The QTU and non-contact time – a history

Any teacher knows exactly how valuable non-contact time (NCT) is, and how vast the array of planning, preparation, correction, collaborative exercises, and assessment-related tasks that get completed in that time can be. The direct benefits for students of their teachers receiving appropriate NCT also cannot be denied.

In the current workload intensification context, where teachers’ work is becoming increasingly complex, appropriate NCT has never been more important. The Queensland Teachers’ Union (QTU) member workload survey in 2018 demonstrated that, on average, classroom teachers work 44 hours per week, which is 19 hours above and beyond rostered duty time. This information tells us that non-contact time requires a review.

Throughout recent decades, the QTU has actively advocated for NCT for Queensland teachers; it is a very important way of addressing the issue of workload. However, the current NCT entitlements, secured by the QTU after extensive campaigns, are due for review to ensure they effectively reflect the conditions faced by teachers in 2019.

A timeline of non-contact time

The QTU was able to secure 210 minutes of NCT for secondary teachers in the 1970s. The NCT entitlement of 120 minutes for primary and special school teachers was implemented after an extensive campaign in the mid-1990s.

1970s – NCT established for secondary school teachers

The early 1970s saw Queensland teachers facing classes of more than 40 students, with no non-contact time whatsoever. This is unfathomable by today’s standards, and rightly prompted an extensive campaign by the QTU and its members.

At the time, preparation and correction time a hugely contentious issue for the Department of Education, and the QTU fought to get water-tight guarantees from the department regarding the provision of NCT, to recognise the unique and important work of teachers. An extensive campaign saw a monumental victory for Queensland teachers in 1972, achieving 210 minutes of non-contact time for secondary teachers. However, while this was a win for secondary school teachers, it inherently created inequity between their conditions and those of their primary and specialist counterparts. The QTU knew it had more work to do.

Mid-1990s – NCT for primary and special school teachers

The primary industrial advancement for teachers in the 1990s was the achievement of NCT for non-secondary teachers as an award entitlement.

From the late 1980s, the QTU campaigned to achieve an NCT benefit for primary and special school teachers. Once again, this concept was strongly opposed by the Department of Education. Early efforts to extend NCT to primary and special school teachers were hampered by the perceived impracticality of applying the timetabled NCT.

With QTU encouragement, more positive attitudes gradually developed, and campaigns in the early 1990s resulted in an agreement with the department in 1994. Under this, one hour of NCT would be delivered through the specialist teacher model. However, implementation was inconsistent and there was resistance from the department.
Negotiations dissolved in October of 1994, resulting in the QTU lodging an application in the QIRC for a minimum of two hours NCT for all primary, pre-school and special education teachers. This resulted in a major full-bench case over 10 sitting days, with the QTU presenting an unprecedented 25 witnesses. In November 1995, the full bench released its decision to support the notion and mandated a two-year phase-in period, commencing in 1997. By the end of this period, all primary school teachers received a full two hours of NCT, allocated in blocks of no less than one half hour.

**2016 – EB8**

While the inclusion of NCT in these two awards are hugely important markers in QTU history and represent significant wins, this is an issue that requires continual review. Not surprisingly, NCT makes a regular appearance in EB negotiations. The **2016 certified agreement**, resulting from the EB8 claim and negotiations, delivered:

- recognition that award entitlements to non-contact time (NCT) are to be used at the teacher’s discretion and that any award NCT lost because of planned school activities needs to be replaced
- the inclusion of NCT for heads of program and administrative time for teaching principals in an industrial instrument.

**2019 – EB9**

When considering this history and aligning it with the expectations and workload faced by teachers in 2019, it is more than justifiable that NCT be identified as one of the key issues in the EB9 log of claims.

Complete parity of working conditions remains a Union objective, and the EB9 log of claims seeks to address this with regard to NCT. Furthermore, the QTU looks to build on its wins for teachers in the NCT realm, to ensure that the time given to teachers to complete the vast array of necessary tasks that sit outside the classroom recognises the role of teachers in 2019.

Therefore, the EB9 log of claims identifies the following NCT issues for consideration.

- Review of non-contact time for primary school teachers in recognition of increased systemic and school-based demands.
- Increase to non-contact time provisions in all school settings, to enable professional activities, including collaborative planning, moderation of student work and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum and the new QCE.
- Non-contact time for year level coordinators and subject level coordinators.
- Teachers to be released from staffing matters (such as exam supervisions, NAPLAN, sports carnivals) in order to provide additional non-contact time.
- Non-contact time to be increased for instrumental music teachers/instructors.
- Recognition of the allocated time and continuous delivery of specialist curriculum (specifically music, PE and LOTE) for non-contact time as specialist time in primary and special schools as part of the allocative methodology.

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