



TO: QTU MEMBERS

Stop the pay freeze

There is at last some clarity about the Queensland Government's intentions around imposing a pay freeze on teachers, principals and other public service workers.

When Parliament next meets on 16-18 June, the government intends to legislate to override any pay rises in existing enterprise bargaining agreements between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021 and substitute new increases and dates into those agreements.

There are numerous variations across the public service. Below is what it will look like for the agreements of QTU members in schools and in TAFE.

Schools

- 1 July 2019 increase PAID
- 1 July 2020 increase – no increase
- 1 July 2021 increase – 1 July 2020 increase
- 1 January 2022 – 1 July 2021 increase
- 1 July 2022 – new agreement due.

The department has not responded to requests for details of the savings this will make. The QTU calculates that it will result in at least \$100 million less going into the pockets of 48,000 teachers and principals over the life of the agreement. While those covered will be paid the same salary at the end of the agreement as originally negotiated, they will be paid less than agreed for 18 months of the three-year agreement.

It is doubly frustrating for those in promotional positions, who did not receive the \$1,250 one-off payment on the basis that they would be receiving increases of at least 10 per cent during the life of the agreement.

TAFE

- 1 July 2019 – PAID
- 1 July 2020 increase – no increase
- 1 July 2021 – 1 July 2020 increase
- 1 January 2022 – 1 July 2021 increase
- 1 July 2022 – 1 July 2022 increase
- 1 July 2023 – new agreement due.

There is no estimate available of the impact on TAFE teacher earnings during the life of the agreement. As in schools, TAFE teachers will eventually receive the same final salary, but will be paid less than agreed for 18 months of the three-year agreement.

Defined benefit superannuants

The freeze also hits members in the defined superannuation benefit fund who were intending to retire over the course of this agreement. The pay freeze affects the "final salary" component of the calculation of their retirement benefit. A pay freeze would result in a significant reduction in their retirement benefit, a very unfair outcome after 20, 30, even 40 years of service.

The QTU raised this in the first meeting after a pay freeze was announced, and regularly since. We have been assured by government representatives that provision has been made to deem the final salary as if there was no pay freeze, but we have not seen the detail of what is proposed.

QTU Executive rejects the pay freeze

The QTU Executive has rejected the pay freeze and the QTU has opposed it in discussions between the government and public sector unions.

The government position is:

- manifestly unfair to teachers and principals, who have been working harder than ever on the front line and whose staffing of schools is essential to re-starting the economy
- industrially unconscionable, in that it requires unilaterally breaking an agreement approved less than 12 months ago
- economically unsound, as it will remove \$100 million from circulation in an economy in recession, at a time when stimulus, not cuts, is required.

There is no doubt that the economy is in trouble, that unemployment and underemployment have doubled, and that the revenues of the state budget have been significantly affected. But this has historically proved to be bad policy and the state government has not made an economic or budget case why this is not so now. If there had been clarity about the freeze, time and an arguable case, the QTU would have balloted its members. But there has not been.

Above all, it is reprehensible that the government would LEGISLATE to override agreements that it freely entered into as an employer. It is not prepared to argue its case for changing agreements with its employees and to put it to a ballot.

The QTU campaigned against Campbell Newman and the LNP when it legislated to override conditions in awards and agreements like permanency and workload clauses.

A decision by the Palaszczuk ALP government to legislate to override pay rises in agreements is no better.

It is a bridge too far for any government to break its agreement with its employees, doubly so to do so through legislation.

QTU campaign

Discussions have been exhausted. Over the past week the QTU has mobilised its honorary officials in branches and schools to lobby parliamentarians against the pay freeze.

That campaign will intensify in the lead-up to the next sitting of Parliament on 16-18 June, and the Union will seek to involve all members in that lobbying.

As far as is possible, the QTU will work in conjunction with other unions with members in the public sector to prevent legislation being introduced and passed.

If, in spite of our best efforts, the government passes legislation, that will not be the end. The QTU Executive has considered a number of contingency strategies if a pay freeze is implemented.

