical condition
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (as they have higher rates of chronic illness)
- people with chronic medical conditions.

Consequently, if one or more of these applies to you, you should work from home. If normal duties cannot be undertaken, consideration should be given to alternative duties and/or professional development, planning and preparation activities while working remotely. To facilitate these arrangements, you should advise your school principal or supervisor (in the same way you would for any leave) that you fall into one of these categories.

If you are the primary carer of someone who falls into the vulnerable person category, and have a medical certificate to this effect, you will be able to access paid special leave.

Advice from the [Queensland Government](#) is that there haven't yet been comprehensive studies that show the effect of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on pregnant women and their babies. If you are pregnant, you should continue to take good care of your health, and just like everyone else, wash your hands and keep your distance from people who are coughing or sneezing, or who you know to be sick. Seek medical attention if you experience any signs of illness at any time during your pregnancy. Contact your obstetrician if you require further advice.

Every DoE employee can access three days of consecutive sick leave without a medical certificate. Longer periods, including for those who are vulnerable, will require a certificate. Members over 60 with health complications should consider the advice of the CHO and stay away from classroom environments.

What arrangements are in place for those members who live in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but need to travel away from community over the school holidays?

The department cannot and will not prevent any staff from leaving a community.

If you are leaving the community for the autumn holidays, you should take your essential personal effects with you (e.g. valuables, passports, legal documents, and pets).

Should a community require you to self-quarantine upon your return, you will be able to work from home or access pandemic leave.

If a community determines that you cannot re-enter, the department may redeploy you or locate you in an alternative workplace. However, access to your belongings may be limited while restrictions remain in place.

This advice also applies to teachers whose home is in another state and wish to travel interstate on holidays. The advice on non-essential travel is that you should stay in your state and stay in your suburb/community. However, if you do travel interstate you should understand the requirements and restrictions on travel, including the self-quarantine requirements of the state to which you wish to travel and the restrictions in place upon your return to Queensland.

Arrangements for special schools and SEPs

Where a student has a chronic medical condition or falls into the vulnerable person category, they should not be coming to school.

The CHO has agreed to issue a health directive to require families of children who present unwell/with flu-like symptoms to keep them home or collect them from school. This directive will also apply to students in special schools and SEPs.

The department has agreed to expedite health and safety measures for special schools and SEPs to ensure that they have access to personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and hygiene products etc.

What do I do if a child comes to school but is unwell?

The CHO has agreed to issue a health directive to empower principals to send students who are presenting with flu-like symptoms home.

Students who present as unwell will have to be placed in a separate location until parents or caregivers collect them or arrangements are made for them to leave school. They will be required to stay at home until they are well.

Failure of parents/caregivers to follow this directive may result in fines.

Arrangements for specialist/itinerant staff in schools

Specialist staff who travel between schools are required to stay at their base school (or another school as agreed by the principals in the cluster).

This includes specialist teachers in primary and special schools, instrumental music teachers and instructors, itinerant teachers and district relieving teachers (DRTs) (this is not an exhaustive list).

Additionally, instrumental music teachers and instructors should cease group lessons and ensembles etc. Focus should be on delivering senior instrumental music to those students studying it as part of the new QCE.

Continuity of learning in the event of school closures

When schools close, it is unlikely that they will close for all students, and they will not close for teachers.

The government is firm that schools will be required to stay open to provide learning for students of essential workers. The final list of essential workers has not been agreed, but will include those who keep us safe and those who keep us well. Teachers would be included in the list of essential workers.

The arrangements in relation to vulnerable and sick students will apply to the children of essential workers.

The remaining students will be taught through various platforms, including virtual schooling, paper-based learning, radio broadcast and other capabilities.

The QTU believes that student free days are necessary to ensure that teachers and school leaders are provided with sufficient time to prepare instruction materials and reorganise timetables as necessary to provide for blended delivery models. Central office is not requiring teachers and school leaders to develop these materials now.

The department advises that it has already uploaded two weeks' of material for P-10 curriculum on the [learning@home](#) website. These materials are not mandatory but may be used as a support resource for home-based learning.

In schools where students have limited access to technology or internet at home, the department is working to investigate other processes of delivery, which may include schools developing print material for collection by parents across the closure and/or the department broadcasting lessons for each year level on radio networks.

Negotiations continue in relation to the delivery of VETIS and senior secondary.

The department has not finalised how attendance of students will be registered during a period of school closure.

Registering attendance of employees

In the event of school closures or shut down, the Public Service Commission requires the department to maintain a register of attendance of all employees.

The department has developed a simple process which includes emailing each employee and asking them to complete a simple three/four step questionnaire. This questionnaire only needs to be undertaken once, unless your circumstances change.

Access to cleaning and hygiene materials

The department has established a number of arrangements with suppliers of cleaning and hygiene products, including soap, paper hand towels, hand sanitiser and toilet paper.

If you have insufficient supplies, or no supplies at all, you should contact Procurement Services on 1300 366 612 or by email Procurement.OCPO@qed.qld.gov.au.

If you are unable to secure the necessary materials for your school through these means, register it as a health and safety issue in MyHR and contact your QTU Organiser for advice.

Negotiating outcomes for members – what real unions do

When considering the responses of the QTU to the COVID-19 pandemic, the QTU Executive (which is comprised of classroom teachers, heads of programs and school leaders) initially determined to follow the advice of the CHO.

This became untenable on Sunday when the National Cabinet failed to address the health and safety concerns of our members and different states determined to have differing responses to school closures.

In response to member concerns, QTU Executive determined that it was important to call for school closures and other protections.

The Union has also advised members on what actions they should take should they believe their health and safety is being compromised if schools have insufficient cleaning and hygiene equipment.

Do not be misled – it is advocacy from the QTU, the United Workers Union and the Together Union that has prompted the government to respond with additional cleaning hours (up to 20 per cent increases for special

schools and 10 per cent increases for other sectors), a health directive, advice to vulnerable employees and plans for continuity of learning.

Other businesses “pretending” to be unions have not been present for any of these discussions or negotiations.

The QTU was established for teachers by teachers, and has been representing the interests of state school teachers and school leaders for more than 130 years, and continues to do so.

An important reminder that dues are payable by **31 March 2020**.

QTU Reps are also encouraged to continue to invite non-members to join the QTU.

The QTU only provides advice and support to financial members of the Union. Now more than ever is a time for teachers and principals to stand together with their Union: union density is union strength.

For more updates and information please visit the [QTU website](#).

Authorised by:

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