

TO: QTU MEMBERS

## **Term 2 - staggered return to at school attendance**

On Monday, the state government announced its intention to commence a staggered return to school attendance for prep and year 1, 11 and 12 students, commencing next week. This announcement brought forward the expected return date for students from 25 May to 11 May, which has raised concerns among members about consistency in decision making and their safety, wellbeing and workload. In order to support members in managing these issues, the QTU has met with the Chief Health Officer and department to identify how schools and members will be supported as students return to school.

The QTU sought to balance three priorities in the period from the emergence of COVID-19 in Australia: the health and safety of staff and students; continued learning in different forms; and supporting the work of other frontline workers. The health and safety (and wellbeing) of teachers, principals, staff and students is a continuing and absolute priority of the QTU.

### **Chief Health Officer advice**

In response to QTU questions, the Chief Health Officer has advised that the largest risk factor in relation to the transmission of COVID-19 in schools is adult to adult transmission. As more has become known about COVID-19, there is limited evidence to suggest that children spread the virus. It is more likely that transmission will occur adult to adult. Consequently, while there are no guarantees that COVID-19 will not occur in a school, the CHO has confirmed that the health advice is that it is safe for students to return to school and safe for teachers (if they do not fall into the vulnerable worker category or live with a vulnerable person) to work with children in schools, provided that certain risk mitigation strategies are put in place. A summary of the complete health advice from the CHO is available on the [QTU website](#).

Based on the medical and other information provided to the QTU, the educational benefits of resuming school-based learning outweigh the very low risk, in a properly managed workplace, of COVID-19 transmission. This is based on medical examination of the spread of the virus in practice in Australia. This assessment will remain under constant review as circumstances change.

### **Strategies to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection in schools**

In response to the advice from the CHO, the department has updated the Term 2 operating guidelines to support the transition back to school attendance for prep and years 1, 11 and 12. Accompanying these guidelines is a planning document that schools must complete. Within this document are risk mitigation strategies that must be implemented in schools.

These strategies include:

#### **Communicating with parents about school operations and expectations**

This communication should include advice that the only students who can attend school from 11 May are those in prep and years 1, 11 and 12, children of essential workers and vulnerable students. In addition, advice should be provided that any years 2 - 10 students who attend school will be supervised while undertaking the same learning@home activities of their classmates.

Additionally, where parents choose to keep prep, year 1, year 11 and year 12 children at home even though they are not medically vulnerable or unwell, they will not be provided with learning at home materials.

## Hygiene measures

These include regular handwashing and sanitising in every classroom, ensuring adequate cleaning supplies, the display of promotional materials about hygiene and social distancing, and increased cleaning of staff rooms, classrooms, play equipment and high frequency touch points.

The CHO has advised that practical subjects can continue, however these areas should be supported by high level cleaning.

## Social distancing

Social distancing is required for adults. This means that the requirement for a 1.5m distance between adults must be followed and that social distancing measures apply to staff rooms, classrooms and other shared spaces. Access to the school site by other adults, including parents and carers, should be limited, and parents and caregivers should not congregate at access points to the school grounds.

Arrangements should be made for staff meetings to occur online or via teleconference.

Where possible, social distancing between older teens (such as year 11s and 12s) should be maintained, however, this is precautionary and is not a requirement of the CHO.

## Health and wellbeing

Students and staff who are unwell are to stay away from school. The CHO direction requiring unwell students to be sent home and remain at home until they are well remains in place. This advice includes minor symptoms such as “the sniffles”.

Additionally, students with compromised immune systems should remain at home and be supported with learning materials.

Teachers who are vulnerable or who live with a vulnerable person are also required to self-isolate, and their ability to work from home should continue. People who are currently working from home because they have been identified as vulnerable or living with a vulnerable person should not be directed to return to school, as the direction of the CHO relating to vulnerable people remains in place.

In response to the workload considerations of those members who teach multi-age classes or both junior secondary and senior secondary subjects, the department has suggested a collaborative planning approach where schools may share materials across clusters, or ask those members working from home to develop materials to support remote learning. Supervision of students undertaking remote learning (whether at school or at home) can be provided by teacher-aides or other teachers.

More detailed advice about this and other issues relating to the staggered return to “at-school” attendance by students is available on the [QTU website](#).

## Guaranteed teacher transfer process

The QTU has been advised that the department is insistent that teachers eligible for a guaranteed teacher transfer should provide a minimum of three preferences in their transfer application. This is despite the recommendation of the QTU that only one preference is required. Consequently, to ensure members are not disadvantaged, we recommend that members follow the department’s advice.

Authorised by:

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General Secretary