School holidays and travel

The message from the Premier is clear, Queenslanders are able to travel within the state of Queensland over the school holiday period. However, teachers in bio-security restricted and western communities continue to seek clarification to ensure that they understand what procedures need to be followed upon the return to the communities in which they teach.

The QTU has sought clarification about the requirement for teachers to complete a medical check, similar to the ones undertaken at the end of the autumn holidays, prior to returning to western communities. The medical check was implemented by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and as such remains in place until a decision is made to remove it. It is the Union's view that to continue the medical screening check would be inconsistent with the revised road map and home confinement directions of the Chief Health Officer. At this point in time, members are encouraged to make their usual holiday plans, being aware that it may be required. If the requirement for the medical screening check is removed, the QTU will provide this advice to members as soon as possible.

For members in bio-security restricted communities, the requirements for return are more extensive. It is the Union's view that all essential workers should be treated consistently. On 23 April, the department was provided with a bio-security plan for those essential workers returning to community following the holiday period. This plan outlined particular requirements for essential workers, including teachers, returning to communities. The QTU is of the view that, as essential workers, it is this plan that applies to teachers and not discrete decisions of local disaster management groups (LDMGs). The QTU has requested the Department of Education to secure a similar commitment from the State Disaster Management Group in time for the forthcoming holidays.

In the meantime, the department has been working with school principals, the local communities and LDMGs to provide certainty about the return of teachers to communities following the holidays. Members cannot be prevented from leaving communities and should proceed with making their travel plans for the holidays. Until the State Disaster Management Group releases a similar commitment to that secured in April, members are encouraged to work with their school principal on the timing of their return to community and what schooling will look like within the community for Term 3.

QTU advocacy for temporary (contract and supply) teachers

Members would be aware that COVID-19 and its impact on schools has brought about a range of unique challenges for temporary teachers. As such, the QTU has been keeping this group of members informed with regular, often weekly, Temporary Teacher Updates.

As a result of its advocacy with the department, the QTU was able to secure payment for week 10 of Term 1 for supply and contract teachers and continues to pursue a similar payment model for temporary teachers for the first weeks of Term 2. The QTU continues to escalate this matter within the highest levels of the department. Ultimately, we are dealing with the decisions of the employer in terms of accessing financial remuneration for casual workers. We understand how significant this issue is for our supply teacher members, and our advocacy with the employer reflects this.

As previously communicated to temporary teacher members, in accessing financial support, supply and contract teachers can continue to apply for:

- special pandemic leave via the [Application for Casual Special or Special Pandemic Leave](#) form
- special leave via the [Application for Casual Special or Special Pandemic Leave](#) form
- paid special leave (quarantine leave) for vulnerable temporary employees via the [Application for Casual Special or Special Pandemic Leave](#) form
- Job Seeker via Services Australia
<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/jobseeker-payment>.

Some supply teachers have made the argument that NSW (and other states) has paid supply teachers to reflect loss of work. What must be understood, however, is that this model not only charged individual schools directly in order to pay supply teachers, but also then included the expectation that supply teachers would attend schools as directed.

We understand that some supply teachers are continuing to struggle in accessing engagements, even with all students returning to school in week six of Term 2. As a result of our advocacy with the department, the QTU secured extension of temporary engagements (contracts) to ensure this group of members would not have contracts terminated in the pandemic climate. This, combined with a high withdrawal of leave applications, has resulted in contract teachers being used by schools for the provision of local relief, and consequently lowering the need for schools to engage supply teachers.

Supply teaching, while providing a valuable service to schools, contains no guarantee of continuity of work. In recognition of this, casual employees are paid a higher hourly rate through the application of 23 per cent casual leave loading. Further, the QTU is aware that some supply teachers opt only for casual engagements, which further extenuates the insecure nature of supply teaching.

Authorised by:

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General Secretary

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PAY FREEZE**

for teachers and school leaders