



Information and news for QTU members



QUEENSLAND
TEACHERS' UNION
OF EMPLOYEES

16 June 2020

TO: QTU MEMBERS

Stand up for your rights

QTU to ballot members on pay freeze

The QTU will ballot all members on three responses to a proposed government freeze on teacher and principal pay: agreement with it, a strike, and work bans to address workload.

The government's final position on a pay freeze is still unknown. Unsurprisingly, given our opposition, the QTU has been excluded from meetings over the past few days. But the next pay increase under the enterprise bargaining agreements in both schools and TAFE is due on 1 July and a government decision is imminent.

Reportedly, a decision will be made at the Queensland Cabinet meeting today. In spite of the great lobbying of MPs by QTU members over the past weeks, the QTU suspects that the Queensland Government will decide to legislate to implement a pay freeze – probably the model outlined in [Newsflash 23-20](#). If the government legislates, the last sitting of Parliament before 1 July is this week, from Tuesday 16 to Thursday 18 June.

The department has failed to answer questions about the amount that a pay freeze would save, even in general terms. The QTU estimates that the freeze will result in more than \$100 million less in the pockets of 48,000 teachers during the agreement.

While the QTU has been publicly campaigning against the pay freeze, the QTU Executive has been preparing for the possibility that a pay freeze will go ahead. That response will be a ballot with three questions for members to consider. This is an outline only of the three questions, with more detailed information to follow.

Accepting the freeze?

Some members hold this view and have expressed it in various ways to the Union. So far, the decisions about the pay freeze have been made by representative decision-making bodies. Executive believes that, if there is to be a member ballot on the other questions, then members should also have the opportunity to express a view on this threshold question.

The QTU has opposed any pay freeze because:

- it is undeserved by TAFE educators as front-line workers, working harder than ever and enabling others to continue working in the middle of a pandemic
- it is a unilateral breach of an enterprise bargaining agreement reached between the QTU and the government less than a year ago

- it is bad, forgetful economic policy that will delay, rather than assist, recovery from the economic recession triggered by the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

When a pay freeze was first announced in early April, without notice or consultation, the QTU asked the government to explain how the money saved would be used to directly assist those members of the community adversely affected by the pandemic. If a reasonable case had been made by the government, the QTU could have balloted its members to amend the enterprise bargaining agreements by agreement. Ten weeks later, the government has still not answered that fundamental question and plans to legislate changes rather than ask its employees.

Striking for 24 hours?

An employer can take no more grievous action than break an agreement it has made with its employees and their union by refusing to pay salary increases agreed for work done.

For a government employer to do so by legislation adds salt to the wound. Alas, this action is not unprecedented. The Newman government legislated to override conditions around permanent employment and workload protection, among other things, during its brief time in power.

It remains unconscionable for any government.

A strike against a pay freeze would be an act of protest against the decisions of government, rather than the usual bargaining stratagem in the course of EB negotiations. It may or may not affect the implementation of the pay freeze. However, it will certainly affect the decisions of future governments considering breaking agreements or imposing change on their employees and their union.

The principal argument against any strike would be the irony of forfeiting pay in the strike to protest against pay lost due to a broken agreement. Yet strike action by TAFE educators has never been about economic loss for the government, but about asserting the rights of TAFE educators, industrially and professionally.

Work bans to reduce workload?

If one party to an agreement can act unilaterally, why can't the other?

If the government decides to act unilaterally to remove pay increases that had been voted on and agreed by QTU members, the QTU will find other ways to improve the work and working conditions of TAFE educators.

The QTU's number one priority is the sustainable reduction of workload for TAFE educators. Before the last election, the government promised a review of workload, to be completed during this term of government.

The QTU's long-term workload reduction campaign will continue to identify and remove unnecessary workload that contributes little to teaching and learning.

In the short term, it seems reasonable to accelerate that campaign to give members immediate relief from some of that workload. This can be done through work bans or working-to-rule

An initial series of work bans would be identified for members to vote on and would be implemented statewide, though some bans will inevitably affect some sectors more than others. But the work bans would not be a static list. As more areas of time wastage and time theft are identified, more bans would be implemented as part of the growing and on-going campaign.

What next?

The government's decision is yet to be seen, as is the form of any action it decides to take. If it implements a pay freeze, the QTU will proceed with its three-pronged ballot and more detailed information about the three questions will be sent to all members.

The continuing COVID-19 restrictions mean that the information and ballot process will have to be modified and different ways of implementing the results will be required. The Union has to take account of limits on gatherings in schools (which it has strongly supported), as well as the absence of vulnerable workers from the workplace and the need to ensure that casual and temporary teachers can take part in the ballot. Separate ballots, particularly concerning work bans, will be needed for schools and TAFE.

Timelines for any ballot will be provided as quickly as possible once government decisions are known.

As always, your feedback and suggestions are welcome. Email them to nopayfreeze@qtu.asn.au.

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