

TO: QTU MEMBERS

Return to School in 2022

Welcome back to Term 1! We know that despite the delayed start for students, members are committed to ensuring that 2022 is a success.

Last week, members were advised that the QTU supported the delayed start and had reached an agreement with the government to scrap the extension of the school year. Over the next two weeks, members are encouraged to work together on modifying school programs so all students have access to the required curriculum in the compressed school year.

During this school year, the QTU will continue to work with members on celebrating the profession, start EB negotiations for a replacement agreement in the school sector, and campaign for a federal government that makes decisions that value education and our profession. We will also campaign with members to address any teacher shortages or health and safety risks. After all, as we campaign for our working conditions, we are also improving the environment in which students learn.

Member wellbeing

Some employees have been suspended for being unvaccinated due to a mistake on the HR database. If you believe you have provided the required evidence of vaccination, give it to your school leadership team so they can make adjustments in the system. If it is updated before 12pm, you can return to work the next day and the record of suspension will be removed from your file. This will be confirmed in writing.

The Special Pandemic Leave Directive has been extended until 26 March, and more changes are being discussed at government level. If unwell, stay home, get tested and isolate until you get a negative result.

Masks

The state government is yet to release the back-to-school plans for students, however the Union continues to advocate for a healthy and safe environment for all staff and students in schools, TAFE institutes, and other education settings, who will possibly be returning at the peak of the Omicron wave.

The employer has to provide PPE to its employees. It is the Union's understanding that members may choose to wear cotton or other masks, however the department will supply surgical masks. Teachers of hearing-impaired students should have access to face shields to assist in communication. If schools have an insufficient stock of masks, they should order more from the department.

Rapid antigen testing

The best way to stop the spread of COVID-19 is for people exhibiting symptoms to stay home, isolate and get tested. Under the [public health direction](#), students displaying signs of illness should not attend school, and if they do attend and are unwell, they should be sent home.

Governments in Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT have committed to providing tests to schools, which staff and students are recommended to use twice weekly. This testing is not compulsory nor is it required for

entry/re-entry into the school site. The QTU does not support this form of surveillance testing, and has advocated for RATs to only be given to those who are symptomatic or a close contact. These tests should be available and accessible to all those who need them, and a supply should be provided to each school. However, there is currently a supply issue across the nation.

The Union is resolute that it is not the role of teachers or school leaders to administer these tests to students – if a student is symptomatic, they should be sent home in accordance with the CHO direction. The Union will closely monitor the return to school of students and teachers in NSW and Victoria.

Indoor air monitoring

The department's ventilation plan for schools has been endorsed by Queensland Health. The plan requires checks to ensure windows can open, fans are operational and air conditioners are serviced and operational. The department confirms that newly air-conditioned facilities should be compliant with airflow and ventilation requirements under Australian Standards. QHealth does not believe there is a need for a broad scale audit of all facilities.

If you have concerns, report them to your principal, who should pass them on to both the regional Infrastructure manager and the regional director for adding to the testing and inspection program. The department is also procuring ventilation systems for deployment where there may be an issue.

Where possible, schools should minimise the use of classrooms that do not have ventilation

Supply and contract teachers

Some supply teacher members are concerned that the delayed start will mean there will be less work for them in the first two weeks of school. The QTU has asked the department to monitor the engagement of supply teachers over this period.

The Director-General has encouraged education leaders to engage supply teachers and to continue existing arrangements for contracts during the two-week supervision period. If supply teachers note a significant change in their engagements compared to the same time in previous years, email services@qtu.asn.au outlining the change.

Supply teachers are reminded, as per TRACER's newsletter, that they need to provide evidence of vaccination upon arrival at school. If they do not, the day's engagement will be terminated.

QTU operations

QTU Officers and employees who work with members, attend workplaces, or conduct trainings are all required to be vaccinated. The CHO directive mandating the vaccine applies to them in the same way it applies to our members. Consequently, should an Organiser or Officer visit a school, they will also comply with any PPE requirements of the school.

The QTU will be restricting the movement of its Officer and Organisers over the two-week student-free period, to minimise travel in line with the CHO's advice.

Authorised by:

Kate Ruttiman

General Secretary