Specialist teachers in primary and special schools – working conditions

This document is issued for general guidance only. It does not constitute professional advice. The issues with which it deals are complex and the document necessarily deals only with general principles. No reader should rely on this document for the purpose of making a decision as to action but should seek the appropriate advice from the Union on the particular circumstances of that reader. The Union accepts no responsibility for the consequences should any person act in reliance on this document without obtaining the appropriate advice from the Union.

The working conditions of specialist music, physical education and LOTE teachers were previously contained in an industrial agreement. As part of a review of Awards undertaken in 2002/2003, the terms of this industrial agreement are now included in the Teaching in State Education Award – State 2016.

The Award provisions are quite complex and interpretation requires careful consideration of all of the factors that impact on the role of a specialist teacher. The QTU and the Department of Education have negotiated a set of guidelines for the implementation of the Award provisions pertaining to specialist teachers. These guidelines are available from the QTU website and should be read in conjunction with this information brochure.

Teaching in State Education Award – State 2016

15.3 Specialist teachers – primary and special school

(a) The rostered duty time for a specialist teacher will be the same as those for a classroom teacher.

The hours of duty total 25 hours per week and, in the case of specialist teachers, are comprised of three components:

a. a maximum of 20 hours of teaching/travel/related-duties, e.g. set up/pack up
b. a minimum of 4 hours and 10 minutes of non-contact time (minimum of two hours) and specialist preparation and coordination time

c. 50 minutes mid-morning rest pauses.

By comparison, a classroom teacher’s rostered duty time of 25 hours per week is made up as follows:

a. a maximum of 22 hours and 10 minutes of teaching
b. a minimum of 2 hours of non-contact time
c. 50 minutes mid-morning rest pauses.

Specialist teachers are entitled to the same meal breaks as classroom teachers (minimum of 45 minutes per day). The mid-morning rest pause of 10 minutes per day must also be accounted for in the specialist teacher’s timetable. Where a specialist teacher is involved in extra-curricula activities during the regular meal breaks timetabled for the school and such activities are required by the school principal, other alternative meal times must be included in the specialist teacher’s timetable.

These conditions apply to specialist music, physical education and LOTE teachers based in primary and special schools, whether the teacher services one or more schools in this capacity or undertakes these duties in combination with general classroom duties, in which case the conditions apply to that proportion of the teacher’s rostered duties that are specialist teacher duties.

(b) A specialist teacher will teach allocated classes in the curriculum area according to a timetable cooperatively developed by the specialist teacher and the base school principal after consideration of information and proposals from other relevant personnel such as other cluster principals, regional subject coordinators and other human resources and studies personnel.

(c) A specialist teacher will also:

(i) coordinate, develop, implement and evaluate the school/cluster program in their relevant specialist area; and
(ii) assess and report on student achievement in their relevant specialist area; and

(iii) provide advocacy and specialist advice relevant to their areas of expertise and be involved in the school planning and budgetary processes.

In general terms, the primary responsibility of the specialist teacher is to develop and deliver the educational program associated with their specialist teaching area. The reference to the specialist teacher as a member of the school team clearly indicates the required approach by school leaders to the inclusion of specialist teachers in school decision making and consultation processes, including valuing the professional standing and contribution of the specialist teacher as a curriculum expert and advocate for their area of expertise. Importantly, the delivery of non-contact time is a subsidiary issue arising from a management decision to provide non-contact time through releasing classroom teachers from attendance at specialist teacher lessons.

Given these issues, it is reasonable for schools to maximise the availability of specialist teachers to provide non-contact time but may not be reasonable to require specialist teachers to act as the sole source of such release, especially where the specialist teacher is absent from normal duties because of extra-curricula responsibilities or legitimate personal reasons for which leave is approved.

With respect to clause 15.3(b), the development of the timetable for each specialist teacher is a cooperative exercise between the specialist teacher and the base school principal. It would not be appropriate for a specialist teacher to be provided with a timetable developed without reference to the specialist teacher. Local level arrangements should be developed to ensure that the necessary consultation takes place before the finalisation of timetables for each semester/year. Importantly, the considerations required by the various provisions of the Award are mandatory. Other considerations such as the needs of other teachers and other curriculum areas are necessary but may not override or negate the requirements of the Award.

15.3(d)(i) Within rostered duty time of 25 hours per week, the average class time for specialist teachers will be 18 hours per week within a range of 15 to 20 hours per week, subject to the following variables:

(A) number of schools in the circuit;

(B) number of classes taught in each school;

(C) distances travelled and road conditions;

(D) the mode of delivery in the curriculum area;

(E) involvement in other activities approved by the principal or Regional Director.

(ii) These variables will also be considered in the determination of a reasonable allocation of coordination and specialist consultation time.

Consideration of the number of schools visited, classes taught and travel undertaken to service a school or circuit of schools is critical to the determination of the total contact (class) time available for teaching. Any additional duties performed by a specialist teacher as a consequence of these issues (e.g. travel between schools, setting up, packing up, etc) is to be deducted from expected class time. The principal and specialist teacher must consult regarding these issues to determine the specialist teacher’s required class time.

On average, the hours of contact time will be reduced by one hour for each additional school (e.g. one school = 20 hours, two schools = 19 hours, three schools = 18 hours etc). However, the actual time required to service the teaching circuit is the determinant factor on reductions to contact time. Where schools are in close proximity or travel between schools on any day is not required, the reduction of contact time may be limited. However, where significant travel is involved, a reduction to class time is clearly required.

Consideration of the travel undertaken to service a school or circuit of schools is critical to the determination of the total time available for teaching. Clause 15.3(e) of the Award provides that both the time taken to travel between schools on any day and the time taken to travel to a school that is in excess of the time it would take a specialist teacher to travel to their base school are work time, and should be counted as a part of the 25 hours per week of rostered duties. Travel time allowed must be calculated in full knowledge of the road conditions and other factors impacting on travel in the local area.

(D) the mode of delivery in the curriculum area.

This issue relates to the subject specific and workplace specific issues arising from the delivery of a curriculum program. Each school determines the process for curriculum delivery in response to school-related factors, including the availability of teaching space, the number of classes to be taught and the actual program being delivered.

(E) involvement in other activities approved by principals or regional directors.
The performance by teachers of co-curricula and extra-curricula activities necessitates the allocation of additional time within their timetables for organisation of these activities.

15.3(e)(i) Time required for travel between schools on the same day will be considered part of the specialist teacher’s work program and will be incorporated within rostered duty time. Appropriate additional time will be allocated for the arrangement and transport of lesson resource material.

(ii) Where the distance from home to the circuit school is greater than that for the base school, additional time required to travel to the school is to be incorporated in the specialist teacher’s work program and therefore within rostered duty time.

(ii) Wherever possible the specialist’s circuit should be designed to service a cluster of schools to minimise travel time.

Travel time is considered part of total rostered duty time and reduces total contact time. An itinerant specialist teacher will have less than 20 hours of contact as a consequence of the operation of the Award clauses outlined in this guide.

Where a specialist teacher services two or more schools on any one day, the time taken to travel between the two schools is included in the calculations of total duty time and therefore reduces the period of contact time. In addition to the actual time taken to travel between the two workplaces, an allocation of time is to be made to allow for the arrangement and transport of lesson materials. It is not appropriate for specialist teachers to have travel allocated during periods assigned for meal breaks in the specialist teachers timetable, although a specialist teacher may have a meal break allocated at a time different to the time allocated for a meal break in a school serviced by the teacher.

15.3(f) Playground duty and bus duty is not to be allocated where the specialist teacher services more than two schools.

Unambiguously, where three or more schools are serviced, the specialist teacher must not be allocated to perform playground or bus supervision. An additional consideration is the impact on the capacity of a specialist teacher to undertake extra-curricula activities and perform supervision. It is reasonable to assume that a heavy extra-curricula workload will preclude performance of supervision during meal breaks and after the conclusion of the school day.

15.3(g)(i) Where a specialist teacher services more than one school, the principal will reasonably adjust the expectation of co-curricular involvement, especially where the specialist circuit necessitates considerable travel.

The impact of this clause must be determined on a case-by-case basis with the individual circumstances of each teacher taken into consideration. However, the intent of the Award provision is clear in that the expectations of co-curricula involvement will be adjusted where more than one school is serviced. Activities other than the delivery of the program of study required by the relevant curriculum would be considered co-curricula activities. In a general sense, the co-curricula activities of the specialist teacher would therefore include taking bands and choirs, co-ordinating instrumental music programs, organising sports carnivals or co-ordinating participation in foreign language speaking competitions.

A related issue involves the participation of specialist teachers in staff meetings. Where a specialist teacher services more than one school, the base school principal should negotiate with the specialist teacher an appropriate arrangement regarding participation in staff meetings. It would not be appropriate for this expectation to involve the participation of the specialist teacher in more than one staff meeting each week or the participation of the specialist teacher in a staff meeting other than at the school serviced at the end of the day on which the meeting occurs.

(ii) It is expected that judicious timetabling of classes will minimise the difficulties associated with sequential specialist lessons and thus maximise student learning.

(iii) It is also expected that judicious timetabling will ensure that occupational health and safety concerns such as voice strain and excessive exposure to the sun are minimised.

Considered in concert, clauses 15.3(g)(ii) and 15.3(g)(iii) present challenges for the process of time tabling specialist lessons. The expectations are clear and unambiguous: 1. Time tabling will result in a maximisation of student learning during specialist lessons and by default in other lessons during the course of the day; and 2. Time tabling will result in the minimisation of the occupational health and safety issues of voice strain and sun exposure. The difficulties associated with sequential specialist lessons present a competing tension with the Award requirement for the non-contact time of classroom teachers to be provided in blocks of not less than 30 minutes, with the aim being one hour blocks.
However, the specific requirement of this Award clause overrides the general provision and is not diminished by the fact that the provision of non-contact time is currently dependent upon the lessons provided by specialist teachers.

**Union assistance**

You are encouraged to take the following actions before contacting the QTU for assistance in relation to specialist teacher working conditions issues.

**Timetables**

If you believe that your current timetable is not consistent with the Award provisions detailed in this brochure:

- fax/mail a copy of your timetable to the QTU, detailing your concerns and requesting advice on whether the timetable complies with the Award
- use the advice provided to discuss your timetable concerns with the base school principal in an attempt to negotiate a solution
- where unsuccessful in resolving the issue at a local level, contact your QTU Organiser for support.

**Other issues**

In the first instance you should raise your concerns with the base school principal. If the problem is complex or cannot be resolved at the school level, you can ask for Union help via the Request for Information / Request for Advice proformas on the QTU website or by contacting the Union directly.